

**"Respect Yourself"**

# Teen urges young adults to avoid drugs, alcohol

by James Bennett

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I dream of not only improving the Native Society, but making it better. For me to do that, I will have to get my education. Hopefully I can do this by playing sports such as basketball. Getting a scholarship may be my ticket to going to college and making a name for myself and my family. Maybe the older people, and hopefully the younger adults, would listen to what I have to say after I achieve my goal without alcohol being in my way.

I have never consumed alcohol in my life, and I want to keep it like that so I could be the first in my whole family to never drink. After I do these things I want to go back and talk to the indigenous people of Alaska.

Maybe they'll listen to what I have to say ... that I made my choice, achieved my education, became an athlete, and took advantage of these opportunities. I want to direct my ambitions toward making the Native Society better.

Accomplishing this could be done by showing the younger adults their Native traditions. "Respect yourself, your elders, and your surroundings," would be my driving message. Most importantly, respect the land, for the land is what you survive by through hunting

and fishing. If you live off the land you must respect nature, so respect the land. Family is important, too. Love your family for your family comes first. I never put anything before my family, not my friends or my hobbies.

Spirituality is really hard to explain. It is a big part of our Native identity. An important rule that I live by is to respect your body. Don't use any drugs, alcohol or nicotine. The only drug that you would find in my system is caffeine. After a while when you abuse the alcohol, you'll break down your immune and nervous systems. You start shaking and you can't hold anything still.

Users or abusers have low self-esteem. They cannot deal with many problems. Many cannot communicate. Communicating is a big factor if you're trying to sober up. If you try to hide your addiction, it takes its toll. I grew up around alcohol, so I know what it causes, and how it can change people.

Alcohol is a reality in the Native Society. And the white people know us as people who drink. They stereotype us as drunks. We're not all like that; there are people who are trying to make a difference in the Sobriety Movement.

Throughout Alaska there are many positive people I know, people from Anchorage all the way up to Barrow. If only there were Alcoholics Anony-

mous programs all over Alaska. In little villages and bigger towns, it would make a difference. There could be different ways for people to sober up in villages, but it takes someone to organize it.

I have to make my choice right now.

I'm trying to take advantage of my opportunities so I can accomplish my dreams. These aren't my only dreams and goals — I have other dreams such as playing basketball throughout high school. And living up to the values of my culture.