

Miss Siletz Shares, Learns, and Enjoys Miss NCAI Pageant

By Tiffany Dawn Stuart

Educating, re-educating, and learning were three goals I set for myself during my year of reign as Miss Siletz 2003-2004. I've educated and re-educated my peers and the public about the Siletz/coastal indigenous people.

During my trip to Albuquerque, N.M., for the 36th Annual Miss NCAI Scholarship Pageant on Nov. 17, 2003, I represented and enlightened others about the Siletz people and learned about many different tribes.

When I arrived on Nov. 15 at The Hyatt in Albuquerque, I attended an orientation with my chaperon, Selene Rilatos. During this time, I met the other young women participating in the pageant and reviewed the busy three-day schedule.

That evening, I participated in the North American Indian Women's Association, New Mexico Chapter's Fashion Show. During this NAIWA fund-raiser, all pageant contestants wore their tribal regalia.

When I walked onstage and then through the crowd, a brief description was read about the Siletz people and about the meaning of the Feather Dance skirt and regalia I was wearing. After the fashion show, I socialized with the audience and enjoyed some food.

The Miss NCAI Honor Breakfast was held Nov. 16 at The Hyatt. The founders of the Miss NCAI Pageant, Miss Indian New Mexico, and all the contestants honored Miss NCAI 2003, Karen-Irene Serna, for her successful one-year reign.

Karen received several gifts. A song from their tribe, a beaded turtle pen, and traditional foods were included in the 12 gifts Karen received from the contestants. On behalf of the Siletz people, my family, and myself, I presented Karen first with pictures I took the weekend before with her in San Carlos, Ariz., at the Miss San Carlos Pageant.

When I met Karen, she was friendly to talk to. She was helpful with my questions and had words of encouragement for me for the NCAI pageant the next week. Handing a coffee cup to her, I said that everyone needs their coffee in the morning.

In the Chinook Winds bag were smoked salmon, a water bottle, pens, a beaded bracelet and necklace, and the

smoke-free tape (the newly released video with Siletz youth talking about smoking). A Siletz pow-wow sweatshirt was also given to Karen. By giving these gifts and talking to her throughout the week, Karen learned from me and I learned from her.

Dress rehearsal for the pageant was that afternoon and included a run-through of the pageant.

The morning of Nov. 17 included a fly-over for Lori Piestewa. Then we all went inside for the Grand Entry for the first NCAI session. Lori Piestewa's family was there and an honor song was sung and proclamation was read by Tex Hall, NCAI president. All pageant contestants were in traditional dress for the grand entry of flags, veterans, and contestants.

The 36th Annual Miss NCAI Pageant took place that evening at the Kiva Auditorium in downtown Albuquerque. I was escorted by my Aunt Selene Rilatos for my introduction. Then I gave a presentation on feather dancing, on what the dance meant and what I would be doing. Then my Aunt Selene sang Grandpa Ben's song while I danced.

The last part of the pageant was modeling my traditional regalia and answering an impromptu question. My question was, "What book have you read that has been most influential to you?" I believe the word of God, the Bible, has been not just a book but a guide to my life.

When the awards were presented, my peers voted me Miss Congeniality. Every young woman who was in this pageant was unique, powerful, successful, and knew her heritage. I made so many lifelong friends and learned so much about many different rich cultures. During the week, I also went to different events and saw the sites of Albuquerque.

Nov. 18 included a fund-raiser for NCAI put on by Native Threads. At the beginning, a pueblo of New Mexico performed a dance that I had never seen before.

NAMMY (Native American Music Association) nominees and winners sang, plus there were speakers and comedians. I had fun dancing with my new and old friends. Celebrities like Adam Beach and Litefoot attended this concert.

I bought a ticket thinking there would be no alcohol at this fund-raiser

for NCAI. I was offended that there was drinking at an event that Miss NCAI, Cheryl Dixon, had to attend because it supported NCAI. Adults showing and endorsing alcohol at this event wasn't a good way to influence today's teen-agers. I'm disgusted that drinking was allowed at a concert that included minors.

My friends and I were refunded our money, but that doesn't make it right. Changes are going to be made with NCAI and rules will be enforced. I just can't be silent about this event; I want people to know that drinking doesn't always have to be at an event to make it fun. I had the greatest time that night without being under the influence of alcohol.

The week ended great, seeing Old Town and hanging out with friends. I had a wonderful time representing the Confederated Tribes of Siletz Indians of Oregon. Every chance I had, I spoke on my values and on areas that need to change with our tribes, whether it was with Notah Begay III, a Warm Springs elder, or a tribal chairperson.

It was cool meeting people like Wes Studi, but I enjoyed it most when I got to talk to leaders who influence Native people today. I represented the Siletz people to my best ability.

Thanks to God for saving my soul and being there in a time of need. Also thanks to my parents, Thomas and Marlene Stuart; my chaperon (teacher, helper, encourager, behind the stage helper) Aunt Selene Rilatos; and to Rena Brandt, Robert Kentta, Grandma Maxine Rilatos, Aunt Valerie Hibdon, Brian James, Confederated Tribes of Siletz Indians of Oregon, the Pow-Wow Committee, and Craig Whitehead. May God bless every one of you how he has blessed me.

I leave you with the Miss NCAI song, *Our Song of Nations* (composed by 1982-1983 Miss NCAI contestants and June K. Parisien-Randall):

"From the plains, from the woodlands, and the prairies, we came. Through the mountains and ocean, desert, tundra, we claim. Over the hills, through the valleys, out of south everglades and here we unite, for this special day.

"We strive for the knowledge of our native ways, by listening to elders who guide us each day. Sharing tradition and values we hold, to plan for tomorrow to help reach our goal. Our song of nations has a meaning so rare that brings us together to show that we care. Our song of nations comes deep from our heart; our love will grow stronger all the days we're apart."

Hum'chi.



Tai Simpson (Nez Perce), Tiffany D. Stuart (Miss Siletz), Cheryl Dixon (Pueblo of Isleta), and Gwen Peterson (Tlingit and Haida-Alaska) attend the NCAI Host Tribe Reception. The host tribes were two pueblos of New Mexico. Tiffany enjoyed hanging out with her new friends and shared the Siletz culture with everyone.