Interview with Kristina Misegan

START OF INTERVIEW

Interviewer (I): Okay, my name is Grace Shae, I’m interviewing for Northern Michigan University’s Oral History: Theory and Practice course. Today is September 27th, 2018, and I’m speaking with Kristina Miseegan?

Kristina Misegan (KM): Misegan.

I: Misegan? President of NMU’s Native American Student Association, also known as NASA. We will be talking about the past, present, and future of NASA. So, Kristina could you say your full name and spell it for us?

KM: Kristina Misegan, K-R-I-S-T-I-N-A M-I-S-E-G-A-N.

I: Thank you, and when were you born?

KM: The seventh day of the seventh month, in 1996. [I laughs]

I: Where are you from?

KM: Marquette, Michigan!

I: Have you lived anywhere else?

KM: No, I have not. Lived in the same house my whole life.

I: Can you tell me about your family, and the community that you’re from?

KM: Yes, my mother is from Milwaukee, Wisconsin, and she moved up here in the early 90’s, I would say. And met my- She moved up to Baraga, or L’Anse, Michigan, and that’s where she met my father that lived in Baraga, Michigan at the time. They are both from the Keweenaw Bay Indian Community, and my mom moved from Milwaukee with my two brothers to work for the Ojibwa Casino in Baraga. They moved up here- My dad is from- was born in Pontiac, Michigan, and moved up to Baraga. He was a commercial fisher for many years. They eventually moved to Marquette pretty much right when I was born, a little bit before to- They both came to work for the Ojibwa Casino here in Marquette, Michigan. He came to work as a security supervisor, and my mom was still a dealer…of cards. [I laughs] And eventually- Now they still both work at the casino probably twenty plus years, and my mom is the casino manager, and my dad is security manager. I have five siblings. One of my brothers lives in Milwaukee, he was born there so he went- moved back. He- his name is Anthony, he is 36, and my brother Johnny lives right across the street from me. He is like 31. I also have a sister that lives here, her name is Hannah, she lives in Marquette, and I have two siblings that live in Baraga, Michigan from my dad’s side named Heather and Travis. My community, I would say, was basically Marquette…[Whispering to I] I don’t know what to say about Keweenaw Bay. [Speaking normally]…and also, I would say the Keweenaw Bay Indian Community up in L’Anse and Baraga. I have lots of aunts and uncles that live in L’Anse and/or Baraga. I don’t really have any other family that lives anywhere else, they all live in L’Anse or Baraga.

I: Are you- So both of your parents are enrolled members at KBIC?

KM: Yes, they are.

I: What kind of activities within native culture do you participate in, on your reservation?

KM: I go to many pow-wows. I started dancing, I believe my mom made me go to my first regalia when I was six or seven, as a fancy shawl dancer, and I go to our Baraga pow-wow every single year in July, and I do travel different places to attend pow-wows and to dance.

I: Awesome! So what brought you to Northern Michigan University?

KM: Well, I [Whispering to I] I have this one written down [Speaking Normally] Well I went to Marquette Senior High School, so NMU was very close. I know I was gonna stay in Michigan to use the Michigan tuition waiver. I never travelled down-state so I actually never, like, thought about Michigan State, or CMU, or anything like that, and I didn’t do that well in High School, so I kinda knew I would be able to get into Northern Michigan University, so that was kind of a big thing, and I also had no idea what I wanted to do. My parents and my brother Anthony would always say I would go to college or go to a university, so I didn’t even know if I wanted to go, but they always pushed me to, so I knew- I loved Marquette, so I know I wanted to stay close to home, so that’s kind of why I decided to go to NMU. I know a lot of people that attended NMU, and I April, the director for the Center of Native American Studies, for a very long time, so it was kinda, just like familiar just to come to NMU, and I stayed to live at home as well.

I: What is your area of study at NMU?

KM: I am majoring in Native American studies, and minoring in political science.

I: Have you changed your major at all while you’ve been here?

KM: Well, I came to NMU undecided, and for the first year I just kinda took classes to see what I liked, and I was started off as a political science major, and I was doing a Native American studies minor, but just recently in 2016 the Center for Native American Studies came with a new major of the Native American studies major, so I transferred to that major and made political science my minor.

I: Awesome, and so here at NMU you are the president of the Native American Student Association, also known as NASA, N-A-S-A. Could you tell me some more about what NASA does, and what are NASA’s mission and goals?

