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**MEMOIR OF A BEAR CLAN WOMAN'S
EDUCATIONAL JOURNEY**

By

Angelina Frances Medina

B.A., Elementary Education, Fort Lewis College, 1974
B.A., Humanities, Fort Lewis College, 1974
M.A., Educational Administration, University of New Mexico, 1978

DISSERTATION

Submitted in Partial Fulfillment of the
Requirements for the Degree of

**Doctor of Philosophy
Language, Literacy, and Sociocultural Studies**

The University of New Mexico
Albuquerque, New Mexico

July, 2016

Dedication

Joe Medina of Zia Pueblo, the best dad ever, this is for you!

Calsue Murray, my wonderful and most patient husband, your loving heart carried
me; this is for you, as well!

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ABSTRACT

This study utilizes memoir, a qualitative research method, to tell how a Pueblo teacher's Pueblo cultural interactions with her students led to positive classroom behavior and achievement. It describes three diverse and separate sets my life experiences, in thematic chapters, that took place. I describe my Pueblo traditional upbringing and interactions with family and community wherein I spoke only the Keres language. Then, I describe my first encounter with White people who introduced me to the foreign language of English and another world, through comic books and a Hershey bar. I was introduced into American schooling where negative experiences with racist teachers shredded my esteem and self confidence enough to dread and hate American schooling at all levels. Later, when I accidentally became a teacher, I freely implemented the Pueblo way of interacting with and teaching my students whose life experiences were very much similar to mine! In implementing Pueblo epistemology and pedagogy, my students' negative behavior became positive. They accepted responsibility to improve their studies and surprised themselves by catching up and advancing into higher levels of achievement.

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Chapter 1: Memoir

Memoir is a self-narrative, a qualitative research method, that depends on memory, poems, personal essays, or journals to tell one's story (Chang, 2007). The first thing that a writer needs to consider is the point and purpose for writing the memoir initially (Kirby & Latta, 2007). In this memoir the writer needs to focus on the question "so what happened to me" that relates to the research question for this particular memoir, "How does a Pueblo teacher's cultural background guide her interaction with her students?" This helps the writer "to know the message and the point that they want to develop and emphasize in their memoir pieces (Kirby & Latta, 2007)" that readers may relate to their own lives. Will someone identify with the memoirist's story enough to find meaning in their own lives? How will that story change their lives? What is it that the writer wants their reader to understand as a result of reading the memoir?

Memoir, written by individuals who want to tell a story, using data from their memory cannot conform to a dissertation format because there is no one way of collecting data. According to Victor Villanueva, "Memory simply cannot be adequately portrayed in the conventional discourse of the academy. I am grateful for the acknowledgment of perceptions that academic discourse provides, for the resources the conventions of citation make available, for the ideocentric discourse that displays inductive or deductive lines of reasoning, a way to trace a writer's logical connections. Academic discourse is cognitively powerful! But the cognitive alone is insufficient. It can be strong for logos. It can be strong for ethos. But it is very weak in pathos. Academic discourse tries, after all, to reach the Aristotelian ideal of being completely logocentric, though it cannot be freed of the ethical appeal to authority (Villanueva, 1993)."

Research studies have been conducted by collecting self-narratives from authors which were then published in a book called *Stories of Experience and Narrative Inquiry* (Clandinin & Connelly, 2000). This book contains personal narratives of various memoir genres written by teachers of their personal stories. These stories were used in the authors' studies of educational experience. There is no one way of using memoir as methodology.

Poetic inquiry (Pelias, 2013) that reveals the memoirist's emotions felt from experiences of curiosity, critical thinking, sadness, depression, or elation and enlightenment is another strong way of expressing or telling a story. Poetry is a way of expressing one's thoughts on the injustices that occur in one's life time and then using poetry as a way of slinging those stings away as it has been done in this memoir to make a point.

Memoirs are selective in that "memoirists focus on the most significant experiences in their lives" on those "hours and minutes that are keen in their lives –the time when the memoirist felt or was most alive, when experiences penetrate to the quick (Phifer, 2000). These can then be organized into thematic chapters to tell a story.

Chapter 2: Introduction

Racism toward Native American people continues as lawmakers in Washington, D.C. verbalize we should have equality in all ways. Unfortunately, their idea of equality is inequality for Native people and Native Students. So much of what is supposed to be fair to Native people is in conflict with the American mainstream way of life. This is also true in the Public schools as it is in Bureau of Indian Education funded schools. Institutional racism results from ignorance that is threaded in covert and overt racism. For decades, institutional racism has been the conscious and unconscious exclusion from the curriculum of American Indian history, culture, languages, literacy, and instructional practices relevant to students' lives. As I have described my student behavior in American schools, students who have been mistreated similarly exhibit reactive-passive behavior, like I did. Some teachers may claim that Pueblo students have delayed adolescence because such students, in their estimation, become resistant but this resistance may actually be an expression of hopelessness and powerlessness.

I grew up in Public schools where racist attempts were made to mold me and shape me into a brown-skinned Indian Caucasian thinking American. I have resisted being controlled, by teachers and public school administrators, as have my ancestors and those who came after me. The resistance by Native students is what many Caucasian teachers complain about. We, Native students, are resilient. Our resistance and resiliency and reasons behind them are still misunderstood. My writing about our Pueblo way of teaching and learning will hopefully bring insightful enlightenments as to how a Pueblo teacher's Pueblo cultural interaction with her students lead to positive classroom behavior and achievement that pre-service teachers and seasoned teachers can attempt to model with their diverse students.

I want Indian students to be acknowledged for the life experiences they bring to school that make enormous contributions not only to their classmates but to their teachers as well. I want teachers to understand that learning a foreign language when one's own language is not written or based on Latin is an insurmountable challenge. English, with all its rules and complexities, has little in common with an oral language based on a Pueblo way of life. English is complicated. It's difficult. It's confusing. It's frustrating and stressful.

Honest communication is important to the practice of respect, acknowledgements, and sincere compliments in a safe and harmonious classroom environment. Most Pueblo and other Native American children enter schools with lived experiences that have formed much of their identity and knowledge about family and community duties and responsibilities. This includes their knowledge about school rules and classroom self discipline. It is common for Pueblo children to have voice in making family decisions at an early age. It is also very common for them to have choices in duties in the home and community. I would strongly encourage this type of interaction with students.

I decided to write a memoir because in it I can refer to all of my own schooling experiences and also all of my experiences as a teacher with students, fellow teachers and administrators with the intention of enlightening educators that the life experiences of Pueblo, Navajo, and Apache students are very much unlike those living in American mainstream.

Chapter 3: Sick of School

Sick of being told, "I'm just a fool"

On January 4, 2009, after many weeks of resisting the mandates of No Child Left Behind at school, I found myself physically, mentally, and emotionally deteriorating. I knew I was mentally and physically exhausted but I did my best to fight against the school mandates because my students were doing very well without them. At the last physical examination, my doctor reported that my cholesterol was very high; my white blood count was extremely low. My immune system was weak. I was coughing and having difficulty breathing. I didn't know if it was asthma or a really bad cold. The doctor advised me to leave the school. She said I was sick. I kept teaching. I became more ill. I did not want to leave my students in the middle of the school year. As weak as I was, I forced myself to be in the classroom, taught, and left school at quitting time. I arrived at home totally exhausted. It soon became difficult to get up out of the chair to stand up. It was necessary to stand still until the nausea and dizziness passed. After medical consultations, a second and a third doctor told me to leave school as a heart attack was imminent. There finally came a day when a decision had to be made. I woke up one April morning and wrote:

This morning I awakened to dark, snow laden clouds in the sky.

My heart sank at the numerous disturbing thoughts running rampantly through my mind.

Nausea communicates through the pit of my stomach as I fight back the need to vomit.

Numbness is brought on from the trembling and muscle spasms in my hands.

My lungs protest the sickening heaviness of asthma and seemingly endless coughing.

My heart struggles to hold itself together as my mind attempts to calm my whole being.

*Thoughts of the academic needs of my present students bring about a need to help them
But the reality of having had to deal with negativity in the school system makes it difficult to
think of returning to conditions and situations over which I have no control.*

*I love my students. I know how to help them but administration won't have it.
I have been put in a box to become a robot and instructed to do the same for the students.*

*When I think about interacting with a co-worker who was put in charge of the BIE Reads
I become angry. I can't think straight. I can't speak coherently. I feel sick. I die inside.
My professional integrity begins to suffer as I find myself doing things I otherwise frown
upon.*

*Like a caged animal in a zoo I feel trapped. I'm fighting within and against a spinning
invisible wall.*

I'm going crazy. I cry and no one hears me to help me keep my sanity or to comfort me.

*This person, whom I liked and respected as a friend, has shown a side I failed to see.
Out of what I thought was a good and kind person emerged a controlling, bullying entity.
She would give a firm directive only to change her mind in mid stream because she made a
mistake.*

*It was okay for her to make mistakes, but not those who were under her supervision.
She would deny, oftentimes, that she had instructed a change, but my written notes brought
the truth.*

*She brought charges against me of wrong-doing, only to have facts prove her wrong.
She retaliated against me, I followed suit, this time.*

*She reported me to the administrators with hopes I would be reprimanded, humiliated, or
fired.*

*The school administrator and head teacher listened to my side, my truth; there was no
reprimand*

*She wrote a short “contract” on a torn piece of paper in her attempts to control me and
asked the administrator to have me sign it...I refused.*

She attempted to usurp administrative authority

When she told two others they could not take leave.

