

# Natives must help each other to survive

by Elizabeth Keating

Fairbanks Native Association

**FAIRBANKS** — The holiday season of Christmas and New Year is a spiritually powerful time for all of us. Most of us are inspired to our highest nature. We lavish gifts on families and friends. We share our joy and generosity with the less fortunate. We experience a "high" similar to being in love. We are more open and friendly with everyone, even strangers.

Unfortunately, we only allow this special experience to happen twice a year, usually at Christmas and Easter seasons. We need to learn to hang on to some of that special feeling to spread throughout the rest of the year. We have some serious problems facing us. We need to call on that powerful spirit within ourselves to find year-round solutions.

For a century or so we have endured a massive impact on our culture and lifestyle. Some of it has been positive, most of it devastating. It has brought about confusion, conflict and great disorder. Many observers, including ourselves, sometimes thought we were wiped out as a people.

A few among us hung in there quietly living a life of balance as we always have since before history. They are among today's leaders, elders and wise ones.

It appears now that we are awakening after the storm and turmoil. We are assessing the effects of what we have been through. We see that we have suffered much damage and loss. But, we also have and enjoy some of the best aspects of technology.

We are in a time much like the time after a serious bout of the worst kind of flu. We feel so much better, but are still weak and vulnerable. We must take care and go easy or else get real sick again. We must protect our family.

Socially, educationally and politically, this is where we are. We should view ourselves as a village that has just suffered a devastating and deadly

epidemic and war. We must begin to recover and rebuild our villages. We must help those who still suffer and support those who are recovering. We have to help each other, everyone of us, if we are to survive as a people, the original people of this land.

We face many serious problems in our recovery that money alone cannot solve. Money is helpful, but money alone is not the answer for what we need. The nearly one billion dollars we got in 1971 for about 100,000 people can prove that.

We need to learn to work together again for the collective and common good as we have for centuries before history began. We need to learn to disagree in a healthy way so that we can continue to work together in spite of our differences.

You, our leaders should learn to accept our disagreements and constructive criticism in the spirit in which it is intended, concern for our individual and our collective needs. We should look for ways of meeting the individual needs of those who cannot agree without hurting the common good.

Here in Fairbanks, the second largest city in Alaska, there are Native people from all around Alaska needing help. I have heard some of you say the Natives in Fairbanks are urban and don't need village concern. Let me tell you, some of the guys in prison are from the villages. Some of the kids that are taken away from families and put in foster homes are also from the villages. Many of the kids in Fairbanks Youth Facility are from the villages.

All of these people, especially the children and youth *didn't choose* to become urban Natives. They need *your/our* help. Just money alone won't help. They need sober and caring adults to help them.

Many of the youth at the Fairbanks Youth Facility should be in a foster home, either here or in the village. They get sent here because there is no alternative. Many of the children are in non-Native foster homes because

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ther aren't enough Native foster homes. These are our hope of the future. If we don't take care of our kids, what kind of future do we have?

The following statistics are general, but pretty close:

- Fairbanks Youth Facility — 40 percent Native.

- Division of Family & Youth Services — 25 to 40 percent Native.

- Hospitality House — more than 50 percent Native.

- Fairbanks Correctional Center — 40 to 60 percent Native.

- Fairbanks North Star Borough School dropout rate — 70 percent among Native students.

These are mostly children and youth who need adult help. Where is it? It isn't somebody else's problem. It's your/our problem and my problem. What are we going to do about it? Some of us are trying. We need help. Let us reflect and look for ways to work together toward solutions to these problems.

The holiday season is a good time for spiritual reflection and renewal. It is a powerful time for feeling joy, peace and goodwill toward others, the world. It is a good time to make a fresh dedication to our beliefs and to resolve to carry them out in the New Year.