

“Saad Bee Hahóózhqod Jini”: It Began Harmoniously with Language It Is Said:  
Navajo Women’s Literature Analysis, Personal Short Fiction, and an Introduction  
to an Oral Narrative

by

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A Dissertation Presented in Partial Fulfillment  
of the Requirements for the Degree  
Doctor of Philosophy

Approved November 2011 by the  
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ARIZONA STATE UNIVERSITY

December 2011

## ABSTRACT

As referenced in Navajo ceremonial prayers and songs, “Saad bee hahóózhqod jini,” it began harmoniously with language. This dissertation examines and celebrates in new ways the meaning of language in Navajo literature. The first chapter is an introduction of this dissertation. I share my personal experiences with language, both English and Navajo, and how it has shaped me to be the person I am today as a Navajo speaker, student, educator, and professional. The second chapter contains an analysis and review of Western ideology of feminism and its place in Navajo society and a comparative study of several works written by Navajo authors, including Laura Tohe, Luci Tapahonso, and Nia Francisco, and how their creative works reflect the foundation of Navajo culture, *Asdzáá Nádleehé, Changing Woman*. The third chapter presents my own short fiction of Navajo characters living in today’s society, a society that entails both positive and negative issues of Navajo life. These stories present realistic twenty-first century environments on the Navajo reservation. The fourth chapter consists of a short fiction written originally in the Navajo language. The story also represents the celebration of Navajo language as it thrives in today’s time of tribal and cultural struggles. The sense of it being told in Navajo celebrates and preserves Navajo culture and language. The final chapter is the beginning of an oral narrative presented in written form, that of my grandmother’s life story. This introduction of her story also is in itself a commemoration of language, oral Navajo language.

Dedicated to my husband Manuelito  
and sons Waunekanez and Hataaliinez

## ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

My final doctoral committee at Arizona State University has been tremendously supportive and encouraging, particularly toward the end of my doctoral program, and I am truly grateful for their support. Professor Simon Ortiz, Chair, you continued to motivate me and keep me on track throughout your role as Chair; I appreciate the times you even stopped by to visit me in New Mexico to check on my progress. Thank you for supporting my creative writing and the need for writing in our own Indigenous languages. Professor Laura Tohe, thank you for serving on my committee since the beginning of my graduate journey and supporting me through good times and bad. I will continue to admire your creative work and look forward to future publications that I can use with my students on Navajo literature. Professor James Blasingame, I cannot thank you enough for joining my committee when I desperately needed the additional support. I appreciate your positive feedback and encouragement; as you indicate that you have learned a lot about my people's culture through my dissertation, I also have learned as much from you. Ahéhee' to all of you.

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## Introduction

I left my family on the Navajo reservation in the early summer of 1998 when I was accepted into the graduate program at Arizona State University. My husband planned to work through the summer and bring our son with him in the fall to join me as I began my master's program in English. At the same time, the day before I left, I promised my grandmother that I would be back as soon as I finished school. I was a high school English teacher at the time, and we lived in a small two-bedroom school apartment. My grandmother had been with us for a couple months. She knew how happy I was to return to school. She told me to do my best and that she would wait for me to come home after I finished my graduate program. She was in her late nineties. A year later when I completed my courses and was beginning my thesis, she became ill with pneumonia. From fall through winter I drove back and forth from Phoenix to Blanding, Utah, sometimes in harsh weather conditions, to visit her in the nursing home. By December, 1999, I defended my thesis and graduated, and my grandmother's health worsened. Over the next few months my family and I were took turns staying with her in a private room. In March, 2000, my two sisters and I drove in from Phoenix again late one night. We were delayed because we had slid off the icy interstate near Flagstaff, and a kind Bilagáana man pulled us out. My sister suggested we check into a hotel and continue in the morning, and I refused. I would've driven all night if I had to. I had to get there. We eventually made it. My aunt and other sisters, who had been there the past couple days, left to get rest. Later that night as my sisters slept on the other hospital bed in the room, I sat beside my grandmother,

who was lying on her bed motionless, and read to her aloud from the Diyin God Bizaad that she used to read to us when we were little. I held her hand and told her that I knew she could hear me. I reminded her about my promise to take care of her when I was done with school. I said I was ready to care for her again, that she needed to get well and come home. I continued reading to her. By early morning, my sisters were getting breakfast down the hallway when I was telling my grandmother that the sun was rising, that it was beautiful. I was holding her hand as she took her last breath.

My grandmother's passing encouraged me to continue my education. It was my grandmother who instilled in me, since I was a child, the great joy of reading, speaking, and writing in the Navajo language. Throughout my childhood my mother, on the other hand, worked as a teacher's assistant at the local BIA high school, and she allowed me to hang out at her classroom, after I got home from elementary, because she knew I liked browsing through and reading the selected American literature piled in the corner of the classroom. I used to follow her to the school library as she returned books there at the end of the day, and eventually the librarian let me get a library card, even though I was still too young and not a student there. I suppose she let me because she was the same clan as ours. The first book I enjoyed reading at that time, when I was about nine years old, was Herman Melville's *Moby Dick*. I remember it was a thick book, the cover dilapidated. I can still smell the book. As a young girl living in the middle of the reservation, I fell in love with that 1970s BIA library. When I wasn't reading a book from the library, where all the books were in English, I was reading Diyin

God Bizaad in Navajo with my grandmother. The combination and juxtaposition of the two languages encouraged my interest in literature altogether. At that age, I had no idea what was already emerging outside of the reservation in the form of a new Native American literature movement.

I am grateful for living in this twenty-first century where Native American literature flourishes. With the technological advances also, I have instant access to masses of Native American literature, whether they be fiction, non-fiction, narratives, autobiographies, biographies, essays, or poetry. Native American literature written by Native women, however, is what interests me the most, and it has provided me the opportunity to explore it further during my graduate studies. To read for the first time, until college, Native literature written by Native women was astounding. The public and private schools I attended through high school had neglected to provide us with such literature. Therefore, when I became a high school English teacher, I did my best to introduce Native American literature to our students on the Navajo reservation. Sherman Alexie and Leslie Marmon Silko were two of few Native authors I was beginning to introduce to my students. My students loved these authors' works. Upon reading these authors, I saw in my students' eyes a hint of motivation to read more, just as Melville did for me when I was nine. The motivation of the students led us to the discovery and study of Navajo authors like Laura Tohe and Luci Tapahonso. Taking our students to the local Navajo Community College, now called Diné College, to hear Tapahonso read from her fiction and poetry was a special treat for our students once. Opportunities like that fueled the minds of our young students, as well my own, in



the depth of Native and Native women's literature in those days, and I hope teachers at the secondary level and elementary level across Native nations will continue to shed light on our Native people's voices through literature.

I decided to take a different approach on my dissertation project – to add creative writing of fiction and oral narrative to research – for several reasons, which each chapter will demonstrate. The second chapter contains two papers, one that presents analyses of Navajo women's roles in Western society, which in turn presents reasons why there is no concept of feminism in Navajo culture, and the other which examines the way Asdzáá Nádeehé, Changing Woman, and the foundation she represents in our history and culture is present in almost every piece of Navajo fiction, poetry and autobiography. These papers demonstrate the importance of understanding the Navajo Creation stories. To understand the Navajo people, one needs to examine and appreciate the significant events of the Navajo Creation, in this case pertaining to women's roles. In her *Reclaiming Diné History* (2007), Jennifer Nez Denetdale affirms:

I pay close attention to female deities who are part of the contingent of Holy People, for their roles remain the template for how Navajo women see their own roles. An examination of my elders' narratives reveals similarities between creation narratives and stories of my great-great-great-grandmother. In particular, a close look at Jaunita's role illuminates Navajo women's traditional status and sheds light on how the stories of female deities like Changing Woman are the template that shape Navajo perspectives on women's roles in Navajo society.

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Navajo women authors such as Laura Tohe and Luci Tapahonso display the “template” of Navajo creation in their works, simultaneously contributing to the preservation of Navajo culture, history, and language.

As a Navajo woman, I have been writing short fiction for many years. They have been frozen in the folders of the many computers and laptops I have had. No, I have never submitted any for publication for various reasons. However, I have realized that it is time to do so. Like all Native women authors whose voices we continue to hear across Native nations, my voice needs to be heard, too. My grandmother’s stories need to be heard. I come from a family of many women, aunts, sisters, mothers, daughters, and their voices are as important as others’, and they need to be heard. Hence, in the third and fourth chapters I have included personal creative writing of short fiction, three in English and one in Navajo, respectively. The topics of my writing vary. Joy Harjo comments in *Reinventing the Enemy’s Language* (1997) that “We are still dealing with a holocaust of outrageous proportion in these lands. Not very long ago, native peoples were 100 percent of the population of this hemisphere. In the United States we are now one-half of one percent, and growing. All of the ills of colonization have visited us in its many forms of hatred, including self-doubt, poverty, alcoholism, depression, and violence against women, among others” (21). Such “ills” are unfortunately a reality among the Navajo people as well, and they exist in my own creative writing. Despite these types of negativity and reality, we Navajo people also continue to grow culturally, historically, and spiritually. Elders and chanters and healers are decreasing among us on our land;

that is a hard fact. However, through prayers and songs and ceremonies, our culture and traditions and language and history remain strong. That is what creates my fiction. That is what motivates me to write, analyze, and observe. One of the stories demonstrates my desire to write stories in my own language, Navajo. Someone asked me once why I write in Navajo when Navajo people don't even know how to read and write Navajo, to which I replied that I write for myself. These stories are told in our language because they are about characters who are real, who speak and understand Navajo. There are many of us Navajo people who still speak our language fluently; there are many of us Navajo people who still teach our children our language. Even the essence of it is real. In regards to writing in our own Native languages today, Harjo agrees that "Other nationalist literary movements from other colonized peoples have recognized the need for a literature to be produced in native language for native language speakers. Along the way, there is hope that in 'reinventing' the English language we will turn the process of colonization around, and that our literature will be viewed and read as a process of *decolonization*" (25). Therefore, for me, or any other Navajo writer, to write a story or poem in Navajo and read it to a Navajo-speaking audience who appreciates it is worth the effort. This story began in Navajo and was completed this way. There are some stories told in Navajo that cannot be translated in English, and this is one of them. Luci Taphahonso, in *Blue Horses Rush In*, notes: "Although many of the stories or jokes that are told can be translated and relayed fairly well in written form, the clear sense of voices and characters is diminished in some ways...." (xiii). That is the case in this story, and it will remain a story in

Navajo. This story focuses on a present-day family discussing the preparation of a traditional Navajo wedding ceremony.

The last chapter entails an oral narrative of my late grandmother, Elizabeth Wauneka (1900-2000). This part of her story is only the beginning. My grandmother lived in the small community of Many Farms, Arizona, most of her life. The narrative begins with her family's move from her birthplace, Montezuma Creek, Utah, to Many Farms, Arizona, where she spent the remainder of her adult life. In this narrative she is still a child. My grandmother used to enjoy telling us stories of her life, especially about her childhood. I plan to finish writing her narrative in the near future. Hertha D. Sweet Wong in her "Native American Life Writing," sums it best: "Since time immemorial, as the elders say, Native Americans have shared stories about their lives and dreams, articulating achievements and strivings. But those who write autobiographically often do so as a form of testimony, bearing witness not only to a history of genocide, but to survival and continuance and the possibility of healing from the 'wounds of history'" (142). My grandmother shared her life stories orally perhaps mostly to "bear witness to survival and continuance" of her own rights, her own reasons, her own life experiences. As a Native woman, as her granddaughter, I feel that her story needs to be heard. I used to imagine gifting my sisters and brothers and cousins with my grandmother's stories in written form, and that that gesture would be the only reason to publish. The more I learn about the need for more Native oral narratives, the more I want to share my grandmother's story. Had she still been alive, I would have written her story all in Navajo for her, and for

myself, and read it back to her. She would have smiled and laughed and agreed and remembered. It would have been great. I can, however, still share her story in English. Perhaps I *will* fulfill my desire to share the completed version of the written form of her life story with my siblings and relatives. Until then, her story is waiting to be told.

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## Navajo Women's Literature

### Western Feminism in Navajo Society

“Women do not know that they are totally dominated by men, and when they acknowledge the fact, they can ‘hardly believe it.’”

- Monique Wittig, “The Category of Sex”

“*A fortiori*: why are men not objects of exchange among women?

It is because women's bodies – through their use, consumption, and circulation – provide for the condition making social life and culture possible, although they remain an unknown

‘infrastructure’ of the elaboration of that social life and culture.”

- Luce Irigaray, “Women on the Market”

These are two of the many striking quotes I remember the most from reading Wittig's *The Straight Mind* and Irigaray's *This Sex Which is Not One*. From these readings, I found myself trying to analyze over and over again the definition(s) of “feminism” according to Western (French) culture, a task producing various answers each time. According to *The Oxford Essential Dictionary* (1998), the common definition of feminism results as being “advocacy of women's rights on the ground of the equality of the sexes.” This simple but yet broad interpretation has helped me lay out the juxtaposition I am about to present.

Through my studies, I have learned that the discourse of Western culture's feminism certainly can become self-contradictory and complicated, even if one

theme is specified and focused on. With this knowledge, I will use Wittig's and Irigaray's selected essays ("The Category of Sex" and "Women on the Market") as examples of Western feminism. These two essays will help me present the juxtaposition of two very different ideas on feminism – that of the Western culture and that of the traditional Navajo culture. Non-Navajo and non-Indian people alike need to know that although the world is currently moving into the twenty-first century, it does not mean that we, the Navajo people, are leaving behind our culture, our beliefs, and our language. Many traditional Navajo people still live on the Navajo Nation today, and it is those people who still acknowledge the fact that feminism does not have a place in our society, that it never has and perhaps never will. The word "feminism" literally cannot be translated in Navajo, obviously because its concept does not exist in our culture. I will explain why it is very interesting to learn about feminism from a Navajo woman's point of view. Most importantly, I will focus on the economic/social status of Navajo women in comparison to Irigaray's economic/social status of women and show how it closely connects to the issue of sexuality generally in Navajo society. I will use other notable sources, including Paula Gunn Allen and Ruth Roessel, to support my views.

One needs to learn about and know the Navajo culture, its history, people and language in order to fully understand why feminism has no role in Navajo culture. The following is a brief explanation of the female deity – Changing Woman – who is regarded as the founder of all Navajo clans and therefore is the "mother" of the Navajo people. Navajo people are who they are because of their



clans. Without clans, the Navajo people would not exist as Dine, The People. Changing Woman, Asdzaa Nadleehe, is the most distinguished and significant female deity in Navajo culture for she represents beauty, harmony and long-life. She is Mother Earth. She was the first to experience puberty, and the (her) puberty ceremony is still practiced today. She was the first to give birth, to twin sons. Through her sons, evil monsters were destroyed and rid of from the people. She is considered to be our “mother,” the earth, and therefore represents the cyclical seasons (i.e. she is born new each year, “blossoms”, and dies of old age at the end of the year, grows “white” hair). Today all Navajo people still properly identify themselves by their four clans (mother’s clan, father’s clan, maternal-grandfather’s clan, and paternal-grandfather’s clan). Changing Woman created the four original clans from her body parts and in that sense also is considered “mother.” Of course there are many other deities in the Navajo culture who play numerous important roles (First Man, First Woman, Talking God, and so on); however, the role of Changing Woman in Navajo history serves as the basis and foundation of Navajo culture as a whole. Like other Native American tribes who have female deities representing important roles in their culture, we have Changing Woman. Paula Gunn Allen informs us further about that: White Buffalo Woman . . . came to the Lakota people long ago and brought them religion of the Sacred Pipe which they still practice. Yellow Woman, Coyote Woman, Grandmother Spider (Spider Old Woman) . . . brought the light, . . . gave us weaving and medicine, . . . gave us life. Among the Keres she is known as

Thought Woman who created us all and who keeps us in creation even now. (*The Sacred Hoop* 45)

Changing Woman is the reason why the traditional Navajo culture is matriarchal and matrilineal. Today, the population of the Navajo people is well over three-hundred thousand. I presume that at least half of that population still lives on the Navajo reservation. About half of those who live on the reservation still fully practice the traditional lifestyle. It is in these communities where Western feminism is not heard of. Even the slightest *concept* of feminism is not in the Navajo language. Here, I refer to “traditional” people as those who have been raised in hogans, with little or no electricity or running water; people who speak fluent Navajo; families who still practice sacred ceremonies and rituals; those who weren’t exposed to much “modern technology” during childhood; and so on. Apparently not all Navajo people are “traditional”; moreover, there are even many Navajo women (and men) who are feminists in today’s Western culture. However, the focus here is on the traditional Navajo culture. My own personal background serves as an example.

I am a Navajo woman born in 1969, raised most of my childhood in my grandmother’s hogan without electricity and running water. I learned how to speak, read and write Navajo before learning English. When I received my undergraduate degree in English Education, my own grandmother, aunts and uncles asked me why. “Why English? You’re not Bilagłana, a White.” One could only imagine how they responded when I chose to go back to graduate school for a degree in “American” literature. My grandmother was born in around

1900 and certainly has lived a traditional life, and to this day, (if I could find a way to explain it) I would not feel comfortable asking her or telling her about the issue(s) of Western feminism. I'm not sure if I will humiliate myself or if she'll reprimand me for even thinking about it. I predict that she would only remind me of Changing Woman, and that will be the end of that "discussion." That applies to the rest of my family and relatives, both female and male, who still live on the reservation.

Because Navajo culture is matriarchal, women *do* have high status economically and socially. Traditional women would be appalled at the idea of women being considered "useful" as in Irigaray's "Women on the Market":

The use made of women is thus of less value than their appropriation one by one. And their 'usefulness' is not what counts the most. Woman's price is not determined by the 'properties' of her body – although her body constitutes the *material* support of that price. (174-5)

As far back as Navajo creation, women have always held high status economically and socially. They were never regarded as "useful" and "properties" by/to men. This derives mainly from the traditional clan affiliation of the people. One needs to be knowledgeable of the creation and system of the Navajo kinship to fully understand how it plays the most important role in Navajo identity. As Mary Shepardson learned,

The Navajo receive their clan affiliation at birth. They are “born into” their mother’s clan, which then becomes their clan, and “born for” their father’s clan. Mother’s clan is of primary importance, and father’s clan is of secondary importance. Navajo kinship furnishes the network of relations or responsibility and expectation of helpfulness. If you ask Navajos a question about kinship, you may receive the answer, “It’s all in the clans.” (160)

For example, I am born into the Yoo’i Dine’e, Bead People clan, and born into the Kinyaa’aanii, Towering House clan. Therefore, *I am* my mother, maternal grandmother, and all maternal aunts (I am Yoo’i Dine’e), and I am born for my father, my paternal grandmother and all paternal aunts. If I have a daughter, she will *always* be a Yoo’i Dine’e, as will her daughter(s), and so forth. In the case of males, a man *is* his mother’s clan, but his mother’s clan will no longer be primary in his children because his children will have their mother’s clan. For a male, his mother’s clan always becomes secondary through his children. This pattern is thus continuous in all Navajo families.

Therefore, primarily due to Navajo kinship, women hold high status both economically and socially. Traditionally women are not considered “properties,” but rather, they “own” the properties. Once a Navajo couple is married, the husband moves to the residence of the wife. He is required to build a hogan (traditional house) for them to live in on the wife’s land. If the husband owns livestock, he brings them with him and gives them to his wife or her family. He no longer “owns” his livestock. The house, livestock, land on which they live,

transportation (automobile if any) and their children all become properties of the wife. Again, the children “belong” to her because they are born into her clan and only born for their father. As Ruth Roessel indicates in *Women in Navajo Society* (1981),

Navajo wives remained the center of the home and family, whether the husband was absent or present. This kept divorce from the having the tragic consequences that often are found among other cultures. Further, living in the general area of the wives’ parents provided a group of relatives around the children that kept divorce from being devastating. Men were always in and around the camp, regardless of whether the father himself was present . . . Further, the various aunts and other relatives surrounded the children with the cushion of love and attention which provided a degree of security for the divorced family that rarely is seen in other societies. Thus, the very nature of Navajo culture made divorce far less destructive and traumatic that it often is in a nuclear family culture such as we find in the dominant American society today.

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In the case of a divorce, the wife traditionally put her husband’s “belongings” (basically clothes and small items) outside of the hogan. When he comes home and sees his belongings outside, he automatically knows that divorce has taken place, a decision made by his wife, and he must leave and never return. He can

not take anything of “value,” for those items are properties of the wife (and her clan).

In the traditional family structure, women and men have equal roles. Women and men share many similar domestic tasks, caring for the livestock, planting and harvesting, collecting plants and herbs for ceremonies or dyeing wool, and so on. However, when it comes to the education of the children, the women teach the children about the important values taught by Changing Woman and other deities and tricksters. Other women in the family can help the mother rear the children. For instance, when a young woman reaches puberty, she is instructed by all the women relatives in the family about the four-day puberty ceremony which she would participate in. Again, the young woman is blessed through the entire ceremony so that she may live in beauty and in accordance to Changing Woman. The women basically oversee the ceremony and its activities, while the men assist where they can. Young men, on the other hand, have a simpler on-day ceremony when they reach puberty, a sweat lodge ceremony.

In comparison to “women on the market” described in Irigaray’s essay, traditional Navajo women would be very much confused contemplating why and how women can be considered “commodity.” In fact, the closest interpretation a traditional Navajo person would come to of the English word “commodity” would be the concept “commodity food,” generic surplus food distributed by the U.S. Government. In that sense, a Navajo person would not understand why and how women can even be considered or “valued” as commodity or “exchange.” As stated in Irigaray’s essay, perhaps in Western culture “women/commodities . . .

remain, as simple ‘objects’ of transaction among men,” but in Navajo culture, this concept is completely irrational. I agree with Roessel in that

It is instructive to examine the disintegration of traditional Navajo family life in those individuals who no longer have their roots in Navajo culture and who, rather, have become addicted to welfare, commodities and other give-away programs which so often destroy individual self-respect and independence. If Navajo women were anything in traditional society they were independent and hard-working. They were not abrasively independent in the sense of “I’m the best and I’m most important,” but, rather, in the sense of quiet confidence in their own ability, along with belief in the help and presence of the Holy People – two factors, which, when combined, could care for the needs not only of themselves and their families but also of their clans and communities.(62-3)

The following passage also serves as an excellent case of irrationality among the Navajo culture:

(All) the systems of exchange that organize patriarchal societies and all the modalities of productive work that are recognized, valued, and rewarded in these societies are men’s business. The production of women, signs, and commodities is always referred back to men (when a man buys a girl, he “pays” the father or the

brother, not the mother . . .), and they always pass from one man to another, from one group of men to another. The work force is thus always assumed to be masculine, and “products” are objects to be used, objects of transaction among men alone. (Irigaray 171)

Even the idea of child bearing is not close to “production of women” in Navajo culture. Child bearing is certainly considered an important and sacred celebration because the Diyin Dine’ e, Holy People, has blessed the family with another life that will represent Changing Woman. It is told that when a child is born and takes its first breath, all the Diyin Dine’ e are present and bless the child with a long and healthy life. A pinch of corn pollen is supposed to be put in its mouth and on top of the head, finalizing the celebration. The placenta then is “given back” to Mother Earth and is buried in a sacred area, perhaps under a tree. If this is not done, the “spirit” of the placenta will “haunt” the woman and various ceremonies will need to be performed to restore the woman’s health. Other traditional celebrations also take place during the infant stage, including the First Laugh. Therefore, these important beliefs support the fact that Navajo women are not simply “products” nor “producers” in Navajo culture.

In the Navajo society, women are not dominated by men at all, as stated about women in Western culture in Wittig’s “The Category of Sex.” Any other Navajo woman reading this would most likely be in opposition with it, particularly traditional Navajo women. Worse yet, Wittig points out that “being murdered, mutilated, physically and mentally tortured and abused, being raped,



being battered, and being forced to marry is the fate of women” (3). I personally disagree with that. In the Navajo society, we are here to live in the ways of Changing Woman; we have always had a voice in our communities. Men are leaders because they are supported by their wives and/or maternal relatives; they have the shield of clan identity that protects them from harm. Knowing who they are and where they come from enables them to be strong leaders. Women consult and advise men in their leadership roles. Without women, men in the Navajo society would have no identity. Therefore, through the matrilineal society, women are not dominated by men. Navajo women were not murdered, mutilated, tortured, abused, raped and battered in the traditional Navajo society. Men knew that the women were respected and held high status in their communities and therefore did not even have the concept of mistreating them. According to Wittig, women in Western society might be considered as “sexual beings” and that they are “socially invisible,” but in Navajo society, women have always been active, visible, highly regarded and appreciated. Navajo women have control over their bodies, lives, families, and properties.

This is not to say that men have no important roles in the traditional Navajo society; they most certainly do. Men are leaders, fathers, husbands, uncles, spokesmen, and so on, all of which are important roles and functions in Navajo society. Mary Shepardson in “The Gender Status of Navajo Women” agrees that “sharing,” not “dominating,” is the theme of Navajo life. And that in the healing arts and religion, men dominate but by no means completely. Grandfathers, fathers, uncles, husbands, brothers, and sons contribute to the

positive emotional ambience and smooth running of the Navajo extended family. I prefer to . . . call this a “partnership” society.

A common myth told in Navajo culture is one that focuses on the sexuality issue. As my grandmother has told us before, this story is told to teach about the equality of Navajo men and women. There was a point in time (in Navajo mythology) when men and women were in disagreement over which group is “better” (a concept which had already been non-existent and forbidden by the Holy People). Nonetheless, the group of men argued threatened that they can live without the women, and vice versa. So it was decided that the two groups would separate forever. The groups moved and lived on opposite sides of a river. At the beginning, each group was carrying on normally with their daily roles. As time passed, the women could no longer manage the cornfields and take care of the livestock. They became ill and too weak to work. The last bit of crops and other foods saved had run out, and they did not know what to do. Women were not supposed to hunt and therefore ran out of food. On the other hand, the men were in the same situation at the beginning. They did not know how to cook, weave rugs, make clothes for winter, and so on. However, they were “saved” by one man who was “feminine.” He was the only one who proved to do the things women do, and he helped the men survive in that sense. Basically, the men would not have survived too if it hadn’t been for that particular man. It was determined that men and women need not debate which group is better, that both groups need each other the same way as instructed by the Holy People. With that history and knowledge, today women do not “dominate” men, either. Women exist in

accordance to Changing Woman, to treat all living things with respect and kinship, and to live by the Navajo clan system. Without the Navajo clan system, Navajo people would be lost, practically non-existent. Men learn this early in life, and they apply it to their women relatives, wives and daughters.

