

My AILDI Experience

Marian L. Escalanti

My AILDI experiencewhoa, I don't even know where to begin. Believe me, I have been dreaming about AILDI for the past five years but so many obstacles have prevented me from being here. My late Mother would say, there is a time and a place for everything. So maybe she was right. I do know one thing, that it truly has been an experience worth the wait.

You see I had come to a point in my teaching career that had cornered me against the wall. I had been looking frantically for divine intervention to enlighten my lessons, my style, my courage and my faith to continue what I truly love to do. Teach my native language. So having met the bull and taken it by the horns, I have now drawn a hypothesis.....AILDI you saved my life.

This poem I am going to read is about all of us here tonight. I have met some wonderful people who have taught me that we are resilient, determined and strong in saving what we truly call our own.....OUR LANGUAGE.

I Pay Homage: to My Four Directions who embrace me.

To the North:

I see the elk, deer, bear and buffalo crying to once again talk with us as how we once did....

I smell the cool rivers ever flowing with the salmon and the trout as the forces of nature brings us the snow and rain that washes away our sorrows and promise us with a brighter tomorrow....

I taste the sweet wild berries, strawberries, chokecherries and freshness of the new day that will savor our sweet memories of each other.....

I hear the sounds of innocent laughter, roars of victory, cries of defeat and the sounds of my heart trembling knowing that this day too will pass....

I touch the hands of the Creator and his touch reassures me that we are valuable to the pueblos, reservations and communities that we serve.....

To the West:

I see the pretty colors of the sunset that only us Natives understand for we are many colors but we are humble, compassionate and brave.....

I smell the powers of the mighty ocean where my California natives once roamed so freely without boundaries and with their languages.....

I taste the sweet smell of the sweet willows and sweet grasses that have been a part of our lives in producing and burning for successful lives and health.....

I hear the calmness of the air, wind and desert animals as they convey the messages of love.....love for one another.

I touch the rays of the beautiful sunset and thank our Creator for another fulfilling day.

To the South:

I see the Ha:sañ standing so proud and producing the Bahidaj that I will respect and take pride in knowing that they too are my brothers and sisters....

I smell the sweat of my brothers and sisters shed by their endless struggle to save what is dear to their hearts.....the language of our people.....

I taste the power that has been instilled in us as we leave and venture on our own paths knowing that there will be a day when we will meet again.....

I hear solemn prayers and whispers that come from your hearts as we wish for continued well-being of our children, grandchildren and peoples of our homelands.....

I touch the hot grounds as we trek to places of learning, for eating and gently surrounding ourselves with other peoples of our Mother Earth knowing they too are here for a reason....

To the East:

I see the brightness of a new day, a new generation and a new beginning for all Native peoples everywhere.....

I smell the sweetness of each passing friend, teacher and student as we embark in a better tomorrow

I taste the smoke and fire that has been burning inside of us to come out and play and share our knowledge at this great place they call AILDI, Tucson, AZ.....

I hear the sounds of cheer, laughter and bitter sweet cries when our elders, community and families welcome us back home.....

I touch your hearts as you have touched mine with your grace, kindness and knowledge that made me the person that I am tonight as I stand here before you...Thank You, May the Spirit that you believe in and my Mother Spirit guide you, protect you and make you stronger than ever.....

Marian L. Escalanti, AILDI 2005, University of Arizona, Tucson, AZ

“AILDI has given me the drive and passion to pursue the needs of revitalization of culture and language for my people. I realize the importance of self education and growth to empower others.”



AILDI instructor Mary Carol Combs with students from the *Alternative Spaces for Revitalization: Indigenous Language and Identity in Film* course. (L-R) Mary Carol Combs, Bonna Dell Ortega, Freyda Crow, Amy Juan, Eddie Welch, Keisha Josephs, & Bonita Imus (2007)

“I’m here for a purpose. Someone was praying for me to reach higher in my educational goals. With a higher education and surrounded by mountains, I can move mountains. I will reach out as an advocate for my community members. This has always been their dream to revive our language. For it’s who we are.”