

Letters to the **EDITOR**

Indian Country important for unity

Dear Editor:

Shalak Naii/my relatives. In the past 500 years since the coming of the Western Europeans, we, as Native people of America have lived many lifetimes and have lived many lives. We have tried all the methods that were brought to us and some have become people that we never were.

Through these experiences, we as Gwich'in people of the Native village of Venetie lands have discovered that what our people had and the way we have lived and believed was the best way we can live on this planet, without harming

the children or the land. The reason our people lived with respect is so that there will be a future.

As Gwich'in, we were fortunate, because our people took life seriously and as a result, did not take anything for granted. Spiritual strength has always been a much needed part of our being. What our parents and grandparents did in the past all had their purposes.

When one of our people, John Fredson went to college back in the early 1900's, he saw what was going on with our relatives in the Lower 48 and immediately set about to give our people some

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protection, which was to set aside the Venetie lands. With this in place, we could then concentrate on our education and learn about the people who were starting to have drastic affect on our people and the way of life, established by our ancestors.

With these education, we soon learned that we were dying off intellectually. Our skins may still be Indian skins, but in our minds, we were beginning to forget who we are and start thinking like and becoming white. For this reason, it is important to separate Native teachings from what you learn from today's education system.

Since we were not comfortable with

ourselves, we were ashamed and angry with one another and soon started fighting with our relatives and killing ourselves with alcohol.

When I studied Indian Law in the early 80's, I discovered that if we are to get any control back, the best way was to acquire the status of "Indian Country". This will help us to re-establish our society by using what is practical from other societies and would give our people back their minds and the ability to think about things from their own perspective and therefore be comfortable with their decisions. In turn, this will bring our people back together and we can be strong and proud once more.

Here in Arctic Village, we now know

our past and how we have dealt with. From this knowledge and the wisdom taught by our ancestors, we can think for ourselves and can be confident of our decisions. We would like to share these learnings with our Native brothers and sisters and bring the whole Indian nation of America back together, as our ancestors have instructed with their emphasis on "unity". With God's help, we can save this planet for our children.

Thank you for your time.

*With Much Respect,
Lincoln Tritt
Arctic Village, Alaska*