Pete Zah, former president and chairman of the Navajo Nation, supports the fact that traditionally Navajo people do not know what Western culture's feminism is. When I interviewed him, he agreed that "(Navajo) women didn't need to make a case (about feminism) because they were already in charge at home with their family and clan. (Our) clan system and kinship rule (our society)." He continued by saying, "For example, I'm married into the Honaghaahnii clan. I 'stay' at the residence of the Honaghaahnii clan. They were kind enough to let me in (marrying into that clan). I am not Honaghaahnii but my children are. I am only a 'guest' there." Mr. Zah used the late Dr. Annie Wauneka as an excellent example of how Navajo women can perceive feminism. He had traveled with her on many occasions, and she often served as an adviser to him before and during his terms. According to Mr. Zah, Dr. Wauneka disagreed with the way feminists were trying to go about making changes of the American patriarchal society. It saddened her to see white feminists "burning their bras" to call attention and make a point. She had become more appreciative of being Navajo when she saw or heard of such events/instances. In fact, Dr. Wauneka, the most prominent woman leader of the Navajo Nation, had been invited by certain white feminists to help them "fight for equality," but she chose not to. She had made a comment about how she was already what they (white feminists) wanted

to be. Mr. Zah stated that Dr. Wauneka often brought up Changing Woman, saying that Western culture doesn't have a concept similar to our culture's Changing Woman. They (white feminists) continue to struggle because they don't have such a concept that serves as a basis or foundation of their society, other than it being a patriarchal society. Perhaps that is why white feminists continue to struggle in maintaining their roles. Dr. Wauneka was the first Navajo woman to serve on the Navajo Tribal Council and stayed there over thirty years. She never used her "femininity" in tribal council and believed that other (contemporary) Navajo women made the mistake of introducing and pushing Western feminism into tribal council. In her thirty years as a tribal council member, she never made that "mistake" and continued to live traditionally at home. Dr. Wauneka was awarded the Presidential Medal of Freedom Award in 1963 by Lyndon B. Johnson.

Mr. Zah agreed that "things are changing, that we have a different way of looking at life. But we need to be mindful of traditional teachings, our elders, our values. We need to aware of the statistics of how many percent of our people are loosing the language and the traditional way of life. "Language makes all the difference in the world," he stressed. He supports the fact that "Navajo women not brought up traditionally can easily understand white feminism today." As I predicted, any Navajo man *would* support the fact that Western feminism does not have a role or purpose in the traditional Navajo society. I asked Mr. Zah one last question – Will a traditional medicine man today, in 1998, understand the

definition of feminism in Western culture? Even if we try to explain it to him? He simply answered, “No.”

Dr. Laura Tohe, perhaps the first Navajo woman to receive her doctorate degree in English, teaches at Arizona State University. She is also a woman brought up in a traditional Navajo home; she speaks Navajo and still practices much of her traditions and beliefs. In her essay “There Is No Word for Feminism in My Language,” she too explains how feminism does not exist in Navajo society. The definition of feminism can be attempted over and over again, but the traditional Navajo society will never conceive its meaning and purpose in Western culture. Dr. Tohe adds personal information about how her own mother and grandmother did not need to participate in “feministic” issues. Therefore, it is apparent in every traditional Navajo family that women never worried about “equal rights,” and perhaps they will never need to.

Living in modern society has created a tremendous impact on the lives of Navajo people, especially the young generation. In fact, a good number of young Navajo women might even support and agree with Wittig and Irigaray on certain issues of feminism. As more and more Navajo women enter the Western education system, politics and careers, they are one step closer to being driven into the world of feminism. The choice of becoming a Western feminist or staying in the traditional Navajo belief system is up to each woman. They are faced with this issue each day, whether consciously or not, as they continue to progress and survive in modern American society.

For those Navajo women living and working on the reservation, the idea of social and economic status is still at the beginning stage. Many women are learning what feminism is and are starting to participate and become active. Those women are usually the ones who have been educated in the Western culture. Like Mr. Zah commented, only Navajo women who were not brought up “completely” traditional would be the likely participants of feminism on the reservation (if it really has a place in today’s society as opposed to traditionally). The women who were fortunate enough to have been raised in a family who taught traditions and values would still refuse to learn about Western feminism because they already “know their place” in Navajo society.

My late grandfather was a very well known medicine man in our community. In Navajo society, medicine men are compared to those who hold doctorate degrees because they normally spend half their lifetime learning the many complex ceremonial songs and prayers. I considered my grandfather as such. He used to comment on the trend of Navajo women wanting to become leaders/politicians; since he was a very traditional man, he did not fully support the idea of women politicians. Not because he was degrading women, but because of traditional values. He certainly believed that women held the highest role in Navajo culture. However, in respect to Changing Woman, he believed that women are “sacred” and “precious.” Since women are significant members of the culture, he did not want to see them degraded, hurt, mistreated, and “abused” by the outside world. It would be like insulting Changing Woman. He used to say that politics is a Western ideology, and that our tribal government is Western, not

traditional. Because it is Western, it is okay for Navajo men to have the desire to be leaders. Since they do not hold the highest status in Navajo culture like Changing Woman and Navajo women do, men can go about exposing themselves to Western concept of politics. Women don't *need* to become leaders in tribal government; they *are* already the leaders in our culture. However, if a Navajo woman chooses to become a political leader, she must be able to maintain the traditional beliefs in order to balance both worlds (although it would be very complicated). My grandfather's prediction still holds true – that it will be very hard for a Navajo woman to become the first Navajo Nation President because our Holy People are too cautious of our Navajo women. It is as though the Holy People are holding them (women politicians) back. If/when we ever get a woman president, dramatic changes and impacts will take place within our culture. As young as I was, my grandfather used to share with me such views. I see why Dr. Annie Wauneka stayed “neutral” as far as women's rights were concerned during her thirty years of being a tribal council member. Roessel is among those who share in the same views of many traditional Navajo people:

It is interesting to note that when knowledgeable Navajo women today discuss politics, the traditional ones usually refrain from wishing or believing that some day a woman will be Chairman of the Navajo Tribal Council. These Navajo traditional roots, believe that for a Navajo woman to become Chairman (which is the number-one position) the teachings and traditions of the Navajos would be violated. These Navajo women believe that it is proper

and someday possible that Navajo women may occupy the position of Vice-Chairman, but they feel that they traditions of the Navajos make the seeking of the office of Chairman unwise and out of keeping with Navajo culture. (133)

I feel that although the Navajo people have progressed into the twenty-first century, they will always work to preserve the culture and language. There will be thousands of young Navajo people studying about various theories in their college courses. No matter how far Navajo people go, they will always have their identity; they will always have their clan and kinship values to rely on and refer to. Most importantly, they will remember the social/economic status of women in traditional culture and compare it to their societies. By then I assume that we will have many sources of Navajo “feminism,” if feminism should ever be created or applied into the Navajo society.

I agree with Paula Gunn Allen that today’s Indian communities value their people who still know of the tribal traditions and customs. This group of tribal members will contribute to the predicted assumption that the Navajo people will eventually “lose” their clan system. Therefore, it is crucial to “remember” the roots of Navajo culture.

I also want to point out that Navajo women in general most likely would still react sharply to essays about women, particularly to Wittig’s and Irigaray’s. Non-Navajo people will better understand why if they learn about the traditional beliefs and customs of Navajo people’s matriarchal society.



Sexuality, however, is not an open discussion in the Navajo culture. The same reaction would be displayed by Navajo women (and men) as far as sexuality is concerned. Perhaps the only “proper” agenda in Navajo culture would be naturally teaching the different roles of men and women. Traditionally, sexuality is not discussed as it is today in Western Society. In Western culture, women are often perceived much differently. Wittig openly expresses the following about women:

Wherever they are, whatever they do (including working in the public sector), they are seen (and made) sexually available to men, and they, breasts, buttocks, costume, must be visible . . . One might consider that every woman, married or not, has a period of forced sexual service, a sexual service which we may compare to the military one, and which can vary between a day, a year, or twenty-five years or more. (7)

Again, because of the traditional roles and lifestyles of Navajo women, sexuality is linked to the belief in Changing Woman. Therefore, traditional Navajo families do not “discuss” sexuality in the way that Wittig uses it in the quote above. It is considered improper to openly articulate the topic of sex, particularly to young men and women. In today’s society, sex is taught at the school levels, birth control is distributed openly, and parents are learning how to talk to their children about it, both in Western and Navajo culture. However,

traditionally, the topic of sex was reserved for the aunts and uncles. One of the aunt's role was to discuss with the niece (who is old enough and usually after her puberty ceremony) the "difference" between a boy and a girl. If the aunt chooses to explain in-depth, she may do so. The uncle, on the same note, takes the responsibility of talking to his nephew about sexuality. Personally, I find this still practiced in today's society. My own aunt was the one who provided me with insight of sexuality when shortly after I had my puberty ceremony. My mother has recently talked with one of her nieces about it also. So the method is still practiced today.

An important aspect of sexuality learned is that Navajo women are not thought of as "sexually available to men." Women at this early age are reminded of their status and roles in their communities and clans. At her puberty ceremony, the young woman is physically "molded" into the form of Changing Woman so that she may live in good health and beauty. She is instructed on how to handle herself like a woman, instead of a girl. She is told how to sit and stand properly, to listen carefully, to help others so that she may always receive help when necessary. Other information is then passed on to her by her female relatives. Traditionally, women dressed covered from neck to ankles; this opposes the way some women in Western culture dress, looking "sexually available to men."

Navajo families traditionally did not talk openly about sexuality. The clan system and kinship roles take over the responsibility of teaching about sexuality. I recently read Ella Cara Deloria's *Waterlily* and found similar kinship methods practiced among the Dakota people in her novel. Like the Dakota, Navajo people

are careful how to address certain relatives. Because the topic of sexuality is traditionally reserved for the aunts and uncles (and sometimes maternal grandparents) to discuss with the younger generation, Navajo people abide by the restrictions and taboos of teasing and properly addressing those certain relatives.

A joking relationship that is the antithesis of avoidance is familiar to the Navajo. Obscene teasing is permitted between both maternal and paternal cross-cousins who are not potential mates. . . . It is called “joking in the clans” and involves clan relations of exogamy. Whenever we got on this subject our informants were convulsed with laughter. (Shepardson 169).

For instance, my mother teases her cousins (both male and female) “sexually” as “potential mates” because her cousins are not of the same clan as she (maternal clan). She would jokingly make remarks like, “I waited for you at the Squaw Dance (Enemy Way ceremony) hoping you’d dance with me all night,” addressing her male or female cousin. In return he/she may respond to my mother by saying something like, “You probably would have just left me for another beautiful person after the first dance anyway.” As for the siblings and cousins of the same clan, they cannot tease in such sexual fashion for they are closely related and can cause the taboo of incest. Siblings or cousins of the same maternal or paternal clan tease one another by more or less “ridiculing” or “belittling.” I can refer to my paternal cousin (our fathers being brothers and in that way are being both born for that clan) as “the one who has no common sense” jokingly. A

common joke used is one about witchery. I can jokingly say to one of my sisters or brothers, “I don’t feel well today. I *thought* I saw you running behind the house last night. You must have witched me again.” The kinship methods are practiced in other ways as well. As for the topic of sexuality, one needs to know the extent of where kinship values can go and how it is properly used in various ways.

In conclusion, the concept of “social/economic status” among women and the concept of “sexuality” overlap each other in traditional Navajo society. It seems that one can not do without the other when they both derive from the entity of Changing Woman. Again, I used the traditional Navajo point of view in juxtaposing Western culture’s feminism to traditional Navajo society. One needs to be aware of the traditional beliefs and teachings of Navajo people to see the way Navajo women (and men) perceive “feminism” both in the traditional Navajo culture and in today’s Western culture. Navajo culture and traditions need to be practiced and respected by the Navajo people today. If they are not, then Western culture’s issues such as feminism will find their way into the Navajo society and dominate all ideologies. Navajo people, like other minorities, have been impacted and affected by Western colonization and ideologies enough as it is; Navajo people, especially women, need to continue to balance the two cultures we live in today. Although many Navajo women have reinforced their status in today’s Navajo society by working, becoming educated and successful, they need to remember that they have *always* had the high/equal status in Navajo culture.

Fortunately we have a history that includes a strong foundation like Changing Woman to help us maintain our indigenous identities.

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## The Cycle of Life: Celebrating Navajo Culture through Navajo Literature

My late grandfather, N'zhdiithahii, was a well-known Blessingway singer when my siblings and I were little. We were forever on the road with him, my mother or aunt driving him all over the central region of the Navajo reservation to people's residences, clan relatives or non-, so he could help them. Never did I once imagine seeing the songs he sang in written form in modern and contemporary texts. Later in life, I was taken aback by the English translations of those Navajo songs when I first saw them in written English, in parts or whole, because to hear and know them in Navajo as a child is completely different from looking at it in written English text as an adult. Now, when reading through them and imagining the voice of my own grandfather singing such songs, I believe my grandfather, if he had lived longer, would have supported the publication of Navajo house/hogan songs in Western academia. In fact, he used to welcome white people into his home, local visitors, and they would ask him questions about his "profession," and I remember he would tell them stories and they would laugh together for hours. In that regards, whenever I read Navajo literature and see Navajo songs written in them, I am able to examine each set of songs with a different purpose—to re-affirm how magnificently complex these songs are and how each set—big or small—presented is a representation and celebration of the Navajo cycle of life.

The use of Native American languages is declining into today's society, and the Navajo language is indeed among those indigenous languages struggling to survive. This fact is unfortunate and is very significant to the preservation and

revitalization of Navajo language. Navajo literature, particularly those written by Navajo authors, is therefore emerging at this critical time in Navajo culture.

Although written mostly in English, these texts will eventually contribute to the revitalization of language and culture of the Navajo people. I will analyze a number of texts to demonstrate how they can and are contributing to the preservation of Navajo language and culture, most importantly to the preservation of the Navajo cycle of life. The texts include David P. McAllister and Susan W. McAllester's *Hogans: Navajo Houses and House Songs* (1980); Walter Dyk's *Left Handed, Son of Old Man Hat* (1996); Laura Tohe's Tseyi' *Deep in the Rock: Reflections of Canyon de Chelly* (2005); Lucy Tapahonso's *Blue Horses Rush In* (1997); and Nia Francisco's *Blue Horses for Navajo Women* (1988).

Walter Dyk's *Left Handed, Son of Old Man Hat* (1966) portrays in great detail the life of Left Handed. As one of the first Navajo autobiographies, much is to be commended as Dyk helps tell the story of a traditional Navajo man who must learn on his own the realities of Navajo life. Many aspects of traditional Navajo life are presented in the story of Left Handed. This text is very interesting among the texts mentioned earlier because it is a story told from a Navajo man's perspective, a Navajo man who comes from the matriarchal and matrilineal Navajo culture.

Cultural restrictions (or taboos, for lack of a better word) are significant in Navajo culture. They separate good and bad. They teach us what is proper and what is not. They help maintain the Navajo cycle of life – Si'ah Naaghai Bik'eh Hozhoon – long life lived well. To live a long, happy life, a Navajo youngster



must listen to his/her elders, do as they say, respect all living things around them; by doing so, they will be blessed by the Holy People who are all around observing. They will regenerate and repeat the cycles of life resembling the natural elements around them. Therefore cultural restrictions are important and need to be respected. Events signifying this life are well presented through Left Handed's story. For example, Left Handed hears his grandmother scolding his mother about why she let her son handle and bring back Anasazi pots; his grandmother explains that the evil spirits from the area where they pots lay can haunt you and affect you (65). Left Handed's father also stresses that one, after learning sacred ceremonial songs, should not "cuss and swear" at his property, including livestock, or they will slowly decline or vanish (77). He also instructs people to not "talk roughly" as well because the animals, sheep, cattle and horses, will sense anger and they will eventually leave or decline in number (81). At another point Left Handed's father also told him not to get too close to the fire or else "You'll ruin yourself" (221), meaning that he will lose his concentration and accidentally fall into the fire, hurting or, worse, killing himself. Crying for animals is also a cultural restriction, but Left Handed cannot help himself cry when his horse dies: "You know very well that you mustn't cry for the horses, so you stop now" (240). These restrictions are continuous throughout the story and are most certainly some of important Navajo cultural teaching. They help create the very real persons Left Handed and his family were.

Another unique cultural aspect is presented through the conversations held between people who are related not only biologically but by clans. In Navajo

culture these relatives teach each other in certain ways. For example, siblings (by blood or clan in each case hereafter) can tease each other by degrading one another; cousins of the opposite sex can tease each other like boyfriend/girlfriend or husband/wife and pretend to be jealous of each other; and granddaughters and grandfathers or grandsons and grandmothers can tease each other in the same manner as cousins of the opposite sex. This manner is demonstrated clearly throughout Left Handed's story, and he seems to clearly understand, or has learned to understand, how the system works as his mother teases her cousin (by clan): "Whenever I leave you I always tell you to behave, not to bother with women. Now I know you were with another woman besides me.' He laughed again and said, 'Yes, I was with a woman...'" (83). Left Handed addresses various people in the same respect by using "sister," "uncle," and "grandmother."

Left Handed also shows detail and vivid imagery of realization as a child. For example, he discusses the first time he pondered the cycle of the seasons and how the moon and sun work: "I used to think, 'There must be a whole pile there where it goes down. Or it must have melted away.' And I thought, 'There must be whole lot there too, where they come from'" (42). He adds his curiosity of childbirth as well, indicating how he used to wonder how a baby gets air inside the mother: "They're inside their mothers for a long time where there's no air. They must hold their breath for all this while.' Sometimes I tried to hold my breath to see how long I could stand it, but I couldn't stand it..." (46). A final realization he includes also is the difference in roles of men and women and his perspective of how women are ultimately stronger than men, considering the

Navajo matriarchal and matrilineal culture. He says, “I found out that a man is way behind and a woman is way ahead, because a woman can do all kinds of hard work too. I found out they’re in many sufferings, and I found out that they can stand them. Like when they have their monthlies, they’ll bleed a lot, but they’ll stand it, and when they begin having babies...they suffer so much” (49).

Song is significant in almost every part of the people’s activities, particularly in Left Handed’s life. An autobiography or biography about a traditional Navajo is not real without song and prayer. Left Handed’s father represents one of those traditional people as he constantly sang for his property. He sang the Owl Song during the winter “so that if it got too cold the sheep wouldn’t freeze, they’d stand the cold, not one of them would be lost through all the winter” (67). Song is stressed over and over by his father and other people who have livestock: “... there’s a song for each one. Even though you know only one song for each of them everything of yours will be strong. Even if you have only one song for the sheep you’ll raise them, nothing will bother them, nothing will happen to them, you’ll have them for a long time, the rest of your life” (76).

The Navajo creation story – Hajíínéídéé’ Baa Hane’ – originates as the beginning of the cycle of the Navajo people. In *Hogans: Navajo Houses and House Songs*, the following comparison of the Leader’s House Songs and the Talking God’s House Songs demonstrates how similar they are in song content and how they represent a cycle of journey, life and blessing. They are selected songs and are compared by the repetitive verse(s) in those songs. In the Leader’s

House Songs: *Moving In Song Number 1*, the verse is “With this, they are moving in...” and “With these, they are moving in...” with reference to moving in with the furnishings in place, including fire (42-44). Next, in *Moving In Song Number 2*, the ones who are moving in acknowledge the Holy People and the furnishings as personification as they move in: “With you, we moved in...” (46-48). Finally, in *Talking God’s Song Number 5* it reads “at a sacred place I’ve arrived...” (50-52) emphasizing the arrival of destination of a journey. In addition, the expression of beauty or happiness is symbolic in the final verse: “The woman...from her...beauty radiates” (54-56). From one point to the next, the Leaders’s House Songs signify the cycle of a journey; however, the place of destination is not a final, complete point as will be discussed later.

In Talking God’s House Songs: *Talking God’s House Song Number 7*, the beginning of another journey takes place, which is the actual journey of the Twins’ to their father the Sun: “On the path, I start off, ... on the path, I start off...” (67-68). Next, in *Songs of the Sun’s House in the Sky*, it states “Toward it I am going” and “Toward it I am on my way” (74), signifying the destination. In *The Twins Arrive at the Sun’s House*, the journey is completed with “I have arrived” (80-82) and happiness is expressed by “Happiness.. Happiness.../ It carries me...”(84-90). The last two songs finalize the arrival (of the Twins) and how they are content as there are, again, beauty and happiness: “Now I have arrived...” (96-98) and “For a beautiful thing I came and waited...For this I came and waited” (104-6).

The journey described in each song represents the cycle of all things. As

my late grandfather used to say, “What do you do when you first wake up in the morning?” This was a trick question that he liked to ask people. One would say, “Um, put my shoes on” or “Stretch.” He would say in Navajo, “No, no. You think! You think, come back to realization from your sleep, from your dream, then you think about your day, your first actions, then you speak..” McAllester states this notion also: “The words, in turn, proceed from thought, and behind thought lies knowledge” (20). Daily routines are a cycle, for example, wake up, think, plan, proceed with morning activities, leave home, work, come home, do normal evening activities, rest, and fall asleep. Creating any type of a plan is a cycle. This is evident in Leader’s House Songs: *Construction Song Number 1*: “About this, he is thinking,...about this, he is thinking...” (25). The creation of a Navajo hogan structure is a cycle; also is the life that repeats itself in it when completed. One thinks about and plans the construction of a hogan, as in the Creation story, then the hogan is completed, a couple moves in, they have a family, who live in the hogan, the children grow and mature into adulthood and repeat the process of marriage and family while the parents continue their cycle by aging and finally reach the end of life. At the same time, the hogan which was first created for the couple ages alongside the couple and their children. As the couple, children and hogan all age together, Changing Woman appears and disappears by winter season cyclically, renewing all life. As stated earlier in the description of Leaders’ House Songs, the place of destination is not always a final, complete point for the traveler as he will continue the cycle of life through age.

Despite the above songs referencing safe and blessed journeys that one takes or wishes to take, journeys are not always without danger and evil. Danger and evil exist in the Creation story, and, in fact, danger and evil caused the migration through the Four Worlds as well as the journey of the Twins to their father. As shown in Talking God's House Songs: *The Hogan as a Place of Danger* (76), one can protect one's self from danger using songs and prayer to keep danger and evil away from their home: "My home...it causes fear..." For example, the Twins' journey, which was a result of evil monsters killing their people, itself presented danger when they reached their father Sun's house. Their own father put them through various dangerous tests to prove that they were his sons. When their father finally accepted them and agreed to help them kill the evil monsters, the twins were able to destroy some or most of the "monsters" but not all; they were instructed not to destroy all the monsters because danger and evil need to exist. Without danger and evil, the world will be out of balance. With good and evil, all things are balanced. Therefore, the Twins destroyed most of the monsters but left a few for the people, such as death, laziness, poverty, diseases, witchcraft, greed, selfishness and so on.

In Navajo culture, as my grandmother used to say, everything is living, not just people, animals and plants but naalyéhé – belongings, particularly sacred belongings made of natural substance, for example, the rugs our people weave, the ceremonial baskets, stirring sticks, weaving tools, clay pots, jewelry, moccasins, hogans and houses. Because all of these things are living things, they need to breathe, they need to feel, and they need to expire at some point.

Therefore, there needs to be imperfection in these things. When one is near completion of weaving a rug, for example, the last line or more will not be woven to the end of the loom; there should be a small opening so, upon releasing the rug from the loom, the rug can breathe. If one closes the rug by weaving the last line or more to their end, the rug is strangled and will suffocate. Perhaps one would make an imperfection in the design, small enough for one not to notice. The same applies to the weaving of a Navajo ceremonial basket. Stirring sticks are not used solely during a Kinaalda as well. These sticks should be used daily with all kinds of corn food preparation, or hung or placed where they can breathe, not be enclosed in a tight container. The hogan or a house should be kept warm and alive with fire; it should not be entirely abandoned (except when death occurs in it). All of these example of Navajo thought and philosophy of living things is evident in Leader's House Songs: *Construction Song Number 6* as one constructs something new, first gathering the natural elements necessary to create it, speaking to it, and it listening back: "As I am planning for it, it drops into place,/As I am talking to it, it drops into place/As it listens to me, it drops into place" (30). All of these elements are alive and need to breathe, thus maintaining the life cycle.

The photo images of the Navajo hogans, modern homes, the people in them, the items within the homes, and the surroundings add a unique perspective to the songs presented. The pictures of actual items in the home, such as coffee pots on the stove and dishes hanging from the wall, help create images of Navajo home life, symbolizing the life and material goods, animate and inanimate objects, described in the songs. The Leader's House Songs and Talking God's

House Songs are not only poetic but real, real songs describing the cycle of Navajo life.

The cycle of life continues to exist in modern Navajo poetry. Laura Tohe's *Tséyi' Deep in the Rock* (2005), with photographer Stephen E. Strom's stunning contribution, breaks new ground for contemporary Navajo poetry, honoring the living history of Canyon de Chelly through her poems and through Strom's beautiful images. In addition to history, the people, land, beauty, nature, and stories all exist in what creates the prevalent motif of the cycle of life—birth, life and rebirth—ultimately symbolizing the Diné people's "mother"—Changing Woman. Moreover, the exploration and celebration of this cycle of life is ultimately, in the end, celebrated by Tohe herself. In her introduction Tohe refers to visiting and revisiting the canyon, at times with her children and at times alone, before she began the production of the poems. She states, "I know now it was the canyon who chose me to write these poems" (xiv). A glance of the language in the titles of the poems present ideas of birth and maternity, for example, "round belly," "grows," "returning," "female," "male," and "his birth." It is the living spirits of Tséyi' who do choose Tohe to create this language to remind us all of the history of the canyon and, overall, the creation and survival of the Diné and Dinétah. According to oral stories of the creation of the Diné, Changing Woman created the Diné, the People. Upon doing so, after a long life as daughter to First Man and First Woman and grandchild to the Holy People, Changing Woman bids her children, the newly born and created clans people, farewell and retires to the west where she now meets the Sun at the end of each day. As each new day



arrives, it is Changing Woman whom the Diné people walk upon and the Sun who watches over the Diné people. At the end of each day, when dusk sets, Sun joins her. Changing Woman, therefore, is symbolic of earth. Since earth feeds us, Changing Woman is mother. Just as Changing Woman was once a baby who changed into a young woman, celebrating the first Kinaalda (puberty ceremony), earth goes through changes; hence, as seasons change throughout the year, so does Changing Woman. Yearly, the spring represents her birth, and winter her old age; when spring comes again, she is always reborn. Accordingly, the Diné traditionally respect earth as mother; therefore, traditionally, Tohe celebrates this respect for earth in her poetry.

