

## **Kenneth**

### ***You can't take anything with you***

**Interview dramatised by Ursula Rani Sarma**

The Sami culture is all I know. I can't even tell you what is special about it because I have nothing to compare it to. I am Sami, it's who I am and I am proud. My people have learned to listen to the reindeer, to hear what they are trying to tell us. It's not so strange when you think that we live like this, side by side, all the months of the year. They depend on us and we depend on them. I grew up with them, since I was a little child, and I have always known that they would be my life. It's as simple as that. I live for them. They are my foundation and I do everything for them. If they are good then I am also good, if they suffer then I suffer too. I feel their pain so strongly inside of me. It is difficult to explain...

In the morning I feed them and again in the evening, I arrive on my snowmobile and they crowd around me. I check on them all the time, make sure they are safe and have enough to eat. If they need to be moved again for grazing then we pack up there and then.

They all have their own personalities, I recognise them by their horns, their skin, but also by the way they are. Each herder has a symbol which we cut into the calves' ears. There are more than 500 different symbols. I can tell instantly which one is mine and which is my son's or anyone else's. Some people think this is cruel but it is an ancient ritual. We work quickly and skilfully and do not hurt them. Remember, causing the reindeer pain also causes us pain.

With the weather changing the way it is we have had to find new ways to survive. The winter is the problem, if the grazing isn't good we have to find new ways to keep them [the reindeer] alive. We can buy food for them but it is expensive and we have to sacrifice a lot. That is a choice we make, to give up our own comforts to keep our herd alive.

We have more than 400 words for snow. We know how to handle each type that comes, what to expect, how to cope. Years ago, one kind of snow would fall and then you knew how to guide the animals through but now, everything can change completely in a few days. It's very hard for the reindeer to adapt to new conditions so quickly, sometimes their bodies cannot adjust in time. We lost several of our herd this year for that reason, their stomachs couldn't adapt quickly enough to the temperature change.

All of this talk about agreements and targets to stop climate change, they are going too slowly. People around the world in the big cities, they will never understand until the effects of their pollution reach them in their own homes. Already we can see some changes happening everywhere, flooding, snowing, extreme weather. People seem surprised, they deal with it and then it passes. But we see it up here now all the time and trust me, you won't escape it. Wherever you are, it's coming to you too and one day it will stay... if you don't start to think now, it will be too late to do anything then.

It falls on everyone. We are all doing wrong. We are destroying this planet, this way of living. There is so much pollution out there. I am not a scientist but I am living with the fallout, with the results.

We are all chasing too much money, we want to make vast quantities of it and quickly. But at what cost? And to what end? If we all stop chasing something far away, and just start to be where we are, it would be a good start. Nature and animals show us so much; not just reindeers, every creature in the world. Start looking at them with clear eyes, learn from them. There is no need to be in such a hurry. Try to live for now, not to just chase money. This day you are living in, this place, this life – you can't take anything with you. Everything that you have earned in a lifetime will stay here. So, why spend all your time trying to gather things only to put [them] in a safe somewhere? Instead live your life for itself, for yourself, for others.

This is the only way that we are going to change anything at all. If people all over the world start thinking about what they are doing now then perhaps it is not too late. Look in the seas today, bottles and plastic bags everywhere. Why? You don't have to throw what you use into the ocean. I can't understand why we are forgetting nature, why we are abusing the world. We think it's so big, but it's not. We are all connected some way, somehow. We will all have to live with the consequences.

I look at my children and I wonder if they will be able to continue this way of life. There are so many opportunities available to them now out there. They can travel, work for a while at one thing and then change. With reindeer herding comes tremendous sacrifice, you cannot live part of your life here and the other part in the city. You need to be with your animals at all times. To build and shape your life around them. When there were no other options then this way of life seemed normal but now I'm not so sure. Especially now things have become so much harder for us. The next generation must make this difficult choice, for the animals and the Sami way of life or for themselves.

I cannot know what the future will hold for my people...