

'All the time I'm trying to remember that I'm a part of this earth, I'm a part of this organism called Earth. That's really the most important thing that I've been taught in my life. That's the tradition that I maintain — it's my heritage.'

— James Florendo

disruption in their traditions. In our case (Klamath), we lost our land base so that automatically was a big disruption in the fact that with losing the land, people migrated." Many of them to Portland, where she now works to help them adjust and survive.

Survival is a key concept to James Florendo, the director of the Springfield Indian Education Program. The program is designed to give Indian children the basic survival skills to make it in today's accelerated society.

A major focus of the program is tutoring to help kids make it through school. But the program also teaches culture and tradition, keeping it alive for some families, teaching others a heritage that has been lost through assimilation. For many families, the past no longer survives in living memory, traditions have been blurred and lost. Programs like Florendo's in Springfield and the NATIVES program in Eugene strive to keep that heritage alive.

Florendo says many Indians are "turning to those traditions to help them get through those academics and try and instill a little self-confidence, a little self-esteem and maintain the tradition within them without making them separate."

Florendo reflects the attitude of many urban Indians in his desire to uphold tradition while becoming a successful part of the larger society.

Unfortunately, stereotypes persist, and Florendo is trying to reshape the program to focus on more vital aspects of survival. American Indians have exerted a lot of effort in recent years in order to educate non-Indians about their culture and their heritage. But even this education process has caused problems for Indians.

"A lot of the show and tell that we used to do in the programs would only reinforce stereotypes for the (non-Indian) students that we went to and talked to. They wanted to see Indians dancing, they wanted to talk about artifacts and historical background. Our students would go out and show them — dress up and dance and show them the traditions of their tribe. And that's how the students think those Indian children are. Well, that's not how they are."

Florendo has faced the same stereotypes in pursuing his real passion in life: painting. He is a Wasco Indian from Warm Springs who

earned his master of fine arts at the University. He says that his art does not necessarily meet people's expectations of what a Northwest American Indian should be painting.

"Being from up here, and being from Oregon especially, I have a perspective in my mind about art and the way that I see Indians and the way that I see culture. And it's not like the Northwest coast, which is the only Indian art style recognized — totem poles and the raven and all. If you don't do (paint) that, you're not from the Northwest."

But the stereotypes exist on a larger scale as well. Florendo says many people look at him and say, because he looks like an Indian, he should be painting traditional Indian art. "They'll ask you why you aren't at Santa Fe. It's really sort of funny." Santa Fe is the home of one of the few art schools in the country run by the Bureau of Indian Affairs.

Even on a university campus, Florendo was faced with these prejudices. "When I was going to school there was a whole attitude of 'When are you going home?'"

But he has not let attitudes and preconceptions influence his art. Whether he paints seascapes or portraits, he brings in an individual essence that makes his art his own.

"I thought I kind of wanted to just do art," he says. "My wife is from Paris. I find myself accepted there much more readily than here. I can do anything I want over there. They'll judge it not by me, but by what they see. I



AL SMITH

can do whatever picture I want. It doesn't have to be a dance or a teepee."

Florendo is not denying his heritage, but he is fighting to balance his heritage with his individuality, his own ideas and the society he lives in.

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my life. That's the tradition that I maintain — it's my heritage. We are taught to know that, remember that, live that."

This balance is what he is striving for in the Indian Education Program. Despite the diverse backgrounds and experiences of the American Indians in this area, there are some basic beliefs that serve as a foundation for a community.

For many, traditions unique to individual tribes are lost while they strive to maintain a larger spiritual heritage that binds most American Indians.

It is these inner strengths that Florendo falls back on in directing the program and formulating services that would best serve the community. "There are all different tribes and all different religions and all different beliefs and custom. But they all have the same basis: that we live through the earth. We take from it, and we give back."

Stewart Whitehead is the director of the Native American Student Union (NASU) at the University. Where Florendo grew up on a reservation, Whitehead has a different experience. He is from Siletz, an area that was affected by termination policy. Since then some of the land around Siletz has been reinstated, but termination already has had its effect.

