6.1

INTRODUCTION TO ANTHROPOLOGY

0:11–1:23

STUDY OF HUMANKIND

My name is Kathy Schick and I am an anthropologist. What is anthropology? Sometimes it's been called the holistic study of humankind, which is a lot of work. It's trying to look at humans from all angles. And I got interested in this even long before I even knew there was such a field.

As a teenager in junior high school and then high school, I became fascinated with looking around the world at human beings all around the world but living in different cultures with different lifestyles, different beliefs and customs. And I wondered, how did this happen? How does this work? I also became fascinated with us as a species, that we were a very unusual species in the animal world. We have this huge brain, we walked on two feet, we had complex tools and technology, elaborate culture. And I wondered how did this really happen? How, when, and why? And then my very first semester in college, I found the field was called anthropology. This was what I had been interested in for so long.

1:23–2:13

SEE THE WORLD

Now, doing anthropology has taken me to a lot of places in the world over the years. I actually met my husband on an archeological dig. And then while we were in graduate school, we went off to Africa right after we got married, more or less spent our honeymoon in a tent. In fact, the first two years of our marriage, we figured we spent about half of it living in a tent with all of our belongings in a little tin trunk at the foot of the bed.

So, we've traveled a lot, lived in many places of the world for months at a time and had quite a wide range of experiences with people and also living in unusual places like the African plains with our nearest neighbors being antelope, crocodiles, and lions. So, it's been a very exciting time.

2:13–3:13

PREHISTORY

Now, when anthropologists want to do their work, their research, they often have to travel. Some people might do it in the U.S., deal with particular groups here but as often, it entails going overseas to other countries and other continents and living with different cultures, learning about aspects of their culture, learning about the physical people there, the adaptation, for instance, in high altitudes and how people adapt—their bodies have adapted to high altitude, so studying the physical being. Also, studying the languages and also studying the prehistory through archeology.

And when we do this, we often will be studying the tools and we'll go and excavate these early tools and try to understand how they made and use their tools and how they lived out their lives, their daily lives and adapted.

3:13–3:58

ANCESTORS

Physical anthropologists may also study human fossil ancestors such as these, so that you will go out and excavate and sometimes study in laboratories. And also, you'll find not only our direct ancestors but also that there are other species out there who are our cousins, long lost cousins. We're used to being the sole species with only the chimpanzees being our closest living relatives but we have much closer cousin species many years ago who also walked upright but had small brains and a different adaptation. So, this is another fascinating aspect of what anthropologists study.

3:58–4:55

A MULTIDISCIPLINARY APPROACH

Now, if you think about it, it's only been about a 150 years since Darwin wrote "Origin of Species". And Neanderthals were only beginning to be found short time before that. So, in that short amount of time, a 150 years for a discipline, we have made huge, huge accomplishments in anthropology, especially in my field, paleoanthropology, which tries to look at human evolution. And usually this entails physical anthropologists, archeologists, and a wide range of other people.

Paleontologists who might study carnivores or elephants, geologists of different sorts living in big field camps and doing their work sometimes for weeks or months at a time, sometimes in remote places of Africa for instance, so you... often doing a lot of travel and interfacing with a lot of other scientists in this work.

4:55–5:35

JOIN THE DISCOVERY

Now, all of these fossils that we found, in a sense, you've heard of probably missing links. In a sense, all of these fossils that we found are found missing links. But remember, for each missing link that we find, when we find the next one, then, you want to find the one that's in between those. So, that is the challenge.

Every year, more expeditions go out. If you go into this field, you might be on one of those expeditions to find new missing links that will fill in even more exciting stories about human prehistory.