

Notes from Elise:

# Elise sees hope in life

To live is to hope.

To get up each morning and start a new day at work or with family is to affirm the belief that living is worthwhile, that daily activities have purpose and meaning, that what you are doing today can make things better tomorrow. Without this hope, there would be no reason to start a new day.

At the Alaska Native Health Conference, questioning the future was very much the underlying theme of all that was done. Participants at the conference quickly became aware of the fact that money, be it federal or state dollars, to run health or social service programs was diminishing and not likely to ever return to the levels of the '70s.

For many, hopes for a brighter future looked dim as they

saw needed programs dying due to lack of funds. The question quickly arose — who will provide health care in the future to Alaska's Native people? And how will the dollars ever be found?

The answer soon became apparent — personal responsibility for one's health and lifestyle was of paramount importance. Money has never solved a problem in our communities. In fact, it is often one of its root causes. Health professionals who visit a village for a few days and leave are unlikely to have a lasting influence unless community members make an honest effort to keep themselves healthy.

Children are taught in school that drinking, drugs and smok-

ing are unhealthy activities. If they go home to a family that drinks, smokes and/or uses drugs, there is a good chance they won't pay much attention to what they learned in school.

Alaskan Natives are the only people who are going to provide quality health care to themselves in the future. And they can only do this by staying healthy, by living healthy lives so that the few dollars available can go further.

The age of "Big Brother" is rapidly becoming the past. The age of individual responsibility and concern is here. Alaskan Natives have a long history of healthy, independent lives for themselves and their families. They must now reach back to that past in order to ensure their future. We'll all be healthier for it.