She scolded a teacher and an educational assistant for not working with fidelity.

She, being white, told them they didn't know how to do their job; both were Navajo.

They felt belittled, unjustifiably criticized and humiliated

But they said nothing.

There have been other negative encounters with the reading coach.

But more than anyone, her attempted methods to control me has driven me to the edge.

My whole being, even at this moment, reacts as if to fight or take flight.

I thoroughly dread returning to the same conditions and situations.

Both the principal and head teacher know my feelings about this job.

I asked for a transfer or consider making modifications to suit us both

But upon being asked, both conveyed I would be returning to the same.

The administrators seem reluctant, unable or unwilling to make any modifications

It was disappointing to hear that, especially when the principal believes I'm an excellent teacher.

Various incidents at school, in November, triggered the asthma attack.

It was difficult to breathe, it was difficult to concentrate.

It was difficult to tolerate the negative behavior of one of my students

So much so that I could not complete a discipline referral form.

The head teacher had to write for me because my hands were shaking so much.

I was seen at the clinic by one of the doctors.

By then the coughing was extremely bad, there was pain beneath my ribs.

There was headache, blurriness, nausea, and total exhaustion.

After sharing the causes of my job stress and my nearly walking off the job

She suggested taking a month to rest and think about my decision.

Sleep wasn't coming easily, my mind couldn't rest, I still had pain.

For some nights I awakened to sharp pain running across my chest,

Another time it struck between the shoulder blades,

The next felt like a bullet shooting through my heart.

I ended up in the emergency room in Gallup.

After examination, the doctor couldn't find what might be wrong.

The morphine helped tremendously in the wee hours of the morning.

After picking up my sister-in-law and her family from the bus and train station

We returned to home where I fell into a welcoming, deep sleep.

For several days after, sleep took me away at least twelve hours at a time.

There were times when I felt like a zombie; I couldn't function normally.

A cup of tea intended for the microwave would be placed in the fridge.

Two different colors of socks lovingly warmed my feet.

For hours at a time I'd stare at the television seeing nothing.

Depression eating caused my gain of at least six more pounds.

Tears came and went when least expected

Just as sobbing came upon me somewhere in the middle of this writing.

Retreating to my room I listened to beautiful soothing music.

Meditation helped for a short while.

Sleep took me away, took me away, just took me away.

Tomorrow I must submit the report cards

Another stressful, frustrating, sad reality.

Science grades could not be given to seven students

Because the reading coach pulled them out of my class so that

They could receive a third or fourth dose of scripted BIE Reading

for which they receive no grade either.

There are so many things that need to be done for my students.

How do I separate myself from these young people I love?

With economy the way it is, how do I begin a new career?

Especially at my age and feeling stressed out by events here

I'm so sick inside; my heart is trying to hold together.

It's nearly midnight now and I feel nauseas.

The cough has not ended .

There is need for the nebulizer – again.

In a weakened state of mind, body and spirit I must try to rest.

The appointment with the doctor on Friday cannot wait.

I need to get to the clinic tomorrow.

The discussion with my psychiatrist for Thursday cannot wait either.

This is why this form of communication is being done now.

I had hoped for some relief but unfortunately it's not enough.

This time period is one of those times I would welcome

A transition to Home – I don't know how to regain my armor.

At the moment of physical weakness and mental distress I had become angry, frustrated, and outraged by the attempted forced remolding and shaping of my life by American schooling into a life that could never be.

It may be that the illness was an accumulation of decades of trying to overcome rejection, feeling worthless, powerless, being alone, unsupported, and invalidated. I know there were people who thought I was strong and confident but beneath it all I have lived with the unwanted, undesired intense depression. I was mentally ill with daily thoughts of suicide and sick inside from all out efforts to survive another day. In many ways, I feel that I carried the hurt, pain, and psychological damage done to my people over the centuries even before I learned of our history. My illness was an accumulation of feeling sick and disgusted with myself because I couldn't stand up to those who oppressed me. I lived a life of procrastination because I feared commitment, criticism, being scolded and being wrong. In some ways I was stuck in certain stages of my childhood I didn't know how to move out of yet. I had strong beliefs that spirit teachers, guides and helpers were always with me...but even so, I seemed to move into and outside of various levels of reality. The illness that removed me from the students I loved and placed me at the doors of the University of New Mexico shortly after being released from the Heart Hospital in Albuquerque.

In my state of illness, I determined that my physical healing required traversing the expansive University of New Mexico campus from the parking lot near Central to the Student Union Building (SUB). It had changed greatly from when I last remembered it as being a cafeteria while working on a master's degree in educational administration in the late 1970's. It was necessary to take a deep breath before I could walk down the stairs at the SUB. My weakened calves and quads reminded me to hold on to the rails for support. It was a challenging effort to descend the stairs. I moved slowly. My vision was blurred so that I could not judge the depth of the steps. My severe asthma plagued my breathing. I walked to the snack bar on the lower floor to pick up aloe vera juice to drink in class. I believed aloe

vera would help with healing from the inside. From the snack bar I walked toward the stairs again, dreading the climb. Again, deep breath, grab the rails to pull myself up each step. It was agonizing and I had to stop every fourth or fifth step to catch my breath. Students behind me would go around me and look back at me as if to let me know I needed to move faster. By the time I got to the top and last step, I had to stop again for my chest was wheezing and my leg muscles were screaming.

After recovering somewhat, I headed for a seminar class at Hokona dreading more stairs to climb. I deliberately avoided the elevator. I had to work my muscles in order to regain the strength I once had. The Hokona hallway was designed and built in such an odd configuration that it felt like I walked for miles. When I finally found the classroom I was exhausted but relieved to find a place at the crowded table. I could not make eye contact with anyone because I was already feeling I didn't belong there. People were talking and laughing. I wondered how people started conversation because schooling never taught me how to do that and I felt very awkward so it was best to withdraw into myself, listen, and think.

Chapter 4: Shra-me

I closed my eyes. Deep breath, fear, fight, write or flee, it had begun to bring it into being. I lived a life of procrastination, uncertainty, fear, wanting the sweet sleep from this physicality yet the aftermath of victories over issues and challenges somehow returned me to spirit and once again I found myself in another episode of life. The journey has been a lonely one. Beneath the strong exterior that others see in me there are tears of a child in need of being loved, to be told I'm loved, to feel loved and wanted, and to feel like I belong. Unfortunately, I have moved through my daily life believing that no one likes me, no matter the reason. On a daily basis from the time I was about six years old through my teenage years, Tsanaya, my mother, often shouted at me, "Nobody likes you. Nobody wants to be near you and nobody wants to be your friend!" I had no one to tell me otherwise, nor did I have anyone to defend me or to reassure me that I was okay. I believed what I was told and withdrew from social interactions with others for the rest of my life, except of course when I felt there was no choice but to respond to those who spoke to me.

Oh, there were also those times when I felt a sense of relief from the daily bombardment of accusations and putdowns. I turned to other beings to feel a sense of normality and acceptance. I turned to nature to gain some sense of peace. I learned to read the eyes and body movements of dogs, sheep, horses, and cats. I spent time with damsel flies, ants, moths, and butterflies. When I had to use earthworms to lure fish, I apologized to them and to the fish for the pain I was causing. There came sensations of connection with the Creator from low lying fog in the southeast corner of the mesa in McCarty where I lived as I felt with rainbows, raindrops, snowflakes, and hailstones. I could feel the power of flood waters as they pushed soil, rocks, and pebbles away from their path during monsoon. Wild

berries, onions, spinach, and tea became favorites to pick but I spoke to them as my grandmother had done just before they were cooked. I was a little intimidated by tall trees in forest settings because I sensed their desire to connect with me. I wasn't ready. So beings of nature were safe friends for me and I learned much from them.

Conflicting, Confusing, Misguiding Messages

I have been impacted by a tremendous, unrelenting clash of cultures between persons of European descent and my life as a Pueblo person from first encounters to this very day. I have consciously resisted being forced to change my Pueblo spiritual beliefs to that of Christianity. I have absolutely no doubt that Jesus Christ existed and his teachings were for mankind to be decent human beings, to be shra-me. Shra-me, the Pueblo teaching of practicing from the heart to be honest with oneself to always do the right thing to, for, and toward all life forms visible and invisible could not be scraped from my inner being. With me, there is nothing, no thing that is not permeated by the Creator's energy. These are some of the beliefs that have never been validated by any of the teachers I ever had. Perhaps this is one among other reasons why American education has been an uphill battle. I know now that I must move into my ideal world where Pueblo socio-cultural-spiritual teachings can begin to be incorporated into a Pueblo life science curricula. I must continue to trust my spirit teachers, guides, and helpers to guide me to ever be shra-me with all life forms seen and unseen.

The choice I made was made stronger during my undergraduate years when I learned how Spanish Catholic soldiers and priests forced Pueblo people to convert to Christianity under harmful threats that led to genocide and holocaust of my people. For the first time in my life I learned of the Pueblo revolt of 1680 that drove the Spaniards back to Mexico where

they also conducted murderous activities. I do believe that Jesus would have been very angry to have his name used outside of being shra-me.

Consequences of Colonial America Not Being Shra-me

This story is deeply personal yet the episodes of my life have lessons for many of us who work with young lives in schools everywhere. My personality and life experiences are undoubtedly the result of early colonial decisions and mandates about Indian boarding school education of which my mother was a product. Indian boarding schools actually served the purpose of kidnapping Indian children, holding them hostage away from their homes while destroying their language, culture, and attempting their assimilation into the American culture.