KM: Yeah… [Shuffles papers] Okay. So NASA, we host two big events every single year. I believe one year, probably like five, six years ago, we weren’t able to hold one of the events, just because of funding, but we host the First Nations Food Taster in the fall semester, and we also host the Learning to Walk Together Pow-wow in the winter semester. NASA also does a lot of different, like, fun events, like, we do like, we have done beading workshops, also like, helping out with the Center for Native American Studies events. Sometimes meeting, like, with, like, different traveling high school students, just to see if they would like to come to NMU. NASA’s mission, I would say probably to promote diversity and kinda celebrate the Native American culture, bringing to Marquette. There is like no pow-wow, the closest pow-wow to Marquette, I would say is Munising, and a lot of people have never seen a pow-wow before, so I think NASA bringing a pow-wow to the community is kinda a big deal just because not many people have seen what a pow-wow is like, and the goal is to continue bringing diversity to the community.

I: Could you go into some of the history of NASA? Do you know much of what NASA has done in the past, or any important players in NASA?

KM: Yeah, I would say-or the- NASA started in 1992 as an Anishinaabe club, and changed the name to the Native American Students Association in 1996. The first Learning to Walk Together Pow-wow was founded by April Lindala, the Center for Native American Studies director, and that was held, actually, in the Jacobetti Center, in March 1991. Then eventually it moved to Hedgecock when it was two gyms, and eventually moving to the Van de Meer arena, and just recently NASA made a change to the location to the Marquette Armory because of the difficulties with the university’s policies, dealing with food vendors, like it’s a pow-wow…a part of the pow-wow [Laughs] is dealing with the food, and making sure we have, like, a pow-wow- I mean a Native American food vendor, which was very difficult doing on NMU’s campus, so that’s why we changed it. I believe- So we are on the 26th annual Learning to Walk Together Pow-wow so I would say that was a huge…or the 25th annual is actually huge [Laughs] for NASA, and I hope that we continue to go further…

I: What have been some successes that NASA has experienced?

KM: I would say successes that NASA experienced was actually, like, actually just continuing the club in general just because there is- NASA is open to everyone, but there is not a large Native American, Native American…s at NMU [Laughs], so I think just being able to continuing the club, and bringing the two large events to the community is, I would say, a huge success, and also trying to fight for different Native American issues on campus including Indigenous People’s Day, we’ve been trying to fight for- to get it recognized, so I would say just NASA continuing on, like, keep trying to enroll new members, and making sure that the club keeps moving forward.

I: What have been some of NASA’s setbacks?

KM: Like I said, the Indigenous People’s Day, I would say one of our biggest setbacks is the university not recognizing Indigenous People’s Day [What?] was part of NASA and actually started a petition for Indigenous People’s Day to be recognized on campus, and we had that petition with hundreds and hundreds of signatures, and we also had ASNMU, the student government here on campus, like, fighting with us, and also we went to the academic senate to get it approved, and our last step was bringing it to the board of trustees, but after them kinda just, I would say like, putting the issue off, and also, like, lots of resistance throughout the meetings, because they would say- accept an Italian American holiday, even though Columbus is a horrible guy to celebrate. They say we- The board of trustees asked if we would be willing to change the date of indigenous people’s day, which the entire point is to have it on the Columbus Day, just because Columbus did not discover America. In the end the board of trustees said it was not their decision, so NASA is continuing to fight for this issue, and I would say that is, like, one of the largest setbacks, but I think we will hopefully overcome it in the future.

I: How and why did you become involved with NASA in the first place?

KM: I had a friend, her name was Chelsea Vadnos (spelled phonetically), she actually still goes to NMU, that was involved with NASA at the time, and asked me to join, and also on the first day of Fall Fest, like back in 2014, I went to the NASA table and seen a new- seen the first meeting, and I wanted to be involved with at least one student organization at my time at NMU. I thought NASA would be a good fit for me.

I: How long have you been involved in NASA?

KM: Since Fall, 2014 when I first started at NMU.

I: And you were just a…I guess you would say…just a member in the office- one of the officers at that time?

KM: Actually, my first meeting I actually became vice president, so I’ve been vice president or president of NASA since I’ve started here at NMU, it’s my fifth year. There was one semester where I was not president.

I: Wow, I did not know that. And that’s probably because of, just, like, the small population of students, right?

KM: Yeah, and like, having troubles trying to get new members into NASA, especially younger members, just because we haven’t been recruiting as much as we should have.

I: What kind of things do you guys do to recruit?

KM: Well we do try to go to Fall Fest, and in the past we have done the summer orientation…orientation dates for new students coming in, freshman. So we’ve done that and we try to do more fun events, like a potluck or something, instead of NASA meetings just if people want to meet NASA, and see if it would be a good fit for them.