Associated with birth and pregnancy, first of all, in Tohe's "Female Rain," the female rain arrives from the south, "cloudy, cool and gray/pregnant with rainchild" and "gives birth to a gentle mist" (26). Female rain is often used as a duality with male rain in Diné culture, where the female rain is the soft, light rain that begins during the spring season, and male rain the hard, heavy rain as that of the summer monsoon rain. For example, in contrast, in Tohe's "Male Rain," the male rain "comes riding a dark horse," "angry," "malevolent," "cold," and "bringing floods and heavy winds." In "On the Round Belly of the Earth," Tohe introduces imagery of birth: "...where my mother buried my umbilical cord so that my spirit would remain tied to Nahasdzaan, the earth" (1). It is Diné custom that one (mother, father, grandparent, etc.) buries the umbilical cord of an infant, when the cord dries and naturally separates from the belly of the infant, near the home, which Tohe refers to here. Tohe further asserts that the indigenous peoples,

upon coming into existence on the land, “took only what the earth would give them,” and “In doing so, they showed their gratitude by offering prayers so that the earth would continue to sustain their spirits and fragile lives.” This relationship with the earth continues to this day, again, as earth symbolizing the indigenous peoples’ mother. The context of “the color of our births” in “What Made this Earth Red?” also can suggest the redness of Indigenous peoples’ skin, in this case, the Diné, whose “trails...were forced upon us, beginning with our blood trails to Hweeldi and back” (3). Tohe refers to this color also in “His Birth,” exclaiming that “At dawn he climbed into this world/wet and red” (45). Infancy is described in “Refugees in Our Own Land”: “Shiyáázh, *my son*, fusses in his cradleboard. The protective rainbow, shaped by his father, arches over his face” (17). Here, sympathy toward the innocent image of mother and infant is inevitable as “Monster Slayer’s archenemy rises again to pull us off this rock where we’ve taken refuge since winter’s approach”; moreover, the mother’s milk, “from which the enemy drinks,” is dry, and there’s a “drowning breath” in her “beloved son’s” throat. At the end, she wishes her infant to “take this map of rainbow and fly, fly...” above into the stars where it is peaceful, as she notes earlier. All of these images of birth described by Tohe confirm her knowledge of and respect for Changing Woman.

Just like Tohe, two other Diné women poets use the symbol of Changing Woman as mother similarly in their works. Luci Tapahonso also uses this symbolism and imagery of pregnancy and birth in her poems, particularly in “Blue Horses Rush In.” Taphahonso’s granddaughter Chamisa, to whom this

poem is dedicated, is the perfect fit for this poem as she is female as is Changing Woman who is being symbolized here. In Diné culture, when a baby arrives, it is often said, in Diné, “the baby has arrived by horse.” In this poem, when Chamisa is born, Taphahonso describes the various types of horses that have arrived with her. Four colors are significantly associated with each direction in Diné: white in the east, turquoise/blue in the south, yellow in the west, and black in the north. Tapahonso refers to those colored horses by stating: “White horses ride in on the breath of the wind./White horses from the east”... “Blue horses enter from the south”... “Black horses came from the north.” However, she says that “Yellow horses rush in, snorting from the desert in the south” (103-104); the intention might have been to claim that the yellow horses came from the west, not the south. Ultimately, at the closing of the poem, Tapahonso makes reference again to her granddaughter’s early stage of life as a female representing the infant Changing Woman who will eventually step into each phase of life: “Chamisa, Chamisa Bah. It is all this that you are./You will grow: laughing, crying,/and we will celebrate each change you live” (104).

In addition to Tohe and Tapahonso, Nia Francisco, another Diné woman poet, also uses the symbolic Changing Woman in her poetry. Like Tohe, Francisco uses the imagery of female rain associated with gentle birth and the beginning of a new life. In “Níłtsah” Francisco describes “the stirring of a woman’s womb” as a metaphor for the clouds ready to gently pour rain. Is Francisco describing the actual birth of a baby as does Tapahonso in “Blue Horses Rush In”? In Francisco’s “Níłtsah,” she says that “at the time of mounting/rain

water/rushing forth,” “the child/Hope/is borne” (48). She then states that “The Child, Hope, gives/Long Happiness.” In the context of the cycle of life which includes birth, life and rebirth (at the end), Francisco seems to not be describing an actual birth of a child named Hope. She may be instead speaking metaphorically, giving names to the stages of the life (as Changing Woman). While Tohe refers to the color of Indigenous peoples’s skin as red in her poem, Francisco uses the colors red *and* brown interchangeably to describe not only the Indigenous peoples but earth as well. In “Brown Children,” Earth, as narrator, speaks to the “Great Grandfathers of the Universe”: “See my brown bellied desert sparrow hawks/...listen to cinnamon-brown woman/her children browned from within her womb” (3). She continues describing her children as “browned as that of soil/like red mesas and its hidden afternoon shades.” The “shy Sky/who fathered her children” is also described as having brown skin. At the end she also adds that “this earth woman” is “so bronzed” like her children who are also “so bronzed.” Francisco also uses the imagery of birth in other poems, such as “Men Tell and Talk,” where she claims that “Men do not know birth and its pain/but I assume those who know the drum tightness do know,” suggesting a metaphor between the tightness of a pregnant woman’s womb to the tightness of a drum that men beat when singing their songs. The duality of female and male also exists in Francisco’s poetry similarly to Tohe’s work. In “Male and Female,” Francisco presents the Diné’s cultural belief of turquoise and white shell having mated as male and female, and she simply suggests that no one knows “the meaning in forms/ of words/ thoughts/ or other wise/ they only live it/ male and female” (47),

that the not knowing sometimes can not be questioned, that it just is. As far as Changing Woman's life cycle (birth, life and rebirth), Francisco's "To Rob" provides much detail in the symbols of Changing Woman's life. The speaker states: "I thought of winter/ a wonderland of winter/ is the Old age of Nahasdzaan/ female earth" (53). The duality of female and male, in this case sister and brother, is also incorporated here. It ends with: "Soon there will be/ the blossoming of sprouts/ just like Changing Woman rejuvenating/ Herself after her stage of old age." These recurring associations of birth in all of the Diné women's works, Tohe, Tapahonso and Francisco, contribute to the significance of the life cycle of Changing Woman.

While Tohe brings back into being the living history of Canyon de Chelly in *Tseyi'*, she continues to symbolize Tséyi' as earth, as mother, as Changing Woman, upon which exist in spirit all her children—Diné people, animals and all other living beings. Lives of the people who once lived in the canyon and who were forced out of their homes to begin the Long Walk in the late nineteenth century still exist orally, spiritually, and illustratively, and they exist through story. Through these stories we also know that the lives of these peoples' descendants are also still prevalent and regenerating in current Tséyi' and beyond. Tohe reminds us of this in her poetry. For example, in "A Tree Grows near the Road," both lives past and present are described. As present-day activities include tourists being driven in and out of Canyon de Chelly, they are unaware of the real stories and presence of the people of the past. Tohe presents, simultaneously, an

image of tourists being driven “in and out of the canyon—half-day, all-day tours, cameras click,/coconut sunscreen” while

Someone shudders in that tree that reaches across the dirt trail. It is a woman driven from her home. Her husband and children scorched, along with the corn and the peach orchards. The sheep slaughtered. Below, the horse soldier paces back and forth, back and forth.” (13)

Although current-day tourists are provided oral synopses of the historical events of the people of Tséyi’, the fact that most perhaps never learn the specific, real details of the stories, or perhaps they do not care ultimately, is unfortunate. Tohe puts this idea back into perspective for us. The Diné elder, who lives in the canyon, in “Jini’” reminds us to listen to the oral stories as well as he explains, “It’s best to take time to listen to the stories and not be in a hurry,” and tells of a man who “stayed behind and drew animals on the canyon wall and blessed it with prayers for The People’s return. He waited. Time passed. Then a long-robed man came through the canyon. He’s there on the wall with the others” (11). Throughout her poetry, Tohe reemphasizes the importance of the oral stories of the canyon.

The animals are also an important part of the life of the canyon. Tohe includes various animals in her poetry, for example, crows, ants and horses. In “Deep in the Rock,” crows (gáagii) “are everywhere,” and “are taken for granted. If they were to leave, they would be missed” (9). Ants also are given important roles as speakers in “Returning”: “Thick black ants watch Earth-Surface child

return. ‘Ahhh,’ they say, ‘leave this one alone; she is returning from that place’” (21). Here the narrator returns to her/his homeland and is welcomed back by the ants; a crow also is present as it “glides a new pattern in the wake of grief’s echoes” (21). What has a much more dominant presence is the horse, particularly the blue horse. Laverne Harrell Clark, in *They Sang for Horses: The Impact of the Horse on Navajo & Apache Folklore*, asserts that “The cardinal horse that Navajo mythology values most is the turquoise or blue horse” (36). She further adds that the Sun, who owned a turquoise horse, “was ever mindful of the needs of his powerful turquoise stallion, which was larger than an ordinary horse” (36). Tohe makes reference to the idea of the turquoise horse in her works here, whereas Tapahonso uses it as the title of her book—*Blue Horses Rush In*, as well as Francisco—*Blue Horses for Navajo Women*. Because the Sun often rode the blue horse, the speaker in Tohe’s “Many Horses” again could be Changing Woman, who borne the Sun’s children, the twins. She says to him, “The day you arrived on your Turquoise Horse I was already riding my Rainbow Horse, as we were promised beautiful horses to carry us into this world” (7). She shares the song that he will sing to her, which in Diné culture is referred to as a Mountain Song. She adds: “I recognize you by your sweet song and your horse.” Tohe also uses blue horses in a poem title, “Blue Horses Running,” a poem about “the simple beauty of blue horses running” (43).

Contributing to the description of the living history of the Diné people, past, present and future, the use of personification is also explicated throughout Tohe’s work. The canyon imagery, as provided visually by Strom, also

contributes to the telling of the stories of the Diné people's lives and experiences. For example, in "Canyon del Muerto," "The canyon trembled with stories" as panic "rose" like smoke (19). In "On the Other Side," the walls, for example, are alive:

On the other side is a wall  
where the souls of the dead  
watch the tears of the living flow. (15)

Here, does Tohe refer to "the living" as today's people or, specifically, the people of the past (those who were forced from the canyon prior to the raids or those who returned home discovering that there was nothing left)? It could suggest both. Tohe also asserts, in her introduction, that Tséyi' "knew I was to return to write this collection" (xiv). Strom's images certainly helps one create or recreate the stories of the Diné while reading Tohe's poetry. Together they create personification, an integral part of Tohe's composition.

Although death is part of the stories of Tséyi', it does not complete the cycle of life; it can be construed as the end of the cycle of life, but does not complete it. In its place, Tohe seems to suggest rebirth, not death. Such as Changing Woman's last journey toward the west where she lies down to rest, not die, the concept of rebirth, to rejuvenate, to move forward into a new beginning, is prevalent as an underlying theme in Tohe's work. In addition, it is quite interesting that most of the speakers of stories/poems seem to suggest that they want to be reborn at the rim or edge of the canyon. The speaker, perhaps Tohe



herself, in “At the Rim” admits, “At the rim, I want to jump into your canyon and run into your ocean, naked and reborn” (5). In “Echoes,” the narrator speaks of a story told to her by “a Diné woman in Oregon” about her son “who fell from the rim at the canyon” (23). Fortunately, her son survives “because he remembered to call out his warrior name.” Hence, he does not die but is reborn with the blessings of “the ancestral Mountain Spirits.” The speaker in “Over Here” also prefers “the rim of the canyon, where I am free to roam and not let the sparkling lights of the city catch me the way they do Coyote” (41). Tohe confirms in her introduction this desire to be reborn at the rim of the canyon: “Standing at the rim opens all the possibilities of wonderment, awe, inspiration, and, above all, mystery” (xiv). Tohe’s portrayal of one’s desire to return to Tséyi’ or Dinétah and be rejuvenated or reborn is also made clear in “Dinétah”:

I happily step over into existence  
Into our canyons,  
our rivers,  
our mountains,  
our valleys.  
Sky beauty above and  
Earth beauty below.  
Oh how I’ve missed you.  
To think I was away for so long,  
And you were always there,  
Waiting on the red earth

to hold yourself open  
and offer to carry my burden. (35)

Such as Changing Woman being “reborn” at the end of her life and ultimately becoming earth, in the Diné oral stories, most of the narrators/speakers in Tohe’s poems express that desire. The grueling stories of the Diné people being refugees of their own land inside Tséyi’ during the days of cavalry are still vivid and real as told by Diné people as well as by the spirits, the trees, the walls, the sand, the rocks, the sky, and so forth. Tohe portrays these stories and images throughout her work. By doing so, it is evident that Tohe, as she expresses in her own voice in her introduction, that she is one of many who often forget these stories of the Diné people due to society’s everyday demands, particularly for those Diné people living outside of and distance away from Dinétah. It is trips like her visits home and visits to Tséyi’ that remind her of the need to record these stories for those who cannot visit in person. We have to remember that not only do these stories exist in Tséyi’ as Tohe describes in her collection, but these stories are everywhere on Dinétah.

Not only do all of these texts remind us of this, but they also give emphasis to the significance of the cycle of life through birth, living, and rebirth. This cycle is symbolic of Changing Woman in the Diné way of life, as she ages through time again and again. All the different parts of her, even the smallest ants, the driest branches on the trees, the empty abandoned hogan, the fallen, decayed fence, and the cracks in the walls, are hungry to tell us their stories. Tohe asserts that other peoples “that have flooded this country brought with them the fury to

own the land. First by the force of themselves, opening the earth and dropping seeds into her, they realized the abundance of the land and wanted more” (1).

Many years later some of those peoples today still tour Tséyi’ as visitors, and they are unable to hear the spirits of Changing Woman and her children telling their stories “deep in the rock.” To Navajo people, the spirits are everywhere, and we need to hear them. To Navajo writers and readers of Navajo literature, it is also up to us to help revitalize and maintain the Navajo culture and language.

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## Stories Bilagáana K'ehjí

### First Laugh

Arlene and Harry left early that morning for Old Gracie's place on top of the mesa to pick the fattest sheep for Dezba. Arlene was always best at picking the fattest sheep. She'd inherited it from Grandma. *You just put your hand between its hind legs and pinch the upper part of the inner thighs. If it jumps, it has no fat. If it doesn't jump, there you have it.* Grandma was very adamant about cooking Navajo food at family gatherings. No extravagant white man's dishes. *Hozhó'ó.* I think we turned out okay. Arlene sure followed Grandma's advice on the fat sheep selection process. *And never pick a skinny sheep, especially for your in-laws.* Unfortunately Grandma's sheep all got skinny on us after she left. She would've understood our selling them all.

Arlene was my oldest sister, in her mid-thirties, who used to be a social worker until she decided to stay home and raise her boys. Her first husband, John Smith, used to be assistant principal for the BIA boarding school. We all thought Arlene and John had a perfect marriage, big Navajo wedding and all. We were wrong. His name was too BIAish to begin with. He was tall and huge, too tall for Arlene, too tall for a Navajo. They had two boys, John C. and John W., and they had been happily married for years, so Arlene thought, until she found John with his boss last summer. Arlene had gone straight from the hospital to surprise him at work that evening, but instead she found herself staring at the blue school van he drove. Inside, behind the dark tinted windows, he was on top of his boss, Principal Lowe. We hated Arlene for not doing anything. "I froze," she had said, while the

van moaned and rocked and all I could do was stare at the label on the door: Central Boarding School District. Making a Better Tomorrow. For Official Use Only. The good news Arlene was delivering to him was that she was pregnant with their third child. Anyone would have been devastated by something like that, but not Arlene. Grandma would not have allowed it. *You are strong women of the Bead Clan. We all stay close together and watch out for each other. Never fall apart.*

Arlene survived the divorce quite well then met Harry at the Gallup Ceremonial last August. Rather, Harry met Arlene. The owner of the Nizhoni Trading Co. and still single at forty-five with gray hair and gray eyes, Harry actually turned out to be the perfect man Arlene should have married first, although Grandma would've definitely protested. *You ladies know better than to bring home a white man. White men have cheated us enough. Now our own men are beginning to be like the white men, disrespecting their wives and mothers.* But I had to admit, Harry was different. He seemed to really care about Arlene. He learned to manage his Gallup business located one hundred and twenty miles away via his cell phone and laptop from Arlene's hogan. Just after knowing Arlene several months, he took on the role of father to John C, John W, and now her new baby girl. Arlene had called us the moment Dezba first laughed, and plans were made.

The sun shone warmly for an April morning. Arlene and Harry were probably on their way back with Old Gracie's fattest sheep bouncing in the back. We were in

the shade house at Grandma's. Uncle Tom lived next door and was taking care of her place now. Grandma Ebby's cows were out grazing already and Grandpa Charley's old Chevy produced a smoke of dust west of the cornfield, headed our way. They would all be arriving soon. I put some more logs on the fire while Clara made a second bowl of dough.

"It's going to be nice seeing everyone again," Clara said, cleaning her fingers of sticky dough.

"I know. When's the last time we got together like this?" I said.

"Too long ago. Ronald's family had one recently for his sister's baby, but it wasn't the same. They do the fast-food thing."

"Fast-food *is*?"

"Yeah, they use like taco meals, chicken meals, pizza."

"Are you serious?" I laughed.

"Yes. No mutton, no corn. It was weird."

"How do his grandparents feel about that?"

"Well, Ronald's grandpa died a few years ago and his grandma's in the nursing home. They just take her a bowl of stew or something. She doesn't know."

"I don't know if that's good or bad," I said. "I mean, it must be nice to not do all the cooking and cleaning and everything else, but what's the point in that?"

"I know. At least they still do the salt," Clara laughed, pretending to defend her future in-laws.

Clara was the second oldest. She and Ronald had been seeing each other

for almost a year now. He worked with a construction company, traveling all over the northwest, and came home only on holidays. Arlene and I never understood how any relationship like that could work. Yet our sister was managing. Working practically fifty hours a week as a nurse at the Indian hospital kept her pretty busy, though. And she enjoyed it. She resembled Mom more than any one of us with her naturally wavy hair and a beautiful smile.

“I hope we never do that,” I said, seriously.

“No kidding. Imagine what the elders would think.”

Uncle Tom brought in some more logs and asked, “Need anything else?”

“No thanks,” I replied.

“Okay. I’ll be at the house. Hey, are your brothers coming too?”

“No,” said Clara. “Randall said his mother-in-law’s sick and they’re going to take her to a medicine man. David said he had to take their cows in for inspection or something.”

Suddenly we heard Officer Begay’s siren heading northbound. The first crying panel was never a big deal, but a second always meant something terrible.

“Wonder what happened,” I said.

Officer Begay was the only cop who worked five chapters. He was related to everybody and anybody through his Bitterwater clan, so news traveled fast. It would be a surprise if we didn’t hear about his action for the day within the hour.

“Drunk driver. Who else?” said Uncle Tom. “Okay. Just let me know when it’s time to eat,” he teased and went back to working on his truck.

Uncle Tom, Mom’s brother, was our uncle, father and grandfather all



rolled into one. Divorced by his ex-wife and children before I can remember, he lived alone and made an adequate living as a carpenter. Dependent on an old hand saw that his father gave him when he was just learning the trade, he had built with his own hands over a hundred houses in the central part of the rez, just a few of which were two-story, and two-hundred and sixty-three and a half hogans (an unexpected divorce situation on the half one), including Arlene's, Clara's and Grandma's. He had lost count on the outhouses years ago. People admired our uncle for his talent and often wondered why he never remarried. We stopped wondering too when we realized that he had us and we had him. After our father died Uncle Tom was the one to teach us how to ride blindfold through the sagebrush on our brand new Huffy bikes, how to steal a piece of mutton from Grandma's fridge to catch the best catfish with, and how to punch Aaron Chee's right eye out when he called us names in the third grade. Somewhere along the way Mom fell off the wagon again and began staying at Mą'ii's, the local bootlegger. One day Uncle Tom got tired of hauling us to the trading post/post office on the first of each month to make sure we got a piece of her welfare check. You guys don't need anything from her, he had said to us, shaking his head, pissed at his sister. You guys got your grandma. When we stopped looking for her, she actually started to come home once in awhile. The last time she spent a few days with us was when Grandma died last year.

Arlene and Clara had each other like Randall and David had each other when they were kids. I guess being stuck in the middle was perfect after all because I had Grandma. Every month she would spoil me with a new Archie

comic book or a Nancy Drew mystery or even a Reader's Digest if nothing else was available at the trading post/post office. Most of the time we took turns reading Navajo from *Diyin God Bizaad. Learn to read both Navajo and English. It will reward you someday.* My favorite was when, on sunny days, with the sheep safe among the sagebrush before us, I sat with Grandma under the shade of a juniper tree and read to her from my collection of Dr. Seuss. *What is this about green eggs? K'ad diitdzidgo shíí.*

*It's called make-believe, Grandma. It's not real. It's make-believe.*

The fire was roaring and crackling in the earth. We needed plenty of charcoal for the grilling of the meat and tortillas. The water began to boil and we were on task. We started on the vegetables when Grandma Ebby walked in with a bag of groceries.

"Hello, ladies," she said.

"Hi, Grandma," I said, hugging her. "Ahéhee'."

"Oh, no need to thank, my dears," she said, undoing her scarf.

"Where's Grandpa?"

"He's getting the rest of the things. He's so happy you ladies are having this dinner for your little one."

"Does he need help?" Clara asked.

"Ao', maybe you can help him, shiyázhí. His arthritis has been getting to him again lately."

"Is he okay?" I asked.

“Oh, you know him. He doesn’t care. Besides, he wouldn’t let anyone drive his truck. Even if he’s in pain he’ll pretend that he’s not and still speed down the highway like he’s some young cowboy heading to some chapter house dance.”

“Where’s my ach’íí’?” asked Grandpa Charley, leaning forward on his cane at the doorway.

“Hi, Grandpa,” I said. “You better not have invited all those ladies from the senior citizen center!”

“I did. I did,” he said, nodding his head. He pointed a finger at Clara and me. “And be sure to serve each of them a nice juicy piece of mutton.”

“No way. They’re just getting the tail. They can chew on that,” Clara said.

“Arlene should be back any minute,” I said. “Help yourselves to some coffee.”

Grandpa was the only brother left of Grandma’s side. We depended on him a lot. He sat at the table and Grandma Ebby poured him some coffee and gave him a cinnamon roll.

“How are you ladies doing? Haven’t seen you much,” he said.

“We’re okay, Grandpa. Just busy with work,” I replied.

“Still teaching those gang members of yours at Shiprock?” he asked me.

“Yes, I’m still teaching them, *Moby Dick* now,” I said.

“Monty Dick *is*,” he asked me.

“No,” Clara said loudly, “she said *Moby Dick*!”

“Ao’ éidí. I heard they’re planning an Enemy Way for him in early June,”

he said, dipping the roll into his coffee. Clara and I tried not to laugh. Someone needed to adjust his ear piece.

“Oh,” I said. “What kind?”

“Ha’íí?”

“What kind njiní,” Grandma Ebby yelled to him across the table.

“Anaasázi jiní,” he answered.

Then, another siren. Then an ambulance.

Silence.

“Monty’s family asked your grandpa to sing already,” Grandma Ebby said. “He accepted already too.”

“Oh,” we all replied.

“Let us know so we’ll be there,” I said.

Arlene and Harry honked the horn behind the shade house and backed up. Grandma Ebby put on an apron and poured hot water into a bowl as I took out the knives and sandstone. Harry dropped the tailgate and jumped into the bed of the truck. It was a fat black-face sheep indeed. Grandpa came out with coffee in hand and complimented Arlene on her selection.

“How much?” he said.

“Old Gracie just gave it to us,” said Arlene.

“Really?” Clara and I asked.

“Yeah. She said she’s expecting more than enough lambs this year, and besides, she wants some corn this fall.”

“Good deal!” I said.

Harry took the sheep down and put it on its side and locked its legs together, then wrapped the rope around them and made a tight knot. I gave Arlene the big knife and she knelt down behind the neck. Clara handed me the mixing bowl and I knelt down in front of Arlene with my left knee on the sheep's strapped legs. I held the bowl under the neck as Arlene pulled the head back tightly by the jawbone and started to cut.

"How can you kill your own pet sheep?" my friend Stephanie asked me once."That's not right." I didn't know how to answer that. She and I were in Mr. Bailey's fourth grade class. Well, bring her home, Uncle Tom had said. So I invited Stephanie to stay over at Grandma's. She was thrilled. We were out in the valley with the sheep before the sun and returned home before dusk. We did this for a couple days. Soon she refused to get up that early. She started to get sick of the smell of the sheep, especially the corral. The mosquitoes at the lake where the sheep drank became a nuisance. The sheep dogs wouldn't let her near the lambs anymore. She soon realized that they weren't "pets." We didn't name our sheep, we didn't hug them, kiss them, we didn't baby-talk them, we didn't make grooming appointments for them. She survived one weekend and never asked me about it again.

*Our sheep and cows and horses are blessed by the Holy People. Treat them with respect.* I was about eight when Grandma made me cut the throat for the first time. *Don't look at the eyes.* She placed my small left hand under the sheep's jawbone, covered it with hers, and we pulled the neck back tightly. Then

with the knife in my right hand, hers covering mine, I cut into the deep red tunnel. The sheep cried out in pain for a second and wiggled helplessly below me. *Don't listen to it.* I tried to think of something else as it screamed. *Mary had a little lamb, little lamb, ... No, not that! Jesus loves me, yes I know....* Then it cried out my name—June! Juuune! Juuune! *No, Grandma! I can't! Don't make me do this! Ge'. Don't get emotional. Don't worry. Keep cutting. That's the way. Nizhóní. You're almost done. Are you sure the Holy People will not punish me? Yes, they will bless you. They will make me the best butcher on the whole rez. I will win all the blue ribbons and shiny trophies. There's June Benally, people would whisper, she's the youngest butcher winning at all the fairs. Like that, shiyázhí, like that. Nizhóní.*

In my dreams, long afterwards, its muscles still quivered in my body.

I gave the bowl of warm blood to Clara and started skinning when Uncle Tom returned and asked if we'd heard about the shooting.

“What shooting?” Arlene said, looking up at him.

“You know those sirens that went by? Just now on KTNN they said someone was shot. They think in Round Rock.”

“Yíiyá,” said Grandma Ebby.

“I guess we'll hear about it soon,” Uncle Tom said, referring to Officer Begay.

My hand, gripping the knife handle for support, quickly made its way through the web of fat under the skin. It was smooth and warm and tender. The

crisp sound promised fat meat. Then Uncle Tom and Harry hung the carcass upside down. Arlene carefully cut around the tail bone and gently tore off the skin. Then we started on the heavy arms.

