

Martha Rodriguez:

Before the border wall, because people like ... home is home, you know? So they go back and forth and they just walk or on a horse. They come over here for to visit or for a wake or things like that. Then go back again. Now they can not do that because of border wall.

A lot of people on reservations in Baja, especially the elders, they didn't have papers like the birth certificates and stuff like that. We don't having electricity. So for you to be able to get a passport or a visa, you have to have all this documents like proof of your income, proof of your electricity bills. All these things that people, and our people don't have that. So it was very hard to do the process to get a visa.

Anne Marie Tipton:

This is the ancestral land of the First People, the Kumeyaay.

When the border between the United States and Mexico was established in the 1850s, the land of the Kumeyaay was split between the new American state of California and northern Mexico. People and culture were immediately divided. In the over 170 years since, the effects on the culture and land management have become evident.

In this series, *Divided Together*, we'll be highlighting the impacts the border has had on the Kumeyaay and the land they've inhabited for thousands of years, how scientists and geographers have collaborated across the border to help preserve and study the land, and the various land use practices the Kumeyaay have used throughout time and how altering them has created an alarming impact.

I'm Anne Marie Tipton, the Education Coordinator for the Tijuana River National Estuarine Research Reserve, and I'll be your guide.

AMT:

During lunch, I sometimes like to walk out on the gravel paths that lead away from the Tijuana Estuary Visitor Center and further into the estuary. Each time I'm greeted by the marsh that marks the western-most edge of the Tijuana River Watershed. Depending on the season, I'll sometimes see different birds cruising the marsh, from the Northern Harriers to egrets to Willets and Long-billed Curlew, and our signature species, the Light-footed Ridgway's Rail.

If I look further off in the distance, I can see the unmistakable border fence separating the United States from Mexico. Just on the other side of the fence is Playas, a small part of Tijuana, Baja California. Resting on the hill are houses that, when looking north, look right back at the Reserve, including Border Field State Park that rests in between.

In this first episode, we'll hear from a respected member of the Kumeyaay Nation, Ana Gloria "Martha" Rodriguez. For nearly 20 years, Martha and her family have been important stakeholders for California State Parks in San Diego County, often sharing cultural knowledge and providing invaluable feedback on proposed projects. She and her husband, Dr. Stanley Rodriguez, participated in our Fiesta del Rio event for ten years. They both run the Kosay Kumeyaay Market in Old Town San Diego State Historic Park. We'll hear how this border has had an impact on the people and the land over the centuries, and we'll hear what Martha is doing to help prevent further erosion and maintain the Kumeyaay way of life and spirit.

MR:

Hello, my name is Ana Gloria "Martha" Rodriguez. I'm from San Jose de la Zorra, Kumeyaay.

AMT:

Martha's current role as a mentor and educator within the tribe can not be understated. The Kumeyaay ways of life were instilled in her very early on, and she plays an important part in passing down this cultural knowledge to the next generation.

MR:

I grew up in San Jose de la Zorra, so some of the stuff like learning from my family, my grandma, my great-great grandma. So I was very lucky to be a fourth generation. So that was even before electricity and internet and all that. So I always grew up helping my family, collecting berries or acorns, and prepare the acorn mash and different meals and stuff like that. I'll go hunting and stuff like that. So that was fun. But at the same time was like, we need to do that to survive. We had to go hunting and we had to go collect our own foods and stuff like that. But for me it was ... how do you say, very fun, but at the same time, learning.

AMT:

And this learning came from a strong role model.

MR:

Well, my mom, she was a traditional chief in my reservation. So she was always doing- she was very active. Then in the communities in Baja and over here, too. She one of the first women to go out of the reservation, even though she didn't speak Spanish very well. She never stopped. She just always and come over here and have that connection with people without even speaking English and how you see how she helped the communities in Baja, too. It was very, how to say, empower me to keep doing the work.

AMT:

Martha's work with the Kumeyaay youth is a strong reflection of her own childhood.

MR:

So right now when I teach, I like to be- people have fun and learn at the same time and have this community knowledge to bring it to the schools. Not only the Western education, but also the traditional education.

AMT:

Her work in educating youth has included empowering them in direct action along the border to protest the wall and its impact on the environment, which involves protecting important cultural sites that hold human remains.

MR:

We found a group. They call it *Tipey Joa*. It's a grassroots organization and we work very hard with social justice and also looking for resources and to empower the youth in the community. So they can be connected to their own communities and help the other youth inside in the communities, too, so they can have role models and then they want to do when they're growing up and stuff like that. We are involved with different issues. Then with the border wall, they have the call of action, we went and support them a hundred percent. We're going over there almost every day. Also, bring people from different reservations, come in and support this and be all together in ceremony to protect the sacred site we have in there. Because when they were putting the border wall, they destroyed a lot of sacred sites.

