

Elder describes his life as example for youth

By BOB KOWELUK
Tundra Times Reporter

This year's statewide Native Youth Olympics held in Anchorage on April 24 and 25 was dedicated to the young and the old...our tradition bearers.

Chief Andrew Isaac, 83, traveled from his home in Tanacross to represent our elders, our living link with the past. Chief Isaac, an Athabaskan spoke to the competitors and spectators gathered at the Anchorage City Gym Friday evening. Isaac spoke of the future, for "kids" to learn and to use this knowledge in everyday life. Isaac also reached into the recent past, at a time when the competitors were babies, and spoke about the fight to protect our lands and our lifestyles. But in the end, amid cheers from all gathered at the gym, he scolded the youngsters to listen and to remember what he had spoken of.

Chief Isaac said, "I've been here in Anchorage in 1942...and I never thought this town is going to be looking like it is right now."

"Right now, this is your time," Isaac said as he spoke in his manner, using the English language as he learned it from life's experience. "The people here (Cook Inlet Native Association NYO Committee) want me to visit with you, the younger generation to take a little of your time. I traveled a long trip to visit with you younger generation in Anchorage to speak with you."

Isaac brought with him 83 years of experience and knowledge of the past reaching even farther. He shared some of his experiences with us, using clothing as an example at first, then education and using the knowledge in life everyday. He shared his experiences with life-



Bob Koweluk/Tundra Times

CHIEF ANDREW ISAAC

style changes also...the changes which never cease.

"When I was 11 years old, I was raised wearing skin clothes," Chief Isaac said. "My Grandfathers and my Daddy's people used bow and arrows to kill caribou and moose. Truly they were such creative people at such a time when us children was living...and the earth changed, the world with our teachings (is gone), persons never learn anymore that way.

"Since the second World War, Isaac said, our world began changing quickly with outsiders flowing into the state, road systems being built, our lifestyle

changing to what it is today. With this change came a loss of our traditional education replaced by a formal education system by the outsiders.

"And we had to learn in school and learn an education right now you give me the book, I can pronounce my name...that's all the education I know. I speak now with a English I worked with a growing people since I was 11 years old," Isaac said of a people's growing up in a time of change. "Working with the white man that's how I learned my education, this education."

"Yes, I know, that's all the

education I got," Isaac said about his formal education. He values the education youngsters are receiving today, an education some youngsters receive well, while some other youngsters go so far as to "dropout" for whatever excuse. "I appreciate you now, you younger generation. When kids coming together here for this meeting, be sure to learn and use anything you learn. If you don't use it, it's a part of you you're not living for. Therefore, our own growing people teaching us, the way that they learn, the way that they make a living, the way that they take care of their family and the way that they take care of their homes."

"So this is the way we're living here on this earth," Isaac said of the Families past and of today. "Us growing peoples back in my own time, Indians, my Grandfather's my teacher, my Uncle's my teacher, my Aunt's my teacher and two people, they teach you lots...

my parents."

Regardless of the changes, living in the past is only memories away for Chief Isaac. "Living in the past, as living today demands that we participate, not kick back to go for the ride, nor does it do anyone good to fade away or drop out. As in the past, today we must live taking with us the riches and the richness of our heritage and culture. Perhaps youngsters can understand our culture a little more by understanding our special ties with our land...the same land now being claimed by newcomers, with their economic special interests.

According to Chief Isaac, "the first time in 1962 there was a big meeting here in Anchorage. (The Natives) they come here to talk about the land claims. I am one of the men who saw a chance to protect as much land as I can for you, our younger generations.

"For your time, I try to save

(Continued on Page 20)

● Andrew Isaac

(Continued from Page Fifteen)

much land for you to use."

After a lifetime, living with what has been and what has come to be, Isaac summed up his experience as a grandfather to his grandchildren: "I appreciate you young generations here now. You learn a good education. Learning and using. Make believing out of it. Make a living out of it. So I really appreciate you younger generation to do good work and to learn and to do good.

"I was born in 1898. A few days ago it was my birthday April 16. There was no doctors, no nurses, no welfare. Us Natives we supported each other. I'm still standing here

because I eat moose meat, I'm 83 years old.

"In my young time a lot of strong stories I can tell you if I got more time to speak a little more. But the whiteman time is but a few minutes....Fifteen minutes to stand here to tell you what happened in my Indian ways and life.

"And if I give you one minute for you to tell me what I've given you, you can't remember," Isaac taunted his listeners to retain what he spoke of. "If you listen, the words go right through your head in one ear and out the other ear and you can't even remember what I've said."