

Interview Transcript: Derek Kimbol and Princess Bass-Mason

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A note from the writer: Native communities have a long history of being multicultural and multilingual. Throughout this collection of interviews, listeners will hear words from 5 different Indigenous languages. Unfortunately, transcribing all of the spoken words in these interviews is beyond my skill-set. In this interview, Derek speaks the Klamath-Modoc language, which was historically spoken in southern Oregon and northern California. For the present, a star marks each Klamath word or phrase in this transcript. To learn more about the Klamath-Modoc language, visit, <https://klamathtribes.org/language/>

Derek: [00:00:13] [*Speaking in Klamath...] My name is Coyote Boy, [*], That's my Indian name.
[*], an elder, [*], our house.
An elder came to our house.
[*], I told her, she said, [*], that means your name.
[*] is the way she told me.
She said that means Coyote Boy in Modoc
Cuz I told her my grandma called me Coyote Boy, so that became my Indian name when I was little and it still is. [*]
[*] I'm Klamath and Modoc.
[*] And that's the place they call Chiloquin now.
And it was called [*] before

Princess: [00:01:55] Okay, can you tell us a bit about yourself and your ties to this area of Springfield-Eugene?

Derek: [00:02:02] Yeah, I first came to college up here at Lane Community College, and it was the beginning of my education to transfer to the University of Oregon. And I graduated from the University of Oregon and the Northwest Indian Languages Institute, [with a] certificate to graduate from the U of O.

And I lived in Springfield and raised my children there. And just, the rivers here, and knowing the history of the Kalapuya and Molalla, you know, a lot of tribes, [*] is what we called Rogue Rivers [Rogue River tribes from southwestern Oregon], you know, and we were all relatives. We

gathered together and were trading. So, just knowing about the rivers in our [*] is our spirituality.

And I never knew all this [at first], it's been a learning experience. But to know that salmon came here, salmon came up these rivers, and people gathered here, and in the spring, to know that the camas was a staple food. So, learning the language, *púksh* is the camas and *tchialash* is big salmon. So it just made me feel good, you know, it made me strong. Every day, it gave me a good feeling here, to carry on, and to know what I was doing here for my education. And yeah I really appreciate the area and I still do.

(Speaking directly to Princess) And I learned that our people came here as well, [along] the route that we made here.

[Interview note: Derek and Princess are both enrolled in the Klamath Tribes. In the past, Klamath people traveled annually into the Willamette Valley through the trails in the Cascade Mountains]

Princess: [00:04:20] Okay, well that kind of leaves me to my next question. I heard that you do a lot of language revitalization work, and I was wondering if you could tell us what that has consisted of so far.

Derek: [00:04:32] Yeah I started, you know, hearing the language as a kid in the town of Chiloquin, and there was only a few speakers left, you know. And they would be talking on the corner, you know, and saying some Indian words, so I was able to hear how the sounds went.

And then, you know, Gordon Bettles, [*] Gordon was the steward of the [UO Many Nations] Longhouse, and he had done lots of work in bringing the dictionaries to the tribe, and getting the [language] revitalization going.

So at that time, I was a kid. I started looking in the [Klamath] Phrase Book, and looking at the books they had. And so, you know, [the language is] part of, you know, growing and striving for sobriety in communities and neighborhoods. It was about our prayers, you know, about learning the things that we want to say to [*], to the Creator. And so I was, you know, I was fortunate to attend some ceremonies where they said, "learn your language to pray." So those are some of the really important things that I wanted to do.

And then, you know, looking at the animals and the birds, and knowing that those birds and creations, they gave us strength, you know, and they gave us medicine and power. I wanted to know all of those things. So there was just a hunger to dive into the materials, and to study [the Klamath language], and I became a language instructor.

And I started hosting some adult classes, or family classes, because I already taught kids in the culture camp, and in the Klamath County School District. I went there to teach on certain days to the children and we had a family night.

So today, you know, after graduating school, and going back home, and forming a non-profit, *Maqlaqs Gee'tkni*, that means the place that we're from, the land that we're from.

You know, looking after traditional food and the plants. That's pretty much where I'm at. Teaching whoever wants to know about the uses of our food, and the names, and the words for the plants. And then words about how we consume.

[*] is foods.

[*] is eat.

[*] is also eat

[*] is come eat.

So there are certain ways that we do things. We put our language back into it. With our forestry restoration, We have a crew [*] It means to go through the forest to clear the brush. So through our language we learn lots of ways that manage the forest, and the ways that we gathered foods.

