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Excerpts from the Bush Justice Conference in Minto in June, 1974

Jeff Kennedy, moderator

Brenda Itta talked about the children who are removed from their home for schooling. She said children are a part of the family. It had been a state law that all children who reach school are required to attend school. The villages in the state of Alaska have schools that reach just the eighth grade. Most villages do not have higher education beyond the eighth grade. She feels that the fine thread of the family structure starts breaking when the child is sent away from home for schooling. The parents do not have a choice because it is part of the law imposed on them. When the child returns to the village they find it hard to communicate with their parents sometime. They may have experienced some bad situations. What they are taught in school does not relate to life in a village. The child may return home with severe problems. There have been drinking and drug use problems. It is difficult for the people in the village this situation. The government assists them in the rearing of their child and this robs the men in the villages of manhood and the women also are robbed of their right to motherhood. She feels that the state of Alaska has not lived up to their obligations to the Natives in insuring that their children are educated in a place close to home. When they lobby for funds for education it is a big hassle. It is a fight between the rural areas and the urban areas. It is a problem of attitude and discrimination. She feels they need the urban people and administration to consider it an honor to have four distinct cultures. No other state in the union has this. She thinks that the state of Alaska should be proud if its rich culture instead of looking down on the Natives. Another problem is a human resource problem in the villages. Children may be needed at home to help the elderly or their parents. They may be needed to go out and hunt food. Sending the children away may create a human resource problem.

Lloyd Alexander said he agrees with Brenda Itta. He has not seen bush justice in all his grownup years. He is glad to see that something is being done about it now. He grew up away from home. He went away from home at thirteen. He knows of children being moved away from home at eight years old for their education. When they returned home they didn't pay respect to their families like they should have. He saw that in Minto and in other areas of Alaska. He spent eight years outside. He saw Indians outside that had the same problem of leaving home too early. He said this destroys the family.

Song by Ian and Sylvia

Georgiana Lincoln from Rampart talked about Native children that wanted to adopt children and being asked for statistics to "prove" that they adopt in their culture. She said Native people did not go to court to adopt a child. If a family could not care for a child then aunts or uncles or another member of the family would take care of the child. She said they don't adopt they take care of one another. She talked about one boy from the village who was in Fairbanks for medical care. She wanted to take care of him temporarily while he was in town but was prevented because of bureaucratic requirements. She called Juneau and was denied. He was placed with a white family instead of her.

Lloyd Alexander said there are Natives who are qualified to adopt. He himself adopted a child.

Judge Nora Guinn from Bethel talked about adoption. She said many people took children into their homes. This was voluntary. There are still people that are interested in taking care of children. There are people from the council who are interested. They see who they can find who is interested. They find people in the villages that are willing to help. They do have a person in Emmonak that is giving them a great deal of help. They also using the human services aides that are working for the state. They utilize everyone.

Song by Michael Murphy

Father Titus Peter from Fort Yukon said children taken away from home would rather stay at home. He said honest to goodness loves comes from the parents. He feels that foster parents have a pseudo love for the child. No matter how well the child is taken care of he grows up in a home feeling out of place.

Pat Aloya, a juvenile intake officer from Fairbanks feels that sometimes bureaucrats are blamed unduly when sometimes the Native people should control the problem. He said if they had strong councils in the villages they would be able to handle their own problems. He talked about accountability. He said there have been some terrible things done in the state and wonders if they will learn from that and grow from that. He wonders if they will make it a better future.

Marie Haley from Holy Cross talked about going to Edgecumbe at the age of fourteen and returning to the village at the age of eighteen. She feels that some from the state don't understand this situation.

Matthew Titus thinks that sometimes Native parents can't always cope with the outside influences on their children. He talked about his own experiences with his adopted children. He said some children go off to school and become influenced by others.