

Stuart Competes for Miss Indian World Title

by Tiffany Dawn Stuart, miss_siletz_03_04@hotmail.com

Competition for the Miss Indian World 2004-2005 title was held April 21-24, 2004, in Albuquerque, N.M. During this four-day competition, I, Tiffany Dawn Stuart, Miss Siletz 2003-2004, educated Indian Country and the public on the Siletz Indians.

On April 21, I met the other 16 contestants: Robyn Bisonette (Northern Cheyenne/Ojibwe) from Billings, Mont.; Viola Brooks, Miss Hoopa Valley (Hoopa Valley, Karuk, and Yurok) from Arcata, Calif.; Erica Cleaver, Miss World Eskimo Indian Olympics Queen (Louden Tribal Council/Athabaskan) from Galena, Alaska; Deanna Frost, previous Miss Indian Colorado (Southern Ute, Northern Ute, Ute Mountain Ute, and Shosone) from Ignacio, Colo.

Cherelee Hall, Florida Miss Seminole (Seminole Tribe of Florida) from Clewiston, Fla.; Eileen Hill (White Mountain Apache/Navajo) from McNary, Ariz.; Elizabeth Johnny-John (Iroquois/Seneca) from Steamburg, N.Y.; DeeVonda Largo (Diné) from Bloomfield, N.M./Rio Rancho, N.M.

Dawn Little Thunder, Miss Black Hills (Cheyenne River Lakota) from Eagle Butte, S.D.; Autaquay Peters (Mashpee Wampanoag) from Clelsea, Maine; Ivy Scott, Miss Indian Canada (Piikani Nation of the Blackfoot Confederacy) from Calgary, Alberta, Canada; Erin Shije (Zia Pueblo/Jemez Pueblo) from Zia Pueblo, N.M.

Delana Smith (Ojibwe, Red Lake Nation) from Red Lake, Minn.; Ashley Thomas-Jeffery, Miss Six Nations (Mohawk) from Caledonia, Ontario, Canada; Lena Tucker, Choctaw Indian Princess (Aleut/Mississippi Band of Choctaw Indians) from Philadelphia, Miss; and Bazil-Lu Windy Boy, Miss Yakama (Yakama/Chippewa/Cree) from Yakama/Mattawa, Wash.

This first morning included registration, introductions, and public speaking at the University of New Mexico (UNM). During registration, I turned in 1,000 raffle tickets. Thanks to Aunt Val Hibdon, Aunt Selene Rilatos, Aunt Shirley Walker, and Mom and Dad (Marlene and Thomas Stuart) for helping me sell tickets. Thanks also to all who bought them.

For the public speaking competition, each contestant had one minute to answer the impromptu question, "Who inspires you and why?" My answer was my mother because she encourages me in areas such as education.

Lunch was then provided before the five-minute interview. This closed interview included five judges and one judge reading the three questions to me directly. The questions were on my goals, what it means to be Miss Indian world, and how my traditional aspects affect my life.

That evening, I enjoyed dinner at the UNM Student Union Ballroom. My dad came as my guest. At the dinner, the raffle tickets were drawn for prizes. My Aunt Shirley won a DVD player and my Aunt Tiny Jane Rilatos won a necklace. This also was a time to get to know the other contestants and take group photos.

April 22 was a day of rehearsal for the traditional talent presentation. I exhibited the Feather Dance in my three-minute presentation. Bud Lane and Robert Kentta made a recording of feather dance songs consisting of an introduction song and my great-grandpa Archie Ben and my great-grandpa Hoxie Simmons songs. I talked one minute on the importance of keeping this ceremony alive and I danced the last two minutes. All contestants were at the Albuquerque Convention Center all day for two rehearsals.

Then at 7 p.m., the traditional talent presentation show began. This portion of the contest has the biggest percentage of the overall score. Performances included the story of the dream catcher, women's shuffle for the Mohawks, an explanation on the different uses of corn, and many other wonderful tribal talents.

April 23 started like every morning – up at 6:30 a.m. to be at the event by 8 a.m. I'm glad my hotel was close to the PITT because many other contestants ran into trouble with traffic.

All contestants were in their traditional dress for the Miss Indian World breakfast. The Native American Student Services program put on this breakfast at the UNM Student Union Ballroom. All contestants received a gift bag after we introduced ourselves to the student body that was present.

Then it was back on the bus as we headed to the PITT for grand entry at noon.

When grand entry started, I was just speechless at all of the dancers in the four directions. The Miss Indian World contestants were behind Onawa Lynn Lacy, Miss Indian World 2003-2004, in front of the grand entry line.

I wore my buckskin dress with a feather dance skirt and Miss Siletz crown. Most contestants had such defined dress from their tribe. After six hours of being in the spotlight, we (my Grandma Maxine and my parents) headed out to dinner and rest.

The dance competition took place after the 7 p.m. grand entry on April 23. We were split into two groups. Each one got one pow-wow song with four push-ups. I was in the second group, so I got to see many different styles of dance before I danced.

The contestants were instructed to interpret the song, meaning we didn't have to dance pow-wow style to the song. I danced feather dance style to the pow-wow song with a feather dance skirt. I placed third in this portion of the competition. After this long day, my family and I headed back to the hotel because we had another long day ahead of us the next day.

Bright and early (again at 6:30 a.m.), I woke up to get ready for the rehearsal for the crowning. The practice for the crowning and Onawa's dance started at 8 a.m. Brunch – breakfast burritos and fruit – was provided before we started to get ready for grand entry at noon.

Now in New Mexico, regardless of where you are, there's "chili" and I call it salsa. Even at McDonald's, there's a value meal with a hamburger with "chili" on it. At the breakfast, there was "chili," or salsa, to put on our burritos.

The noon grand entry started with a bald eagle in the arena. The dancers populated overnight; when almost all the dancers were in the arena I had less than a foot of space all around me. I wore my buckskin pow-wow dress with a feather dance skirt and basket cap. After the tiny tot division, we left to eat and rest.

It was coming down to that moment. Grand entry started at 7 p.m. and the crowning proceeded after grand entry and a musical performance. Each of the



Tiffany Stuart with Delana Smith, Miss Indian World 2004-2005

contestants was introduced. When my name was called, I felt a rush through my body. This feeling of being proud of who I am and whom I represent gave me this great feeling inside.

Awards and crowning came and the results were: second runner-up was DeeVonda Largo, first runner-up was Ivy Scott, and Delana Smith was crowned Miss Indian World 2004-2005.

I was proud to represent Siletz/coastal people, my family, my school (Haskell Indian Nations University), and myself. Thanks to everyone who believed in me to run for the title of Miss Indian World. This experience is one I'll remember for the rest of my life.

Thanks to God for watching over my family and myself. A big thanks goes out to my parents, Aunt Val, Aunt Selene, Rena Brandt, Sam Lynch, Grandma Maxine, Aunt Shirley, my brother and his fiancé – Thomas Stuart Jr. and Cheryl James, Robert, Bud, Lynette Hibdon, Patty Grant, Ricky Cliff, and Justina Abrahamson.

For more pictures and/or details on the Miss Indian World Pageant, log onto www.gatheringofnations.com. Thanks again for all the support! Hum'chi.