My mother recalled that boarding school personnel cut and washed Indian students' hair with kerosene to kill lice. She said she did not have lice, but that did not matter. It happened to all of the students. American style clothing, underwear, socks and shoes were given to them to wear to school. If they spoke Indian they were made to put chips of lye soap in their mouths as punishment. In the classroom, their hands were smacked with the teacher's pointing stick or a ruler if desired responses were not given. My mother told of being taught how to cook, sew, and clean in the American way so that they could subsequently be farmed out to white peoples' homes for domestic work. She worked as a maid in a mansion in Evanston, Illinois.

Top of the World

Toward the end of my eighth grade year, I realized I would soon be entering high school. The idea of being a high school student at the age of twelve scared me. I observed and listened to the big kids in back of the school bus as they talked about homework

assignments in math, English, and science. In the mornings they would ask each other if they had done their homework. Some would say, “No, it was too hard.” The smart ones would tease them and tell them how easy it was. It stressed me out to listen to their conversations about homework, grades, and high school graduation. They were smart; I was not. They had close friends to talk to about anything; I did not.

What was my fate going to be in high school? I was certain that I was going to be a failure. I would become a dropout, a failure, because I was dumb. Or maybe I would become a pathetic alcoholic because I was surrounded by alcoholics. No, no, no, no, no! I could not allow that to happen to me. I had to fight to get out of my life situation and the only way I could do that was to get through high school, get my high school diploma and find a job to support myself. I wanted desperately to get out of the ugliness of my daily life. I had to graduate from high school. It was my only chance.

As life would have it, whatever you think becomes a reality. But of course I didn't know that at that time. I hated math! I had loved it when I was in the third grade but when my stepfather found a job as a cook at Top of the World, we moved. Top of the World? Why was that place called Top of the World? It was just a truck stop with a small curio store and small café. There was nothing exciting about that place!

My mother enrolled me at a nearby Bureau of Indian Affairs school. I was led into a semi-dark classroom where there were other kids who looked like me. They were all Navajo kids. The teacher showed me to my desk. I was not introduced to the class, so it was a relief to not be acknowledged. I could just disappear into the rest of the brown faces that stared at me.

The class was in the middle of a math lesson. That excited me because at third grade I had done well in math at my last elementary school. The teacher, who wanted me to feel a part of the class, asked me to go to the blackboard where three other students stood waiting. I had no idea what they were studying but I felt confident I could handle it. She did something I had not experienced at my other school. She verbalized the math problem. We students were to work out the math problem in our heads, write it out on the chalkboard, and the teacher would check our answers. The other students responded quickly. I stood frozen because I had no idea how I was to solve the math problem. My brain didn't work! I was the only one at the board with nothing written. My stomach churned. My classmates now knew that I was dumb! What a sickening way to start the first day in a strange school among strangers! After that, my brain shut down. The teacher made no attempts to explain or show me how to work the kind of problems they were working on. She gave me a note to take home along with a mimeographed copy of my math homework.

After that day, I never could catch up in math. I no longer understood it. My feeble attempts to solve math problems met with unsurprised looks by later white teachers. Not anyone of them attempted to teach me or show me how to work the problems. They passed me anyway. I accepted that I was not only a stupid person, but I was of low intelligence. Every time I had to work a math problem my body would shut down. This life situation was definitely not at the top of the world and nothing seemed shra-me at all!

Broken

With great hopes that the educational process would be shra-me I found myself in yet another math class. There were only about seven of us in class. I didn't know if that particular class was the dumping grounds for the "not too bright" students. There were other

math classes at our high school but we were assigned to be in this particular class where there was a definite lack of teaching. There weren't any homework assignments and I was overjoyed about that. The two math teachers who had been assigned to us were obviously disappointed. They quit their jobs almost immediately. There were a number of times when we didn't have a teacher so we didn't do anything, and no one from the front office seemed to care. The school administrator's solution to this problem was to hire a warm body to be in the math classroom off and on with us students. About a week after the last teacher abandoned us, another person was hired to put up with us. As usual, my classmates and I reported to class, sat down at our desks, and waited. Through the door came a short, hunched over, gray haired, wrinkled man with a brown briefcase. We looked at one another and said nothing. We weren't sure what to expect anymore as we waited and watched. The teacher proceeded to the desk at the front of the room. He placed his worn out briefcase on top of the desk and then looked at us. He introduced himself in slurred speech but did not ask us our names. He told us he would be teaching us for the rest of the semester. Then he turned around to his desk, opened up his briefcase and out fell his wine bottle. It crashed on the floor. Broken glass scattered everywhere. We gasped and then started laughing. A couple of the guys toward the back crumpled up their spiral notebook paper into wads and threw them at our new teacher. He raised his arms to protect his face as another student ran out of the classroom. A few minutes later our principal came running and puffing into our now messed up classroom and fired the new teacher on the spot! Although that was a shra-me thing to do, the late action did not benefit us.

Wanna-be Scientist

Somewhere along the way I decided I wanted to become a scientist. To me, scientists were the ultimate bearers of intelligence. I so wanted to be intelligent. I wanted to make scientific discoveries from research I was conducting about something. I had no idea that there were many categories of science studies. I wanted to be famous like Madam Curie. So I signed up for biology class when I fell into a moment of self-confidence. That I could pronounce biology made me feel really good. It made me feel a little smart but my brain was in a fog about what biology truly was. At the time, it made no difference because after all – it was a science course.

I searched for the biology classroom and finally found it hidden mysteriously away from the rest of the regular classrooms. There were other students sitting at their desks as I searched for a place to sit. My biology classmates were unusually quiet. After the tardy bell rang, the biology teacher announced to the class, “Everyone will receive a grade of “C” for this semester so you can bring other class assignments to work on during the classroom time but I’m not going to teach.” We gasped. My mind was racing. The biology teacher’s announcement was not at all shra-me! How was I going to become a scientist if the science teacher wasn’t going to teach us anything about biology?

He informed us that the school administration refused to purchase up-to-date biology textbooks, laboratory supplies and equipment. So, he reasoned, if the school wasn’t going to supply us with the necessary teaching and learning supplies then he wasn’t going to teach. Oh, never mind that we students’ had no say in that decision. Adults, to Pueblo training, were the decision makers unless young people were asked their opinion. I had been molded by public schooling to accept that I had no voice in my education and that I was not to talk

unless I was answering my teachers' question. So far, the number of negative experiences in public schooling convinced me that I had to continuously fight to be shra-me, then as a student, and in the future when I became a teacher.

Examples of the Bureau of Indian Affairs not Being Shra-me

I returned to California after flunking out of college the first time in 1962. At that time, the United States Bureau of Indian Affairs proselytized vigorously their Relocation Program. Indians could be relocated from reservations to any metropolis in America with all expenses paid...well almost. Again, I didn't understand the meaning of the word relocation. I did recall a meeting I attended that described the program. We Indians were asked if we agreed with the idea of leaving our homelands to relocate to a city where we would be educated and find jobs. That way we could live in whatever city we chose and earn a living. There was no open discussion about the government's intention to remove us from our homelands to never return. This way they could claim that Indians were leaving for cities and never returning home so now the government could lay claim to the reservations, minerals, and water rights. Being naïve I felt shame that Indian people did not have beautiful mansions, cars, jewelry, clothes, and other things valued by most white Americans. I was confused. I wanted a nice home, but I wanted it on my homeland. I would need a car and clothes for work, but I didn't necessarily want the so-called American dream. I wasn't sure what it was. I didn't feel like I was entitled to those things. Besides, the idea of living in an environment of concrete, asphalt, and gasoline fumes emitted from automobiles on overly noisy city streets wasn't exactly living in a natural environment. It wasn't a natural environment to me. There didn't seem to be any real practical choice for me. I didn't want to step back into dysfunction at home so it was best to go away, go to a secretarial school and

find a job. Clearly I would never return to college because I didn't have any money. So I boarded a train to San Jose, California.

The Relocation Program made arrangements for the train fare and the hotel in San Jose. My mother gave me some money. I arrived in San Jose on a Saturday evening. There was no one to meet me or greet me or to show me around. After the city cab dropped me off at the hotel I went directly to my room and remained there. It was a dingy hotel. My room was small with faded light blue walls and a brown door. The bathroom was at the end of the hallway. There was only the bed, a side table with a chipped brown lamp and a faded beige lampshade. There was a single window I could actually open to peer out to the street below. There were a lot of neon lights flashing along the street. I did not see a café or grocery store near the hotel to buy food. I went without a meal that Saturday afternoon and evening. There was no television to watch so I took a small notebook from my suitcase and started writing.

My letter of complaint, which the Relocation Program never saw, was about the lack of directions, arrangements for meals, and no one to meet me at the train station. I'm not sure where I got the idea of writing such a letter because I had become accustomed to doing what I was told and rarely questioned anything. I decided I would deal with whatever came up the best I could, after all, I was an independent young lady.