I: So, while you’ve been in NASA, you’ve been in NASA for quite a long time, what have you accomplished while you’ve been in office there?

KM: I would say I would- I’ve learned to be a leader. I started NASA very shy, and through high school I was always kinda just following people, I’ve never took a leadership position, so this was my first time actually becoming a leader, so I think my biggest accomplishment is, like, learning to be a leader, and kinda stand up instead of falling back in the background, so I think that is like my biggest thing, and also, like, making friendships is a huge thing a part of NASA, like I’ve probably made a lot of forever friends, and also hosting the successful events of the First Nations Food Taster and the Learning to Walk Together Pow-wows, and hopefully gaining new members.

I: Awesome. So, you graduate after this year, right?

KM: Yes.

I: So, what do you hope NASA and their new president accomplishes in the future? What would you like to see NASA do?

KM: I hope that NASA continues on with the pow-wow, the Learning to Walk Together Pow-wow, and hopefully, like, gaining new members and bringing just…bringing, like, more people together and making them more aware of the, like, Native American culture.

I: Do you have students this year that you think- that give you hope for the future of NASA?

KM: Yes I do. We have a few new members this year, and I- there’s a few members that are really willing to take on leadership roles, which I’m very excited about, so I think there is lots of hope for NASA beyond when I graduate.

I: Okay…let’s see here...Why do you think NASA is important at Northern Michigan University?

KM: I think NASA is important at NMU just because it brings diversity to campus. There is other cultural groups on campus, which I think is very important, like bringing different food fests, just, I think that is the biggest part, is just bringing diversity.

I: Do you- Does NASA work with some of the other diversity clubs?

KM: We have been invited to other events and, like the… [Whispers to interviewer] Is it the Black Student Union? [Speaking normally] The Black Student Union has helped in the past with different NMU- or, different NASA events, so yes, I think there has been, like collaboration, and I think that’s a great thing.

I: That’s awesome. Why do you think NASA- the existence of NASA is important to the community outside of NMU?

KM: Like I said before, just that many people in the community aren’t- there isn’t a huge Native American presence in Marquette, even though we are on Anishanaabe lands, so many people, like when I grew up in high school, I knew there was three or four different Native American students, so I think bringing the pow-wow and everything to the community, kind of just shows…just kinda shows, like, the importance of bringing the Native American culture to the community, and showing that we are still here.

I: That’s cool. Have you seen- When you- When you find- When you see non-natives coming to these events like the pow-wow, can you kinda see a change in them sometimes?

KM: Yes, I do, and seeing, like, more respectful, seeing like respect coming forward towards the Native American lands, and the importance of, like protecting the environment and everything, I think that’s a big thing that- a big presence that we bring when we do have these events, and showing, like the First Nations Food Tater, we have decolonized food, which is- brings healthiness- brings the health [KM and I laugh] aspect of what we used to eat, and getting the food from the lands I think is very important, and shows through the event.

I: So, you’ve been talking about the First Nations Food Taster and the Learning to Walk Together Pow-wow at NMU. Could you tell me more in-depth about these events, and why they’re important? You’ve gone into a little bit, but…

KM: Yeah. The First Nations Food Taster is an event that we always hold in November, so that is our fall semester at NMU. Mainly we bring decolonized foods and different Native American dishes to Jacobetti, and the community comes, and it’s more of a sampling just to see what the food was like, and we have many different kinds of foods, like bison stew, and many people have never tried bison, so we bring samples to different foods, and that’s actually a fundraiser for our Learning to Walk Together Pow-wow each year, so that we get lots of volunteers, students that attend NMU, but we also get volunteers that are just in the community in Marquette. We also bring other people from, I’d say like different tribes, like the Keweenaw Bay Indian Community, come up and help with this event, and we also get a lot of support throughout the community, we ask various different, like, businesses for help with this event in donations, and the Learning to Walk Together Pow-wow is an event that is held in March, that’s our winter semester at NMU, and that is a huge event, I think it’s the biggest event that we host. We could see close to 1,000 people attend, even NMU students and the community, and that’s just a big day, just to celebrate the culture, bringing the community together, and trying- we usually have a food vendor that is from, let’s say, a tribal nation, and that’s just a fun event just to show everyone what a pow-wow is and different dance styles, and hearing the drum and singing, I think is very important, and that one is held this year in March 30th.

I: Awesome, I can’t wait to go. So, the First Nation’s Food Taster, I had a question about that, where did all of these recipes come from?

