

Students' fight against spill inspires writer

by Paul Swetzof

for the Tundra Times

Unalaska High School seniors Danielle Avila and Amy Looby were a great inspiration to me recently. They wrote an outstanding and insightful letter to the *Tundra Times*.

OPINION

These two young women have demonstrated that youth can care about their community, be aware of their history and use their knowledge for great insight. They have shown us exactly why our cultures will not only survive, but prosper.

All that the next generation needs from us is support, education and the knowledge of heritage which they can only get from their relatives and village elders. They will then do a very good job of helping to preserve the generations of the future and the environment which will sustain them.

Danielle and Amy's letter was sparked by the recent grounding of a Japanese processor and the subsequent oil spill from that ship. This incident caused them to express their frustration and anger at much more than the oil slick. They expressed their outrage that the people of Unalaska seemed to be losing control over their destiny.

They discussed a Japanese processor which is fouling the beaches and killing marine life around the island. They are angry that the Japanese refused to give permission to take the ship to sea and sink it. They wondered why the same foreigners who are fouling Unalaska also have an unrelenting economic grip on the town.

These two high school students had the insight to see the economic, political and corporate games that are being played out on their island.

After putting it all together and realizing the evil games that other people were playing with their lives, they had the courage to do something about it. They publicized the truth. These two teen-agers showed everyone that we don't need to take it any more.

What the Japanese are doing to the Aleut homeland of Unalaska, is a good example of what outsiders and big money interests (and I include some of our Native corporations) are doing to villages all over Alaska. They are holding our lands, undermining our governments, fighting subsistence and playing high stakes games with all of the above with the money which was supposed to be a settlement for the 91 percent of Alaska we gave up (at \$3 an acre), in that thing we loosely call a Native claims settlement.

I know that Danielle and Amy are going to continue to do battle against those people who invade our homelands for a profit, without ever caring for the land, water and wildlife which is so much a part of us and without which we cannot survive.

I want them to know how very much I respect them. They are an example to me, and I hope to everyone who learns about them and from them.

They might be wet behind the ears, but we can all learn plenty from them and all of the others who have taken it upon themselves to fight the good fight.

And one more thing: Amy and Danielle should know that we are going to stand with them to win back and preserve our homelands. We can't win without them, and they can't win without us.