The following morning, I decided to search for a café as I was now very hungry. When I stepped out to the street, I noticed how empty it felt. Unlike San Francisco with its bustling activity of people, voices, automobiles and buses, there was none of that outside of the hotel. As I walked down the block, I noticed a short lady walking toward me. As we came closer I noticed that she was an Indian girl who was all alone like I was. She smiled

and waved, probably noticing that I too was an Indian. She said, “Hi, are you Angelina? I heard there was an Acoma girl who was going to be on the same train I was, and I looked for you but couldn’t find you.” Feeling self-conscious I said, “Yes, I’m Angelina. No one told me there would be anyone else on this trip. I thought I came alone.” We laughed at our familiarity of government services, or rather the lack of services and communication. She asked if I was hungry, so I told her I hadn’t eaten since Saturday and that I was too afraid to leave the hotel room. She said she had brought food to eat on the way, so she had some left for tonight’s supper. We continued walking down the quiet street to find a place to eat. Whether or not we found a place I don’t remember. I didn’t like the feel of the neighborhood that the Bureau of Indian Affairs had placed us. All of my senses were on alert as my eyes also scanned for possible danger. Automatically my mind was at work for a possible escape route should it be necessary.

On the following Monday, we set out to find the BIA offices. There were no friendly greetings or apologies for the bleak hotel, nor were there any apologies for setting us out on a train without instructions to bring food. We were processed in the usual, cold uncaring ways of the BIA I had become accustomed to.

As things turned out, she and I were to enroll in the same secretarial school in San Jose at Heald’s Business College. Heald’s was on the second floor of a large building on one of the main streets in downtown San Jose. The classrooms were small and the instructors were impersonal and cold. Only the instructors were white. The school was filled with Indian girls who came primarily from the Dakotas, Alaska, Arizona and the State of Washington. We were all Indians. Nothing but Indians. It might as well have been the Bureau of Indian Affairs Business School. It felt like high school all over again.

There was a savings and loans association near the school that I passed every day. There was a huge window through which I would peek every time I passed by. There was a counter with a blue top. People could be seen at their desks looking very businesslike. I wanted to look like a business person. I wanted to work there. I walked into personnel, completed the application, and returned for an interview. Imagine my joy when I was hired on my first try. I reported to the BIA that I had found a job. Rather than to congratulate me, I was scolded for not reporting to them first. They had made appointments for me to interview at other places. The counselor at BIA told me to go to the interviews they set up and forget about the job I just found. Wow! The length the BIA would go to sabotage my efforts floored me. I refused and walked out.

After a couple of paychecks, I was able to move out of the boarding house and into my new apartment. It was my first one bedroom apartment with all utilities paid. The bonus was that it had a swimming pool!

Janet, in the meantime, came to my apartment with her assignments. We worked on them together. There was still hope for her to receive her certificate in the spring. At least, that's what she was working toward. One day she arrived with a frown on her face. She had been informed by the BIA that she would soon be sent back to New Mexico because she was failing in school. That really angered me. I was sick of Indian people being pushed around as if we didn't have any feelings or pride. More humiliation! I told her she could move in with me. She said she didn't have any money to help with rent or food or transportation. I assured her that I would take care of those things if she would just continue working toward her certificate. She moved in.

One day I answered a knock on my door. Two men in suits stood outside. They asked for Janet. She came forth. They told her they were there to take her to the bus station so she could go back to New Mexico. I stepped in front of her and told them to leave and never knock on my door again. I slammed the door shut!

The next day, during my lunch hour, I went to the BIA office to speak to the supervisor. I told him that I didn't want any of their personnel to come to my apartment for any reason. With that he fumbled for a file. Aren't you the one we couldn't get a job for, so now you're cleaning houses? I lit into him like I had never done before. I told him that I found my own job but that they, the BIA, took credit for it so they'd look good in their reports. I told him that the bureau had placed us in boarding houses where the owners bought the cheapest, molding foods and expected us to consume it. Besides that, the landlord's son disrespected the girls who lived in their house by coming behind them and throwing up their skirts as they started up the stairs. All the crap I put up with over the months came pouring out of my mouth until he backed off. Silence. I left.

I walked away from the bureau exhilarated! In this case, I had been pushed to the edge. Janet and I were soon joined by another person who had been intimidated in the same way as she was. This time, there was no one knocking on my door. It felt good to be able to take care of rent, our food, and their transportation to search for jobs. In the meantime, each of them took turns cooking for us. They cleaned our apartment and they even washed my clothes. None of what they did was expected by me. They were, in tribal ways, my sisters.

Each of them eventually found jobs and moved away. I was alone again. This journey, our journey together, brought me to a place of power. I found my voice in a power structure that had been so oppressive for way too long. Obviously, BIA personnel never

learned to be shra-me. I am thankful that my being able to follow the Pueblo teachings of being shra-me enabled me to help others when they needed it.

Be Proud, Third Graders, for Being Shra-me

“I love my principal,” I burst out in response to another teacher who told me that our elementary school principal was bipolar. This could not be! I did not want to believe her. The new principal invited me to her apartment behind the high school near the school’s football field. Her apartment was arranged so beautifully with lovely furniture and a glass display case full of sweet figures of kittens and flowers. We had a wonderful conversation, and I liked her immediately. I was looking forward to a great working relationship with her.

I loved the beautiful hills and mountains surrounding us in Dulce, New Mexico. Moving into a new job was a huge relief from the desperate situation we had experienced for several months. By the time we arrived in Dulce we were once again without living expenses but we were hopeful that what we had would last until our first payday. Our duplex apartment was a large two-bedroom with garage situated on a hill full of other staff apartments. It was owned by the school district and we, thank God, didn’t have to pay the usual security or first month’s rent because we would not have been able to do that. The rice, potatoes, and oranges would have to last for at-home meals. The food at the school cafeteria was good so meals were not necessarily an issue.

There had not been time to locate the elementary school after we got to Dulce. We didn’t have much in the way of furniture, except for our queen size Sleep Number bed. And Calsue’s brother gave us his futon bed which we placed in the living room; otherwise, our duplex was fairly empty. On the morning I had to report to work, I left early. I left early, for I was certain I would get lost. Driving to the elementary school was a treat all the time I was

there. I loved the mountain ranges that seemed to change colors every day. I also loved the cloud formations with the sun and invisible dust creating postcard scenes for me every day. The blue rooftop of the elementary school was the first thing I saw. The school was still very new and it looked very nice. It, in fact, was really good to be in a brand new building after being in old downtrodden buildings that were obviously in need of great repair. The new school was in an isolated area with no other buildings around it.

I parked my six year old turquoise blue Ford in a designated area and walked to the school. I almost skipped to the school I was feeling so relieved and optimistic. The lobby was spacious all around, and the secretary behind the counter was very businesslike. She informed me, without looking at me, that the principal was somewhere on the school grounds, gave me my student list, and pointed me down a hallway where I would find my classroom. My new classroom was next to the other third grade teacher's classroom. She heard me opening my door, knocked on my door, entered, and introduced herself. She was a petite Caucasian lady, rather shy I thought. She seemed stressed out already. She welcomed me and offered to share any educational material I might need for my students, and then left.

While I was at the front lobby waiting for the secretary to return, a teacher came up to me and smiled, "Are you the new teacher?" she asked. "Hi. Yes, I'm Angelina Medina," I replied and extended my hand. Instead she put her hand on my shoulder and said, "I'm so sorry." I must have looked puzzled and she exclaimed, "Your students. You'll see," and she walked away. I had never received a greeting like that before so I stood there thinking about it when another teacher approached me. "You must be the new teacher for third grade," she said as she pointed to my list of students. She looked through the list of students and looked sympathetically at me, "Oh, I am so, so sorry you are getting this bunch. Look out for

Mitchell. He busted the wall in the principal's office last year!" she warned. She rushed off before I could get her name and to ask questions. I looked at the list of eighteen students and wondered what the rest were going to be like, especially when two teachers just told me they were sorry I would be getting this particular group of students. Nevertheless, I studied the list of names and could not wait to meet the faces that fit them. I had high hopes!

On the day of registration, I left my door open in case parents wanted to come in to meet me and see their child's classroom. I was preparing the bulletin board when I heard a commotion somewhere. I peeked out. I couldn't quite see anyone so I walked toward the lobby. There I saw a mother standing against the counter looking exasperated. Her little boy's back was to me, but I could see he was angry with her about something. "Hi, you must be Mitchell," I greeted the little boy, looking him straight the face. I then looked at his mother for verification. She looked a little embarrassed as she replied, "Yes, how did you know?" We smiled at each other knowingly. Once again I made eye contact with her son and told him, "You are a very smart little boy and I know you're going to do great in third grade! So come prepared with your pencils and paper because you are going to be a hard little worker and you'll need several sharp pencils, alright? I can see that you're going to behave very well in my class." Mitchell seemed taken aback as he smiled at me and nodded his head in the affirmative.

The first day with my students was wonderful. I had made and decorated name plates from colored stock paper which they taped to the front of their desks. It made roll call easier for me until I was able to connect their names to their faces quickly. The students listened politely and cooperated in getting their books and other materials organized in their desks. They completed the initial writing assignments I gave them without a problem. So far, so

good. I maintained the positive energy in our classroom environment although it was not easy. There were several wiggle worms and a couple of nonstop talkers in my class. Clearly there were miracles to perform!

After two weeks, I had them sign in as they came into the classroom. It saved time. Within that time I was able to recognize those students who were struggling with reading and writing so that I could create individualized lesson plans and material for them. This school was immersed in all the mandates of that time so there was a lot of pressure on us. All but five of my eighteen students were either at or below second or third grade level according to the schools reading level progress chart provided to me. Every single one of them, however, was likely to need intensive support. The test scores were the results of the reading benchmark goals testing the students took in May just a couple of months before I was hired. Up to 2004 I had not been aware of the reading programs and testing required. Also up to then I had no strings tied to me in previous classes I taught so I was beginning to feel the weight of the mandates, and I didn't like it one bit!