Whitehead says one result of this forced assimilation is that "a lot of them have inbred with the white people so that there aren't very many full-blooded Indians in those areas. A lot of their culture has been lost, there aren't very many people who can speak their native tongues. Very few still bead or do anything like that anymore."

"There are a lot of people in Siletz that are Indian people that don't know anything about their heritage. They know they're Indian, they know they grew up in Siletz and that a reservation was there, but that's all. A lot of heritage is gone."

He is aware of some of the traditions that were absent in his own upbringing: the holidays, traditional foods and ceremonies that were no longer practiced among many of the Siletz Indians. "I never saw a Root Feast celebrated where on the reservation in their traditions they celebrate the spring with a Root Feast. They celebrate the coming of spring and the food. They pray for a good crop, and they pray for good hunting and the continuation of all that. I didn't see all this where

I came from because they lost all that."

Whitehead says NASU provides a number of functions to the approximately 90 American Indian students attending the University. One is a social support. "Especially when they come from the reservations," Whitehead says. "They can find a place where they can talk to other Indian people and take part in events that we have."

Educational opportunities, cultural events and other information are channeled through NASU. Many of the



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social functions like dinners and pow wows are held in the Long House located on Columbia Street in east Eugene.

Traditionally, long houses were the gathering places where Indians had their pow wows, their spiritual celebrations and their feasts. The NASU Long House is similar, housing everything from dances to community meetings.

The Long House was dedicated to NASU in 1975. It was blessed by the people of Warm Springs so it could be used as a spiritual place. One couple was even married there in a traditional American Indian ceremony performed by a Washington Indian.

Whitehead believes urban Indians face somewhat different problems than those on reservations. He says that just the small population of Indians in a city leads to difficulties. "When children go into a school they're probably the only Indians in that class — where students in Warm Springs go to Madras (to attend school). There they have five to 10 Indians in their class. When they go to a place like Portland, they have to deal with a different situation."

He says adults face similar problems when they move into cities. "When you look into the urban areas there's a lot of alcoholism that goes on. That might occur because of the identity problems that they have, of being accepted by their co-workers when they get into the urban area because sometimes they're discriminated against a lot more than they were exposed to on the reservation."

Discrimination, unemployment, loneliness, resentment. Whatever the reason, alcoholism is one of the most devastating problems among

American Indians, in urban areas as well as on reservations. Many grow up with a sense of loss, of the injustice their ancestors suffered, of the heritage that has been stripped away and often made meaningless. All too many of these people turn to alcohol and drugs as an answer.

Some support systems do exist, however. Red Willow is one such counseling center which focuses specifically on American Indians with addiction problems. And if an Indian in trouble is lucky, that person might run into Al Smith.

Smith is a local man who is active in counseling and as a spiritual leader. Since he hoped his first freight from Klamath Falls into Portland, he has seen the devastation alcohol has done to his brothers and sister — and to himself.

He now uses his 30 years of sobriety to help others overcome their addictions. He says learning his own heritage and tradition has helped him to relearn attitudes that were destructive to him. By counseling, leading prayers at sweat lodge ceremonies and playing his drum, Smith is helping rechannel the bitterness and resentment in other Indians that might be destroying their lives.

Although they have suffered with recent federal cutbacks, all of these programs struggle to keep running, to provide their services as well as a sense of community for American Indians. That sense of community is often what keeps people from drifting on to yet another city, Bolme says.

Florendo believes that, in setting up services, it is important to structure them so the entire family is helped. He says when people are unemployed or facing financial difficulty, they have a hard time giving their children the everyday reinforcement they need; that parents get wrapped up in their own depression.

"Especially in Native American cultures," Florendo says. "When you're a provider and you can't provide, it's really demolishing. How can you be an effective parent and role model when you can't take care of things that are crucial to the whole family?"

But Florendo is optimistic. "We've always been told we were different. Instead of dwelling on those differences, maybe we should start using those differences to our advantage. If our belief is different, then we may as well start believing that way and use that to survive instead of using it as an excuse to be sad."

He sees the end to that sadness in the smiles on the faces of his children. "The kids are our future. If I can't do any better, then I hope to support my kids so that they can do better." □