“We better give Old Gracie plenty of corn for this,” Clara said, indicating the attractive meat.

“I know. Just one of those arms could feed everyone today,” Arlene responded.

Aunt Ebby and I held the giant, durable dollar-store plastic bowl below the chest as Arlene hacked the chest bone down. She cut open the abdomen with the tip of her knife and out rushed the entrails, fluids and all.

“Everyone should be showing up pretty soon. You girls have enough salt?” asked Grandma Ebby.

“Yeah. Grandma had some stashed to last about five more generations.” I said, trying to keep the intestines and oversized stomach from sliding out of the bowl.

“You got the basket ready?” she asked.

“Everything’s ready except for your famous blue mush,” Arlene teased her.

“Oh, I’ll make some. Don’t worry. Let’s just get this done.”

We set the heavy bowl on the sheepskin spread out on the ground and started to clean out the bowels. The stomach was priority for the blood sausage, everyone’s favorite, so we started on those while Arlene and Uncle separated the rest of the carcass. Grandma Ebby stirred the big pot of blue mush, made of

roasted ground blue corn. In another pot she had boiling red mush made with her hand-ground sumac berries. The head was singeing in the fire. Uncle would wrap it in aluminum foil later for a slow roast under the fire pit.

The dinner was scheduled at noon. Arlene had made Dezba her first velveteen outfit, and Harry had brought back the cutest pair of moccasins from his store. The boys also had their First Laugh blessings, too, but Grandma had been the hostess then.

The propane stove was always reserved for two things and only those two things: blood sausage and fry bread. Harry started the water for me and I began to prepare the sausage when Molly, Officer Begay's wife's ex-husband's aunt who never travels without her dogs in the back of her pickup, the gossip queen herself, pulled up outside in her brand new Ford, her rez dogs barking in the back, an old water barrel tied in the corner.

No one ever knocked at the door-less entrance of a shade house, except Molly. "Yá'át'ééh, sha'álchíní," she said.

"Ao', come in," I said.

"I heard you kids were having a dinner today," she said softly, expecting an invitation.

"Ao', it's for my daughter," Arlene said.

"I hope I won't ruin your dinner, but I have some awful news," she said.

"Ha'ííshą'?" Grandpa said.

She walked in with a slight limp and stood near the fire, clearing her throat. "You know that Steven Manygoats from down the valley?"



“Ao’, that one.”

“I heard he shot his kids.”

“What?”

“It’s true.”

“They said it was in Round Rock,” my uncle said.

“No, it’s here. Down the valley,” Molly replied.

“Hádáá?” Grandpa asked.

“Sometime this morning.”

“Didn’t they have three kids?”

“Yes. He killed all of them. They said right there in their kitchen. It’s true.

There’s lots of people down there right now,” she continued. “I was just driving by, and they blocked off the cattle guard to his place. Lots of people.”

“Yáa,” said Grandpa, shaking his head.

I looked down at my hands in the bowl of dark blood. The strips of fat and ground white corn I added to it floated on top. The blood crusted around my wrists and I got numb inside.

“Haah, let me do that,” Grandma Ebby said to me. She slid the bowl away from me. “No one was crazy enough to do that in our days,” she said, adding the sliced potatoes, carrots, and jalapenos.

I pulled off some paper towel and sat next to Grandpa, wiping my hands.

“They said there’s blood all over,” Molly continued.

I didn’t want to ask, but Clara did. “How about Lorraine?”

“They said Lorraine wasn’t there.”

“Where was she?”

“They said that Steven came home from Colorado late last night and found Orlando Sam’s son, Orlando Jr., in his house. I guess before that Steven threatened to kill her then next time she messed around with Orlando Jr. He was serious I guess. So sometime last night he chased Orlando Jr. out of the house with a gun then fought with Lorraine the rest of the night. Finally this morning Lorraine took off to call for help. Soon after she left is when he did it.”

“My God,” Grandma Ebby said, pouring the batter into the stomach.

“What is the rez coming to?”

“I just remodeled their kitchen a few months ago,” Uncle added, “put in new linoleum and everything.”

“Who called Officer Begay?” I asked.

“Their shepherder had just let the sheep out when he heard the shots. He thought Steven was just shooting at another coyote. He walked over later to the house to see, probably never thinking Steven would ever do something like that. He found the door wide open, and inside it was like that,” Molly said. “He said Steven was sitting in the corner crying and shaking, then Steven asked him to call the police.”

Silence.

“I hope Lorraine’s okay,” Arlene said, who started to slice the meat again.

“I mean, your own husband doing that to your kids.”

“Well, she shouldn’t have been messing around,” Uncle added.

“We don’t know the truth yet,” Grandpa said. “It could be a number of

things.”

“How old were his boys?” Clara asked.

“H0la. I heard the oldest one was in second grade,” Molly said.

“I’m glad I’m not working for a couple days,” Clara said.

“Yeah,” continued Molly, “they were just babies.”

Surreal images of what must have taken place in that house flashed through my mind. Did they know? Did they cry? Did the oldest question his dad? Did they suffer? Did they understand what was happening? I hoped they were asleep.

*It’s called make-believe, Grandma. It’s not real. It’s make-believe.*

The male rain had come unexpectedly one early July. Renata and Billy were already out barefoot jumping and sliding in the mud. The heavy clouds were slowly drifting north and the brown puddles were surrounded with suds like just poured chocolate milk.

“Let’s go,” Billy said, leading the way. We used to gather at the irrigation ditch after a good rain and take turns diving into the pool. One time on our way there we came across a puddle between the bushes.

“Look,” Renata pointed out.

“What are they?” I asked.

“Man, baby fish!” Billy said.

Big black dots with quivering tails swam around. Hundreds of them.

“Get that can over there,” Billy told Renata.

She pulled out of the ground a rusted coffee can and gave it to him. “These are fish,” Billy said.

“No they’re not,” I said.

“Yeah, you can ask Mr. Adams. It’s in our science book.”

I didn’t know whether to believe him or not. All I knew was that these things we were supposed to leave alone. *It will bother you when you get older. So will frogs and snakes.*

He dipped the can in the puddle and scooped some out. They tickled the palm of my hands as we scooped more into the can.

“That’s enough,” I said. “Where are you going to put them?”

“In the living room. We’ll get a fish bowl,” he said.

“We don’t even have one. What are we going to feed them?” Renata asked.

“Will you shut up?” Billy said.

Instead of practicing our dives Billy insisted on going home to show everyone. We walked into their shade house where his grandmother, who was walking to the outhouse, was boiling stew and coffee on the wood stove.

“Hey, you know what? Mr. Adams said people, I think he said Chinese people, cook these and eat them,” Billy said.

“No they don’t. Stop making lies,” I told him.

“Yeah, shall we try it?”

“No,” I said.

He stood over the burning wood stove with the can in one hand and, with

the other, slid the pot of stew and the coffee over to the side.

“What are you doing?” Renata said.

“Watch,” he replied. He scooped out one handful of the tadpoles and splashed them on top of the stove, and the little black creatures bounced and sizzled all over place.

“Don’t!” I yelled. “They’re just babies!”

He laughed an ugly laugh with his crooked teeth and took out some more and threw them on the black burning surface again. WHOOSH! I covered my eyes and dropped my head. He laughed and laughed. I saw my muddy feet and imagined myself burning like the tadpoles, jumping in the air as my feet, my back, my arms, my face sizzled. Except that these baby organisms were not just burning; they were dying. I promised myself then that I would never kill anything, anyone, ever. I didn’t want to want to die in pain, screaming, helpless.

Is that how the sheep feel, Grandma, when you cut their throat? Are they in pain like that? *That’s different. You don’t worry about that. Only the Holy People can allow that.* I didn’t understand, did not want to understand. I imagined myself as an adult struggling with arthritis, deformity, rash that won’t go away.

*It’s called make-believe, Grandma. It’s not real. It’s make-believe.*

Clara and I made thick tortillas over the fire. On the grill the coiled intestines hissed as their juices squirted at us. Grandma Ebby pushed her pots of mush aside and started the fry bread while Grandpa turned them over for her.

Slices of blood sausage steamed on a platter. Roast ribs were mixed in a

bowl with liver and ach'íí'. The steam corn stew smelled delicious. The salads were ready, and the tables were set. Against the wall gift baskets were neatly stacked ready for Dezba to give, to share her first laugh and joy and good blessings with the people who would eat the salt.

Everyone soon started to arrive. Aunty Mary and her family from across the lake, Grandma Yazzie from Chinle, Hosteen Tso and his family. The chapter president, Leonard Nez, and his family, and more.

Arlene finally came in with baby Dezba in her arms. Dezba looked like a doll in her purple velveteen dress, wide eyes with chubby red cheeks and a double chin. Her brothers tagged along. I wondered what John Smith was doing at that moment, completely unaware of his daughter's blessing. What a jerk. I wondered if Arlene was thinking the same thing. Dezba was on her mother's lap. Everyone quieted. Harry handed Arlene the Navajo basket that contained the tiny crystals of natural salt. She wrapped Dezba's tiny fingers around the edges of the basket and held them there while everyone gathered around them. Grandpa led the blessing. A blessing of rebirth, purity, and long life. A blessing for our pain, for our forgiveness. A blessing for Dezba whose name suited her well that day—She Who Is Departing on a Known Journey.

After his prayer, Grandpa began one of the Blessingway songs.

Hee yee nee ya

Hee yee nee ya

Biyázhí nishlǫ́, nishlǫ́

Biyázhí nishlǫ́, nishlǫ́

I started to cry. For Dezba's new life, her beauty and good health. For Arlene, whose family was blessed. For my mom who's still wandering out there, searching for herself. For Grandma, who would have been most proud of us today. Most importantly, I cried for the children whose lives ended today. Here we were, celebrating life. And in a somber house just down the valley, north of us, children lay lifelessly. The authorities had reported they were all deceased, probably on the scene. I didn't want to believe that. What if one of them was still alive? How can they be sure? People make mistakes. Perhaps the toddler's heart was still beating. Perhaps he was fighting alone on that cold linoleum floor, surrounded by the comfort of his older brothers' warm blood. Perhaps he had celebrated his First Laugh in the arms of his father, his father who made him laugh for the first time, blessing the world with his voice, the same father who set him on a departure, on a journey not known.

*It's called make-believe, Grandma, make-believe.*

## God Lives in a Motel in Holbrook, Arizona

“Mommy,” he says.

“What, Hon?”

“Look, horsey.”

“Wow.” In the rearview mirror she sees him admiring the horses beside the road.

“Big horsey!” he points.

“Oh, yeah.”

“Bye, horsey,” he waves.

“Bye,” she repeats.

She focuses on the road ahead, glancing often at her son in the car seat. She’s been crying since she left the house, shaking, wondering if Delbert will catch up with her. She pulls down the mirror and looks at her bruised cheek. The cut above her right eye has stopped bleeding, and so has her lip. She has wads of bloody baby wipes in the cup holder.

“Mommy, juice.”

“Na’, baby.” She hands him his cup from the diaper bag and flinches as she reaches back. Her shoulder is probably bruised by now also.

She doesn’t know where she’s headed. Just far away from him.

The sun has set to their right and the shimmering lights of Burnside fade away behind them.

Her father was the first to ask about his clans. “He’s Folded Arms and born for



Bitter Water,” she had told him. “Aa” he said, not looking at her. She paused and knew his next reply. “That makes him your older brother. You know that,” he told her. “I know.”

She was working at Bashas’ when she met him. He came through her register and was buying a pack of cigarettes and a can of shortening. “It’s for my grandma,” he said, “I mean the shortening.” She tried not to blush. “Said she’s fixing a basket of food for some people, and she was missing the shortening. Like someone’s gonna say, Where’s the shortening?” he teased. He gave her his debit card and she gave him the receipt. “Thanks, Mr. Thompson. Have a nice day.” “You too, Ms....” “I don’t give my name to strangers,” she told him. “I’ll remember that, Shirley Yazzie, Assistant Manager,” he said, glancing at her name tag. He left and she wondered if she would ever see Delbert Thompson again. It was that same evening when he came through her line again saying he was on his way back to work in Tuba City, this time with a bouquet of wilted carnations from the flower section. “For your grandma?” she asked. “No, for you. Notice you didn’t have a ring on.” That following weekend they were having mutton stew at the Gallup flea market where he bought her a San Domingo turquoise necklace.

Shirley got along with his grandmother. Másán they called her. She was eighty years old and still going, didn’t have a herd of sheep but wove beautiful rugs. She would have about three looms of different sizes set up throughout her house. She sat at a different one each day, depending on the loom’s mood, she’d

say. Shirley learned the basics from her, helping line the wool between the tight strings and patting it down gently. She even gave her a ride to town sometime to help her sell her rugs. Delbert appreciated that.

Másán was the only family member of Delbert's whom Shirley got along with and that was all that mattered. He had a younger brother who was in prison who only wrote twice a year, an older sister who lived in Phoenix and hardly came home, and another older sister, Donna, who lived nearby. Donna minded her own business, didn't talk much to Shirley. Delbert had told Shirley the family split ever since their mother died. Shirley knew exactly what he was talking about.

"Son, are you O.K.?" She looks in the mirror and notices Baby sleeping. His head hangs low, still holding his juice. She thinks about his birthday party the other day and how happy he was. Másán shared his birthday, and he sat on her lap as everyone sang to them. Delbert had made it home for this special occasion. He hadn't come home in five weeks. The company was behind and everyone was working seven days a week he said.

She takes another baby wipe and soothes her eyebrow with it. It's not as bad as last time, she thinks. Last time he had come home smelling like cheap alcohol again. "I miss you," he said, slobbering all over her mouth. She wondered if there were really any Navajo guys out there who said I miss you meaningfully, and when they're sober. Shirley remembers the first time he came home like that soon after she moved in with him. She regretted not saying anything. It was too late.

It's dark as she approaches Bidahochee. Her headache goes away but her neck is tight. She turns south toward Holbrook and passes a herd of cows. Suddenly a truck honks behind her and she starts to panic. Please, God, don't let this be him. No. The truck honks again and she speeds up. There's an old gas station off the road up ahead, and if she can only make it there, she might be fine. What if it's closed? What if there's no one there? What if the lights are out? She tries to breathe slowly and speeds faster. What will he do? He can't take Baby from me! No! The truck behind her slows down and keeps at a distance. He can't possibly catch up that fast. Besides, he probably thinks she's headed to Fort Defiance to her aunt's. She had thrown his truck keys among the sagebrush outside their trailer. He couldn't have found them that fast. Her cell phone minutes had just run out. Who would she call anyway? Just Jake at Bashas', but he was off today. He would've known what to do. But she didn't want to bother him. The car still trails her. Her hands shake again as she crouches lower in her seat. Her headache is coming back.

"I want to marry you," he told her.

"What-ever," she giggled.

"I'm serious."

"You want to marry your sister? That's gross."

"Forget that shit. You know what I mean."

"And you know what I mean."

“Yeah, but I don’t believe that stuff.”

“My dad’s not going to like it.”

“I’m not marrying your dad.”

“O.K., Mr. Thompson.”

“O.K., Mrs. Thompson.”

He came on a weekend when her father was working on his truck. She looked from the window and tried to listen to their conversation, but the dogs were barking and KTNN was blasting on her father’s radio. She noticed Delbert trying to act cool, wearing his best cowboy hat. He said something to her father, but her father leaned over the engine as though concentrating on a difficult exam, scratching his head. Delbert said something again, and her father, chewing, spit the other direction. He scratched his head again and, wiping his hands with an old shirt, faced Delbert. Shirley couldn’t hear any of it. Delbert, his arms crossed, stared at the engine while her father talked to him. Her father kept talking, shaking his head. This wasn’t good, her father talking this long. Then Delbert slowly walked back to his truck and drove away, the dogs following.

Three people witnessed their signing of their marriage license– Justice Tom Manygoats, Másán, and a heavy metal kid who just happened to be there looking for his probation officer.

Delbert missed the baby’s first heartbeat sound at the Indian hospital. He said they were working six days a week and used the one day to relax, instead of having to

drive five hours home and five hours back. “A waste of time,” he said. But he said he couldn’t wait to see the baby. “It better be a boy,” he said. “And if it’s a girl?” Shirley asked. “It’s not going to be a girl. You better make sure that baby’s a boy.” She was glad that Másán was excited about her great-grandchild. Másán couldn’t hear anymore, but they communicated just fine. Másán was the first to feel the baby kick. “Yíiyá!” she laughed.

At the turnoff to Dilcon, Shirley thinks about turning west and heading for Flagstaff, but that’s too far ahead. Holbrook would be alright. She keeps going and notices another vehicle following her. She looks at the gas gauge and sees that it will make it to Holbrook. Auntie Lena lives in Holbrook, but Shirley hasn’t visited her in a very long time. She’s hesitant but knows she will understand. Her eyes are puffy now, making her squint. Baby wiggles in his car seat but doesn’t wake up. She wants to go faster but livestock usually graze in the area. As she’s headed up a hill, something stands on the side of the road. She rubs her eye and sees that it’s just a dead juniper tree hunched over. She keeps with the hazy light ahead of her.

The baby was eight months in her tummy when Delbert returned unexpectedly one weekend. She could hardly move about. “Hi, Babe,” he told her. She ignored him and continued spinning the wool for Másán. “Yá’át’éeéh, Shiyáázh,” Másán said. He nodded, shaking her warm hand. He asked Shirley to go back to the trailer. He said he was hungry and wanted to rest, and besides he had something

for her. She reluctantly placed the spindle in the basket and told Másán she's going to bed. "I'm sorry I haven't called. We've been real busy." Shirley heard all this before and kept quiet. He grabbed his bag out of the truck and followed her inside. He closed the door behind them and before she sat down at the kitchen table he pulled her arm. "What the hell is wrong with you? I'm trying to talk to you and you're treating me like shit." "Don't!" she yelled. "What is this crap I've been hearing about you and Jake Tsosie?" he demanded. "Let me go! I don't know what you're talking about." She sat down and held her tummy. "You come home anytime you want, who knows what you do out there, and you're accusing me of something stupid? When all I do is sit here taking care of your grandma? I've never said this to you before, but is that all you married me for? To sit here and wait around for you?" He yanked her out of her chair and threw her against the counter. "Stop! My baby!" She slid to the floor and held her tummy. "Forget you! Forget him! This is probably his baby! You whore!" He kicked her in the stomach, twice, leaving her crying in pain, "Stop! No..." She never felt the baby's heartbeat again. He was blue when they placed him in her arms.

He came home often after that, apologetic. If there was a place to go, she would've gone there. If she had a close relative to help her, she would've gone there. Her father she never heard from again since she moved to Delbert's place. She heard that he remarried into the Towne family over the mesa. She wondered how he was doing. Maybe she should've listened to the old man in the first place. She at least owed him that. He had raised her by himself when her mother

disappeared one day when Shirley was ten. The whole town knew she ran off with the white man who worked at the school. Her father never admitted it to Shirley, but she it was true. He did the best he could with the odd jobs he had supporting his daughter. She was at boarding school most of the time anyway. But on weekends and holidays he let her play near him while he worked on vehicles at the auto shop or when he did construction. He even made tortillas for her once in awhile; sometimes they were still doughy on the edges, but they were good.

She's on the long stretch of highway when Baby starts to squirm in his seat and cry.

"Mommy."

"I know, Son. Just wait a little bit. O.K.?"

She decides that this is the last time she puts up with him. Másán says to call the police, but he will be back out again the next day and do the same thing. She's given up doing that. This time she will go and keep going until she finds safety for her and Baby. He will not take Baby away from her this time. She knows Auntie will report him to the police and take her to the hospital. But she can't have that right now. She just needs to get as far away as possible. She didn't even have time to grab some clothes. She thinks about going to Phoenix where she has cousins who can help her out for a while. Or she could go to Flagstaff and start out on her own. Maybe go back to school. Her headache is getting worse and it's getting late. The cars behind her don't pass her or get too close. It can't be him. He would've run her off the road by now. She sees the lights of the truck stop and

feels some relief. She possibly can't drive to Phoenix in her condition.

She drives up to the truck stop and parks behind some RVs. Baby is happy to get out of his car seat and she grabs the diaper bag. She lets her hair down, covering part of her face, and carries Baby inside, although he can walk. Truck drivers and customers stare at her as she rushes into the restroom. There an older lady asks her if she's alright, if she needs help. She thanks the lady and tells her she's O.K. Baby stretches out his long body on the changing table as she quickly changes his diaper. When she looks at herself in the mirror, her eyes fill with tears. How could he do this? "Take care of yourself and the little one," the lady says. "Mommy, owie," Baby says, looking up at her. "No, Mommy not owie." She lifts him up to the sink and rinses his little hands and wipes his face. "Want num-num?" "Yep, Mommy." "O.K." She covers her face with her bangs again, then thinks, What the hell? Just as long as she doesn't run into someone she knows.

"May I help you?" the kid at the counter asks. He looks Hopi.

"Yeah, can I have a kid's meal? And a Coke."

"Kids meal!" Baby says.

"No, I mean, do you need any help? Should I call the police or something?"

"No. Please. Don't worry about it."

"Are you sure?"

"Yes. Just give us the food."

"Da food," Baby says.

"Alright."

"Thanks."



“Danks!”

When Shirley was pregnant with Baby she had trouble sleeping. She dreamt about her first son all the time. In her dreams she was lost in a dark room. She didn't know where she was and didn't know which way to go. Her baby called out to her with a faint cry, more of a moan. She searched and searched but couldn't find him. He cried again and she pushed the darkness apart with her hands. “Shiyázhi,” she cried. She would wake herself crying and holding her round stomach. She didn't want to trouble Másán with it so she never told her. When she was ready to have Baby, her dream took her to another place. This time it was a place of brightness. She saw both her sons in the distance, chasing each other, laughing. She followed their little dark figures until she came to a big, empty building. They were laughing inside and she knew they were safe. Just as long as they sounded happy. The dream was always nice but she knew it was not right.

Ned Begay explained to her that she needed to have a Ghost Way and then follow it with a Blessing Way. “This is not good, you having these dreams,” he said.

“You need to protect this baby by having a sing for it.”

“I know.”

“And there's a figure pointing to this dead baby.”

“What do you mean?”

“I see something bad happened to it.”

“Yes, he was stillborn.”

“No. Something else.”

“I don’t know.”

Ned Begay stared at her.

She knew he knew.

“I don’t know what you’re talking about.”

The Ghost Way was fast and simple. Shirley was blackened and was told not to cut meat and go outside after dark. Másán brought in the wood by herself at night for four days. The Blessing Way was never arranged.

“It’s too much,” Delbert said. “Maybe next month.”

“But the baby’s due next month. That’s too close.”

“Can’t you still have it after the baby’s born?”

Baby’s back in his car seat and eats the fries like he hasn’t eaten in days.

“Ałtso niyá,” Shirley says, and seeing him holding his fries with his little fingers makes her tears run again.

She cannot live like this anymore. She’s known other women whose husbands abuse them and she used to wonder why they just don’t leave them. Security. Money. For the children. She’s heard all kinds of excuses. Even on T.V. Now that it’s happening to her, she realizes it’s not that simple.

“I’m sorry,” she says to her baby, shuffling his hair. “Eat, Baby.”

“Good,” he says.

She’s parked behind the R.V.s, big trucks pulling in and out, and watches the busy

interstate, wiping her tears. She washes down aspirin with her Coke. Another truck pulls in and backs up to park. She starts her car.

Jake Tsosie started at Bashas' shortly after she was promoted to assistant manager. She supervised him the first few weeks and he did well. He was about ten years younger and he was from Burnt Corn. Drove in from there every day. Nothing else to do in the winter, he said. He was learning the Enemy Way chants from his grandfather and traveled with him all summer. So in the winter time he slowed down and worked wherever he could. Driving buses, washing dishes at the elementary school. Shirley admired his pride. She had lunch with him once in awhile, at the fry bread stand or the gas station/Taco Bell/Pizza Hut. He worked hard, arrived early and left later than his shift. How could Delbert accuse her of Jake? He was just a friend, a co-worker who helped her a lot, whom she shared stories with, laughed with. Yeah, he was handsome, but she was married. She was older. Way older. She was expecting. The first time. Then the second time. Both times Jake helped her around at work, pushed a chair under her when she needed to sit down, helped her to her car. He comforted her when she lost her first baby. She didn't dare tell him how the baby probably died inside her. But he listened to what kind of guy Delbert was. "Be careful," Jake would tell her. She tried to be.

Shirley gets off the interstate and slowly drives downtown Holbrook. She pulls into the nearest gas station and fills up the gas. Baby's still eating the last of his chicken nuggets. She's never stayed in Holbrook, other than visiting Auntie Lena

when she was small. They've always just driven through on their way to Flagstaff or coming back from Phoenix. She has some money in the bank, and decides to spend the night. A good night's sleep would be good, for Baby, too.

She sees a sign – *\$29 one person. Free Phone.* She pulls in and parks the car. The parking lot is pretty empty. Baby starts to get cranky. She pulls him out and walks to the office.

“Just wait, Son.”

The receptionist tries not to stare at her. “I'm O.K.,” Shirley tells her.

“We don't like trouble around here,” the receptionist says.

“There's no trouble.” She takes the room key, Baby on her hip, and exits.

Baby starts crying as she's getting the diaper bag from the car.

“Who's that crying?” says a voice behind them, startling Shirley. She turns and sees an old woman with a wine bottle in her hand coming out from behind the office.

“Whoa! What happened to you, dear?” she says.

Shirley ignores her.

“Who's that handsome little guy crying? You O.K., sweetheart?”

Baby stops crying and studies her.

Shirley closes the door and starts walking to her room.

“Dear, you got any change? A quarter? I want to get something to eat. Sandwich or something.” Shirley fumbles with the key at the room door. The woman comes closer.

“You need to get some help, dear.”

“I’m O.K.,” Shirley finally says. “Shibééso áden. Leave us alone.”

“I know you’ll be O.K. We’re always O.K., you know. But you need to get that eye checked.”

“I said leave us alone.”

“You know, my kids’ father used to do that to me. I said to hell with him and left him crying.”

Shirley opens the door and turns the light on.

“You gotta do that to them. They don’t treat us with respect anymore. Next thing you know, they’ll be holding out their arms again, begging. Forget them.” Her face shows that she was beautiful once, like those Navajo women frozen in time on Monument Valley postcards, or perhaps even a Navajo fair rodeo queen. Now a thin scar stretched from one side of her mouth to her ear.

Shirley lets Baby down and he goes inside.

“I gotta go. You should, too,” she tells the woman.