KM: A lot of the recipes come from Marty Reinhardt’s book- from the decolonizing project…yeah, so a lot of that- the recipes come from Marty Reinhardt. He’s a professor here at NMU, or in the Center for Native American Studies, and also we kinda just look for the different recipes as well, because we have a lot of people that are gluten free, or vegan, or vegetarian, so we also look up different recipes, like last year we had a jalapeno soup, which was delicious. So, we do search for the- We do research for the recipes, but we also do get a lot from people we know from the center

[I whispers something unintelligible to KM]

I: Awesome! So, what kind of decolonized foods do you have there?

KM: We have, like, bison stew, we are- or bison, so we also have deer, so we also cook venison, which people really seem to enjoy. We also have things like squash, and we make something like three sisters’ casserole and wild rice, so that’s like a very big- a popular dish because bringing different things like wild rice, and squash, and pumpkin cookies, and everything, so just different decolonized foods that you would see way back then, bringing forward now, and seeing that it is actually delicious and a lot healthier than the foods that we eat today.

I: What other things will you things will you find at First Nations Food Taster, besides having a great meal there?

KM: Yeah, we also, well you’ll also meet a lot of different, like, a lot of friends. People are always willing to talk over food. We also have a silent auction which we get donated items like beaded earrings, or a necklace. We also have different books, as well on the silent auction, it’s just what people are willing to donate that year, but we also have a raffle that we have each year, we go around to businesses around Marquette and we see if they are willing to donate different gifts, gift items that would be easy to give away during a raffle, and we also have, her name is Elda Tate, she’s a Native American flute player, so you’ll also be hearing the musical, or different musical things at the food taster. We hope to- We hope this year to invite people to drum and sing in front of people- hand drum. So you’ll also be going through the silent auction, the raffle, there’s just a lot to do at the First Nations Food Taster besides just eating, but you’ll also meet different people in the community as well.

I: Nice. Likewise with the pow-wow, besides the dancing and singing, what else can you find there?

KM: You can find different foods. This is probably not mostly decolonized foods, but still food that lots of people enjoy, like we can say fried bread, or fried dogs [Laughs]. A lot of fried things, and different soups as well, like there was a wild rice soup last year, I asked our food vendor to make a vegetarian soup, because I am also a vegetarian, but I know a lot of other people are [Laughs]. So it was a lot of fun just to see different- like wild rice soup was delicious last year. You can also- You’ll see different dances with, like, specials. You’ll see, like, a feather dance for children, just for people in the community to have fun. Even if you’re not in regalia you can ask- you can dance as well during the inter-tribals, and we also have a lot of vendors that come, like craft vendors, and you’ll see different informational booths as well at the pow-wow, so you’ll also be able to shop as well.

I: Interesting.

KM: We also have a feast that is open to the community. That is in the middle of the pow-wow when we take our break, so if anyone is willing- that comes to the pow-wow will be fed that day, I think that’s a big part of the pow-wow. If we’re bringing everyone together, but we also want to make sure that everyone is fed, so that is a huge thing about Native American culture, is that we want to feed people a lot. [KM and I laugh]

I: So those two events probably take a lot of time planning, don’t they?

KM: Yes, it does. It takes a lot of members- not a lot of members, but a lot of dedicated members, I would say, throughout NASA. We- That’s why it’s such a big deal to recruit new members, I would say, because we- a lot of members do have to take leadership roles. Making sure that certain things get done, and making sure things get sent out at the right times, and also networking, so throughout NASA I would say that you will learn different skills that I think is a good thing throughout life, because you’ll be networking with different businesses, and tribes, and writing letters that is, like, good skills to have, so yeah.

I: Does the Center for Native American Studies get involved in [KM gasps]… planning this?

KM: Yes, the Center of Native American Studies is amazing with helping NASA. All the professors, even with donating, APRIL Lindela, she will help a lot with making sure- helping us, like if we have questions about- we just did a big 2% funds, that’s funds that come from different tribes, we ask the Keweenaw Bay Indian Community, and the Sioux Saint Marie Tribe Chippewa Indians, so she helps us make sure that our grants are getting- are written well, as well as making sure that they go in the right direction, and different professors a well help [Unintelligible], and just all the professors at the Center of Native American Studies will promote the events in their class, but also usually offer extra credit, so they are helping our events by bringing their classmate- or bringing their students to help with this event, and offering extra credit, which I think is amazing, so that helps us out tremendously. We get multiple, multiple volunteers because of that.

I: Awesome, thank you for talking about that.