Princess: [00:08:12] What are some of the difficulties the Klamath, Modoc, Paiute people face when learning their languages? Is this something you have also struggled with?

Derek: [00:08:20] You know, we went through a great, you know, really hard time with Termination. So, you know, being such a strong people, and such a proud and strong nation at one time, to lose our language down to just a few speakers. It was a really hard thing. Yeah, so that's made it difficult by not having [fluent speakers], you know, that's what happened, and we don't have it in the home as a first language anymore. And it's come down to books. Grammar books, that, you know, are written from the University of California. There's a certain way to learn the grammar. So I think just having the structure, and teaching for the grammar is what it's gonna take.

Learning, [*] is learning.

[*], so learning a lot gives you a lot of knowledge.

[*] So, um, especially in the way [*] in the way we live. And so our language has all that knowledge.

Princess: [00:10:01] What were some of the sources you consulted as you were Klamath or Modoc?

Derek: [00:10:10] Well, luckily we had the [Klamath] dictionary, so my grandma had a dictionary. Gordon [Bettles], you know, distributed dictionaries to all of the families, and so I'd go upstairs, and grab my grandma's dictionary, and we'd be looking through there, me and my cousins, and we'd just be trying to find all those words, and, you know, we didn't know how to say them though.

And that's how we started becoming really interested, and then we had a few speakers left when I was growing up, Neva Eggsman, and Chief Reid David and Bobby David [*] were some of our elders that were real passionate about keeping it going. So, um, you know, fortunately, I looked through some of the old texts, and I found some tapes that went with them, and found all the fluent stories, and I could hear the speakers from the 1950s. And that really gave me, [helped me] really know how to pronounce and how the tone went, and the language and the speed, and how fluent and how it sounded.

Princess: [00:11:38] Do you study and practice Klamath with other people in your community?

Derek: [00:11:44] I used to, um, right now, it's, um, the program is kind of, it needs to get up and running still for Klamath within the tribes, but on a daily basis, I speak it at the grocery store, to a lot of non-tribal people, and then I see a lot of the tribal people, and I go into the tribal office.

And I'm talking Maqlaqs to them, and saying lots of phrases, and so some of them start saying them. And then amongst the people in the community, they say em, they say [*], [*], [*],

So, yeah, so amongst the tribal members we do, we say them, you know, all these words, [*]. So I know some of the ceremonies, some of the young men that are picking with the ceremonies, they're starting to make songs with the language. So, you know, it's always inspiring.

Princess: [00:13:03] Can you share some of the ways that studying the language has impacted your family?

Derek: [00:13:10] Yeah, it's really helped our family, and it's helped us learn how to pray, how to talk to the Creator, and how our way of life was. I learned a word, and it's a Sahaptin word, [*], a phrase, it means it's the way it is. And the way that we talk to the plants, and the way that we talk to the rocks, and the way that we talk to [*] to the Creator, that's the way it is, you know? The ways that we believe in the land, and so it gave us an understanding.

Princess: [00:13:58] In a perfect world, how would you implement Indigenous language learning?

Derek: [00:14:04] On the ground, you know, immersion in the woods, on gathering the food, you know. [*] fishing, [*] hunting. You know, the things you do, incorporated into our daily life. And when you wake up, [*] you know, [*] you get up out of bed [*] you know, give thanks, give thanks to those ways that we have. [*] you know, that is the way that we do things.

You try to come back and start grassroots organizations. It's slow, you know? It's slow because a lot of people, you know, don't understand yet. You've got to educate. How can we build capacity, you know, and then people are trying— So it's just slow going in a rural area, until you get people out. So there's \$100 million sitting in the Oregon Watershed Enhancement Board for our tribe. It's like, we could do it, anyone could do it, it just takes organization.

And then we ran into, it's so terrible. We get people in, that get in office, they want to shut down the community garden, because they didn't build it. Or they want to go against anything that's

healthy. It's called lateral oppression. So it's a real thing, unless you get a real leader into the spot that understands. That's why I'm so serious, because we still have so much work to do on everything. Even to decolonize, and have a healthy house, and a healthy food and healthy watershed, and help feed the watershed for the next generation. We have to start a new, we have to start teaching now, a new education. You know, it's a different education than has been taught.