Then it was very neat for me to be involved with it because I really like when they have younger kids and the elders coming together and be like, "This is not right, what you guys doing." To see all the youth very empowered. "This is our land, this is our holy land, and we're here to protect it in a peaceful way." Then you can see, really see how the government from both sides of the border, how they treat the native people like criminals. We're over there very peaceful and prayer in a ceremony, and they're trying to stop us.

And it was like, the government- the military from both sides of the border and then helicopters and planes, and it was all over us. And see, the kids, they were not afraid. They were not afraid. They were just very strong and very empowered. This is our homeland. Then to see people stopping the big machines trying to destroy more land and people were like, "No, we're here."

At the same time, it's hard to see that. This is your land, you're protecting human remains and stuff like that. These people just treat us criminals. It's terrible, especially to see them with the

elders being there, and the other side, like, "No, we have a cemetery over here. We have human remains. We know."

Then people was like, "Oh, they don't have nothing in there." But later when they found human remains, I was like, our elder saw. They told us. They were there when that happened. But just to see them be the youth very empowered and be like, "No, this is our home land," I was very happy.

AMT:

It wasn't just federal government entities that were responding with extreme force to a peaceful protest, and trying to intimidate the Kumeyaay with the threat or suggestion of violence.

MR:

Then sometimes some people who have ranches close by, too, sometimes they just come and attack us in a very mean way and very disrespectful, yelling and stuff like that and trying to fight. So sometimes we are so heated, too, but we calm down. We're here to pray, not to get in a fight. Then to get in a fight every day is the easiest thing to do. The hardest part is to control yourself and not get into that fight, because we are there to do more important things and not to fall into that. That was a very hard when somebody is insulting in your face and calling you names and tell you a lot of things. So that was very hard.

But I think everyone did a good job when we did what we did, and just go and pray and doing ceremony.

AMT:

The violence toward California Native Americans is not just a recent occurrence. It started soon after the Spanish soldiers and friars came to Alta California in 1769.

Even with this history, Martha draws strength from fellow tribal members like elders and youth, as well as from the symbolism of the Kumeyaay Nation's flag.

MR:

A lot of people use the Kumeyaay flag for different reasons. One example was to when they want to honor the Spaniard soldiers over here in the Presidio, they asked for the Kumeyaay flag. We are not agree with that. I said, "No, we're not celebrating the Spaniard soldiers after what happened." So when we went over there and we saw that they were all the representative, the Spaniard soldiers going up the hill, and I just saw them and I saw the people. I was like, "Oh, my

God, hell no." So I ran over there and I took the flag from this guy. He was just looking at me, looking at him. So I took the flag and went back to my people.

It's a lot of controversy because when we want to be, too, involved. We can see it and stuff like that. But some people take the flag to the wrong way.

For example, we will not celebrate the Spaniard soldiers. They were doing it, and it's just like, it will allow to do that. They'll look we are celebrating, too, but we are not. It's important to have the Kumeyaay present, but we need to make sure not here to celebrating all these things happen and to recall the history. I think that's our duty to talk the truth, *Kanap Kuahan*, and say what happened to the truth. That's why we have this organization, it's a coalition.

Also working with the people from both sides of the border, right now we are working to have one Kumeyaay flag to represent all the Kumeyaay communities from both sides. So not let the border wall to divide us.

AMT:

Let's take a second to recognize that that was a really important story showing contemporary acts of resistance against the ongoing colonization of Kumeyaay culture. Since Customs and Border Protection's Operation Gatekeeper border construction project in the mid-1990s, there was a more formidable border wall between the U.S. and Mexico. Later in 2009, after the Real I.D. Act waived all construction regulations regarding the border wall, another even higher fence was constructed.

In addition to the border wall, there were other obstacles the Kumeyaay faced that only made interaction between tribal members more difficult and that included proving their identity in order to move freely across the border.

MR:

So we worked with a Kumeyaay task force and then working with the Mexican consulate over here in San Diego. So people bring people from Baja here and then they ... they understand that people don't have those papers. So they kinda, like, help us to do the visas for them. But the problem is they expire now. So a lot of people, they can not cross the border because those papers expire.

Right now, we're working very hard to be more connected and to spend more time together because I think it was worthwhile. It was that connection. It was after the border wall, it was just very limit. Then I think with all this, the work that *Tipey Joa* is doing, bringing people together. Now they have a friendship, so it's more easy to have the connection. With social media, that helps a lot, too, like connected, being- saying hi or whatever. Then, so, yeah. So I think it's more and more.