“Wait. You’ll be O.K. Just don’t take him back. Don’t be afraid of him. You can do it on your own. Like me. Aaay!” she laughs, shoving Shirley’s arm.

Shirley nods. She finally smiles.

“Go home and get a sing. For you and the little guy here. That’ll help.”

“Thanks. You take care, too.” She sees Baby playing with the phone.

“The Great Spirit will take care of you. Don’t worry. Just like that sign says over there.”

Shirley looks at the motel sign and notices on the other side of *\$29.00 per person*.

*Free Phone*, it reads *Go d Place*.

“You see, He’s here. This is His headquarter!” the woman says, amusing herself.

“He lives here in Holbrook. Bet you didn’t know that.”

“No, I didn’t.”

“So you’ll be safe. Don’t worry. Get some sleep, dear.”

“You, too. It’s kind of cold out here,” Shirley says.

“Sure you don’t have some change?”

Shirley opens her purse and hands her two dollars.

“Ahéhee’, dear.”

Shirley watches her disappear around the corner.

“Hey, it’s me, Shirley. Did I wake you?”

“Yeah, but that’s O.K. Where are you?” Jake asks.

“I’m in Holbrook.”

“Holbrook?”

“Yeah.”

“Are you O.K.? Are you with Delbert?”

“No. We got in a fight again,” she starts crying.

“Where’s the little guy?”

“He’s here. He’s asleep.”

She tells him what happened. It makes her feel better.

“Hey, you want me to go over there? I can be there as soon as I can.”

“No, I’ll be alright. It’s just kind of spooky, being alone, especially here.”

“I’ll tell you what. I’ll be there first thing in the morning. Don’t worry.”

“No. I’ll be O.K. I think I’ll go to Phoenix to my cousin’s. I’ll call you from there.

You know, I don’t even know why I’m calling you. I’m sorry to always bother you like this.”

“Forget it. You know I like you, and I care about you. I don’t mind helping. I’ll even meet you in Phoenix.”

She blows her nose.

“I don’t know why you want to put up with me. I’m going to get you fired.”

“So what. You can give me a recommendation in Phoenix,” he teases.

Suddenly, she hears a commotion outside.

“Wait,” she says. “Something’s going on out there.”

“Hey, don’t go out there. Be careful. It’s probably some drunk tourists having a good time.”

She hears someone yelling. “No, sir! You can’t do that!”

Someone bangs on a door.

“I know you’re here!”

“Sir, I’m calling the police right now!”

Another loud bang on a door.

“Shirley, are you there?” Jake asks.

“Yeah, I’m here. I’m starting to freak out. Someone’s banging on the doors.”

“Hey, calm down. Just stay inside and stay quiet.”

“I can’t. I gotta check, make sure it’s not Delbert.”

“No, don’t do that!”

“I’ll call you right back.”

“Shirley! Don’t hang…”

She replaces the phone and goes to the door.

Someone continues banging on a door. She opens the curtain a little but can’t see anything.

“Stop it, sir!” someone yells again.

“Fuck you!”

“No, fuck you! Somebody, call the police!”

Shirley slowly unlocks the door and opens it.

Something breaks, and again, and again.

She looks out and sees Delbert kicking the headlights of her car. “God damn it,

Shirley! I know you’re here!”

She freezes, and he sees her. “Damn you, bitch!”

She slams the door and locks it. “No! No!” she screams. She runs to the bed and grabs Baby. She tries to dial the front desk, but she’s shaking terribly and drops the phone.

He pounds on the door, kicking it. “Damn it, open the door!”

Someone yells again. “Mister, you better calm down!”

Shirley runs into the bathroom and locks the door. She crumbles into the corner, clutching Baby’s small body as tightly as she can.

“Somebody, help me!” she screams, raising her hand.

She hears the front door bust open.

“Please! Nooo!”



Mustang 1991

6:30 a.m.

Hey, shik'is. Shí ástht'í. I'm at Mustang...Ch'ííndii. She's working again...Ao'...I'm going to Chinle first...getting on the road...Ao'. I have appoint at DES. Áadóó HIS...Aa'...Hóla héí...Hágoshíí...Ao'. We'll see.

6:45 a.m.

Hello? Mom? It's me...I'm heading to work. How are you?...Are you sure?...Are they giving you your medicine?...I'll be there this weekend...I have too much to do at work. Can't call you anymore. My boss is breathing down my neck all day. She doesn't even do anything...I'm doing the best I can, Mom...I'll try and call you again this evening after work...Ao'...O.K. Bye.

7:10 a.m.

John. This is Randy Claushchee. I can't come in to work today...I'm not feeling good. I might go to the hospital...O.K...I should be there tomorrow...Just tell Herman to drive today. He knows what to do...O.K...Thanks. Bye...Bastard.

7:20 a.m.

Hello? Sally? It's me, Mary...Are we still havin' Bingo this weekend? I'm goin' to Gallup today...I was gonna get some things if we're still havin' the Bingo...Oh...Oh...O.K....I can pay the fifty dollars by tomorrow. Just tell her...Hágoshíí. I'll get small stuff. Maybe a toaster or coffee pot...Oh, really? Maybe a cheap comforter...O.K....I'll call you when we get back...Ao'.

Bye...Oh, Sally,...Oh shoot!

7:54 a.m.

Hey, is this Jasper?...It's me. Hey, what's up? Shit, man. I can't talk that long. I only have one dollar to make this freakin' call. What's going on?...I thought you guys were gonna show up last night...Shit! We tried waiting...We ran out, man...Shit, we need more than that...O.K. Don't fuckin' screw us up, man...I'll hold you to that...What the hell?...Alright, man, chill. Later.

8:31 a.m.

Hello, is this the admission office?...Hi. My name is Laureen Tapaha. I just got a letter from your office stating that I was accepted... Yes. Thank you... Yes, I am. I'm calling to let you know that I will be there, at the orientation... Yes... Just one. My mother... Um, our phone doesn't work right now... No, she can't get personal calls at her work... I'll just call you again if we have any questions. But we should be there next Saturday... Yes. We got that in the mail too... No, I don't have a computer here... No, there's no library... That's O.K... When will the dorms be open?... O.K.... And my mom wants to know how much we have to pay for that... O.K. how 'bout meals?... Wow. That's a lot for my mom to pay. I don't know if she can do that... O.K.... Thank you. I'll just bring the papers... Thanks... Looking forward to it too... Bye.

9:46 p.m.

John, just sent the money from Chinle... One hundred and fifty. And it cost me extra twenty dollars... Yáádilá! You better pay me back... You better... I need it... I gotta go... Take care... Whatever.

10:01 a.m.

Sara, hey, it's me. What are you doing?...Nothing. Just doing laundry...This place is packed. Two ladies almost had it out over a dryer. I'm like, Calm down, ladies. It's just a dryer. Their kids are all bawling out in the corner...My clothes just started, so I have a few minutes. So how's it going with you-know-who?...Oh, really?...Is it? That's good...You better be careful...You need to give it time...I don't know. He didn't come home the other night again and he totally didn't want to talk about it last night. I'm getting tired of it. We totally didn't talk last night. Just made dinner, ate, and went to bed...Yeah, Zach tried to play with him, but he didn't want to. Just got grouchy. I told him to leave his dad alone. He's used to it by now, anyways...I don't know. I'm gonna tell his mom about it this time if he doesn't come home again. See what she has to say...Huh?...No, she's O.K. His uncle's having a Ndáá' next month, so they're trying to get ready for that. I was there the other day cleaning out the chaha'oh with his sisters. I almost told them about it...No. We'll see...Hey, someone's waiting. I gotta go...I'll call you again sometime...Don't rush into it with what's-his-name...O.K. Bye.

10:09 a.m.

Hello? Ruth? When are you coming back?...We tied her hair today...Ao'...She ran with Tanya, Rae, Mona and us...Are you kidding? She was lazy. She got mad a little bit because she was the only one washing dishes. We told her she has a whole week of that...I know. She's just like her mom...O.K....Just get some fruits for salads, some drinks, and anything else you can think of to feed people...It's hot out here...O.K. Be sure to pick up the raisins from Aunt Katie.

She said if she's not home she'll put it in a bag inside the chizh box by the door...O.K. We'll see you Friday...Love you...Wear your seat belt...Bye.

10:21 a.m.

Hello? Ruth, I forgot to tell you. Get some pads for her...I don't know. Get both. See which one she'll like...No, not that! She's not ready for that...O.K. Bye.

11:30 a.m.

Hello? Operator? Yes. I'm trying to make a collect call to Ohio?...I can't seem to work this phone correctly. I don't see a number...Oh. Yes. 561. 656. 3245. ..Yes. 561. 656. 3245...Yes. James Stevensen...Brent...O.K....Hello? James. Hey! I'm in Arizona...Yes. It's beautiful out here...I'm in small town on the Navajo Reservation...No, I'm just headed that way now...I think it's about half an hour from here...I heard...Yes. Listen, can you call Susan for me?...I've been trying to reach her, but my cell doesn't work out here. ..Just tell her I'm O.K., and I should be in my hotel room in about another hour. She can call me there. Not sure that the room number will be; she can just ask for me...Thanks. I sent you a postcard from the Four Corners...Yeah, so you should get it soon...Alright. Talk to you soon.

11:45 a.m.

Lane? Hi. This is Shantelle...Nothing. How about you?...Um, my mom's getting some things. We're at the store...So how's it going?...Have you heard from anybody?...I know. It is so boring, I swear. I want to just get out of here... I don't know. Maybe Phoenix. My uncles lives there...They go to California a lot. He said I can go with them sometime...I wish...How about you?...Really?... I know.

I can't wait to get out of this hell hole. Just one more year. Can you believe it? Maybe we'll get the same homeroom again...Hope we don't get Mr. Watson...Oh my God. That'll be so messed up...Shut up!...You!...Oh, I have to go...Mom, wait!...Oh, nothing. Just talking to my mom...Um, probably just feed the stupid cows on our way home. How about you?...Lucky you...O.K....I'll try and call again soon...Yeah. I can ask my mom...No, she's cool...O.K. Bye.

12:16 p.m.

Sharon! Where have you been?...We waited for you...I'm send the cops again...Because you don't listen! What else can we do?...You tell me! They can find out what you do over there...Got no choice...That's what you're asking for...Don't even think about your kids...Forget it! I have to!...Well, come home!...See you in jail again then. Maybe you'll stay there this time...Sharon!...Hello?...Ugh!...Diigis!

1:20 p.m.

Hello? Dr. Adams? This is Anna Bitsie, Gilbert John's sister? Gilbert isn't doing good. He's not swallowing now, not even water. His tube's coming out. I mean the food is coming out from his tube. I don't know what to do. He won't let me take him over there to the hospital. He's very mean now. Please help me, Dr. I'm getting scared, don't know what to do. Please call my son Jake so he can come get me so I can talk to you on the phone. It's a ways for him to walk to my house, but he'll give me the message. His number is...um, you should have his number. Thank you. This is Gilbert John's sister, Anna Bitsie. Please call me. I'm worried about my brother. You know. Bye.

1:45 p.m.

Hello? Is this the police station?...Hi. I want to report a drunk man passed out in our backyard...House #209...BIA...No. My wife said he looks like a Kinyaa'áanii. Because he's drunk and he has no respect...How should I know? We just came back from Kayenta and there he was...There's a bunch of flies around him and he's on a ant hill...You better tell them officers to hurry up. Just when you need them they're never around! So they better hurry! My wife's getting crazy. She's gonna beat *me* up pretty soon is you guys don't come ASPA. Hurry up! If he pees on that ant hill, you guys gon' have to pay for his ceremony, you know...I am calm! Geez!

2:01 p.m.

Hello. John. It's me, Mel. Are you entering the rodeo at Crownpoint? I heard they up-ed the prizes...Yeah, we'll be there. Just wanted to let you know...You better do it soon...Hágoshíí.

2:22 p.m.

Hello? My name is Margaret Atsitty and I live at the school housing...There's a drunk man passed out behind my neighbor's house...It might be their relative or something. I'm not sure. But he doesn't look good...What do you mean, Does he look like a Kinyaa'áanii? What? Are *you* Kinyaa'áanii? Only Kinyaa'áaniis ask stupid questions like that...Well, just send someone over there right away. O.K.! Well, no one's over there yet. My neighbor keeps poking him with a broom. I think she's digging in his pockets...the drunk man's pockets...I don't know! Just hurry up before he wakes up and staggers to my place!...Yáádilá!

3:36 p.m.

Hello?...Ugh!...Hello?...That's four quarters!

3:37 p.m.

Hello?...Hey, Ron,...Hello?...Shit!

4:55 p.m.

Hi, Dad. It's me...Nothing. Just getting something for Grandma...Guess what?...I got a job at the chapter house...Yeah. It's for the last ten days...I don't know. Probably hoe weeds or something. I don't care. It's money for me...I know...Yes. I'll use it wisely...How're you doing?...How's the baby?... I know... Well, she doesn't want to talk about it anymore. So I don't bother her...But she's really helping me fill out all kinds of paperwork for scholarships...It's a lot of work...he was talking about getting me a car, but we'll see...Dad, um...never mind...That's O.K....I just wanted to tell you about my job...It's O.K. if you don't send me money... Yeah, I'm alright...I understand with the baby and all...No. That's O.K... Yeah. I will...Alright...Bye.

5:20 p.m.

Hey, Shik'is. Ch'ííndii. She's still working...I rode the bus back...Ao', she's still there...I just have six dollars...T'áá shíí bííghah...I'll wait later...She ask too many questions...Hágoshíí. Ao'.

5:48 p.m.

Hello? Sally? It's me, Mary...I just got back from Gallup. Going home now...I got some nice stuff...I think they'll like the comforter. It's the kind that comes with the sheets and stuff. Then I got a nice roaster on sale. It's not as big as yours,

but nizhóní yee'... You still have the dabbers?... O.K. I'll see Aunty and get some mutton too... Probably just steam corn and fry bread... You'll get coffee?... Hágoshíí... Call me Friday again... Oh, invite that Mae Begay lady. She brings her whole clan. I heard she's pretty lucky. Heard she even won a Chihuahua dog somewhere jini'... Ao'... But the sheep dogs already got it jini'... Ao'... I know. O.K. Bye.

6:00 p.m.

Hi, Sis. Mom wanted me to call you. She said Karen's Kinaaldá might be cancelled. They don't know yet. I guess Grandpa Tso's sister passed away this morning. They're still getting the details. Hold tight, and I'll call you again tomorrow morning. She's still running, and we're still serving people. Bye. Hope you get this message before you go shopping.

6:40 p.m.

Hello?... Is this emergency room?... Yes, I'm calling to see if Chico Benallie is been admitted?... He's my sonny. They said he was beat up by some rowdy kids, and he can't breathe. They said they beat him so bad he can't stand up... O.K... Hello?... O.K.... Oh... Thank you.

6:47 p.m.

Hello?... Is this the jail?... I'm trying to find my sonny, Chico Benallie. They said he might be in jail... This hospital told me... O.K.... Oh good. Can I see him?... Oh... Can I just talk to him?... How come he can't talk?... Drunk?... I thought he got beat up and he can't talk?... Where?... In a backyard?... On a what? Ant hill?... He's thirty-eight years old. He won't do that!... He stays home with me.



Takes care of me. He's a good man...Party? Chico don't do that!...O.K.

Sorry...Did he eat?...O.K. What? Am I a Kinyaa'áanii?...Ha'át'íí!

7:15 p.m.

Hi, Sis...Did you get my message?...I know. Sorry. They're having it, so don't worry...Grandpa Tso's sister was Kinłichíí'nii, so it's not the same. Mom said go ahead and bring the stuff this weekend...Yes, we ran at noon. It was so hot. Karen got all sweaty and her satin blouse just got stuck to her, and she didn't like it...Shhh...So we just let her put her t-shirt on...Yeah, you should've seen her. She was wearing a Madonna t-shirt with a bunch of turquoise necklaces around her neck, with her velvet skirt and moccasins...Yeah, I took a picture...I gotta get back. We're making her sleep on sheep skins...Shhh...Wait...There's this hungry dog here. Gonna give him some of my burrito...Yeah...Anyway, we just started grinding, too...O.K. Well, we can't wait to see you. Bring whatever you can.

Don't forget your running shoes! And the raisins!

8:01 p.m.

Hey, Shik'is. I bought some...Ao'. Two of them...A new lady working...the mean one left...Ao'...This one t'óó diigis...Hágoshíí. Meet me at the wash. Ao'.

Just you and me. Now.

8:35 p.m.

Hi...I hope you weren't asleep...Good...It's kind of windy...Yeah...I think it's going to rain...It smells good...I know. The cornfields need it...It is so beautiful this time of year...Really?...Well, I'm so glad I moved back. This is it. This is what I miss...I can take off for lunch and come down to the flea market for a

bowl of stew or roast mutton. I can hike down Canyon de Chelly or up the mesas in the evening. On weekends I can take the kids to Gallup and eat at Earl's. We can watch a movie in town. The theatres are not AMC or Harkins, but they'll do. The floors are usually sticky with spilled soda, but they'll do... Yeah, come visit us anytime... That'll be nice... It's getting windy. I'll call you again tomorrow... O.K.... Bye.

9:45 p.m.

Hello? Is anybody there? Earth to the tribal leaders!... Hey, check this out... Hello? Is anybody there? This is the future generation of the Navajo Nation. I'd like to inquire about the past generation and see why the hell they screwed up because we're in deep shit here. Earth to anybody... Hey, I'm just messin'... Hey, shit, there's a cop!

## Story Diné K'ehjí

### Ñt'ée' Nihizée' Dahalchí'

Shimá éí nahjí bisásk'eegi hááhgóshíí łeets'aa' nímazí yíí' ta'oonih. Shideezhí éí kq' yíí' na'ashiish tsííd łá' ánáánéídlééhgo. Kq' dahigáál bííghahgi éí bikáá'at'eesí bikáá' atsi' daat'ees. Ach'íí' dadiltalگو daach'il. Azid éí ádaakt'áá'igo niheeshgizhgo daat'ees. Shimá yázhi náyoonił ak'ah dah yoołjolgo.

Cheii éí doo baa na'aldeehí da nahalingo ché'ėtiindóó bik'i'diidíingo dah sidá. Ndáá'go ákót'íí łeh. Aadéé' da'ítíhgo diné binaanish dah hólóq naanááhahgo hastóí yíł t'óó t'óó'dóó dah nahááztáá łeh ahił dahalne'go. Ákót'éego bijáád ałnásinilgo dah sidá ayidítsi' yiba'.

"Shicheii, ahwééhísh łá'?"

"Nda, áłtsé," ní.

Shimásání yéé' éí ayóo hwił bééhozin nt'ée'. Ałtso da'at'isgo índa ayidítsi' ahwééh yíł yiyaa niikááh nt'ée'. Éí daats'í yaa nitsékeesgo sidá. Shimásání daats'í yaa nitsékees. Ał'nín'áágo nihaa ílyeedígíí daats'í yaa nitsékees. Bilíí' díkwíí shíí yiskándáá' bits'áá ádinígíí daats'í yaa nitsékees. Dego chaha'oh yíniil'áo néeshch'il.

"T'áádoo t'áá ádzaagóó anídaohdlohí doo," nihiłní nihimá. "T'áá áko t'áá ádzaagóó ndahołt'i'go baa ndoohkah." Bíla' dijéé'go yaahiłts'i'.

"Ha'íí nijiní," shiłní shideezhí, yidlohgo.

"Ge' shoo," ní shimá.

Shideezhí Marie áłts'ísí yéédáá' t'óó nichxóq'í nt'ée'. Áłahjí' honé'éshtil jildeel łeh nt'ée'. Doo tá'ázhdígisgóó honii' ayóo dich'íízh nt'ée'. Hotsii' éí doo díniséégóó biniinaa t'óó hotsáá' ndajiiłch'íł nt'ée' t'í'ízí yázhi bighaa' nahalingo.

Aldó' t'áá áko bikee' ádingo naanáálwoł leh nt'ée'. Biniinaa lah tó nílíní góne' ndeii'née nt'ée' tózis yik'i diiltaálgo bikétl'ááhdéé' yéego yizhgish. Bik'ah hahíítléé'go dił yoosasgo hááhgóshíí yichxago hooghandi ndasiiltí. "K'ad shikee' bii' sé'eez doo, doo ádaanídiishdlééh da doo," nígo bizéé' hat'ée'go ná'ookaah. Azéé' á'ííggóo doo yinízingóo biniinaa. Áadi bikétl'ááhdéé' hajoo'baá'igo bá náskad, ayóo dits'idgo biniinaa. Nt'ée' shikee' bii' sé'eez doo nínéé' biiskání t'áágééd náanáálwoł. Biniinaa Két'áhí dahozhdíiniid.

"Tsxííłgo ádaoht'í," nígo shimá ak'ah dahizká. Lees'áan deiniłmasgo naaghal. "T'áádoó yání da hwaa alwo'. Tsxííłgo. Háish éí nímásii yííłgéesh?"

"K'ad ádeeshlííł," ní shádí Kósii. Tó áłtso haadeedééłbúıdgo naazká.

Shádí éí t'áá alhaah bił naash'aash. Ya'iishjááshchilí góne' bi'dizhchí. Shí éí Ya'iishjááshtsoh góne'. T'áá la' hají'áázh nahalqo ádaantsííkees. Kóhoot'eedáá' kót'áo hwá áda'iilyaa. Shí éí táá' náahai yéedáá'. Íídáá' t'áá kót'áo nihinaanish dahazlíí'. Íídáá' nihimásání nihá naha'áo áda'iilyaa. Hááhgóshíí baa hoł hózhó.

"Díkwíish da yíkááh," ní shimáyázhí.

"Hóla. T'óó ayóo yíkaigo shə'," ní shimá.

"T'áá shíí áko. Ákót'áo shíí lə'í hwída'íídííkił," ní shimáyázhí.

"Béégashii nihik'eh nítjigo shíí dadidii'niil," ní shádí.

"Éí haadííłíłgo," bidishní.

"T'óó nda'niilkaad doo," ní.

"Béégashii hani ndazhniłkaad, dibé yee'," bidishní.

"Yeah," biłní shideezhí.

"Áko ləá, dibé deídííkił," ní shádí.

"Tł'ízí t'áá beenééláá'go," bidishní.

"Naa'ahóóhai shíí," ní shimá.

Shimásání yéé ákónihizhdíiniid ní. "Másání, ha'íísh biniinaa t'áá áko béégashii deiyeeh łeh?" "Jó níléidi diné dóo asdzání i'niilts'ee'go asdzání bik'é t'áadoo le'é niilyééh. Háálá éi asdzání oolchííł doo, iiná ííł'íi doo. Éi ádóóne'é danilínígíi bich'í' ni'ilyééh. Ałk'idáá' éi dootł'izhii yoo' da t'ááłá'í siláago, dibé da bił yóolta'go niilyééh nt'ée'. K'ad éi doo deeghánidéé' asdzání bik'éi deíkááh łeh, shísh éi ha'íi shaa doolyéél danízingo. Áko béégashii éi ná'ah dóo ak'éi danilínígíi atsi' bitaa'nih. Éi baa ahééh íł." Áadóo shádi áshíłnii łeh nt'ée', "Shí shíí éi béégashii t'óo ahayóigo nihaa doogéél. Nisha'?" "Shí éi naa'ahóóhai ayóo shił likan. Naa'ahóóhai shíí chidí bikéé'déé hadeezbingo shaa doogéél," bidishní łeh nt'ée'. "Yóí. Chidi beego is." "Aoo', áko nihik'éi t'áá bííghah doo ndaaz'ahgo," bidishní. Shimásání t'óo nihaa ańjídloh. "Hái éi naa'ahóóhai éi ánééláá'go néił'ah doo?" ní shádi, "Ałk'idáá' anída'iisdéé'go t'ahdii naa'ahóóhai nihaa naanáajah doogoósh." "Nóweh," ní shimásání, "jó bik'éi yaa ntsékeesii át'é ndeezhí. T'óo shíí azis biih dahidooltł'íł t'áá daditałgo dóo diné bitaa' dadoo'nih."

"Cheii, ndiidááh. Cheii."

"Ha'át'ííshą"

"Nlááhdi nilíí' yéé dahidiyáa lá. Tí' tsxííłgo."

Áadi shicheii bił nánisht'áázł nt'ée' t'óo ayóo diné bił ni'iizhjee' lá.

"Yaa," níigo shicheii adááyá. "Ch'íídi ch'íídi ni' lá ájít'í ni," níigo hí'ée yich'í' niníyá.

"Haash doolnííł shicheii," ní shiyáázh, shimáyázhí bahastiin. "T'óó nahjí' kólééhéí yáádilá."

Shicheii t'óó názyiz dóó dah diilwod dóó iihnáálwod.

Haash dó' yit'áo dooleel," ní shimáyázhí. "T'óó baahajoobá'í, ti' hoonííh." Shicheii bilí'í'ée cattleguard yíih dooltaál' nt'ée' léi yii' ndinéé'na' lá. Náhootałgo bijáád k'íínítí' lá. T'áá íídáá' ałtso niilyool lá. Ch'ééh ániigo t'óó naa'aníyęęzh. T'ííhdóo náhididziih.

Cheii t'óó bił dah ndihsht'áázh. Nagháígóó nihił ná'oolwołgo shiyáázh adeesdęęh yíists'áá'. Cheii bilí' bizánázt'i'ée yineemasgo dah yooléelgo bił nánisht'áázh.

K'adéę ałní'ní'aahgo ałtso áda'iilyaa. Dah dínííłghaazh éi íldee'go índa ádoolnííłgo. T'áá shęo hózhónigo oo'áál áko. Shicheii ayidítsi' biyaa ndasiikáá dóó i'niilghal. "Díí láá," níigo bibéęzh biza'azisdéę' ha'yí'á. T'áá íídáá' chahah'oh góne' ndahoshiilzhóo' ndi shimá yázhí nnááho'niishóo'. Shádi t'áá akéé' tó nnáánéęsas. Nizhónigo halchingo dineebin.

"Da'oosá héi," ní Cheii.

"Nihí éi íldee'go índa," ní shádi, ach'í' yéę yidiyiilgéeshgo.

"Wayne bíhéędáá'shą' k'asdáá adaasiidlo' ni'," ní shimá yázhí.

"Oh yeah," dishníigo ada'niidlo'.

"Ge' shoo," ní shimá.

Baa dahwiilne'go k'asdáá' adasiidlo'.