At the teacher's meeting called by our principal, we listened carefully as she described the low test scores of our students. It didn't seem to be a surprise to the rest of the teachers and staff that my students scored the lowest. After the meeting was over several more teachers came to sympathize with me. I guess the low scores of my students didn't really register enough to realize how serious a situation we were in. After the meeting was over, my beloved principal asked me to come to her office.

Feeling confident, I smiled as I sat down across from her desk to hear what she had to say. My smile faded quickly as I faced a seemingly angry person. My beloved principal's congenial smile became a scowl. She began by telling me that my students' low reading

scores were reported to the school board; the scores, she said, was an indication that my students had regressed and it made her school look bad. The school board told her they questioned my experiences and ability as a teacher. She said, “You must not be a Level III Master Teacher after all so you will be mentored by another more experienced teacher!” She told me that I would be in the spotlight, monitored and under strict supervision! “What? Why?” I asked. “Because your students’ scores are very bad and you didn’t do a good job of teaching them!” she replied angrily. “Wait a minute. We haven’t even tested them for this fall, yet. Those scores reported to the school board were from last semester’s end of the year testing,” I protested. The look in her eyes and face showed me she did not want me to say anything and that maybe I should be cowering instead. She continued, “As far as I’m concerned, you’re just a teacher in training regardless of what your teaching license shows. You will report to me every week on everything you are doing. Now return to your classroom.” I got up to leave. I was in shock. Me? “My students’ low scores from last school year were my fault?” I thought. “I wasn’t even here!” I was confused but mostly angry because she wouldn’t listen to reason, or maybe she didn’t listen because she didn’t believe that Indians were competent teachers. But then, I was the only licensed Indian teacher at the elementary school.

Although my students were settling into good behavior in the classroom they were very different on the school grounds. Once again I was called on the carpet for my students’ bad behavior. “Your students are out of control! They are undisciplined and you need to have more structure in your daily schedule and your classroom,” the principal scolded me. “You need to talk with other teachers whose structured daily schedules are models you can follow and if you do that your students will become well behaved!” she barked at me. Since

I stayed in my classroom working on lessons I really thought my students' behavior was tolerable. They didn't talk back to me. They were still antsy and all but two were usually always on task.

The pressure was on me from all sides where I was concerned. The principal and school board were supposedly monitoring me and the New Mexico Public Education Department were intent that we were following strict guidelines. The reading coach was continually reminding us to "teach with fidelity!" My instructional schedule became overloaded. Implementation of the mandated reading programs left virtually no time in the daily or weekly schedules for me to meet the individual learning needs of my students. My students were destined for failure, I felt, under the reading program being used at our school. I had never felt this kind of pressure before and I certainly had never been mistreated by school administrators at any of the previous schools where I taught. There would be no time for individualized instruction at this school. All I knew was that I was going to steal bits and pieces of time to do everything I could to help my students progress.

Our school used a reading program which had quite an array of workbooks dealing with the various components of reading. This would be my first time to be supplied with brand new reading textbooks, workbooks, intervention material, and a teacher's manual. The teacher's manual required extra time to study the format and organization of teaching reading. I was beginning to feel like a mindless robot. The textbooks were for students functioning at the third grade level. Trainers from the NMPED had highly recommended that we provide reading instruction at the reading levels of our students, but the Open Court Program made it impossible for us to do that. The reality was that only three of my students could function at third grade while thirteen were struggling at first and upper first grade level.

That I received only third grade level textbooks for use by all of my students was upsetting to me. I anticipated many of my students would be extremely frustrated. I needed early elementary reading material to use with my struggling students but I was not allowed access to such because of the reading mandates.

What I did then was to assign six of my students (1st grade level) to read along with the reading cassettes. I had them use their finger to follow words in the textbook as they listened to the story. Knowing that it took concentration to keep on task with finger pointing words, there was a possibility they would not really hear the story enough to understand it. So I had them listen to the reading cassette a second time as they practiced their finger pointing technique. This seemed to be helpful to them. Then I would have them read a paragraph from the book to me, if there was time. After they read to me, I wrote down the words they struggled with, gave them the words as their personal reading, spelling and dictionary words. Whenever possible, they also had to write a sentence using the words or use them in short stories. It was tough and those poor kids never worked so hard in their early academic lives.

The higher level readers checked out particular chapter books from the school library to read at home. Before the books were returned to the library I had my readers give me an oral book report. I provided my students with supplementary reading comprehension exercises, at their level, to work on in class or at home. With the pressure of being scrutinized I felt at the time that I had no choice but to implement their reading program. It killed me to do it but I had no alternatives. My “pie in the sky” wish was to implement individualized reading but I, like the rest of the teachers, had no choice but to go along with the extremely scripted reading program. Students throughout the school were assigned

reading, according to their grade levels even though they were struggling. They went to study groups with various reading coaches located in another section of our building. My students grumbled and groaned every time they had to leave our classroom to go to their study groups. They pleaded to stay in our room to read something else. The scripted techniques demanded by this program were very boring and frustrating for students. Time, with my particular assigned group from other classes was often wasted because I had to discipline four really uncooperative students during each reading session. Like my students, I dreaded this time as well. We were all miserable.

One of the nine students assigned to my reading group failed the final assessment because he wouldn't participate or do the work. He very often disrupted the class and I sent him often to the front office. With another student, it was virtually impossible to get him to participate or do his work. After speaking with his parents about potentially holding him back in third grade for another year they agreed to have him stay in my class during recess to do his work. It took many weeks of his recess time to get caught up. After several weeks he finally understood that if he didn't do the assignments he was going to miss recess, and he loved recess. I didn't let him off the hook so he remained in the classroom for the remainder of the fall semester. Toward the end of the semester, he promised to do all his assignments if I would let him go to recess the next semester. We shook hands on that one, and he kept his promise.

As for my other struggling students, I had no idea how they were doing. I had not received feedback on them from their reading coaches. There wasn't any time for me to hear them read. All I could do was to have my students check out books from Title I. They would read them during our sustained silent reading time.

Although the students brought a rug or pillow to use on the floor during our sustained silent reading time, they were still easily distracted. They tended to move themselves, their book and pillow from one place to another and lost time reading. I wondered what I could do to make them more comfortable to enjoy their reading. An idea came.

There were a dozen computer cubicles built along the wall in the back of our classroom. There was the top section where one day new computers would sit. The bottom section was individually sectioned off as well. The first student who began to relocate from one side of the room to the other ended up in the bottom cubicle. Ha! Other students follow his example. This was good! I allowed them to choose their own space and even allowed a partner here and there. I wanted to do something more for them.

With the sewing skills of my educational assistant, we created short curtains for each cubicle. We draped maroon material along the top half of the bottom of each cubicle. We glued Velcro to the wood along divided sections and to the cloth so that each cubicle had its own curtain. The students soon lined their cubicles with small cushions or pillows they brought from home. Behind the closed curtain, they used a flashlight that I gave to each student. Reading behind those draped cubicles was a privilege. The room became quiet as the students either read to their partner or if they chose to read in a low tone or silently to themselves. I sat in the corner of our classroom, in a chair reading one of their chosen books. I read their selections so I would know the stories they were to share in their oral book report.

Our practice of sustained silent reading worked out very well. Since silent reading enables students the ability to read more and at their pace, their reading comprehension improved enough that my students were able to read more books which gave them more

practice. If they completed their books earlier than expected they exchanged books. It was working out well. Once again, the ingenuity of my students solved a problem!

I feel it necessary to honor my students for their efforts to raise their reading scores since those were what the school district required. My students worked during the fall semester, and they did raise their reading scores by the end of the first semester. I had posted their reading record chart on our bulletin board. I showed each student where they scored in September and their score in January when I received a copy. The reading coaches had sent the reports to the superintendent. The acting superintendent received them, and she was thrilled with the success of my students. The principal delivered the acting superintendents email of congratulations to my students. The principal had nothing to say to me or to my students after she handed me the email. On February 3, 2005, it read:

I got my first look at your middle benchmark data...

Oh MY GOSH!!!

KEEP UP THE GREAT WORK!

YOU ARE AWESOME...

LEARNING TO READ!

IT'S HAPPENING!

We know this is a first step and it deserves –

CONGRATULATIONS!

I placed the acting superintendent's email in a Valentine and posted it on our bulletin board for all to see. I had my students come to the bulletin board to show them their accomplishments printed on their reading records chart and congratulated them. They

cheered. They were happy. The deadly feeling of failure was wiped away by our acting superintendent's note of congratulations to my deserving students.

Yes, my students' scores did go up. Their scores gave hope to other teachers and students. The mandated reading program is what the school district was depending on for student success in reading. It seems that they bought into the explanation that fluency in word recognition was necessary for comprehension as touted by the creators of the program. Students who disliked it were expected to test in phonemic awareness, phonics, and then reading fluency. It measured the speed at which students could read! To me, it didn't matter how fast they read, if they didn't comprehend the story to be able to tell me about it or to write a book report then they still needed a better way to learn.