So, yeah, we need a school, we need a university, we need to get these jobs, you know, they can pull reed canary grass for 25 bucks an hour, going up and down our rivers that are loaded with it, but I run into opposition, to me, I guess, I don't know. Cuz, man, it's so horrible, it's jealousy, it's like, but it's actually coming from the older generation. See Natalie Ball talks about it in her book sometimes. But I've seen it, there's people down there that will glare at you. If you know about the watershed—like you can say, hey, here's this bill, they'll just like, no, we don't even really want to do the watershed, but we're kind of acting like we're about it.

Princess: [00:17:22] Yea, people slow to be educated or want change, they're stuck in the colonial ways, the power of that.

Derek: [00:17:32] Yeah. And then Tom Ball did that, you know, dissertation, post-colonial anxiety of the Indian tribe, and it was about our tribe, you know, because after termination and after everything, you know. So that's where we're at, we've got to break the cycle, yeah. You know, it's apparent because, you know, we kind of grew up, I grew up after Termination, so it was rough, you know, in Chiloquin. But I mean, it wasn't rough on me because I had grandparents that raised us and stuff, but it's like, certain things were pretty rough on some of my friends as their parents passed on and stuff.

I don't know, for the Modoc side, it's like a whole other story about Modoc, like where our land down there, and the history. Klamath County Museum did all these different talks last year cuz it was 150 years since the Modoc War [of 1872-1873]. It got down to a lot of things that weren't known. And it helped people understand, you know, that really we lived there, and we lived in a way that was really good with the lakes there.

Princess: [00:18:58] Do you see a connection between language revitalization and other issues tribal communities are working on, like land stewardship, historic preservation, and cultural wellness?

Derek: [00:19:10] Oh, yes. A lot of our places have names, and there's different uses and areas where they have names for everything. So it's like you can associate all of our land with all those places. So, yeah.

Princess: [00:19:32] Thank you. Okay, so transitioning more into your environmental stewardship, can you explain what environmental stewardship means to you and some of the ways you are pursuing it in your community?

Derek: [00:19:45] Yeah, environmental stewardship means taking responsibility for our ecosystem, our watershed, our all of life, and every organism in our ecosystem and in our

watershed. So making sure it's healthy and non-toxic, and it's better for future generations. So, yeah.

Princess: [00:20:16] Can you tell us about your participation with prescribed burns? Where did the burns take place, and how did you become involved with that work?

Derek: [00:20:25] Yeah, I became involved with traditional ecological burning through the Long Tom Watershed Council here in Eugene. And a very nice colleague, Mina, she put together some grants to put on Indigenous fire trainings. So there was a burn at Mt. Pisgah to restore the camas for the oak savannah there. So that was a very good burn, it brought a lot of agencies together. And just to learn that the way Native people here managed the lands for thousands of years. You know, it's really good for everyone to recognize this and for these ways to be acknowledged.

Princess: [00:21:23] Is there a relationship between stewarding fire and stewarding water?

Derek: [00:21:29] [*]. [*] is fire, and it's a sacred element to our people. And it's used for everything. So like I said, [*], everything is alive, everything has a spirit, and so the fire is really sacred to us.

And the same as [*], water, the [geothermal] spring places is where our people went for power, went for healing, So, you know, these elements of earth, we know that they're sacred, and they give everything life.

Princess: [00:22:16] Thank you. Would you like to discuss the dam removal work on the Klamath River?

Derek: [00:22:22] That's a big topic. I mean, I'm glad, you know, it's good they're coming out. I would have done things a little bit differently, because they didn't really consult with the tribes about how they're coming out. You know, they did it when there wasn't some high flow, you know. And I would have waited, you know, until the high flows in the spring to remove a few of them, and then, but you know, it's taken a lot of work, and they've done actually a good job. So that was the only thing I was thinking, man, that first one that came out, they didn't have no flows to get it going, but...

Yeah, but I'm glad, and I'm looking forward to salmon, you know, [*]. And I'm already thinking about where I'm going to go [*]. Somewhere past Klamath Falls. Cuz I'm going to go over to Captain Jack, and, you know, we're Hawk Creek Modocs now, and I didn't even know about all this stuff, you know. I grew up in Klamath Falls, and I didn't really know about everything. But now I can go, like, right when I get into Klamath. I see, like, it's beautiful, the lake there, you know, it's really pretty. And when you come down at nighttime, and you see the city light's shining off the lake, they're pretty.

And then I've seen something on Facebook today that said "The most depressing towns in Oregon." And it said, Klamath Falls. And it had Grants Pass, and then it had a bunch of these towns, and then I was like, I was going to laugh, you know. But when I see the place now I see the Modoc land. Like, I'm up on the north ridge of Klamath Falls, I look, and I see Mt. Shasta.

