

Ana Cooke of Bethel reigns as Miss NCAI

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By Naats'keek

Anastasia Cooke, a 20 year old Yupik Eskimo, likes to be called by her nick-name Anna. She is the daughter of Chris and Margaret Cooke of Bethel, Alaska. Ana graduated from high school at Bethel and in her last year, she received the award of Most Outstanding Senior Girl. Ana is also Miss National Congress of American Indians for 1992-1993, an honor equivalent to being Miss America. She appropriately deserves this honor.

When she was in her third year of high school, she attended the AFN Convention for the first time. She became very active in the operation of the convention, which helped her develop much leadership qualities for the next convention where she served as AFN Youth President.

Besides holding title of Miss NCAI, Ana holds two other pageant titles. In July of 1992, she was crowned Miss Kuskokwim and then later won the title of Miss World Eskimo-Indian Olympics. In November, she went to Washington, D.C. to compete for the title of Miss National Congress of American Indians.

After graduating from high school, Ana attended Smith College in Northhampton, Mass. She

transferred to Stanford University the next fall where she is now completing her sophomore year.

The following are answers to questions posed to her during a recent Thingit & Haida Central Council Youth Conference which was held in Sitka from April 12-14, 1993.

Question: What does it mean to be holding three pageant titles?

"To be able to speak to youth and adults about Native youth concerns. The important thing is being a positive role model. I want to encourage young people to be positive role models among themselves. If you hang around positive people it will rub off on you. I also get to do a lot of things on a national scale."

Ana went to the Inaugural for President Clinton and personally met the new president, his wife, Hillary, and Vice President Al Gore and his wife, Tipper. "There I met a lot of Native Americans and youth. I learned a lot about different cultures.

"One important thing I learned was that we all have common problems. Every culture has problems with alcohol and drugs, high school drop outs, teenage pregnancy, suicide and accidental deaths.



Anastasia Cooke chatting with an admirer.

Photo By Naats'keek

"The problems we have as Native Americans is balancing western culture with our own indigenous culture and keeping our language alive."

She thinks that small villages, rural and larger communities in Alaska share common problems as well. She said that many young people think, "It's only your family that has problems with alco-

hol; it's only your brother that's dropping out of school; it's only me that got pregnant. But to know that other people from around the world share the same problems is soothing. You don't feel so alone. Then we can build networks to approach these problems."

Ana feels strongly that we have to realize that Native people don't have these problems just because

of race. "you don't have these problems just because you're Native American. You have these problems because of a social impact. To attribute it to your race is a bad thing because it encourages stereo-types."

Her contact with other people and other places have helped her to realize the importance of learning how they have succeeded in education or how they kept their traditions alive. She feels it is important for us as Native Americans to find ways in which we can balance our lives.

"Attributing your problems to your race is really hard," she says. "A lot of people who drop out of high school attribute it to 'Well, I'm a Native. That's why I dropped out.' Or someone who has a problem with alcohol, 'Well, I'm a Native. That's why I'm an alcoholic.' That's a really devastating attitude to have," she says. "So then you expect yourself to drop out, you expect yourself to fail in this or that, you expect yourself to come in last on the test scores. We need to change this mentality. You see, you're not born with this failure — to erase that kind of mentality would be very encouraging to a lot of people."