When it came to science, I gave my students many options to choose for their science writing project. They unanimously chose the skeletal system. They were intrigued with how the skeleton could support their muscles, organs, brains and as blood veins and blood vessels that ran in so many directions. The first choice for writing I gave was for everyone to study about the whole skeleton and then write about it. They all groaned. When I asked why, several replied that they wanted to learn about different parts of the skeleton. A couple of students wanted to learn about the skull, another wanted to learn about the ribs and so on. So I asked them to think about the part of the skeleton each wanted to research. I presented a few general lessons about the skeleton for them to think about. Each student chose a part of the skeleton to research and write about. There were a couple of students who wanted to write about the same skeletal part and asked if they could partner up. That was fine with me.

Students selected their research material at the school library. Some students had their parents download and print information for them to study. We made a lot of use of the

school's computer room where we accessed the internet. They certainly seemed excited about their studies as they shared information about the muscular systems or digestive systems that were protected or supported by particular bones of the skeleton.

Daily lessons on the organizational parts of the writing process were provided since the fall semester and throughout the months. They became practices from the Daily Challenges. The Daily Challenge, during the third nine weeks asked questions about the skeleton. Otherwise, The Daily Challenge was often presented as sentence starters. The challenge was for them to respond to the questions by writing their short responses using The Writing Process format. This was the time for them to practice writing complete sentences, correct spelling and appropriate punctuation. These daily practices were at an average of fifteen minutes each morning. The daily challenge was to remind them continually to apply what they were learning in language arts at all times.

The principal handed me a packet and insisted that I use a daily analogy program with my students. I was required to include it in my daily morning schedule. Its purpose was to develop creative-thinking skills by building reading skills via vocabulary enrichment. I made an honest attempt to implement it but my students weren't ready for it and they showed their frustration. They had not learned the necessary required skills for the program and I wasn't going to set them up for failure. Without direct teaching, demonstration and practice of all the components of an oral language and English language practices seemed to be just "busy work." They had already too many setbacks. I eliminated the program and went on to work on the language arts skills they lacked.

Just when my students felt comfortable using a particular writing process, the principal insisted I change to another writing program. She said that other schools where

Native American students were enrolled were using it. She claimed their program was working. My students became frustrated with trying to learn the writing program insisted upon by the principal so I dropped that also. They were doing well with the writing process we had begun with so I decided to stay with it. As it was, my students had already completed narrative and persuasive writings using the writing process that was familiar to them. Now, for their science research project, they would write their expository paper for their science project.

As my little researchers were completing their writings, I showed them how I had been required in college to format a cover sheet for my course essays. They wanted to do the same. Then I showed them how I inserted my essays into a plastic cover with a hard binder. They did this also. In creating my students' "thinking spaces" under the computer cubicles in our classroom, I realize now that it modeled the environmental, behavioral, and personal environments that helped my students' writing brain to develop. My students writing brains had reorganized information internally and connected with other brain systems that helped them develop their metacognitive and cognitive writing abilities.

It was shortly after my students' academic progress that I decided to pay a visit to the then president of the school board. I finally gained the courage to approach him to express my feelings about being blamed by the school board and the principal for my students' extremely low DIBELS scores. I asked him why they blamed me, in the fall when I had just started working, for my students' low scores. I showed him my students DIBELS test scores dated in the early spring. I asked if it was true that the school board had ordered my principal to monitor me and that I be mentored by a more experienced teacher. I also asked him why they disregarded my Level III Master Teacher's license and say that I was a teacher in

training. He seemed rather surprised to hear my report and my questions. He told me very directly that none of those things had ever happened. Now I was the one in shock again. So my principal lied to me. Why?

Unprecedented Challenges

Since I was not rehired at the elementary school in Dulce, I went deeper into depression. There were so many terrible and ugly things that happened before escaping to Dulce that it was extremely difficult to pull myself together. The ugliness continued at the elementary school where I felt targeted by the elementary school principal with her false accusations about my teaching ability. I was still in a daze during the four months in the fall when I was unemployed trying to figure out what and why things went wrong. Thankfully, Dulce was a beautiful area.

While my husband was at work, I took to the river to pray and to meditate. I was desperate for healing. One time, while I was at the river, I laid down on the ground. I closed my eyes to listen to the gurgling of the water. I was so mentally and physically exhausted that I fell asleep in my loneliness. I don't know how long I was there, but the sound of a roaring mountain lion woke me up. As I quickly sat up, I looked around. There was no mountain lion. So what I did find, though, was that I had laid my head beside an ant hill. The red ants did not crawl on me, but that might have been because I had a good relationship with them. For as long as I can remember and into my aging life I visited with them, spoke to them, observed them, and fed them. I still avoid stepping on them, especially when their homes are built between sidewalks. I usually walk around them. For whatever reason, no amount of meditation or prayer brought me to balance even when seemingly good things happened.

In January 2006 I was offered a teaching position at Dulce's Excel Program. It was an alternative school for students who had dropped out of school. Such students could take classes at their convenience to complete high school courses so they could graduate. There were two rooms in the mobile unit. The male instructor whom I was joining was in one room, and I was assigned to the other. He was to be my supervisor. I didn't know how long he had been in the program, and at the time it didn't matter to me. I was, however, expecting to be advised, shown, or trained in the program's system.

He told me I would receive any new students who came while I was there. I have to say it was rather quiet for a long time so I busied myself with bulletin boards. I tore down poster ads for educational material, travel, and other useless advertisements that wouldn't do anyone any good. In place of those advertisements I created language arts bulletin boards. I included samples of writings. The other had to do with punctuation. These were areas that students at all levels had difficulty with and I anticipated it would be the same in this program.

The next thing I did was to search through the filing cabinets to find anything that might be useful for lessons. The files were in disarray, so I started organizing them. When my supervisor came in one day, he asked what I was doing. I told him I was trying to make sense of the learning materials in the filing cabinets. I wanted to learn what materials to use with students. Well, I guess I was messing up whatever system he had, so he told me to stop. I guess he realized it was time to "train" me.

This time, he told me that when students enrolled to begin their studies, he just gave them a prepackaged learning kit. Whoa, that news stunned me! Hmm, students had their own folders with their names on them and their learning kits were in the folders. They were to

complete each lesson on their own, and if they got stuck, they raised their hands and he would go to them and help them. He said he would finish up with the students he presently had. I still had none. He said that he would teach math with the new students coming in, and I would teach English, except for those he had been teaching before I came.

One day, I finally received a new student. At about the same time, my supervisor transferred two of his former students to me, so I had three students. The new student came for several weeks. She seemed to be serious about graduating as she worked diligently during the time she was with me until she graduated. The other two girls came when they felt like it, so I didn't see them very often. When they did show up they made excuses for why they didn't do their assignments. I accepted them at first but I realized this was a pattern, so I began to check on them to see if they needed my help. They did not want to discuss their assignments with me. They soon sought out my supervisor, after I offered assistance, and then they would leave. He came in to tell me they didn't want to work with me and asked me what did or said to them? I told him I offered to help, but they insisted on seeing him. Then he told me they had been coming for almost two years and were not advancing. He said their time in the program would soon be up, and he didn't think they were going to graduate.

I received a message, one day, to stop by the middle school to see one of the eighth grade teachers. As soon as I was free, I walked across the street to the middle school to meet her. She said she had been talking with my husband about one of her students. She had asked if he would accept her into his class where he was working with at risk students. He could not accept her but suggested she talk with me. She explained she had an eighth grade student who was difficult to get along with and refused to do her assignments. She was

behind in her studies and would not be recommended for high school unless she completed an essay. She then asked if I would accept her and mentor her. I asked my supervisor about it and he said that was fine.

Jackie came the following day during her class period. She walked in quietly and plopped herself down at one of the tables. She made no eye contact. She remained staring at the floor and said nothing. I quietly walked over to where she was sitting, pulled up a chair and sat down beside her. “Bad day?” I asked. She nodded her head. “I’ve had those days myself. When things don’t go right, you just don’t want anybody bothering you or talking to you, huh?” I said. “Yeah,” she muttered. “So, I’m Ms. Medina. I’m of the Acoma tribe, Zia and Zuni Tribes.” I shared. “I went to school in Grants, and my English teacher there gave me a really hard time when I was in high school. I couldn’t speak or write English to her satisfaction so she would scold me, threaten me, and humiliate me in front of everybody. But I made it, and here I am, so what’s your story?” I asked her. Jackie’s story gushed out of her with obvious anger. She felt she was not receiving the help she needed. She became frustrated trying to explain the kind of help she needed but could never get her message across because the teacher kept interrupting her. That’s when she would get upset and either talk back or walk out of the classroom. After she finished talking, she relaxed.

I asked her what she needed help with. She explained that she needed to write an essay for her teacher so she could enter high school. She said she wrote a draft and showed it to her teacher but it was unsatisfactory. She was clearly frustrated. I told her I wanted her to write a half page on any subject. The purpose, I told her, was for me to get an idea of her areas of strength and weaknesses. Once I determined them we would talk and plan how the lessons would be done so she could then work on her essay. With that she placed a clean

sheet of paper before her and began to write. By the time she completed her writing it was time for her to return to the middle school. I walked her to the door and told her to not give up on herself and that she was going to do great! She smiled.