You know, it's just like, it's the awesomest place. You know what I mean? It's the most beautiful place. To know our...

But I want to see it restored. That's the thing, because you see, the lake, they call it Lake Ewana right now. So [*] is where we fished, and that's where the falls were—there's no falls [now], you know, for Klamath Falls. But then, it goes down here, the railroads right here, it's just like a super funnel. You know, but, anyhow, there's a lot of bad things, and then there's, like, industry. And then you can still see the place of the, where we were created. So, it's like, well, I love it, you know.

Princess: [00:25:07] Cool. How would you describe your relationship to Springfield and East Memorial Land County? Is there any word you hope to see happen in this area in the future?

Derek: [00:25:17] Yeah, I lived in Springfield for six years. I was going to college, and I love the entire ecosystem there. The Mckenzie River, I'd go up and get elderberries up the Mckenzie. So, you know, I've done some work on the river there to remove invasive plants along the river. You know, I really would just like the education, you know, the way the Indigenous people lived here, along the McKenize River too and the Willamette River. And, you know, that just helps everyone.

Like I learned the story over in Sisters, how they restored the creek where they used to dry it up. Now it's called Whychus Creek. And now modernization happened with agriculture there. And it's helped an entire community. And with the name change to Whychus, you know, crossing over the water, it really helped people with the vision of the place and to embrace it. So you know, I hope all that can come back to these areas.

Princess: [00:26:46] Awesome. What are some of the possible benefits of learning about and remembering indigenous knowledge and indigenous land stewardship practices? You sort of answered that a little bit, but you want to reiterate?

Derek: [00:26:57] Yeah. It helps you with your health, it helps you with your understanding of the way our ecosystem was and what's beneficial to our environment. And so it really makes you appreciate life, you know, in general.

Princess: [00:27:18] Did you have any mentors or role models growing up who helped shape you?

Derek: [00:27:22] My grandmother raised me a lot, and my great-grandmother and my great-great-grandmother, she's nearly 100 years old, and she camped on the river all summer long and stayed by herself a lot until someone would come camp with her. But she was a medicine, she had medicine in her and power in her, Indian power, they say. So she was kind of like the grandma of my grandma, so everyone looked to her, and so all of my grandmas, they really shaped me.

And then my grandfather also, you know, he- one of court cases, *Kimbol vs Calahan* that reaffirmed our hunting, fishing, and gathering rights. So you know, all of them elders, my grandparents. And they helped shape me, and showed me what I'm supposed to care about.

Princess: [00:28:31] Thinking of the up-and-coming generation in the Native community, what are some of the challenges that you think they will face? Do you have any advice for the younger generation?

Derek: [00:28:41] Yes. I'd like the younger generation to learn about growing foods, to learn about their traditional food, to learn the way that their elders and their ancestors lived on these lands here. And I want them to learn, I really want them to learn about sustainable homes, about how our people lived, how our people lived in homes for thousands of years that we built together.

So it's become a passion of mine to get off of fossil fuels, to stop climate change, to decolonize, to have healthy watersheds and healthy foods, and to have a sustainable life. So that's what I would like for the future generation to think about, and to learn.

Language Exchange Between Princess and Derek (Speaking Western Shoshone and Klamath-Modoc) [29:43 00:33:33]

Princess: [*] What's your name?

Derek: [*] What's your name?

Princess: [*] Princess Bass-Mason [*] Where are you from?

Derek: [*] South from here. [*] Klamath and Modoc land.

[*] is Where are you from?

Princess: [*] I'm from Duck Valley, a Nevada Idaho Reservation and Klamath Falls.

Okay, um, where are you living now?

Derek: [*] I'm living in Chiloquin

[*] is where do you live?

Princess: [*] I live in Portland, and sometimes Eugene.

[*] Where is your family from?

Derek: [*] From that place [*] is the Klamath Marsh. [*] is the place, Modoc Territory. [*] means from Klamath Falls.

Princess: [*] They're from Duck Valley Reservation in Nevada, Idaho, and Klamath area [*].
But I'm not sure where exactly where in Klamath we originated from. [*] my maternal grandma
[*] is from the [*] area too.

[*] How are you?

Derek: [*] I'm good, I feel very good. [*]

Princess: [*] I feel good, I have good feelings.

Derek: [*] Thank you.

Princess: [*] Thank you, [*] is that's good, that's done.

Derek: [*] Thank you.