I think the ceremonies are very important. Bring the elders and be connected. To have that connection between families, I think that it's time for them to be connected again and not let allow to- the border wall to divide us anymore. So yeah, we're doing a lot of stuff to make some

changes in there.

AMT:

Martha has worked for years to facilitate people coming up from her home reservation, San Jose de la Zorra.

MR:

Well, we invite them to come to our different events, make sure there was transportation and so a place they can stay and food and stuff like that. We have a lot of support, thank goodness, from the communities over here, too. When we have, for example, the Woman's March, we have help with different organizations and have transportation and hotel for them and food and stuff like that, and come and participate in and have that to empower the young women to come, and the elders of course, to come and empower them to be like, "Hey, this is a woman's event and we're doing this all together with all different nations."

AMT:

Earlier, Martha talked about how her mother was such a strong influence and has motivated her to do the work she's doing. During our talk, she again referenced her mother when I asked about the catalyst to start this work within her tribe.

MR:

It allowed her to see a lot of injustice in the communities. I said, "I think we can do something to have a better life in our communities." Then that's why I want to bring more resources to the communities, so the young kids, they can see something else. It's just not alcohol or just other things. It's something else they can do.

And have the youth involved, people who are already gone, they have their education and then come back to the community and bring the resources. I think that's beautiful because the young kids, I'm like, "Wow, we want to do that, too."

So I would love to have the resources for the youth to be comfortable and so they can have an education and they're not alone. Whatever we can do to help and support them to have an education, a higher education, so they can- to help the communities. Right now, you have to have those papers to open more doors.

So we're working very hard, too, so we can have the tools to help our people, for example, to be respected. The elders can teach without having a Western education because they have the traditional knowledge for thousands of years and thousands of years. So why not to put value in that? We cannot learn that in any university. But it's going to a Western education, you'll learn the

tools to fight for your own people. Then be like, "No, we have the right. We have the right to protect our traditional knowledge, too."

AMT:

Martha holds an important perspective about what has helped to preserve cultural traditions on the US side.

MR:

I think that traditional gatherings and then family teaching their own kids at home. I think that's where they learn the more, with the grandpas and grandmas. Then also, they have summer camps, so that's when they teach cultural basketry, pottery, traditional games, language. So that's another way. Having fun, but learning at the same time. So they come all together and stuff like that. Then also the traditional gatherings because everyone goes over there, have fun. They have singing, dancing and the games. So it's very popular. So, yeah, people just having fun and happy to doing all this stuff and that's how kids are learning. So growing up and they want to do more and more.

Then I think it's very important because it can be a lot of racism between native people, too. So I think it's very important to see us as a big family now, because oh, you enroll, you're not enrolled, because you are not one or because of a different nations. I think it's important to come all together and support each other and be connected.

AM:

Before we said goodbye, I wanted to hear from Martha how we can incorporate the Kumeyaay ways of knowing and being into our work in the borderlands.

MR:

So I think one of the ways is to to preserve the areas, natural areas, and know development and how infrastructure in there and destroying the land . Because a lot of when they people do developments over here they destroy the land and they put invasive plants. They kill basically the native plants. So I think that's very important to people who- protecting the area. I've had more native plants.

Also have more Kumeyaay names in whatever. Like this is a park with a Kumeyaay name and stuff like that. I think it's good to respect the first people in this area and also to let people know this is Kumeyaay land. This is the people. We're still here because sometimes people talk about Kumeyaay nation like people from the past. "Oh, they were..." always taking in past. We're like, "No, we're still here." That's what I tell my people, too. I'm like, we need to have the Kumeyaay present in these areas, too, because we need to let people know that we're still here, you know?

AMT:

It was so great to talk to Martha about her work with bringing Kumeyaay from both sides of the border together and learn about the *Tipey Joa* organization that helps Kumeyaay youth grow and be empowered to become full citizens. The lengths that she and others have to take to bring folks up from the Mexico side of Kumeyaay Territory are discouraging, but it is heartening that through social media and negotiating with the U.S. Customs, they have found a way to connect and allow the elders to meet.

In his recent apology to California Native Americans, Governor Newsome described the centuries of “instances of violence, mistreatment and neglect inflicted upon California Native Americans throughout the state’s history.” After such a difficult past, members of the Kumeyaay nation draw strength from each other and continue to maintain the *Kanap Kuahan* truth telling tradition to defend their sovereignty and identity.

Thank you to Martha Rodriguez for sharing her personal history and important cultural perspective with us. And thank you for listening to *Divided Together*, a podcast series brought to you by California State Parks Foundation, Parks California, and the generosity of an anonymous donor.