Jackie came well prepared the next day. She brought her spiral notebook, a pen, and note cards. Her demeanor was more positive as she greeted me with a smile this time. I asked how her day was, to which she replied, “Boring”. After a little bit of chit chat, I asked her if she was ready to hear what I thought of her writing. She chuckled, “Not really. Did I do bad?” I shared her chuckle, and told her “You did great! There are a few minor things you somehow missed along the way, so we can fix them. You will need to stay on task to complete your assignments otherwise you’re really working against yourself. The assignments are not about the teacher. They are about you. They are your practices to advance and achieve your goals for yourself. When you don’t complete your work, you are cheating yourself. Do you understand?” “Oh, I never thought of it that way,” she replied thoughtfully. “Okay, so do you want to start working toward your promotion to high school?” I asked. “Yeah, yes, I do. I don’t want to flunk and have everybody talking about me” she replied wistfully.

Oh, this Jackie girl was quick! It didn’t take long at all for her to grasp the organization of writing. With short topics she practiced organizing her writings until she fully understood how her research paper should look. At the same time, I gave her the editorial tools to edit her own work. She quickly learned how and when to use punctuation in her writings. Her face would light up every time she learned something new. I thoroughly enjoyed working with Jackie. Within a few weeks I felt she was ready to start her research paper.

She chose to write about Wounded Knee. I informed her that she could not write about Wounded Knee after reading from just one or two books. I asked her to write down questions she had about Wounded Knee in order to search for answers. This was new to her. Like most Native people, including myself, asking questions was challenging. I told her it was not easy to come up with questions because, as Natives, we are taught to listen very carefully and whatever questions we had in mind would be answered by what we heard or saw. I shared with her what my grandfather once told me, “You learn more by listening than by talking so much.” She wrote her questions first in her spiral notebook and found that more questions came. Before I left her alone, I suggested she put her questions in order and then transfer them to her 3 x 5 note cards.

The next time she came she had an armfull of books about Wounded Knee. She also had articles she downloaded from the school library computer. Clearly she was serious about learning much about her subject. I gave her time to look through her material before I joined her to see if she had any questions. I noticed that she copied her information word for word. This was the time I brought up plagiarism and paraphrasing. She groaned at the thought of paraphrasing thoughts and sentences of their authors on her own. I agreed that that thought process was foreign to Native people because we didn’t have to do that in our culture. It was one of the necessary evils we would have to learn and get used to as we entered high school and college. I also referred her to the citations in the articles she downloaded. They were examples of what she might be doing in the future when she went to college. Oh, that was an overload I could see, so I backed off. I told her we would worry about it when we got to it.

I had Jackie select exact quotations that needed to be paraphrased from her note cards. “Do I have to rewrite them by myself?” she asked challengingly. I could see from her

posture and the look in her eyes that she was anticipating frustration. My reply would determine whether or not she would act up and leave. I knew that look. I had done it myself. I learned that the frustration builds because we presume the teacher won't take time to show us how. Instead, most teachers give verbal instructions in their fast talking manner so that the lesson is missed. I sat down at the corner of her table, and told her, "Let's go through these together and see what we come up with," I suggested. She gave me the look of doubt. I asked her to pick the first card and read the quotation. She read the quotation out loud. Then I asked her what she thought it meant. She read and re-read, thought about it, and then expressed her interpretation. Then I had her write it down. She read her paraphrase, thought about it, and revised it. When she seemed satisfied I asked her to read it with editing in mind. She remembered to start the sentence with a capital, checked for correct punctuation and made those changes. When she completed the paraphrase I told her she just had the experience of working through a very challenging issue for Native students. Paraphrasing was not easy and it required a lot of critical thinking. It was like placing yourself in somebody's thought patterns to figure out what they were trying to say and then interpreting it and writing it. This lesson took a lot of time, but she now had a better idea of how to proceed. I told her she could rest from that experience and just read for now. She was relieved to hear that.

The other practice that came from this project was that of building vocabulary. When she found an unfamiliar word, she would ask for the pronunciation. I suggested she develop a dictionary section toward the back of her notebook. This way she could refer to that section if she decided to use the word. I also told her that it's not enough to learn how to pronounce a word; it's equally important to know what it means and how to use it in a

sentence. I had her locate the definition that fit what she was reading. She was surprised that a word could have multiple meanings. She asked if she had to write all of the definitions in the dictionary. I advised her she didn't have to write all of the definitions and to use only the one she needed at the time.

The change in Jackie's attitude was good to see. She did not waste time ever. She worked diligently toward completing her history teacher's essay assignment. I had told her early on that her essay could not be completed with the first writing. The first paper was a draft that would probably need editing and corrections as well as revisions. This is when I asked her to read it carefully and be her own teacher. As a teacher she would be searching for complete sentences and correct punctuation. With the first draft she also did a lot of cutting and pasting.

She made her corrections and started fresh with her second draft. With the second draft she was checking to make certain it was in the correct format. The writing process she was to follow, was posted on the bulletin board so she always had access to the examples that were there. Her essay was lengthy. She downloaded pictures to add to her paper. There was very little, if anything, to change after her second draft. I had her take a break from it so that her mind would be fresh when she had to read the final paper.

Finally, I had her format the cover sheet as if she were submitting it to a college professor. She was thrilled with the way she centered it and made it look professional. She was thrilled to see her name in print on an important paper she would soon be submitting to her history teacher.

At the end of the school term, Jackie's beautiful essay was ready to be submitted. When I last saw it, her fifteen page essay was beneath her well-centered coversheet in a plastic protective pink cover with a white spine binder.

Jackie's teacher came to see me. She was so thrilled with Jackie's paper that she posted it on her bulletin for other students to model its format. She told me that Jackie had excelled and "actually earned an A" in history and was able to advance to high school.

About the time my work with Jackie was completed, I was transferred to the middle school to work in the Reconnecting Youth Program (RYP). The RYP provided a last chance for students expelled from school to receive academic work instead of just remaining out of school for the school year. Mr. Murray had been teaching high school boys during the fall. The second semester several girls would enroll and I was selected to work with them.

At the end of the school year I was informed that my contract at the middle school would not be renewed. It was puzzling, though, to have received an excellent teacher evaluation from the principal and in the same breath be told I couldn't handle eight grade girls so I would not be rehired. Turmoil was brewing with other teachers of color. They had not been rehired either.

Over a few months I received story books that gave me further glimpses into the American world. One I especially liked was a hard covered, thick fairy tale book with gold binding. I asked my mother to read them to me. As I progressed with reading at school, I would spend hours reading at home reading stories about places outside of my world. I liked Robin Hood because he was practicing taking care of others and fighting those who were selfish, mean, and unfair. He was practicing how to be shra-me as we were taught in the

Pueblo way. Shra-me meant doing the right thing. It meant being honest, truthful, and helpful and always practicing doing the right thing toward others. These were teachings I practiced daily as I experienced school life and home life. It was good to know that Robin Hood was also practicing to be shra-me.

Alice in Wonderland scared me a bit. It was a bit eerie to see pictures of her as a wee girl who could fit into a rabbit hole. Oh, I know she fell into the rabbit hole, according to the written story, but it was unrealistic to me. Evidently I was already questioning the logic of a rabbit hole just dropping into some dark underground place. I knew what a rabbit hole was like because I had seen them. My mind and my imagination jumped between my reality and white American fiction. There were numbers of unpredictable characters in the story that were clearly not being honest or truthful. I was weighing Pueblo traditional values against fictional characters. For instance, the Cheshire cat could not be trusted in the same way as I trusted my own cat. The story was so confusing to understand that it frustrated me. I could not relate it, at that time, to anything in my life. It was a story I easily let go but my inability to comprehend European stories and way of thinking continued throughout my schooling.

Cinderella was easy to relate to. She was good, kind, unselfish, and willing always to do the right thing. She was being shra-me. The part that bothered me about this story was how the two step-sisters were compared to Cinderella in terms of being imperfect and being perfect as far as physical appearance was concerned. Early on I thought it was wrong to judge a person by their looks. I did agree that there was a lot of selfishness on the part of the stepmother for she was teaching her daughters how to be dishonest, self-centered, and overly selfish. I really liked the part where the birds and other animals helped Cinderella. Hearing stories told by my grandfather helped me relate to the helpfulness of Cinderella's animal

friends. Various animals helped Pueblo people to emerge from the first world. Humans and animals could communicate and they helped each other. I understood about being grateful to the beings in nature, about honoring them in song and dance. I also knew that there were times when animals had to be killed in order for families to eat so they did not die in vain. Cinderella's European world contrasted with my world and presented conflicting messages. These stories and those I read in school textbooks were unrelated to my growing up experiences and Pueblo way of being. Like my students, later in life as a teacher, I could not relate to the stories and teachers could not relate to my experiences and chose not to understand that there were differences between the worlds they thought they were preparing me to live in the world I actually knew.

Through books that were sent to me from strangers, I found myself continually intrigued, surprised and often startled by and about the American way of life, beliefs, attitudes, and practices. In order to maintain some balance in my life, I had to acknowledge and accept the vast differences and some similarities between white cultures contrasted with Pueblo culture although I did not feel safe in the classroom to point them out. There were still many things I didn't understand about teacher expectations in school. There were so many mixed messages that I had to tread lightly in American public schools at all levels. Little Lulu, the Hershey candy, the plastic grown up doll, the stories and pictures in the fairy tale book all opened up windows into a world completely different from my own.

Chapter 5: New Horizons and Realizations

For over six decades, it had seemed like, felt like my spirit had looked outward from this physicality to observe life that appeared to be happening to someone else. Some days of reality were clearer as if a healing touch of spirit rain cleared my space for a short period for much needed peace and a period of harmony. In this sacred space I was able to safely breathe in some reality to view, sense, and be nurtured by nature and other beings of kindness for a little while – until the mist of change settled in to thicken like Heyashi, a soothing fog. Then the waiting began until the heyashi lifted once again. Once Heyashi lifted, I found that my spirit teachers, guides and helpers had placed me yet in another space.

