

To this lawyer, education is all important

By BILL HESS

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Native education is very important to Ella Anagick.

When she was a child, most of the people living in her village of Unalakleet were very

poor, although she remembers them as being hard-working and resourceful. They built their own homes, and filled their dinner plates with food they had wrested from one of the harshest environments on

earth.

"When I was 10 years old, I remember going to some of the teachers' houses," Anagick recalls her encounters with another world which had already set itself down amongst her

Inupiat people. "They lived in really nice houses. I remember thinking, 'if I could get an education, I could be a teacher and live in a house like that!'"

Anagick's goal to better her-

self never left her. After finishing up her days in the Bureau of Indian Affairs day school in Unalakleet, she attended Mt. Edgecumbe High School for three years and then transferred to Aiea in Hawaii for her senior year.

While there, she learned about a university in California called Stanford, which was reputed to be an excellent school. She applied, was accepted, found the money necessary and finally graduated after majoring in math. She then went on to Dickinson School in Carlisle, Pennsylvania, where she earned her law degree. She now works fulltime as a lawyer for Calista Regional Corp. and the Association of Village Council Presidents.

Now Anagick wants to let young Alaskan Natives know the value of an education. "Our ancestors had to develop very keen skills and acumen to survive out in the harsh environment," she explains. "In developing their skills they were extra resourceful. They had to rely on themselves for everything! They built their own housing and caught their own food."

Although there seem to be many problems in the education of Native students, Anagick feels that if young people can apply the same resourcefulness and energy their ancestors had, they will do well in their studies. In fact, she believes, if students want to maintain a unique Native life-

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Ella Anagick poses with Denali Elementary School students Buddy Walters and Michelle Goodwin, both 10-year-old fifth graders, and Jerry Collins, 12, a sixth grader. Anagick, an attorney, has a strong interest in Native education.

'A good education is another survival skill'

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style, they had better get all the education they can.

"It is a paradox," she explains, "but it is better to develop the skills in your own community than to have them brought in by others from outside. That works more to the destruction of our lifestyle."

Anagick sees two basic paths young people can follow to find a good and successful life. "They can apply themselves in pursuing an education with the same vigor and skill our ancestors had," she explains, "so that they can meet the challenges of 1991 and the future."

Native lands and stocks held in the regional and village corporations are scheduled to lose their federal protection in that year. Anyone will then be able to then acquire them.

"I know in a lot of the villages, in Calista and the other regions, there's a real need for people who can manage, who have management skills, accounting skills, investment skills." These need to be developed by Native people, Anagick says, "so that we can control our own future."

"If we can get the young motivated to get an education, so that they can go back home and work, not only for the corporations, but for the IRA (Indian Reorganization Act) self-governments, then they can go back with a better sense of control, rather than having all these regulations and other values which conflict with our traditions forced upon them."

When people who come from a self-sufficient culture see such changes being imposed upon them, out of their control, it makes them feel helpless, Anagick says.

"One point I want to make very clear is these young Native people have to apply themselves just as diligently as their ancestors did in obtaining the skills for survival.

"If young people chose not to go with the route of education, then they should learn to be self-reliant," Anagick believes.

The young need support. Although academics were not stressed when Anagick was a young student in Unalakleet, the atmosphere was supportive. Children were encouraged to come to school and learn, and just about everyone became involved in basketball games and other school activities.

"It gave children more pride, more spirit, more spark!" Anagick remembers. "As an incidental effect, it gave them more incentive to stay in school."

Anagick believes role models, especially male role models, are needed. She recalls that a Native teacher, Mrs. Bernadette Trantham, had a positive influence on her own desire for an education.

An education is difficult to pursue unless a student has strong family support, Anagick stresses, but if for some

reason this support is not there, it is still important that the young person finds support from other concerned Natives.

College is a big concern of Anagick's. "I'm disturbed at the fact there are these statistics that indicate there are fewer young Native people in

college now than there used to be," she says, noting figures from the University of Alaska in Fairbanks and Anchorage.

These statistics were made real to Anagick recently when she attended a gathering of Native students at the University of Alaska - Anchorage Community College, as a guest

speaker. She had expected to see a large crowd of young people there, but very few had gathered. It was then Anagick decided she wanted to speak out on education. Soon, she will be visiting with Native students at Denali Elementary School in Anchorage.

"I think there should be

a real concerted effort to focus in on this problem. I don't know if it's the fault of the university system, or if there is not enough support given these young people.

From her own experience, Anagick found that there were those who would say she

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couldn't make it, and she expects other students might face similar doubts. "If you have the drive to really do it, then nothing anyone says can stop you. You set your mind to do it, and once you set your mind, you no longer have fear. It's a matter of mental attitude."

Although her ancestors had not gone through the academic university system, Anagick found thoughts of them to

be a great help during hard times. "I thought of my great grandparents, and the way they had lived in Unalakleet.

"This was a contributing factor to my getting through school. Because I knew of the lifestyle they had lived, and the pride they had taken in their heritage, and the time they had taken to train us."

Anagick passed her Alaskan bar exam last June. She now works with villages in the Calista region in need of legal advice.