Nihínaaí Wayne áldó' be'esdzáá Marlene yił íłts'ee' díwkií shíí nááhai  
 yéédáá'. Be'asdzáá Tsé Si'ánidéé' íyisí naagháo. Doo dahwiit'íigóó hááhgóshíí  
 k'ad ni' dahwiiltsééhgo ałkéé' nisii'náh. Shínaaí nichxóó'í łeh yéé doo  
 chxohoo'íigóó yiihiyíłáh. Biyoo' da t'áá ákondi yéé beilt'éego yee naazi', bitsii'  
 da ná'ázt'i'go. Shimá sání hááhgóshíí hwaa bił hózhó. Doo lá dó' dooda da, níigo  
 shimá sání bił nahonichxiih. Bee nahalzhoohí shá iihdadohtííł, áadi níyáago  
 asdzáá náhodínéeshhał, níigo. Hwaa anídeiidlohgo hááhgóshíí chidí alájji'  
 iihdahjizdá nihił dah adiilyeedgo. Shínaaí t'óó baa ahjídloh. Łíí' neeznáa daats'í  
 hokéé' njéé'. Shimá dóó shizhé'é éi béégashii naakigo jooyééł. Kwe'é ahíidiikah  
 hodoo'niidgo naalyéhé bá hooghan lé'gi niikai. Nihik'éi t'áá la'í nihikéé' yíkai lá  
 áko. Áádóó t'i hodoo'niidgo dah náadii'ná. Ayóo díwózhii bee hodíłch'il lé'gi  
 kéédahojit'íi lá. Dził bitsíígi hózhóni lé'gi hooghan sinil lá. Hooghan nímazí t'áá  
 áłts'ísí lé' nizhónigo ániid ályaa lá. Wayne t'óó baa hojilne' ni'. Dibé bighan da  
 t'áá íyisí hooghan bíghahgi si'á. Níléi kindéé' éi hááhgóshíí diné  
 ch'éédanit'ááhgo ákwe'é niikai. T'áadoo adeiijeehgóó kodéé' hastiin lé' nihaa  
 yíłwod. Yá'át'ééh nihidíniid dóó hooghan góne' yah anihí'eezh. T'áá shíí  
 hodidoonaal, níigo ch'ínálwod. Hozhó'ó dineebin. Shimá sání éi, Koshdéé' bee  
 nahalzhoohí shííghah nnohtíih, níigo. Shimá dóó shizhé'é éi hááhgóshíí  
 biseriousgo siké, niłéhígíi ałch'e' ninéeniłgo. Díi áłtsé bimá baa doo'nił, áádóó  
 díi éi bizhé'é, ahidi'níigo. Tsésq' ádingo doo bééhózingóó naháátá, k'adéé shíí  
 yah a'anééh daniidzingo. Ałní'gi éi béesh bii'kq'í bii' didooljéé' lé' bii' kq'.  
 Honáásgóó tó nihaa dadiilí. Ha'íish doohah da, dajiníigo. Marlene shíí ch'ééh  
 hadazhnił, dahojini shínaaí. Outhouse góne' shíí ada'deelkaal, éi doodago shíí

dziłgó'aa eelwod, dahojiní. Hááhgóshíí anídeedloh nt'ée' yoo' léi' diists'áá'. Ge',  
hodoo'niid. Aadéé' Marlene, dahojiníigo Wayne hwaa anídajidloh. Nt'ée' yoo'  
yéé náadiists'áá'. Aadéé, ge'shoo. Nt'ée' MEE' yiists'áá'. Nt'ée' ch'é'tiindéé'  
t'í'ízhxoooh léi nihinéł'í biyoo hálóogo. Shizeedí ła' ch'é'tiindóo jizdá nt'ée'  
k'asdáá' hajíichxah. Shhhh, Kojí, níigo shimá yázhí t'í'ízi yich'í' hadoolghaazh.  
Aadóo ada'niidlo'. Kojí is, dahojiníigo. Lééchaá'í hani. T'í'ízi yéé t'óo  
bidees'nihii' dahdiyá. T'í'ízi shidees'nih, níigo shimá yázhí hwaa anídeiidloh. Ge'  
níigo shimá ch'ééh nihich'ahojishké, jó hwí da anjídlohgo.

“Auntie t'óo diigis,” dishníigo anídeedloh.

“Well,” níigo shimá yázhí anádloh.

“T'í'ízi kojí' hodoo'niid,” níigo Cheii azídítsí' yéé altsxo yiyíyáá'go  
ahwééh yidlá, “Áadóo haanáadaht'íid,” níigo.

Áadóo shínaaí dóo Marlene ííłts'ee' dóo diné hoch'í' ayáda'niłti'. Ayóo da'iidáá'  
dóo da'iilghal áko. Bik'ijí' sáanii t'áa yádaalti'go shínaaí dóo Marlene bich'í'  
ádaalyaágíí ánáadóolníł nááhodoo'niid. T'óo ayóo bich'í' ádaalyaa léi'  
aa'anáadajiidlaa. T'áa alkéé' hwá ch'ínáadajijjááh. Áadóo bááh hikaní  
nááhodoo'niid. Sáanii dóo hastóo' t'áa yáadaalti' áko. Áhoołts'íisi léi' nizhónigo  
hodiits'a'. Nt'ée' bááh hikaní nizhónigo ályaa léi' alkéé' yah anáadajiiizká. Ligaigo  
bé'éstléé'go hichxí'go bee naashch'aa'. Ákwe'é ahih dajizhnil dóo  
anáadahodiiskid. Áadóo ndajiiłgéeshgo diné, Marlene bik'éi, t'áa altsxo nihits'áá'  
ch'ínjéé'. Ch'iyyáan ła' nihá alch'edaalyaa, éidí alkéé' nihá yah anáadadii'nił,



nihidoo'niid. Bááh łikaní t'áa nihí ndahołgéeshgo daohsá, nihidoo'niid. Áko shí dóo shideezhí dóo shádí ła' bááh łikaní yéé bich'ł' dineebingo ndahiilgéeshgo baa ndiikai . Ayóo łikan léi' háahgóshłł ndahishiilgizh dóo dabi'niidáá'. Tsxłłłgo, nihłniigo shimá. Bááh łikaní deiidáago nahátá nt'éé' yoo' yéé náadiists'áá'. Áadoo kóhwiindziní t'ah nt'éé' t'ízichxoooh yéé aadéé' yah a'í'eezh. T'óo ayóo t'ízí bikéé' yah íjéé'. Sáanii yéé hadadeeshghaazh. Aadi, shhhhh, ch'ééh dadii'niigo t'ízí nihidáahgi naanáajah. Shimá yázhí éi, Kojł', Kojł, níigo ch'ééh t'ízí bitł'aa' néenikad. Tł'ízí yéé shłł t'óo bił ádahasdłłdgo nikidijéé' ndi nizhónigo t'áa shá bik'ehgo athéénijéé' dóo ch'éénijéé'. Bááh łikaní yéé altso yik'i naazhjéé' lá. Shicheii éi t'óo nihaa anádloh, Haalá áhoodzaa, níigo. Háahgóshłł anideiidloh nt'éé' t'óo ayóo nihizéé' góne' dahalchxí'. Bááh łikaní deiidáá'éé' nihizéé' t'áa beewoł dahalchxłł' adahoolaa léi' k'asdáá' dloh nihíghá. Ch'ééh nihiwoo' deit'oodgo doo k'eda'nidééh da. Shimá yázhí k'ad ni' iidlóohgo, Oh shoot, níigo ch'ééh biwoo' yit'ood. T'óo ayóo nihizéé' dahalchxí'go nda'ahiníł'łłhgo naháátá. Ts'ídá áko diné yah anáájéé' dóo ch'íiyáán nihitaaská. Ahéhee' ndadii'niigo nihizéé' dahalchxí'. Diné k'asdáá' nihaa adaasdlo'. Doo lá dó' dooda da, daaníigo shłł Marlene bik'éi nihaa dahalne' dadii'ní. Tsénahabiłni Dine'é t'óo dadiigis lá, danihł níigo shłł nihaa dahalne' dooleeł dadii'niigo nánii'ná. Shínaai éi t'óo nihaa yánzingo ádahwiilyaa, t'áadoo áádéé' naohkaí, t'óo nihaa yáhásin, hái shłł ádaohł'łi sha'shin, nihłniigo.

“Doo lá dó' nihizéé' dahalchxí'go nániikai da ni',” níigo Cheii t'óo nihaa anáádloh.

“Ge’, aadéé’ oolwoł,” níigo shimá náhidiitah.

“Aadi dah díníílgaaazh óhłééh.”

“Oh no,” níigo shimá yázhí nikidiilwod.

“Niwoo’ check ánílééh, łichxí’ dó’ áshlí,” bíłní shimá.

“K’ad éí, na’, ahéhee’ nihits’áá’ íyáá,” ní Cheii. “Nizhonígo shíí áda’ doołííł, shí k’ad dooleeł,” níigo ndii’na’.

“T’áá ádzaó. Dah nánídaah,” bíł’ní shimá.

Cheii t’óó anádlohgo łahjígo dah nááneezdáh.

Shimá yázhí éí dah díníílgaaazh yaa ndiidzá.

“Aadi, k’ad náálwoł,” bidoo’niid shideezhí Marie.

“Doo hwináál da,” bíłní shimá yázhí. “T’áadoo ninoseyí.”

Marie t’óó joodlohgo chaha’oh bine’joo ch’íjílwod, “Yíi,” jiníigo.

“Yíi is, it’s too late for yíi,” bíłní shimá yázhí.

Kósií hááhgóshíí chaha’oh yiníghá dééz’íí’ diné doo da hoo’íní da nahalqo.

“Get over here,” bíłní shimá.

Cheii t’óó aníjdloh. “Kojí bidohní,” níigo.

“Aadi,” bíłní shimá.

Kósií ch’élwodgo kojí nahaatá yidííniid. Yah anáálwodgo ání, “T’áá la’í lá.”

“Oh no,” níigo shimá yázhí łees’áán łá’ náádeeníłmas.

Asdzání léí’ ch’é’étiindóó “Yá’át’ééh sha’álchíní,” níigo sizí.

“Aoo’ yá’át’ééh,” níigo shimá yíłák’edoolnii’. “Wóshdéé’. Wóshdéé’.”

“Kojí nahaz’á,” níigo Cheii yiizí’ alák’edadilniihgo.

“Hózhónígi kéedahot’í lá,” ní asdzáá sání. “Áadoo ndi atiin dasiilzih da. Nizhónígo nihíł ílwod.” Biscarf ádeediiltsooz.

Marie éi ayóo hwaá daniichí nt’ée’ háálá lókeeshchaa’í jílígo. Shínaaí háágóshíí hwaanichí’ leh nt’ée’. Íishjáá ashkii bibéégashii t’óo ahayóíígi bééhodíisííł, hojínígo. Bibéégashii ádinígi éi dooda, jinígo. Whatever, t’óo jiníí leh. I’m never gonna get married, jinígo. Nt’ée’ ashkii léi bééhojoošíí. “Julius wolyé, Cheii,” jiníígo Cheii bíł hojilne’. “Haolyé.” Jooliiyis.” Nt’ée’ Cheii, “Jó diigis is,” bíłní. “No,” jinóo aníjídloh. “Julius.” “No, Cheii.” “Hóla héi,” nígo Cheii Julius hózhi’ hwá ánááyiidlaa.

Julius áldó’ t’áa sínda hodoo’niid léi’ t’áágééd íldee’. Diné dineezbin dóo ahwééh hoyaa ndaasiiká. Tó dílchxoshí sik’azígíí daats’í áldó ła’ danohsin nígo Kóšii RC Cola niinínil.

“Díí láá ahehee’,” ní hastiin léi.

“Ni t’éiyá nééhosin, shich’ée’,” ní asdzáá sání, shimá ááhiłní.

“Aoo’, t’áa ániidígo ahééhosiilzííł ní’. Nihí éi Tsénahabiłnii Dine’é daniidíł. Díí éi shich’ée’ át’é, Marie bádi jílí. Dóo hónaaí hóló. Éi ajiyéehdi kééhojit’í. Díí éi shideezhí. T’áa ła’ heet’áázh. Dóo díí éi hach’ée’. Díí éi nihizhé’ée. Tł’ízí lání éi jílí. Doo ayóo azhdiits’a’ da. T’áa sáhí nihá ájít’ée k’ad. Nihimáháá éi kóhoot’eedáá’ nihits’áá’ ájídín. Kót’áo kéedahwiit’í.”

“Jó yá’át’éeéh,” ní asdzáá sání yéé. “Nihí áldó t’áa ákót’áo kéedahwiit’í. Shí éi Julius shitsóí. T’áa ájít’s’ísídóo hwiyaá hool’a’. Náhást’éi honááhaigo

homáháá hots'áá' ádin. Chidí náhodiidlá. Hozhé'é yéé' éi t'áádoó bééhoosijid da. Tó tsi'na'iiláhi t'áá bikéé' azhdinoodzáa nt'éé'. Áko ndi nizhónigo éi hoyaa dahwiil'a'. Díí éi hodá'í James dóó hoch'ooní. Díí éi homá yázhí Bertha dóó hoch'ooní. Dóó díí éi ła' álchíní dajílí. Julius hwił ayóó'adaat'é dóó ayóó'adajó'ní. Éi shíí biniinaa t'áá át'é akéé' iih jíjéé'. Tódich'í'ni éi daniidlí. Julius éi Naakai Dine'é yáshchín. Éi shíí hozhó'ó yee nihił hoolne' t'áá íidáá'. Díí sha'álchíní éi Áshjǫ́hí yádaashchín.”

“Jó nizhóní. Ahéedahosiilzǫ́jǫ́d,” ní shicheii. “Háísh dó' doo asih da. Nihí ałdó' t'áá akót'áo nihił nahaz'á. T'áá hwił adajít'éego t'éiyá ha'níi ła. T'áá shíí aaníí. Shí éi díí sha'áchíní dóó shitsóóké shaa adahalyá. Homáháá ałdó' nihits'áá' ádin t'áá ániidígo. T'áá shíí áko t'óó dadii'ní.”

“Na', kwe'é da'osá,” nígo shimá ch'iyyáán nidasiiká.

“Díí łaá, ahéhee',” ní Julius bidá'í. “Náána łahti éi ayóo alkan ła.”

Łikango da'iidáá'. Sáanii t'óó ahił ndahalne'go. Ałtso da'iidáágo łeets'aa' nahjǫ́' adahii'níłgo Julius bimásání hanáánáadzí'.

“Jó íyisíí biniiyé niikaígíí éi nihił béedahózin, sha'álchíní,” jiní.

“Nagháidáá' díkwíí shíí yiskándáá' niha'álchíní ahééhoosijid. Nizhónigo áhaa áhalyá k'ad nisqo baa nitséskees. Nihich'é'é nizhónigo nihiyáázh yaa áhalyá. Dóó nát'áá' shíí nihiyáázh hozhó'ó baa áhojilyá dóó nihí shíí ałdó' nihíká análwo'.”

“Ao',” ní shimá.

“Ákót'áo hoch'í' yádeelti'go hoyaadahwiil'a'. T'áá shíí nihizhdiizts'áá' t'óó íł.”

“Ei łaá,” ní shimá.

“Áko kodóo Tódich’íi’ nii daniidlínígíí niha’álchíní hozhó’ó bá áda’diilnííł daniidzingo biniiyé niikai. Jó t’áa hó ákójínqo bee hadzoodzít’ áldó’. Nizhóní ákót’áo t’óo dahodii’niid. Jó ániid nji’aash. Nizhónígo iiná ázhdoolííł daniidzin. Éí íyisíí biniiyé niikai.”

“Ao’, sha’álchíní. Ákot’áo bééhózingo nizhóní,” ní Cheii. “Díí t’áa áłtso ákót’áo bá ada’alyaa niha’álchíní. Ei lókeeshchą́’í jílínígíí éí hwá laanaa daniidzin nt’ée’. Jó k’ad bééhozin. Ayóo ná’ál’ahgo át’é. Diné k’ehjí yájíłti’ígíí éí t’áayó hoł nantł’ah ndi t’áa hoł bééhózin.”

“Nihiyáázh áldó’ t’áa ákót’é,” ní asdzáá. “T’áa shíí náásgóo bíhojiil’aah doo t’áa ájíláh.”

Shideezhí dóo shádí dóo shí łeets’aa’ t’áadabi’niigiz áko. Sáanii t’óo ahwééh biyaa nináádasiiká.

“Áko łahgóo éí ndoolyééłígíí díídí daaniigo dayóokeed łeh,” ní adzáá. “Nihí shíí éí hat’áo áda’ol’í. Ła’ éí doo ádaanii da łeh. Éí hazhó’ó nihíł íishjáá ádadoolííł. Ákót’áo bééhózin.”

“Ao’, łahgóo ákódaanii łeh t’óo ha’ní. Nihí éí nihimáhą́ doo hááhgóshíí azh’dókeed da nihijiníí nt’ée’. Háalá éí baahasti’. Bits’ą́adóo yee’ éí bíla’ashdlaa’ii hodooleeł. Éí baahasti’ jiníí nt’ée’. Nizhónígo ba’álchíní hodooleeł dóo yá’át’éełgo bíł haz’ą́ doo. Díí dóo díí bik’é ndoolyééł jinóo éí té’é’í bíł naaztí’go át’é jiníí nt’ée’. T’áa shíí aníí.”

“Ao’ t’áa ákót’é,” ní shicheii.

“Éí shíí éí t’áa nihí bee nihídahólnííł dooleeł,” ní shimá.

“Éí láá. Jó ákót’ée lá,” ní adzáá. “Nihí áldó’ t’áá ákónihidoo’niid. Ao’. Jó ákót’ée dooleef lá. T’áá shíí bídeenígahígi át’áo áda’diilníí.”

“Ao’, sha’álchíní. T’áá bóhóneedzánígi át’áo áda’jiil’ííh. Baa ahééh íí, ao’,” ní shicheii.

“Jó ákót’ée lá. Nihí shíí díí néekah dooleef. Dibé t’óó ch’ídasii’nil ni’,” ní asdzáá. “Łikango nihits’áá’ da’iidáá’. Ahéhee’. T’áá shíí kót’áo nihits’áá’ nááda’diidííł nihaa náanii’náo.”

“Ao’. Ákodoonííł. Ao’,” ní shimá. “Hozhó’ó náokah dooleef.”

T’áádoó sáanii dah nídiikai.

Shicheii éi ch’ééh déyá níigo ch’é’étiindóó sizí. Bilíí’ baah dah siláháá ch’é’étiingi dah silá nt’ée’ nee’diiláágo yinéł’í. T’áá dah yoolééłgo iihnáálwod.

Marie nihaa nálwod. “So, what happened?” jiníigo.

“We gave them a long list,” bíłní shádí.

“Naa’ahóóhai t’áá chidí beegééłgo bííghahgo dabidii’niid,” ní shimá yázhí.

“Whatever,” ní Marie.

“Aláájí’ ndoolyééhígí éi llama dabidii’niid,” bidishní.

“Mom,” níigo yidloh Marie.

“Ge’,” ní shimá.

“Ao’. Áko hait’áo shíí ná’áh llama. Bídahwiidool’áál,” ní shimá yázhí.

T’óó baa ada’niidlo’.

“Haa’ish bizázhígis? Bik’os t’óó kóníłnééz,” ní shádí.

“Niheégííłgo shíí bééhodooziil,” bidishní.

“No, seriously, what did they say?” ch’eeh ní Marie.

“Diné da’atsts’ééhéé áádi bił yah adííłwoł. Excuse me, haashit’áo bizázhdígish dinóo,” ní shimá yázhí.

“Ni’apron tóoyóo diłgo,” ní shádi.

“Béesh dah yí’ááłgo,” bidishní. “T’óo nihits’áá’ náhootał dinóo.” T’óo anídeedloh.

“T’óo adadii’ní,” ní shimá. “Nizhónigo ahił ndahosiilne’, shiyázhí. Ayóo ádabó’níí la. Bimá sání ayóo bá áhwiinít’í.”

“What did you guys ask for?”

“Jó llama,” ní shádi.

“Dóo naa’ahóóhai,” bidishní.

“T’áa nihí bee nihídahólnííh doo dabidii’niid,” ní shimá. “Cheii dó’ ákóní.”

“Don’t worry. Nizhónigo ánáada’diilnííł,” bidishní shideezhí.

“I know,” jiní.

Shicheii t’éiyá baa shíni’go anáádzá. Bilíí yáhásááh sha’shin. Shimá sání yáhásááh sha’shin. Doo kót’é níí da. Áko ndi shíí shimá sání yéé bits’áádóo áda’iil’ínígíí bee hotah yá’áhoot’ééh t’óo nisin. Bee shíí náás náájoodáál doo. Hwaa ánáadahwiilyáago. Hoda’iiltso’go. Hwił ch’aa ndeiikaigo. Marie dóo Julius a’niilts’ee’go shíí áádi atah ánáájít’ée doo. Shimá sání yił nzaadgóo iiná ájiiláágíí nahalingo bee ho’doolziid dooleet shideezhí. Áadi shíí sánii daniidlnígíí nihitahdóo ánáájít’ée doo. Tsénahabilnii bitahdóo ánáájít’ée doo.

## Oral Narrative

### Bead People – Leaving Home

It must have been near the first frost. I was excited because we were going to a new place. My father had told me about the new place and I started to dream about it at night. I knew my parents had made several trips there since I was little, but I never imagined we would move there. I was also sad because Montezuma Creek was where I was growing up and that meant leaving my special hide-outs, my only cousin, and my home. T'áá shíí áko, I thought. Father and Mother have a hogan ready for us there, and I will be starting school.

My mother packed the night before, which didn't take long because we did not have many things. The sheepskin bedding was rolled up and tied. The cooking and eating utensils fit into an old bag. Our clothes were neatly folded into a large brown paper bag. Mother's turquoise and silver jewelry were wrapped in buckskin, and the rest of our belongings were wrapped and tied in our quilts. Outside Father had been preparing the horses, feeding them, checking the saddles over and over. I laid one of the extra sheepskins on the floor beside my baby brother George who was also asleep on a sheepskin. As I watched my brother, my mother moved around in the dim light packing our things. I thought of the long trip ahead. I did not know what to expect and did not ask many questions. Moments later, just before I began day dreaming of the new place, Father came back in and told us to go to bed. "Da'ólhxosh. We have a long day tomorrow," he said. That was all he had to say, and I crawled on top of my sheepskin spread out



near the hogan wall and nestled comfortably under my woven blanket. Mother laid beside little George, and Father blew out the kerosene lamp.

“Yaanibaa, ndiidááh, tí’,” Mother said, tapping me on the shoulder. “We have to go now.” It was still dark outside as I could see through the chimney. I rubbed my eyes hard so I could be fully awake for the morning prayer.

“Ch’ínóhjeeh, ” my father said. He was holding the small corn pollen bag waiting for us to step outside and stand beside him. I always knew what to do, to stand facing east quietly and wait for him to begin. Father was not a medicine man, but he knew of our customs. He prayed to the Holy People and asked for guidance and safety. I stood still and yawned quietly. Then we each took a pinch of pollen and blessed ourselves, put some in our mouth and on top of our heads, and carefully sprinkled it to the east while offering it to the Holy People. By doing this, we knew that our journey would be safe and good.

I was the last to bless myself as Father finished singing the Horse Chant. The sun was beginning to form its full shape from the east now, and I was excited to begin the journey. I didn’t know how to sing the sacred songs Father used to sing, but I did know that they were special songs used to communicate with Talking God and Hogan God. With this, I looked forward to moving to Dá’ák’eh Halání, Many Farms.

The horses were ready. My father and I were going to ride one, Mother and my brother George the other, and the third to haul our belongings. Father and Mother looked around one last time inside the small hogan that we had been living in for the past ten years or so. It was beginning to deteriorate; it had been

already old when my father and mother moved in as a newly married couple. The fire on the center ground was cooled, the water barrel emptied, and the old wooden chest left peacefully. We did not have a wagon to haul such bigger things. The chest was one of the first gifts Father made for Mother. They believed that the Holy Beings would take care of it as well as their home. Whether another family would be using our hogan or not, we did not mind. I knew somehow only that we would never return. To visit perhaps, but not to move back. Even the few sheep and goats we had we gave to Mother's nearest relative. "We will have many more," my father told Mother.

"Are you sure there is nothing inside?" I heard Father asking.

"Ao'. I checked twice," Mother said. She looked around once more and followed Father out the door. Her long brown hair was rolled into a traditional bun at the back of her head and wrapped with long strips of carded wool. She was tall and thin and still looked as pretty as she must have years before when she first married Father. I wished I would be pretty like her.

My baby brother was tied onto the saddle with strong cords of hide. He usually enjoyed the smooth swaying movements of Mother's horse, especially when she took him on her herding of sheep and goats. As soon as Father locked the padlock and was beginning to nail it shut, I remembered something. "Áłtsé!" I yelled.

I jumped off the horse, and Father quickly undid the padlock on the door. "Bikéé' yah anilyeed," Mother told Father.

I was trying to move the chest and Father offered to help. With one push he slid it away from the wall, and there it was under the chest. The Holy Bible. It had been a gift from my friend John. He was a white man that used to come around on horseback to visit us and other people that live nearby and share stories and pictures of Jesus. The Bible had writing on it, but I couldn't read, nor did my parents or anyone in the area. Only when John came around did he read to me and my cousin Haazbaa', or it seemed he read from it. He was a funny man, tall and skinny and could speak some Navajo, just enough to communicate with the families. I especially liked how he always brought a stick of gum or candy for me. I was sad that we didn't tell him about our moving.

“Yáa,” my father exclaimed. “I told you to be ready last night.”

“Jó beisé nah. I just forgot I put it there the last time Mother wouldn't let me look at it. She told me to throw it away,” I said, holding it with both hands across my chest. It was new and the cover was dark green, and John told me it said The Holy Bible. “Can I take it? I'll put it in one of the bags and not bother it until we get there.”

“Lá'aa,” Father approved. “Let's go.” He closed the door once more and locked it for good this time. Mother realized what happened and shook her head in disagreement but did not say anything. We got on the horses and slowly strode away.

The sun had fully risen by now and I held on to my father. I used to play nearby on the hills with Haazbaa' since we were little, but I never traveled beyond the hills miles away. And that morning I enjoyed the beautiful scenery. Sleeping

Ute Mountain stood east of us. Beyond that the peak of Dibe Nitsaa, Hesperus Peak, one of the sacred mountains, rose. My father said it had always been there, but I never quite noticed how big it is. The hills were specked with cedar and sagebrush beginning to dry from the changing temperatures. There were more hogans beyond the hills and I never noticed them.

