

Corporal punishment leaves deep scars

By Flora Johnson

Chukchi News and Information Service

ILIAMNA- When I was in fifth grade, my math teacher spanked me with a homemade paddle in front of 45 classmates.

Den Nena Henash Our Land Speaks **OPINION**

I had asked a student sitting next to me for help with a problem. I was too scared to ask the teacher a question about something he had just spent 20 minutes explaining. So the teacher saw us talking, he paddled me, and I was sent home for the day.

When I returned, he hit me again in class. This time, he struck me on the top of my hands with the same paddle, because he said I was cheating.

The teacher never did ask us what we were talking about or what we were doing.

After that humiliating experience, I became shy and lost my self-esteem. It was like a spark of hope went out of me for learning.

Today, I believe corporal punishment should be outlawed in Alaska.

In a report titled "Cross Cultural Spanking Practices," author Barbara Jim Theisen stresses that current educational and psychological trends favor non-physical punishment for children, which stands in contrast to the more popular "how to" books on parenting and child management, such as Dr. James Dobson's "Dare to Discipline."

Dobson urges the use of spanking as an effective if sometimes painful means of controlling children's undesirable behavior.

I disagree with him because studies have shown that high levels of corporal punishment in school and frequent disciplinary interventions almost invariably lead to worse student behavior.

In "The Law of Public Education," E. Edmund Reutter Jr. and Robert R. Hamilton write that the use of corporal punishment in this country as a means of disciplining school children dates back to the colonial period.

Professional educators such as Dr. Thomas Gordon assert that teachers lose their power of punishment as children get older. With younger students, most teachers rely heavily on punishment. They not only punish by withholding students' needs, but they can behave in ways that cause discomfort or pain to their students, either physically or psychologically.

Slaps, spanks, tongue-lashings, extra work, failing grades, detention periods, standing students in corners and hundreds of other ploys have been used by teachers to create enough discomfort so they might comply with teachers' demands — out of fear.

The American Psychological

Association issued a statement on corporal punishment in 1975. It emphatically deplores the use of physical punishment as childhood discipline and urges "more effective, humane, and creative ways of interacting with children."

Current policies in our local Lake and Peninsula School District state "corporal punishment is not allowed as a means of discipline."

Alaskans should take a second look at physical punishment in the schools. Surely, in our ever-increasingly violent world, we need as many ways as possible to learn to curb our aggres-

sions so that we, as a society, may learn to face the future with confidence and with hope in a better tomorrow.

Athabascan Flora Johnson, a teacher's aide who plans to become a certified teacher, grew up in Allakaket in a family of 12 children and now lives in Iliamna with her husband and

two children. Her first job was working for former Sen. Mike Gravel in Washington, D.C. She wrote this column in an audioconferenced writing class out of Chukchi College, a branch campus in Kotzebue of the University of Alaska Fairbanks. Chukchi News and Information Service is a writing project of Chukchi College.