

# Inupiat pride

Many Alaska Natives continue to be strangers in cities whether in Alaska or elsewhere, but we know such existence is transitory, a pathway we must sometimes travel. Cities, after all, are a Western creation, and we use them only when necessary. We may even spin out our lives comfortably in a physical sense in these alien places so long as we know that there is a spiritual cord binding our hearts and minds to the land, to our people and our ways for all time.

Such realization or being gives us a focus to cope with the craziness of the city environment, once described as "a race track to nowhere." Occasionally, the tie which connects us to our cultural core is injured and unraveled, even severed, causing the precious harmony of our lives to go out of balance. Some of us become confused and lost, joining the legions of Western civilization, wandering in search of direction, even pitifully borrowing someone else's uncertain guide for living.

Willie Hensley told us a few years ago at an Alaska Federation of Natives Conference that "...we must look within ourselves for the answer." Since Willie's message to us, NANA has gone about defining and refining what is often referred to as the "Spirit Program" or "Inupiat Ilitqusiat."

Simply, it is a guide for finding the answer to our existence as humans, and it is based on the strengthening of our cultural values and maintaining the spiritual cord which connects us to our people. It can be adapted for use by Tlingits, Aleuts, any other Alaska Native group, and even people of the western world.

SMC