Close to noon, we came to a place where many of our people were gathered outside a big gray building. Men were standing against the wall outside socializing, and others, including children, sat on the ground near their wagons relaxing and eating, watching passers-by. Father told me that it was a place where people buy food in cans and boxes. He said the sweet candies I liked come from there. I smiled. “Naalyéhé bá hooghan, Father said. “It is called a store.” He said it says Montezuma Creek Trading Post above the door. I thought maybe John told him that. So this was where Mother and Father got the canned food that tastes so good. As we arrived, some of the people greeted my parents with “Yá’át’ée’h.”

We rode up to a cedar tree near the trading post and got down. Father tied the horses to a branch and told me to go inside with him. When I stepped inside I was so amazed. The floor was not dirt like at home; it was wooden and it squeaked loudly as people walked across it. There were all types of canned food stacked perfectly on the shelves against the wall. On one side of the room were Navajo rugs of all sizes hanging on the wall behind the counters, and Navajo baskets hung from the ceiling. On the opposite side of the room was a long glass-covered case and inside were many turquoise and silver jewelry, squash blossoms,

bracelets, concha belts, as well as Navajo sash belts. On the table behind the white man were heaps of buckskin. It was like a dream.

“Baa’,” Father had been calling me from the counter, motioning to me with his hand. I walked carefully past the people who were waiting to trade a rug or piece of jewelry. “Háídíí shą’ nínízin?” he said to me, asking which I wanted.

I stared at the different colored candy in the big glass jar. I pointed to a bright red one. The white man behind the counter took out a handful of red hard candy and gave it to me. I cupped my hands, received the sweets, and pulled out the bottom of my blouse and wrapped the treats. “Ahéhee’,” I shyly thanked him and stepped back. The white man looked like John, but this man was fat and wore funny-looking things on his nose that he looked at me through. He had very little hair on his head.

Father purchased some canned meat, canned fruit and more coffee for our journey. There was a young Navajo man telling us what the white man was saying. The white man did not talk slow for me like John did. “That will be one dollar and five cents,” the white man said. “We’re sure going to miss you around here, Young Man. You must come back and visit us often,” the white man said to my father. “Be careful crossing the water.”

I wondered what the translator meant by the water.

“Ao’,” Father answered as he gave the white man the total coins. “Ahéhee’.” Father shook hands with both men behind the counter, took the paper sack of items, and we walked out.

Outside he asked me to dump the candy in the paper bag so he could tie it to our belongings on the horse, but I insisted on keeping it. I had rolled the bottom of my blouse underneath my sash belt so the candy would not fall out. Father put the sack of food in one of the bags tied to the horse. As soon as we were set, we rode off again. We continued on south. By noon, the journey was smooth and seemed somewhat easy. It actually was fun looking, looking at the new places. My little brother would cry every now and then, and I would tell him not to cry, that we would be there soon. The trip was nice and slow and quiet, until we got to the big water flowing. I did not know then that that was the San Juan River.

#### Half Way There

We stopped between the crowded cottonwood trees and looked at the deep water flowing. This was not good. My heart started beating fast as I pressed against Father, holding him tighter. Although I did not want to let go, Father got down and checked the saddle, straps, my brother, my mother, and our belongings.

I wanted to cry. “Nizhé’é yéego yíínítá’,” Mother told me. I nodded and held my father tighter.

“Tì’,” Father said and slowly proceeded into the water.

My brother was bundled in his cradle board and tied and wrapped onto the saddle in front of my mother. My mother and father had crossed the river many times never with my brother and me. Each time they went south and returned they talked of the big water.

When Father let the horses into the water, I closed my eyes. Soon I could feel the water rising up to my legs. I had never been so terrified. Slowly and quietly I began to cry. Our horses were used to crossing the river, and they seemed more confident than I was. When the water came up just below the saddles, the horses began to swim. The water was freezing cold. As the horses were swimming across, I noticed they were beginning to move with the current of the river flow and I began to scream. “Tó nihił nidadoonah! We’re going to drown! Look at my brother ! The water’s going to go above him!” I yelled and screamed. Suddenly I wanted to tell on my parents. “John bił hodeeshnih!” I yelled, threatening that he will get mad at them for this.

“Ge’,” Father told me as he let the horses drag themselves onto the other side of the river. Our skirts were drenched, as well as our blankets. Father and Mother checked my brother and the horse hauling our things. I slowly looked back. My heart was still beating. I was shaking.

“T’áá ákódí,” Mother told me, assuring me that’s the hard part.

I nodded and held onto my father as we proceeded again. I checked my candy and was glad that they were still tucked under my blouse. John will never believe this when I tell him, I thought.

By sundown we reached a place my father called Red Mesa. Dark red mesas lined a wide valley that stretched from east to west. Beyond the south mesa, the tips of the Chuska Mountains stood high. Soon they would be covered with snow. Fine sand, sagebrush and yucca plants covered most of the valley.

The sun was setting in the west and created a beautiful sky of blue, purple, red and orange. Although I was very tired by then, I liked admired this place.

We gradually arrived at Old Hosteen Begay's hogan, a friend of Father's. Old Hosteen had been expecting us and invited us in for dinner. He looked the same age as Father, but shorter and thinner. His wife was very kind. She seemed much younger than her husband. We all sat around the cloth she had unfolded and laid near the fireplace. She placed a pot of stew, tortillas, and coffee in the middle and told us to eat. As she poured cups of coffee, began we began to dip our tortillas into the pot and enjoy the meal. I was hungry.

"Were the children okay when you crossed the river?" asked Old Hosteen.

"Yaanibaa' was very scared when the horses started swimming, but she's brave," replied Father. "She was more worried about her brother."

Old Hosteen laughed. "You *are* brave for crossing a big river like that," he said to me. "Most children would get hysterical and jump off the horse. I heard a boy did that not too long ago. Luckily, he was still tied to his father and was pulled back onto the horse. He almost drowned."

I stared at Old Hosteen and thought about the boy. I also realized that no one, besides my Father and John, had ever told me I was brave. Not even Mother.

When we finished eating, I quietly sat beside Father as he talked with Old Hosteen. I carefully unrolled my blouse and looked at the hard candy. They had become sticky, but they still looked delicious. I took one out, put it in my mouth, and re-rolled the rest.



Father untied our things outside and let the horses rest for the night under a nearby cottonwood tree. Old Hosteen helped him feed the horses while Mother talked with Old Hosteen's wife inside, admiring the rug she was weaving. I lay inside on the bedding. I had taken my sash belt off and used its fringes to entertain my brother who was awake in his cradle board. By that time, I was enjoying my second piece of candy and wondered about the next day's travel. I was already sore from riding all day, but I figured the entire trip would be worth it. I was excited about meeting Father's relatives. He had moved to Montezuma Creek when he married my mother ten winters ago. After finding no job there in the past couple of years, he decided to accept masonry work at Chinle. The first school was to be built there and he was happy to be part of the new school. Many people knew my father for his masonry work. He said he was allowed to choose his own crew and would begin to lay the foundation to a school where Navajo children would go to school, including me.

At first my mother disagreed with the idea of moving away from her land. When a Navajo couple married, the husband always moved to his wife's family residence, which my parents had done. But Mother's mother, my grandmother, had passed away when I was only a baby. Mother had two sisters and one brother, but she lost communication with them after their mother's death. Both sisters became too much involved in drinking, and her brother moved to his wife's land and was never heard from again. Finally she decided that living in Many Farms would not be as bad. She would have people living close by, helping her.

And Father had promised her better things with his new job -- dishes, a weaving loom, clothes, livestock.

I only thought about the new school I would be attending. Mother wanted me to stay home and care for Brother, but I was determined to attend school. Fortunately, Father supported me strongly and it was decided that I would attend Chinle Boarding School. Father said being ten winters old was the right age to start boarding school, and Chinle was the perfect place to start. Now I was happy that we were moving. I couldn't wait. I lay next to Brother and put my arm around him. He was still smiling at me when I drifted off to sleep.

### One More Day

I slept good that night in Old Hosteen's hogan. I did not want to move when Father woke us up the next morning. "It's time to go again," he said. I noticed through the chimney that it was still dark. The smell of fried potatoes and fresh tortillas helped me get out of the sheepskin bedding. I walked out into the cold morning and remembered the long way we still had to go. My back was aching and my legs were sore from riding all day. I hoped we did not have to cross another river.

Father had already prepared the horses, and Mother was adding the bedding to the load on the horse's back. I remembered then that I had put the book inside one of the bags. I found it and quickly flipped through the pages and put it back. I longed to be read to. After we finished eating, Old Hosteen asked us to step outside. He took out his corn pollen bag and prayed to the Holy People.

When he finished and we all took some pollen, Father thanked Old Hosteen, “Ahéhee’, shik’is. My family and I will remember you and your wife and your hospitality. You also will be blessed for that.”

“Ao’, shik’is. Take care of your family. We shall perhaps see you at a Yé’ii Bicheii ceremony this winter,” said old Hosteen. “And you,” he looked at me, “take care of your little brother. Remember, you’re a brave girl.”

“We will be going now,” Father said. Mother was already sitting on the horse with Brother strapped in front of her. It was cold and she had a thick blanket wrapped around herself, covering Brother as well. Father got on his horse then pulled me up. I fixed my blanket and made myself comfortable behind Father. We slowly strode away and headed south toward the red mesas. The sun was beginning to rise now, and when I looked back, I saw the smoke slowly swaying from the roof of the small Hogan. Old Hosteen was walking towards the sheep corral.

We gradually climbed up the trail on the mesa. When we reached the top, I noticed the mountain Dibé Nitsaa to the north. I thought about our hogan that we left and felt a bit of sadness. Father and Mother rested while Brother was sound asleep in his cradle board covered by a small blanket, and the horses fed on nearby plants. I stood at the edge of the cliff and looked at the few hogans below. I wondered how many children lived in the valley of Red Mesa and thought about where they went to school, if they went at all. I was happy that Father was going to let me go to school. “It’s the law. Navajo children have to go to school,” he

had said. Father never attended school but learned some English as a young boy growing up in the Chinle valley.

“What are you thinking about?” Father asked me.

“About school,” I answered.

“You’ll do fine. You’ll be staying in a place near the school building where you will be taken care of. They’ll feed you, they’ll teach you many things, and you’ll become a smarter person.”

“How about Mother? Will she okay with Brother at home when you are working?”

“Yes. Don’t worry. Your aunts and uncles will be there to help her. I’ll just be gone a few days at a time. You’ll learn that Chinle is not far from Many Farms. Besides, I’ll be in Chinle, too. I’ll check on you every day.”

We all sat in the shade and ate mutton jerky and tortillas that Old Hosteen’s wife had prepared for us. Father said that we should be in Many Farms the next day. I couldn’t wait. His relatives, a family related through clan, would be waiting for our arrival. After we rested, we departed again, this time travelling slower than the day before.

By late afternoon it was very warm. Father and I took turns riding the horse and walking. I enjoyed walking because it allowed me to play. I liked to pick plants and strange rocks and sticks. Other times I rode the horse while Father walked. Occasionally we would see livestock or sheep wandering nearby which indicated that people lived in the area. We had not seen anyone since we left Red Mesa, but Father had said we would in a place called Rock Point. If we were low

on water or food, we could stop and visit a family nearby, but we had plenty of both. We did not have time to meet and visit with people.

We finally arrived at Rock Point and stopped by at the trading post. Mother and Father purchased a few items and exchanged greetings and talked with the local people at the trading post. They were informed of a Yé'ii Bicheii ceremony that was scheduled at Many Farms and was going to begin in a few days. I wondered if the ceremony was near the place we would be living. Mother and Father had taken me to a Fire Dance a couple of times, and I was anxious to see another one. I imagined myself dancing like the young girls and boys, dressed in traditional clothing and jewelry and moccasins, and how s I would concentrate on the steps and songs as people watched carefully late into the freezing night.

We stopped near a stream that evening and dismounted for the night. We set up camp and relaxed. Father led the horses to the stream and let them drink. We also washed our faces and drank from it. The water was very cold and refreshing. Father said we were halfway between Rock Point and Many Farms, and that we should arrive by the next afternoon.

### Many Farms

By noon the next day we reached Many Farms from the north. A mesa stretched all the way along the west side of the valley. Miles away to the northeast, the mountains stretched in blue. I was overwhelmed with the new place, and when Father told me of the lake hidden right over the hills east of us, I became ecstatic. A lake was nowhere in sight or near their our place. I could not wait to go fishing with my father and decided that this place might be better after

all. Harvest time had come, and we saw people working in their fields. As we rode through the small town, we saw families helping each other picking the last corn and melons. Children were helping their grandparents load big bags of corn while their parents carried the bags to their wagons. It appeared that the people in the valley lived much closer to each other, whereas at Montezuma Creek we all lived miles apart.

“That is where we’ll be staying,” Father said. He was pointing to a small hogan that looked similar to our old home. The family who lived there were practically his real family. The woman was the same clan as Father. That is how they were his family. Father said his original hometown was many miles away, in a place called New Mexico. He had met this family during one of his trips to Chinle. As we approached the place, a couple of dogs came running toward us barking. There were two other hogans beside ours, and people came out of them when they heard the dogs. An elderly man and woman first greeted us.

“Yá’át’éeéh, shiyáázh, shich’é’é,” said the woman as she shook hands. She seemed very friendly and was happy to see us. She then walked over to me. “Is this my granddaughter? My, how beautiful she is,” she said as she helped me down from the horse and hugged me. She was my nálí. Nálí then got the cradle board and held Brother who was ready to get out of his cradle.

Another couple came with their children. “Yá’á’tééh,” said the lady. She was Father’s clan sister. She introduced her husband, Tall Man, then her children, Deezbaa’ and Charlie. Deezbaa’ appeared to be the same age as me and Charlie still a toddler.

“Tì’ da’iidá,” said the elder man, Nálí Hastiin. He put the horses in the corral and gave them hay and water as we went inside their hogan. Their hogan seemed to be bigger than the rest because they had many things and still a lot of room. To the left a wash pan sat on an old water barrel near the door. Next to it were two more barrels of water, and a number of hoses were hanging from a nail on the wall. Three old metal chests were stacked on top of each other on the other side of the barrels. Across the doorway was a place for bedding and sitting. Sheep and goat skins made a comfortable seating arrangement there. Nálí’s loom showed that she was almost finished weaving a large rug. On the right side, a cabinet full of dishes and kitchen utensils stood against the wall. An open fire in the center of the home made their home very warm and cozy. I felt at home.

“We are happy you all have come,” said Nálí Hastiin. Everyone sat on the dirt floor around the food. As Nálí poured cups of coffee, Nálí Hastiin spoke to Mother in Navajo. “We know it was a hard thing for you to do, moving away from your mother’s land and your home. It is not right for a Navajo man to move his wife and children to a strange place, but in your case it’s different. We have met you before and know that you have a good family here. We will do the best we can to take care of you and your children here in Many Farms.”

Mother nodded.

“We appreciate you bringing your family here. Your mother was a wonderful person. And we know you miss her. But you need to take care of yourself and your family now. We are here for you and Young Man,” Nálí said.

Mother's mother, my grandmother, had become ill and died suddenly one year before. After that happened, Mother had no relatives to rely on. She only had us.

"We have livestock and cattle. Some shall be yours," Nálí Hastiin said to us. "We are too old to take care of all of them them now. Yaanibaa' can help take care of them," he said to me. "Deezbaa' and her parents have their own livestock too, and the two of you can herd sheep and goats together."

"Ahéhee'," said Mother. "We are very grateful. My children shall learn many good things from having these animals."

"You will also be healthy and fat from the mutton," Nálí Hastiin teased me. "A skinny Navajo woman is not good!" They all laughed and we continued to eat.

We moved into our new home and made ourselves comfortable. I learned that my grandparents also had a large cornfield which they planted on every summer. There were two large corrals, one for the horses and cattle, and the other for the sheep and goats. A few cottonwood trees shaded the corral and hogans, and large, thick greasewood surrounded the area. Between the hogans was a shade house which was used for storage and summer living. There was a wash that ran not too far east of the residence which came from Canyon de Chelly and continued north. I soon discovered it and enjoyed going there with Deezbaa'. We liked to sit near the edge and throw in rocks and twigs and watch them flow north.

I liked our new place. After a few days Father was getting ready to start work at Chinle, and I was excited to start school with Deezbaa'. Mother still seemed upset that I will be in school and not at home helping her, but I looked



forward to school. The night before we were to leave for school, I could not sleep. I was happy to begin learning the white man's language. I knew it meant a lot to Father getting a job and wanting to support us. I was sure that her mother was happy too, although she did not admit it. I thought maybe she does not say much about being glad to move to this new place because she still misses my grandmother and how things used to be before she died. I wanted everything to work out for all of us. I wondered how soon it would be before I could start reading the Bible on my own. I had hidden it under my bedding near the wall. I snuggled under the thick covers as I looked at the few stars showing through the chimney. I was sure my life was about to change in good ways.

### Going to School

Early the next morning I stood outside next to Father. This time we were offering our prayers with Deezbaa' and her father. Father thanked the Diyin Dine'é for bringing us safely to Many Farms and asked for protection as Deezbaa' and I begin school at Chinle. He mentioned how he would be working at Chinle also, but he would be going back to Many Farms every few days to check on Mother and Brother. He asked Haash'chéélti'í to guide us girls in learning the Bilagáana language. He then asked Haashch'ééwaan to protect us as we live in the dorm. He also asked Mother Earth and Father Sky to watch over all of us each day. When Father was done, we passed the small corn pollen bag around and completed the prayer.

We all had breakfast together in Nálí's hogan. Nálí lectured us on how to behave at school. "Don't misbehave. Listen carefully. We heard some white teachers can be very mean," she said sternly.

"Get up before the sun. Don't let Sleepy Man keep his arms around you after the sun rises," Nálí Hastiin teased us.

The trip to Chinle was going to be on foot. Deezbaa' and I packed one outfit each and put them in one small bag. We kept our jewelry and sash belts at home and wore only our skirt and blouse and moccasins. Our mothers brushed our hair and tied them in big buns with new strings of wool.

I said goodbye to Mother and Brother. I was surprised to see tears in Mother's eyes when we hugged. I was not sure if Mother was going to miss me or if she was still upset at Father for letting me go to school. Nevertheless, I tightly hugged her and told I was going to miss her and Brother. Deezbaa' did the same with her parents. Finally, we said goodbye to our grandparents and hugged them as well.

The bright sun was still rising as we headed south down the valley. The sheep dogs followed us for half of the way before they turned around. We walked along the wash which guided us all the way. Other people were walking to or from Chinle, mostly older men and women who either worked there or traded at the trading post. We finally came upon the trading post located halfway to Chinle. The store was located under big cottonwood trees and near the wash. By the time we arrived at the store, Father was carrying both bags, his own and our. We went into the store where Deezbaa' and I got a bottle of orange soda each and

Father a bottle of root beer. An older woman had traded her newly woven rug and was purchasing items of food. “For my nephew’s Yé’ii Bicheii ceremony,” she was telling the owner. “It will be starting in a couple of weeks, so we are trying to stock up things we need.”

“Is he the main patient?” the owner asked.

Chinle.”

“Oh, I see. Well, let me know if you need anything else. I still have time to order some more things,” he said.

“Ahéhee’. The woman’s husband put the purchased items in their wagon outside and helped her up on it. She was short and fat and had many coins that decorated her red velveteen blouse. From shoulders to wrists, across the chest and back, and around the collar, shiny coins were sewn in rows of three or four. I had never seen anything like that.

Deezbaa’ and I were drinking our orange sodas outside waiting for Father. We admired the woman’s fancy dress as she rode away seated next to her husband.

“I think that’s Mary Big Rock. And her husband. They live close to the mesa between here and Many Farms.” Deezbaa’ said. “We usually see her at the Many Farms trading post too. That’s how I know her. She’s a good weaver. And her husband makes jewelry. He probably made that blouse for her.”

“Let’s go,” Father said. “I don’t want you to be late. You’re supposed to be there in time for supper tonight.”

“What will we eat?” Deezbaa’ asked. We continued walking.

“You will be eating all kinds of food. You won’t have to cook, but you have to help do dishes and other chores.” He was not sure himself. He had never attended school. During his childhood, schools did not exist. Not until I was born did he learn that the white people were going to start building schools. I think the whole idea of learning was exciting to him as much as it was for me. For that reason, he wanted me to do well in school. “Remember what kinds of food you should not eat in case they cook it for you?” he asked the girls.

“Fish,” I said.

“Right. Why?” Father asked.

“It will make us sick and get sores.”

“Good. What else?”

“Mushrooms,” said Deezbaa’.

“Yes. Why?”

“It makes you go blind.”

“Good. Just remember things like that, and you will be fine. I doubt you will eat that kind of food at school because they are hard to get around here, but you still have to be careful,” he said.

When we arrived at Chinle, the wash curved and led them toward the canyon. Not too far from the opening of the canyon was a newly built trading post. The wash coming from the canyon stretched behind the store, and people were gathered in groups and pairs around the new trading post. Some people sat under the nearby cottonwood trees and ate their snacks. Others stood against the trees or the building and talked about local events. Horses were tied either to the

wooden fence decorating the yard of the store or to the trees in front. Father asked for directions to the school, and an older man said he was ready to go home and was glad to show them the way since the school was located on his way. They properly introduced themselves and we began walking following the man.

“This one is my daughter, and this one my niece,” Father introduced us.

“Are you going to school?” the old man asked us.

“Ao’,” we said.

“That’s good. Two of my grandchildren are there. The others are still at home. They are going to wait for the new school to be built,” he said. He led them up the hill on the trail.

Father continued to tell him that he was starting his job building the school early the next morning. He admitted that he was excited and that he had not gotten paid in a long time. His silversmith work had slowed down and he was happy to accept the masonry position. It meant that we had to move from Montezuma Creek, but he knew that it was best for his family. The old man understood.

When we reached the top of the hill, we saw the ground where the school was to be built; it was a large area and people had cleared and leveled it already. The building materials were stacked and piled around the space. Big green tents sat not too far, ready to be occupied by Navajo workers for the next few months. Some of the workers had already arrived and were being instructed.

“You’ll be working right there,” said the old man. “When do you have to show up?”

“Before supper. After supper they are going to tell us what to do. So as soon as I drop these girls off, I will come back.”

“The school is at the old church. The children stay in the buildings next to it,” said the old man. “Come on.” He led us down the hill.

“I have never been to the church. I have not been here since I was a boy. As soon as I was married, I moved to Montezuma Creek,” said Father. “Even as a boy, I hardly came to Chinle with my parents.”

We passed the work site and headed west. The trail connected us to a dirt road. People rode by on wagons or horses and greeted us. “Yá’át’ée’h” and “Ao’, yá’át’ée’h” and nods were exchanged along the way.

I wondered how far I was going to be from my father when the old man said, “Jó kóó.” The old church sign above the door read Chinle School. It was obvious that the school was recently painted white. Even the two big doors at the entrance showed no signs of dirt. “I will be going now. Good luck in school, ladies. You be tough there. Some kids say they are treated mean, but that is probably because they do not listen. Do what you are told and you will be okay. And I’ll see you around,” the old man said.

Father put bags on the ground. He told us to stay where we were. As he walked up the steps, we heard the teacher giving lessons inside, “One, two, three, four, ...” He knocked on the door a couple times before an older white woman answered it. “Yá’át’ée’h. I brought my daughter and niece,” he said.

“Oh, you’re Mister Mansisco,” she smiled. “We’ve been waiting for you. Weren’t you moving from Montezuma Creek?”

“Yes.”

“And those must be the new students. Oh, look at them. They are very beautiful ladies,” she said, smiling and waving at us. “I’m Miss Margaret. I help Miss Wilson. She’s the teacher. Let me tell her you’re here, then I’ll show you the dorm.” She went back inside and Father walked back down the steps.

“That woman’s name is Margaret. She’s going to show you where you will be staying,” he told us.

“Is she the teacher?” I asked.

“She helps the teacher. Your teacher’s name is Miss Wilson.”

“Miss Wilson.”

“Miss Margaret seems nice,” Deezbaa’ said. She had been worried about the

Miss Margaret was a short young woman. She wore a nice white blouse and a dark blue skirt with black shoes. Her golden hair was put up neatly in a bun behind her head. When she approached us, we noticed she had red freckles under her eyes and on her nose. Deezbaa’ and I looked at each other and almost laughed. We had never seen a Bilgáana with red spots on her face. We tried not to giggle.

“Hi, girls,” she said and bent down to look at us. “What are your names?”

“Haash yinołyé?” Father translated.

“Yaanibaa’,” I said.

“Deezbaa’.”

“Yunny Ba and Des Ba,” Miss Margaret slowly pronounced. “Is that right?” She nodded at us. “Ao’?” She herself was trying to learn Navajo. “Come on. This way.”

She led us behind the school. There were two other buildings almost as big as the school. “These used to be homes. More rooms were added to make it bigger for the children to stay in,” she said. “They’re practically new inside.”

Father did not understand most of what she said, but he knew that we would be treated okay. Just as long as we were staying with other Navajo children, he was not too concerned. He was going to be working nearby too.

Miss Margaret took us inside the dorm and showed us our beds. There were about five bedrooms total, each with about four or five beds. There was an additional room for the dorm aids. A large room was decorated with yellow and green interior, three sofas, a couple chairs and a coffee table. There was a small kitchen used for water and snacks. The floor throughout the place was shiny and white. The cooking and eating area was in the same building of the school. “This dorm is for girls. The other one is for boys,” she said. I put my bag on the bed. Dark wool blankets covered each bed. One dresser stood by the door. “Ann will show you where to put your things later. You’ll like her. She’s Navajo. Comes in after school before supper to help you with school work.” She went into the dorm aids’ room and pulled out some papers for Father to sign.

“I’m going to go now. Be good. Listen to your teacher. I’ll come again maybe tomorrow,” he said in Navajo.



“If you could just sign your name right here, Mr. Mancisco,” Miss Margaret brought him the papers and pen.

He signed his name then asked, “Come...tomorrow?”

“Who?” Miss Margaret asked.

“Me.” Father pointed to himself.

“Oh, no. I’m sorry. Didn’t they tell you? Once you bring your children, you cannot visit them until break time, which will be until middle of December.” She hoped he understood her.

Father shook his head. I could tell he did not understand her clearly.

Miss Margaret then called for someone. She left the room and came back with a young Navajo man. He told us in Navajo that he cleans the school when they need him. He said they use him as interpreter although he still has much to learn.

“It distracts them from learning. I hope you understand. I apologize if they didn’t tell you. I’m sure they did, and you probably just didn’t understand,” she said to Father. The man tried to interpret as best as he could. “I just came two days ago myself from Cincinnati, Ohio. Have you heard of that place? Anyway, I’m still getting used to the place. I already love it out here.” She breathed in the cool air and quickly glanced around. “They’ll be fine. I’ll make sure. Okay?”

