

- Before I begin, I would like to say how honored and grateful I am to be this years Youth Keynote speaker. I owe a big thank you to Sarah Sherry at First Alaskans for not letting me say no to such an opportunity and for encouraging and supporting me along the way. When she asked me if I was interested in doing this, part of me was like, “Duh! Of course I would! I’d be a fool to say no!” But at the same time, I was like, “Debbie, (cuz that’s what I call myself), Debbie, this is kind of a big deal, you do know what you’re getting yourself into right?”

- As I sat down to write I thought, how am I going to get through to these people? What am I going to say that will change the way they think about their everyday choices? What will I say that will help them focus on as they go to their workshops? What words can I put together that will be so powerful that they will go back to their home and help contribute to create a healthier community? I’m thinking, well, it’s the first day of the conference, it’s early in the morning, focus number one, keep them awake! After Ed talked, you better be awake, because when I’m finished, it’s not scheduled, but there’s going to be a pop quiz and hopefully ya’ll have been taking notes, if not, you better get on it! First I’m going to talk about responsibility. Everyone has responsibilities.

- Responsibility:
 - As Alaska Native youth, it is our responsibility to learn as much as we can about our rich Alaska Native cultures, for someday we will be the elders that the young people will go to, to learn. If we don’t take the time to do so, our cultural knowledge will lessen with each generation to come. We can not afford to let this happen. Our culture is our most precious value; it’s one of the biggest factors that make us who we are today. Our pride in it is something that no one can take away from us. Our spirit is that of our people before us that will continue to flow through us and to the people that will come after us. I say again to you, it is our responsibility to ourselves, our communities, our future children, their children and for the continuation of our culture to flourish.
 - To the elders, as a youth speaking, it is your responsibility to make sure that we as young people know this know it well. Just as you all have learned from your elders, it is time for this knowledge to be passed on, so that our culture that has survived for thousands of years can continue for thousands of years to come.

- Youth: I know it’s hard to have so much on your shoulders, so many people expecting you to be the sole carrier of our traditions, so much pressure to be the ones who make sure the generations to come know about who they are and where they come from. Trust me, I know! I am up here trying to motivate the young Alaska Natives towards right direction, when I too am still learning. It’s difficult. I know sometimes you may feel stuck, like you’re in between two worlds, having to choose which one to live in. But we need not to choose this or that, we must learn to take the best of both worlds and apply it to restore this balance. Do not feel like you have to excel in every aspect of our Native cultures. Everyone has

their high and weak points. For me, ask me to dance, I'll do right here and now, but ask me to do, say, the one-arm reach? Native, please! You must be out of your mind! See, we need to learn to work with each other to achieve our goals by working together; each one of us brings something unique to the table.

- Storytelling:

I grew up in Kotzebue until I was eight. I remember going to camp, picking berries with my mom as my dad and brothers go out hunting. I never had a chance to fully learn and practice for myself, living a subsistence lifestyle. I mean, I'd take you berry picking at Costco and we'd be set for the winter! But it's the moments that are really important. Hunting and gathering is not just a time to stock up your freezers, it's a time to share stories and to teach each other.

Each and every one of you has a voice. Use it. Speak up. If no one hears you, speak louder!