

At first a stranger, she forgot to be homesick

By LINDA LORD-JENKINS
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Paula Vivian White didn't know how homesick she was for her Alaska home until she returned for Christmas vacation from her studies at the University of Oregon in Eugene, Oregon.

It was then, as she saw her family and friends that she realized that she really missed the place that she had grown up in and the people she has grown up with.

But Miss White, the reigning Miss World Eskimo Indian Olympics, said she does not regret for a minute travelling thousands of miles to attend school in a specialty that is difficult to major in in Alaska — computer science.

"When I went down there

(Oregon) I didn't know one single person," she says. While there are many Alaskans attending the university in Eugene, she says she knew none of them.

Her roommate in the dormitory in which she is staying is a junior from Singapore who also is majoring in computer science and Miss White has found that many of her close friends are Orientals.

But before she started to worry about making friends and her social life, Miss White says she focused her efforts on her reason for being in school — for an education — and threw herself into her studies.

"I was so busy with my studies . . . I was constantly studying . . . that I didn't realize how homesick I was un-

til I came home."

Her 14 hours of class credits earned during her first semester represented classes in four subjects. Those subjects would make most people, and certainly a first term freshman, faint.

She has taken classes in computers, writing, pre-calculus and speech. The two classes that many would find difficult — pre-calculus and computers — were easy for the young woman from Anchorage.

"That's where the talents fall for me," she says while admitting that writing is "the hardest thing for me."

"I went to my teacher and asked why I wasn't getting better grades. She told me that I have good ideas and inter-

esting thoughts but I have difficulty getting them across clearly, that as soon as I could bring them out more clearly I would have no problem."

She said that she found all of her teachers to be very helpful and willing to help students.

That proved especially vital to White because she missed her first week of classes while she competed in the Miss National Congress of American Indians title at the NCAI convention in Bismarck, North Dakota.

She went to Eugene to find herself many chapters behind in most of her course work. "Once I caught up I was okay but it was hard catching up."

She now makes it a point to study as much as needed to stay up with her classes.

The one surprise that Miss White has had about college is "that it isn't as difficult as I thought it would be."

"My parents prepared me well for college. They always talked to me about life and people and how some can be — they try to run over you to get what they want."

"In college I found out that many people don't care about you but some do."

She says that she has on more than one occasion faced a person who did something that she didn't agree with. "I sat down with that person and talked with them. I'll try to resolve problems with the person."

In one instance she found "at first she was shocked that I would come up and sit down with her. Then she told me some things that I do that she didn't like. We found it was all a big misunderstanding and we have come to be very close friends," says Miss White.

As Miss White has started to socialize more with fellow students she found that being an Alaskan and an Alaskan Native brings much interest in her.

She says she will sometimes tease people who are awestruck that she comes from this land. "I remember teasing these two girls. I told them we lived in condo-igloos. They'll ask if it is dark here 24 hours a day. A lot of people think that Anchorage is a very small town."

Miss White has gotten involved in the Native American Student Union on campus and is helping coordinate a Pow-Wow on campus in May. She has been invited to attend the Pow-Wow as an honored guest in her capacity as Miss WEIO and has received a similar invitation from the University of Washington.

Through her contacts at the student union she has met two other Alaska Native students, one from Kotzebue and another from Nome.

She said she had an opportunity to talk to girls in her dormitory about her people and heritage one day when

she attended a pow-wow wearing a Kuspuk and some bead-work jewelry.

Explaining that she is Miss World Eskimo-Indian Olympics usually gets a first response of "What?" but as she talks about the event her excitement grows and spreads and many people now really want to attend the event in Fairbanks.

She says the Miss NCAI pageant was "my worst pageant." She was 18 years old and the second youngest of the 17 contestants.

One of the male escorts for the reigning Miss NCAI told Miss White's mother that she should wait a couple years then return and compete again. Her youthfulness had worked against her to some degree.

Miss White says that she probably will compete again and she advises any Alaska Native girl or woman who wants to compete in the Miss WEIO contest to do so, even if they don't represent any organization. She competed on her own and yet "never expected to win."

But she did and says the experience was well worth it.

Although Miss White thinks she hasn't learned any great lessons from her first semester at school, she spoke to high school seniors and juniors at the Cook Inlet Native Association during her break. She told them one simple thing — "not to be scared. I talked to one lady who was so smart but she said that she got so homesick when she first went to school that she didn't get the grades that she could. When she realized that everything was okay she started doing good."

"Being away at school is not really that much different, you're just a few thousand miles from home. I made up my mind not to be scared or homesick."

But, while she may not be homesick she has come to one conclusion — she definitely wants to return to Alaska when she is through with school.

Miss White says that working for the National Aeronautic and Space Administration has always been a dream for her. She knows that such a dream-come-true would mean that she would have to leave the state of her family, friends and heritage. That she is unwilling to do.

She says that she realizes how valuable those friends and family are to her each time she gets a call or receives a letter from home. "At first I didn't get many letters then all at once they started to come. Each time I get a letter I get so excited!"

She makes sure that she writes back almost immediately so those letters keep coming. "They cheer my day."

Especially one from her five-year-old brother, Paul who can barely write but knows enough to write a big "I love you, signed Paul White."



Paula White - Miss WEIO.