Father nodded at Miss Margaret and turned to us. “I’m going now. I’ll be back in two days.” He swung his bag over his shoulder and left us standing there in the room. I worried that he did not look very happy when he left.

“Well, girls. Let’s go meet Miss Wilson,” Miss Margaret said. “Yunny Ba and Des Ba,” she said to herself. “She will explain what you need to do.” The Navajo man told us to listen to her although we did not know what she was saying. “You will only learn that way,” he said. He told us he will be around and left. Miss Margaret led us to the school building. “Come on in,” she smiled.

We walked down a hallway. Miss Margaret opened a door at the end of the hallway, and we walked into a classroom. Lots of Navajo children sitting quietly at the tables raised their heads and stared at us. “Do your work,” Miss Wilson said to them. The children continued to draw. Miss Wilson walked over to us. “Good morning. You have already met Miss Margaret. I am Miss Wilson, your teacher. Miss Margaret, please watch the children. We’ll be in the office for a few minutes.”

Miss Wilson took us back into the hallway and closed the door behind us. She was a tall and heavy B ilagáana woman, older than Miss Margaret. Her dress and blouse matched her gray hair. Small eye glasses hung on a chain from her neck. I noticed she also wore black beads, and on the bottom of those beads, a small shiny cross. She opened another door and walked into her office. She told us to sit down and closed the door behind her. The Navajo interpreter was seated in a chair next to her desk. According to him, this is what she said, “There are some things you need to know. Ann will explain it to you again after school. First of all, you will change your clothes. You will get out of those clothes, put them away, and get a nice clean set to wear each day. Secondly, you will learn how to wash your face and hands each morning, before lunch, before supper, and

at bed time. You will bathe twice a week. Ann will help you with that. Next, you will not speak Navajo here. You are here to learn how to speak English and read English and write English. If you speak Navajo, you will not learn anything. We eat breakfast early, lunch at noon, and supper at sundown. You will listen to me and Miss Margaret while you are in school. When you are at the dorm, you will listen to Miss Beth and Miss Lucille. They are at a meeting now and will return shortly. They will have their own instructions for you in the dorm. Lastly, you need to change your names. No more this-ba and that-ba. I don't even want to ask what your names are, so I'll just give you your new names now. You," she pointed to Deezbaa', "will be called Norma. You, "she looked at me, "will be Elizabeth. Aren't you both from the Mancisco family? So you'll keep your last names." She wrote the information on paper. "That will be all. I'll show you where to sit, and that is where you are to remain for the next year."

#### American Students

"Norma" and I did not say a word. We sat quietly and let her and her interpreter finish speaking. Not talk Navajo? I wondered how that would be possible. Father did not mention that part. Maybe he did not know. But I figured that Ann was a woman we could talk to and wondered when we will meet her. I wondered if Ann was nice like Miss Margaret. As Miss Wilson talked, I noticed the framed papers which hung from the wall. A large wooden cross, like the one on Miss Wilson's necklace, also hung on the wall. A few books stood between

bookends on her desk. Behind her on a smaller table sat a black machine we had never seen before.

She led us back to the classroom and separated us. I sat at the front of the room with my new name that I could not pronounce, and Deezbaa' sat at the back. Miss Margaret gave us each a sheet of paper and a pencil and continued her lesson on numbers. I noticed Miss Margaret was not allowed to talk also, unless she was asked a question or was helping a student. The other students had learned their routine and stayed very quiet; like Miss Margaret, they spoke only when spoken to. Deezbaa' and I glanced at each other throughout the rest of the afternoon. It was until the end of class that I realized that there was another group of children in the next room. When they were dismissed, both classes let out and I saw that the other group of children was older.

"They're sixth grade and up," said Miss Margaret. "They're older and learn harder things." She was walking all of us to their dorm.

Before we reached the dorm, a young Navajo woman came out and greeted us. "Yaani'baa' and Deezbaa'?" she asked Miss Margaret.

"Yes, but here are their new names. Miss Wilson would like for you to use their new names right away," she handed the Navajo woman a piece of paper.

"Yes," replied the woman. She turned to us and said in Navajo, "Hello. My name is Ann. I work for Miss Wilson. I help children who go to school here."

"Please tell explain everything to them," said Miss Wilson, patting Deezbaa's head. "I have to go now. I'll see you tomorrow."

“Miss Margaret is very nice,” I said.

“I know,” Ann paused and watched Miss Margaret go back into the school building. “Let’s go inside.”

The other students had already gone inside and were beginning to clean the dorm. Some girls were sweeping the bedrooms, some were getting the mop water ready at the kitchen sink. A couple girls were wiping the windows in the main room. Ann took us to our room and showed us our beds. She asked us to sit down and told us she had to explain some important things.

We sat side by side on my bed and Ann sat across from us on Deezbaa’s bed. “Did Miss Wilson talk to you?” She talked to us in Navajo.

“Ao’.”

“School is a good thing. You will learn many things. It will help you in the future. If you want to stay in school here, you need to abide by Miss Wilson. She is the leader. Those who work here all work for her. Listen to them also. If you don’t listen, she will get mad at you and punish you.” We listened carefully. Nálí had warned us about that. “Which of you is Yaaníbaa’?”

“Me,” I said.

“And you’re Deezbaa’?” Deezbaa’ nodded. “Children here have to get their names changed too.”

“Why?” I asked.

“Because this is white man’s school. Our names are too complicated for them. The white man’s names are not difficult.” No one at home mentioned that we would be getting new names. “Yaaníbaa’, it is said that your name will be

Elizabeth. Deezbaa', your name will be Norma." My name sounded harder than Deezbaa's.

"My father will not agree," I said. Deezbaa' started to cry.

"When you are in school you will use your Bilagáana names. When you are at home, you can use your real names," Ann said.

"Do all the students we go to school with have Bilagáana names too?" Deezbaa' asked.

"Yes. Most importantly, you also cannot speak Navajo. You will learn the white man's language and you will only speak that from now." I saw that she did not like telling us this information. I wondered if she had children of her own who go to school also. I wondered what their names were changed to. "You also will wear a different set of clothes. So you have to give me those you are wearing. If you brought some with you, give them to me."

"Will you keep them for us?" I asked, taking off my blouse. "My mother will get mad at me if I lose them. She made them for me." I reached for the bag, pulled out my favorite black blouse and blue skirt and handed them to Ann. Deezbaa' was still sniffing and gave her set to Ann also.

Ann told us she was going to get our new clothes and would be right back. When she left the room, Deezbaa' held my hand and tried not to cry. "It's okay. When my father comes, we'll tell him. He will talk to Miss Wilson for us. Don't cry. Ann will get mad at us."

"I should have stayed home. I should have cared for my sheep instead," Deezbaa' said.

“Stop,” I whispered, “I will take care of you.”

Ann returned with black shoes, white socks, long black skirts, and white button shirts. She said she put on hot water for our bath and led us to a small room. A big metal tub sat in the middle of the floor. A bar soap and another container of liquid soap were on the floor in hand’s reach from the tub. She told us to undress and brought in the hot water and mixed it with cold water. We stepped into the tub and sat down. This made Deezbaa’ giggle. At home we bathed in the wash or the lake. For me, this was the first time I had ever taken a bath in a tub this big. Once in a while we played in the stream that flowed near our place in Montezuma Creek, but I never thought of washing my hair with soap from a container. Mother always washed my hair with yucca. We sat motionless as Ann poured the warm water over us and scrubbed us with the soap. The lather of the shampoo reminded me of the yucca root my mother used to wash my hair. Ann told us the shampoo was the Bilagáana version of the yucca. When we were done bathing, Ann showed us how to put the clothes on and helped us dress. She braided our long, damp hair in twos and tied them at the ends with rubber bands.

Ann instructed us on how to help with the chores. She explained the daily routine and asked if we understood.

“My father said he will visit us in two days. When he does, can we go to the trading post with him?” I asked.

“You also need to know this. You cannot see your mother or your father or your relatives until Christmas,” Ann said.

“How long is that?” I asked.

“About two full moons from now.”

“No,” cried Deezbaa’. I was disappointed too.

“Why?” I asked.

“You are here for school. You will be learning. That is the only way you will learn the white man’s language and teachings,” she tried to explain.

“What about my father?”

“Miss Wilson will tell him. The children here know about that rule too. It will be okay.”

A small bell rang from the school building and Ann told us that it was time to eat. Deezbaa’ and I were quite sad. I remembered that I did want to stay home in the first place. I did not want to be like my mother and stay home and weave all day. I wanted to learn how to speak the Bilagáana language and to read it and write it. I knew I had to stay at the school and be brave. I knew Father would be proud of me. As long as my family lived down the valley near the wash, a day’s walk away, I knew Deezbaa’ and I would be alright. As long as my father worked at building the new school just east of our school, I would be alright. Maybe if I learned hard, by spring time I would be able to read from the Bible John had given me. I thought that would be good.

The dining room was very clean. Like in the classroom, we were to sit on chairs at the tables. The girls lined up first, then the boys. We had to pick a metal tray and place a metal plate and fork and spoon on top of it. Next, we held out our trays over the counter of food and received our supper from the cook. The Navajo woman who served us was older and dressed in white. The girls ate on one side of



the room while the boys sat together. The milk was nice and cold. I was used to warm goat's milk, but I liked the cold milk. The meat tasted similar to the canned meat Father brought home once in a while from the trading post, except this was covered with brown gravy. Deezbaa' said she liked the warm rolls too, although we agreed that our mothers' hot tortillas were better. We sat with our legs swinging under the chairs as we waited for the rest of the girls to finish. After supper and doing our chores, we were allowed to play outside. Deezbaa' and I sat on a small hill of dirt. I wondered where my father was and if he could see me from his work site.

Over the next few weeks we became acquainted with the other girls easily and found that the daily routine was not so bad after all. I eventually forgot about my father's visit, assuming that someone explained the rules to him because he never came like he said he would. We rose before the sun each day, reminding ourselves about the Sleepy Man my Nálí Hastiin warned us about. The days were getting shorter and colder. We took turns each day building a fire in the main room and kitchen. Father would say that *Asdzáá Nádleehí* was getting older and laying down for her rest as the snow began to cover the mountains. All the children were each given a thick black coat to wear for the winter. Soon our trails led to and from the school building, our little shoe tracks following each other through the snow. We had learned all the alphabets and numbers from one to one hundred. We knew how to count the days and months of the Bilagáana calendar and recited the new date each morning. Spelling our names was fun. Navajo was not spoken at all, even with Ann. At night when we pretended to sleep we talked

in Navajo with the other girls, telling stories of home and family. We would whisper and laugh late into the night, careful not to wake the workers.

Miss Wilson was mean as expected by my Nálís. It took only three or four instances of speaking Navajo, unintentionally, for the children to learn quickly not to speak it in front of Miss Wilson. There was boy named Daniel. When he spoke Navajo accidentally, we watched him crying and struggling as he chewed half a bar of soap in front of the class. Miss Wilson stood beside him ordering him to finish it, reminding the rest of the class what the consequences were if Navajo was used. Daniel cried and vomited and cried as he finished the bar. He spit out the last few remnants of the soap stuck to his teeth and the roof of his mouth.

Another girl named Thelma had long, dark scabs across her small hands, representing Miss Wilson's wooden ruler. Just as long as the children obeyed her and honored her, Miss Wilson was content. She never smiled nor laughed with the children. She did her job teaching us and stuck to the daily routine. Miss Margaret was the only one who socialized with us children. She had grown accustomed to her job and her students. When I got older I learned that one of the instructions emphasized to her as soon as she arrived at the school was not to get involved with the students' personal problems. "Do not get too close to them," Miss Wilson had told her. "We are only here to educate them so they can become civilized." Miss Margaret tried to comply with those instructions although it was very hard for her. Deezbaa' and I felt closer to her than to Ann or anyone else. And I knew Miss Margaret cared for us more than the other children. She gave us extra sweets when she could. She let us stay in the bath longer. She gave us one-

on-one time with our reading. She gave us extra items like crayons and pencils. She liked to tell us about Ohio. I guessed that she missed her family in this place called Ohio.

It was until the big snowfall when Miss Wilson announced that Christmas was in a few days and that the students would be allowed to go home. Ann told us the message was passed through the communities that the parents or family members needed to pick up their children for Christmas. If they were not picked up, they would spend the holiday at school with Miss Wilson. I knew Father was among those who heard first because he worked nearby and probably could not wait to pick me up. We were all so happy to go home and be with family. My father and mother would be so proud of how much I learned. Deezbaa' and practiced what we would share with our families. We knew Nálí Hastiin would be proud. I wondered how big Brother was getting each day at home. I guessed that he was outgrowing his cradle board and was crawling around, getting into Mother's weaving tools and eating dirt. I hoped that he would remember me. We looked forward to walking that long stretch home with Father. Three full moons was a long time to be away from family, and we managed to get through it alright.

### Merry Christmas

The morning we were to leave for home, we made Christmas pictures for our family. The one I made was bright red. I drew a picture of me, my brother and my mother and father on it. We were standing in front of our new hogan. And there was a big, white snowman next to me. It was wearing one of my

father's coats. We were supposed to fold the picture and put it in our bag, but I did not want to crush it. I took care of it real good so my father would be happy to see it. We learned a couple of Christmas songs and got one cookie each. I did not eat mine. I saved it for my brother and me to share and wrapped it in paper. As soon as we ate our lunch we were dismissed to go home for Christmas. We had about two weeks to be home with our family.

The bell rang and I looked at the other children running to their mother and father and even grandparents. They were hugging. Some were crying. I knew my father was going to hug me like that. I held my bag and my Christmas picture. Deezbaa' and I waited and waited for my father. There were only us and about two other kids waiting by afternoon. We did not want to have Christmas with Miss Wilson. Deezbaa' started to cry and I wanted to cry with her. Miss Margaret said, "He's probably just running late." I thought he might still be at work trying to finish.

The sun started setting in the west and it was very cold outside. The other two children and Deezabaa' were still crying. I wished they would not cry. I tried to be brave. Miss Margaret put some more wood in the stove and we were warm. She gave us books to look at, but I looked at my picture I made. Miss Margaret was telling us that she could cancel her trip and stay with us if we want. I said no. Then we heard a knock on the door. Miss Wilson was supposed to check on us again, so we sat up straight. Miss Margaret opened the door, and I heard my father's voice. It was him. I ran and jumped on him. He hugged me for a long time. He didn't want to let me go, and I kept holding him. "Yá'át'ééh, shiyázhí,"

he said to me. Then he put me down and hugged Deezbaa' too. She was crying again. I knew she wanted to see her parents also. I quickly showed Father th my picture and he laughed his laugh. "Nizhóní," he said. He was happy to see me, but I could see that something was wrong.

Miss Margaret said it was too cold for us to go home, but my father said he would take us to his work and we would walk home in the morning. So he took our bags and we walked to his work. The school was almost finished. It was many times the size of our school. My father said they work even when it is snowing because the white people wanted to start the new school right away. He said many men got too sick and went home. He stayed and they tried to finish as much as they can. He carried me half of the way to his work then carried Deezbaa' half of the way. It was cold. The moon was bright and showed us the way.

We came to the big tent and inside there were men sitting around talking or playing card games. My father put us by the fire and made our bed. It was warm like at the dorm. Deezbaa' and I giggled because we didn't have to sleep quietly. We stayed up and talked with my father.

"Shimá dóó shitsilí shą"? I asked about my mother and brother.

My father did not say anything for a while. He said my brother was getting bigger and my mom was not feeling well. I wanted to see them.

"Shí shą'?" Deezbaa' asked my father. He told them her family was fine. He said they all wanted to see us too and told us to go to sleep. We told Father about our new names. He laughed about our names. We told him at home, though,

we can use our real names. I slept like a baby next to my father. When the fire was out, I cried because I was so happy. I was happy and safe.

The next morning my father woke us up early. We ate some mush and drank coffee with the men. They said they had no children at home and they were going keep working. My father said goodbye, and we left.

The snow must have melted some because the trail we walked was clear. Our black shoes crunched on the frozen ground. My father teased us and said our shoes sounded like horses'. Even though it was cold, people were still traveling back and forth to Chinle, on foot or horseback or wagon. The sun came up and it got warm. The more we walked the more we got hot. My father pretty soon carried our coats and we played all the way home. Our hearts were beating fast. We very excited to see the rest of our family.

When we got closer to our home, Deezbaa's dogs came running at us first, and we hugged them and they licked us. Then everybody came out and saw us. Deezbaa' cried. She was so happy like I was when I saw my father. I waited for my mother to come out of the hogan, but she didn't. Nálí Asdzáá took my hand and we went into her hogan. There she told me what happened.

My mother took my brother and they were staying somewhere else. I asked Nálí Asdzáá why and she said my mother was not feeling good about staying home by herself because my father was at work all the time. I asked where they went, and she said they were staying with a family on top of the mesa. Nálí Asdzáá said I would see my mother in a few days. I showed my picture to her, and she hugged me. I said I was going to give it to my mother when she

comes. I knew my mother would be happy. She would forget about the bad feelings she has when I am away at school. She had bad feelings because she wanted me to stay home with her and not go to school. I would tell her all about my writing and spelling and my numbers. I knew she would feel better and hug me too.

Deezbaa' and I played all day every day. We herded our sheep deep into the wash and up to the lake and close to the mesas. We felt real again. My father left for work again two days after we got home. I was not worried because he would not leave me for a long time. He gave me two dimes and I saved them.

I waited for my mother and brother. They did not come like Nálí Asdzáá said. My father came home one more time and asked if my mother came. I said no. He said it was probably because of the snow. But the ground was brown. Snow was only under the greasewood and on the north side of the hogans and corrals during the day. I thought about why my father would say that.

Christmas came. Nálí Asdzáá and Nálí Hastiin told my father to butcher a sheep for us to eat. Deezbaa' and I helped clean the ach'íí' and other parts of the sheep so we can have a good meal. And we did. Deezbaa's mother made mutton stew with big chunks of potatoes and thick golden fry bread to dip the stew with. Nálí Asdzáá boiled the adił and ajéí on the small wood stove. The fire cracked and popped, and we kept on cooking. Even the fire was happy. Finally Nálí Asdzáá roasted the ribs and ach'íí' over hot charcoals. Deezbaa' and I fixed the cloth on the ground and put the dishes and rest of the food down so we could eat. Father surprised us and brought out strawberry jam, cookies and colas too. I

knew it would be better if my mother and brother were there. But I ate everything like my father. Nálí Hastiin told us some coyote stories and we all laughed into the night. Nálí Asdzáá gave us a great big piece of candy each for our present. I was going to give her one of the two dimes my father gave me, but I decided to keep it. I thought I would draw another picture at school and give it to her for a late Christmas present. That was a good idea. We almost ate all the jam with fry bread. I only wished my mother and brother were there with us.

My father went back to work the next day. Nálí Asdzáá said when my father returned again that meant we were going to go back to school. Deezbaa' cried again. I knew she wanted to stay home this time. She didn't want to go back. I knew by the way she cried this time. When my father came back from work, we were going to go back to school in two days. Deezbaa' talked to Nálí Asdzáá and Nálí Hastiin, and they talked to Deezbaa's parents, but her mother and father said she must go back to school. They would not listen to her.

"Shimá t'ahdoo yiistsééh da," I told my father. I wanted to see my mother so much, and my brother. He told me it must be too cold for them to come back. He said my brother would get sick if they tried to see me, so I said nothing more. I told him to give my mother the picture I made. He said he would.

The day before we were to leave for school Deezbaa' and I took the sheep to the wash. The sun was coming up already and it was not too cold. The dogs followed us as usual. We knew that we were not going to come home again until the time around the first thunder. The cottonwood trees would be getting little green buds and water would be running north in the wash.



“Kojigo adiit’ash,” Deezbaa’ said. She wanted to go a new direction down the wash.

“Dooda,” I tried to discourage her. She didn’t listen to me and started running.

“Shiř dídeel!” She wanted me to catch her.

I chased her through the thick bushes and before I could catch her, she jumped off a high cliff and rolled a long way down. She landed on her back. She cried my name, and I ran more steps along the cliff looking for a low place to jump. Finally I reached her and the dogs were already licking her. She was in pain and said her back hurt, but she got up with my help. We sat down on a big rock and caught our breaths. My heart jumped up and down so fast. Her fall scared me.

I asked her if she was okay.

She said she was not hurt bad but her head was spinning. I went to the place where she fell and spit hard. I sat beside her and saw that dirt filled her mouth and teeth and she smiled a brown smile at me. The dogs were looking at us funny and we laughed so hard.

She said she did not want to go back to school. I knew how much she didn’t want to go back. I reminded her that her parents wouldn’t let her stay home.

She was quiet for a long time. She started to tell me that she would say that she hurt her back bad. I said I did not want to lie, and she said she would tell them that I didn’t see her fall. I had bad feelings, but I know she did not want to

go back to school. I thought about how I would be lonely without her, but I know once she was “healed” she would go back to school. My heart reminded me that I did not want to stay home, that I wanted to finish my school.

I agreed with Deezbaa’s idea. When we got closer to home, we made like I was helping her walk and she was making loud moans and was limping hard. I tried not to laugh. She stayed home. I went back to school.

My father said he would tell my mother that I grew tall and big. He would give her the picture for me and tell her that I wanted to see her and my brother. I wanted to hold her and breathe her smell. I wanted to sing to my brother my letters and numbers and Christmas songs. Then I thought I would do those things next time I go home. That thinking was what kept me hopeful.

School was fun for me. I did not like it when other children got in trouble because we had to watch them getting spanked or hit. We would all get in trouble and get punished. We would all clean the school and kitchen even if it was already clean. Miss Wilson said we must forget Christmas and not think about our families. She reminded us that we are there to learn the better ways. The next time we would see our families was after planting. That was a long time away.

Miss Margaret was happy to see us again. She hugged all of us after school in the dorm. She sat beside us and asked us many questions. She asked what we got for Christmas, and some of us told her we got candy. Some got hair pins or paper and pencil. Some got nothing. As long as we were with our families, it did not matter. She did not quite understand. Her hair had curls, and she looked different, but her smile was still pretty.

We learned how to spell more and count more. We learned how to read things like “cat” and “dog.” We learned how to read the words in some of the books. That made me feel good. I learned that ten cents was a lot of money, and I hid my two dimes under my bed post. I was happy to think that I will read John’s Bible someday too. I knew John would be proud of me if he were there. I wondered how he was doing.

Deezbaa’ never came back to school. I thought about it. I knew she would never come back. I would tell her all about my spelling and reading the next time I went home. I was going to take her to the store and show her how to count money for a soda or candy.

When it got warm again we started playing outside more. One time I saw my father looking at us playing. He was standing on the hill with some men. They looked like they were resting from work in the middle of the day. He waved and I waved back. I was happy all day. I looked up there every day after that, and sometimes he was there with the men or by himself. Sometimes he wasn’t there. I started to think about how my mother and brother were doing. I guessed they were home by then.

After I heard the first thunder, I knew it was not much longer before we got to go home. I tried my best every day to get good marks on my spelling and numbers. Miss Wilson did not bother me much because I finished my papers when I was supposed to. Some other children wanted to go home so bad that they stopped doing their work. And some of them would not eat. I did not see why because the food was good most of the time. Some of the children cried all day,

some all night. Miss Wilson used her ruler more on them. She was very mean to those children. I thought maybe if she had a ceremony she would be nicer. If she drank some herbs and took corn pollen maybe she would be healed from her anger.

Miss Margaret showed us the calendar every day and we saw how many more days we had left for us to go home. She let us mark the days. We took turns marking the calendar. But not too many days after the first thunder, Miss Wilson surprised us coming into our rooms. We were getting ready to go to sleep, and she came in with Ann. Miss Wilson spoke to us loud and fast. I was proud because I was starting to understand English. I know she said something about going home. Maybe she decided to let us go home early because she knew we wanted to see our families. Ann listened quietly, then Miss Wilson left.

Ann began to explain to us what was said when Miss Margaret came running in too. Miss Margaret looked very worried. Ann said we all had to get up very early the next morning and go home right away because the health people said so. There was a sickness floating around and everybody was getting sick. And some people died from it already. She also said our parents did not know about this, and that we had to find our way home, that we could not wait for them to come get us.

We all looked at each other and did not know what to say. Some children asked if they could go home that night because they lived in the Chinle area. Miss Margaret said no because it was dark, and she was afraid for us. One girl said if we could go home in the morning, then why couldn't we go home that

night. Miss Margaret and Ann agreed that she was right. So they told us we can leave at that moment if we wanted to. The rest could leave in the morning. I wished that I could go home with some of the children who live in Many Farms and surprise my mother and father, but I had to wait until morning. Then I remembered my father. I could go see him and spend the night at his work again. If he was working the next day I would go home by myself. People traveled that path all day long anyway. I would be okay. I jumped off the bed and started changing my clothes. Ann helped me put on my jacket and I hugged her and Miss Margaret. “You tell your father hello for us. And make sure you walk home with him tomorrow,” said Miss Margaret.

I left with about six girls. Some of the boys joined us, too. Some went their own way into the dark. They said they lived not too far. Two of the girls, Suzie and Beth, lived in Many Farms and wanted to go with me. I told them we had to spend the night at my father’s work and that we would go home in the morning. We heard dogs barking from different directions. Maybe they heard the children going home, I thought. It was cold but not freezing. Our coats kept us warm. The moon was out. When we got there, most of the men were going to sleep. One man put some more wood in the fire and I walked up to him. “Shizhé’é shà’?” I asked. He told me he left before the sun went down. He asked what we were doing there late at night. I told him the school let us out. He told us to stay and spend the night on my father’s bedding, but I told him that we could probably catch up with my father.

I looked at the moon and asked it to help us get home. Suzie and Beth were scared and wanted us to stay at my father's work, but I told them we might catch up with my father, and we might get home before sunrise. I told them to look at the moon, how it was shining bright for us. They didn't say anything else, so we left. The trail was empty and lonely at night. We held our bags tightly and followed each other. We sang some songs. I thought we should have asked Ann and Miss Margaret for some snacks. I was hungry a little. Suzie said she was, too. Beth just wanted to get home fast. We heard dogs far away. I said maybe we might see a coyote. Beth started to cry. I knew I should not have said that. So we sang some more in English. Then we sang some Késhjée' songs even though the first thunder came. Father would remind me not to sing these songs now, but it made us feel better as we followed the trail in the moonlight.

About half way home we saw a light flickering near the wash. It looked like fire, not a lantern. We stopped and looked for a long time. "Ha'ijsh át'é?" Beth asked. I did not know.