KM: Oh yeah!

I: There’s been a push by NASA to get Indigenous People’s Day recognized at NMU, on their calendar. Could you tell me more about what has gone into that? I know you talked about that previously. Tell me more about what’s gone into that, and where that stands today.

KM: Yeah, just last semester we kind of we got the answer that the board of trustees wants us to stick with, and not try and push further, and that would be them saying that it is not their decision to do that. So we are kind of left here saying “Whose decision is it to make?” Like we are not asking for a day off or any kind of break, we just want it to be recognized on the calendar, like we are on Anishanaabe lands, this is very important. Our- Before each graduation ceremony they will acknowledge what lands that we are on right now, but they’re not willing to put it on the calendar, and since NASA is so involved with this, and getting multiple students’ signatures you think that this is what students want, so that is very shocking that they’re not willing to do that, like, for Columbus Day we don’t get the time off, so we are still- we still want to fight and make sure that this happens, but just last semester that is what we heard, even though we had the petition and the ASNMU’s help with the academic senate. We had their support as well, and now the board of trustees is just trying to put it to a halt, or just kind of trying to ignore it, so we are trying to figure out what else we can do this semester. NASA always- or usually does an event on Indigenous People’s Day, which is, this year October 8th, so we’d like to even do it, just do a celebration, and just bring more awareness to this issue. Last year we did have, like, we had a social gathering all day on campus, and also went for- did a walk around campus as well, because that is when the board of trustees meeting was meeting, just a couple weeks after, a week after or so. So this year we are doing a social gathering, just bringing awareness to this issue, also showing people that this is what we want. We’re gonna have drumming and singing there, and we are also doing a movie at the end of the day 6-8pm in Jamrich. We are doing a fun movie, because we do- we want to bring that this issue is very important, like Christopher Columbus did not discover America, he started a genocide, so we want to- e don’t want to just dread on this, because it is a celebration. We want to celebrate indigenous people, so we are doing a fun movie, but then we are also doing a question- a Q and A after the movie, kind of like a panel just to bring up the issues if anyone has any certain questions about the past and why we want to recognize this day.

I: Awesome. So…How many people went to the board of trustees meeting last semester?

KM: I do not know exact numbers, but I would say around 15-20 people, but also you have to count the other organizations, like ASNMU also went to support, we had different professors as well go to support so we had a lot of different- We had a large NASA presence, but we also had people that were supporting us.

I: How many people spoke at that?

KM: I do not know that as well. I think it is five people that spoke about the issue, because each person had an allotted time, so we wanted to fill all the spots that we could, just to make sure that this is such a huge issue. Yeah, we did have around 5 people that spoke at the meeting actually.

I: Yeah, because that works- You have about three minutes to talk, right?

KM: Yeah.

I: So you can take up 15 minutes or something with 5 people.

KM Yeah, and even in like, in the previous meetings that they did have, ASNMU used their time to talk about this issue.

I: What were the- What were the NASA members say- Okay, what were the NASA members saying, and what kind of reactions did you see from the board of trustees while that- while people were talking?

KM: I was not able to go to the board of trustees meeting [Laughs]. I know we were bringing up that this is what the students want, so why won’t the- why won’t the university- why doesn’t the university, kind of, give the students what they want? Even if we have a large presence, like, shouldn’t we stand up for what we want, and shouldn’t they see that this is important, should that- the students want on campus.

I: Have you seen- Has today’s national political climate effected NASA, or the Native American Community in general?

KM: There’s a lot of different aspects to the political climate that has effected the Native American community, just as a whole. I would say one of the biggest issues for our region up here in the Upper Peninsula is, I would say, Trump, and his- This year he did a budget proposal for next year, and theres going to be big cuts in the Great Lakes Restoration efforts. So he wants to cut funding for a $300 million program that helps with cleaning up pollution, protecting wetlands, and helping the fish habitats, which really effects NASA and just the Native American community as a whole, because we say that water is life, and we need to protect it for our future generations, so I think that it is a big thing is trying to protect our water. We have the largest freshwater here, right next to us, and we need to make sure- because we live off this water, and we fish out of this water, we eat out of this water, so we need to make sure that- we need to keep protecting it, so there have been different rallies around the Sioux area by the bridge that I know NASA members have attended to make sure that we keep protecting the Great Lakes.

I: Okay, that’s all the questions I have for you today. Is there anything else you would like to add, or talk about?

KM: I don’t think so, I think we covered a pretty great…section.

I: Okay, thank you very much for talking to me today.

KM: Yeah, thank you!

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