She spoke the English language I thought I had learned to speak, read, and write at McCarty Day School in my village of Deetsiyama (North Door). It was still a strange language then, even after I had learned to say the first English greeting word hello which came out of my mouth as hadoo. I sat uncomfortably at an oversized, bolted down desk in my first classroom at the day school. As my university professor spoke, I looked around the classroom to see if my classmates understood what she was saying. I found myself in an academic world which addressed theories of language and thought, orality, written and unwritten. Remembered fears of learning a foreign language returned to challenge me once again – this feeling was all too familiar and all too real. I sat listening intently to understand the multi-syllable words she uttered.

Upon hearing her advanced vocabulary, it felt like I had bounced into another dimension – a dimension of the unknown. I could feel myself drifting from present reality into another dimension as if I was out of body. She reminded me of my very first teacher speaking a foreign language. She, with her smiling eyes, spoke softly and gently seemed

more compassionate and understanding. Yes, she was soft spoken but her expectations were clear. They were high expectations.

She spoke of how we needed to dig deeper, with passion, from where we were as students. There was the research side of us that we had to develop. She advised that if we lacked the passion to dig deeper then we didn't belong in the doctoral program.

Do I have passion? If I don't have passion I don't belong in this doctoral program. These words lingered in my mind. Memories of previous negative educational experiences made their appearances. The negative experiences of Anglo instructors in American schools had shaped my insecurities. Fear of taking exams reared its ugly head. I hated becoming excruciatingly ill prior to taking any exam, like I became physically ill just before completing teacher certification exams.

I think when I feel a life threatening situation then survival kicks in – that to me was passion. It's a tremendous need to save myself, to survive, to leap over that hurdle. That need to survive is intense and immediate action is necessary. I did not believe myself to be an intellectual nor was I scholarly inclined. I did not have a need to analyze, deconstruct or delve deeply into theory, research or to prove what might be true or not true.

I floated back into my body and once again I heard the instructor speaking – it's another era. The reality of my being in a doctoral program hit home. Oh, my God, what am I doing here? Oh, my God, I have made it this far. Did I have the passion to come this far? Why couldn't I feel this passion she spoke of? I'm sick to my stomach.

As I drove north on I-40, it began to rain. It rained hard but there was a golden light spraying across Sandia Mountain just beneath the purple and gray thunderclouds. What was the message here? The message in the golden light, hard pouring rain and thunderclap across

the purple and gray thunderclouds could not be missed. It was happening again. I knew that I had to do whatever I was meant to do at UNM, in the late fall of my life. Immediately, I thought that I did not belong in the doctoral program but the message from the upper beings was clear. Gu-meh, I had to confront my fears just as I did when I entered school for the very first time. Gu-meh, go in strength like a woman, I told myself for these were always encouraging words from those who reminded us that women are strong, resilient and capable.

Unusually Unpredictable

Miss Minnie Oleman was my first English speaking teacher at the McCarty Day School. She had been the teacher to my grandmother and my mother. The first day of first grade was uncomfortable for me. The classroom looked and smelled strange. There was a large black board at the front of the classroom. The wall to the north had large windows. I could see our sacred Mount Taylor from where I sat so that made me feel more comfortable every day after. I was in the first grade classroom.

I don't recall how she began our introduction to English. Perhaps it was with the alphabet and numbers. I learned them very quickly because my mother helped me learn them and to write them. Now that I understood how the letters of the alphabet were arranged to make words, I could read my Little Lulu without any problems. I could recognize simple words that Miss Oleman put on the board before she pronounced them for us. When she pointed to the words with her pointer I immediately pronounced them. My knowing them pleased Miss Oleman immensely. She often called on me to say some words out of our Dick and Jane book. I froze. The problem was that new English words were still just sounds and scribbles to me. I did not know how to read them anymore than any of my classmates. But she called on me often to repeat what she said in English so that my classmates, she hoped,

would follow my lead. Out of respect for my elder I did just that. She did not know that by calling on me often she created a problem for me, after school, for the rest of the year. I didn't realize it then, but being indoctrinated into speaking English would have a future effect of me losing my Keres language.

Good Morninga

There was a Spanish speaking fourth grade teacher who greeted us every morning by saying, "Good Morning." By this time, there were more students from both Acoma and Laguna and we all spoke Keres. Upon being greeted by our teacher, we knew we were to repeat the greeting. The problem for our teacher was that when we repeated the word it came out, "goo mornin'." The teacher was listening for the ending consonant in the word "morning". We students definitely did not sound out the letter "g". The words in our language end with a slight whisper. We were not familiar with hard consonant sounds at the end of the word so we often pronounced words incorrectly. Our teacher refused to give up on us. She was bound and determined that her Keres speakers were going to learn how to respond correctly to morning greetings by sounding out the final consonant. One morning, she enunciated and repeated good morning with an emphasis on the ending sound. We responded with "Gud mornink". This upset her. She stood in front of us, pointed to her lips and told us to repeat after her. This time, she enunciated very loudly, slowly, and clearly, "Good morning-ga". We could see this was very important to her so we replied "good morning-ga" with emphasis on the "ga" sound. This made her very happy. After that, whenever we heard others leaving out the "g" sound, we corrected them. This became a standing joke for a long time.

In the summer of 2010 at the University of New Mexico, the Native American Language Teacher's Institute was held in a room where the Acoma professor lectured from a lower-level center stage. She looked upward toward the upper mezzanine where Native American students sat and took notes. Our purpose was to learn about Native language revitalization efforts in Pueblos or on reservations. It was also to share with one another some teaching methods that worked and discuss those that did not.

At first, I felt very intimidated being among them. Many, if not all, were teachers of their Native languages! I was in awe of them for having that ability. It was an ability I once had before entering public education. I felt sad and embarrassed because I could not make a contribution to my tribe or the class in my Keres language. I had not had anyone to interact with or to communicate with in my language since I left McCarty, over fifty years ago, when I was seventeen years old. It hit that the government's efforts to acculturate me into American society had worked. I no longer had thoughts in my language. My thoughts were all in English. I felt cheated and angry for the invisible strings that were connected to me via public schooling, by the government's intention to change me so I could be "educated" and "successful." But I still did not feel educated or successful. Instead, I lost the ability to speak my Keres language fluently, and I had not been able to be a part of the Pueblo society or culture for many decades. In my first course, I realized that American schooling made me one of the causes of Keres language loss!

Ugly truths emerged as I thought about my desire to change the image of how Indian people were seen by the American public. Movies of cowboy and Indians perpetuated the lies and negative stereotypes taught in American history. Grunts and pidgin English spoken by Indian characters gave the impression that we were of low intelligence. On the school

playgrounds, white classmates telling me to go back to “wherever you and your people came from” hurt my feelings and confused me. Where did my people come from? Did my white classmates have more right to be here on the playground than me? To be greeted by bullying classmates with a smirk, a hand held up, and grunting, “How” or “Ugh, me want smoke peace pipe” made me angry because they were demonstrating to me that I must be as stupid as the Indian characters in the movies! My self esteem had already been so damaged that I could only look down to the ground and keep walking, yet I was seething at the same time. Changing my image as an intelligent and wise Indian was one of the lifetime goals that I subconsciously pursued in order to change the otherwise ugly reputation we had as dumb, stupid drunks who couldn’t speak a decent English sentence.

Native American Language Teacher’s Institute at UNM

The positives, and there were many positives from my summer Native American Language Teacher’s Institute, were that the many awesome people surrounding me in class were pioneers, if you will, of revitalizing and maintaining Native languages in their communities and schools. Indigenous people were finally, after centuries of being forbidden to speak our languages, given the right to speak it and teach. For me, at my age, it was a relief to know of this important change. Revitalizing or maintaining our language is saving our culture and one of the ways for our people to heal from historical trauma.

I felt very encouraged that teaching in our Native languages was being discussed. Issues and challenges for teaching Native American languages in an abnormal setting like American schools were shared, but still there was hope. I came away from the course with new knowledge from articles by Native American scholars, definitions and scholarship on deeper understandings of what language is to cultures and our history.

Isleta – My First Lessons

Teachers' beliefs and attitudes, I believe, make a tremendous difference in how students' behave, gain a desire to learn, and take responsibility for their assignments.

Teachers' beliefs and attitudes also make a tremendous difference in how students' trust or distrust, respect or disrespect their teachers. I believed in and trusted my students' prior knowledge, living experiences, sense of duty, obligation, and responsibility. My attitude was that when students, even at the second grade level, understood why they were provided certain lessons in any subject, or they had to research and write about topics of their choice, they could do a high quality job.

My first teaching position was with the Tiwa speaking people of Isleta Pueblo who lived just fifteen miles south of Albuquerque, New Mexico. The Isleta Elementary school was funded by the Bureau of Indian Affairs.

On my first day, I reported early to work. My class was located in a beige and brown self contained aluminum building. There I met my teacher aide, as they were called then. She, an Isleta woman, with light brown hair, matching sparkling eyes, and an infectious friendly smile, welcomed me. As she gave me a tour of our classroom I asked her why the teacher left. She told me here had actually been two teachers before me who left because they could not handle the students. I wondered if the students' behavior was really as bad as their reputation. I was soon to find out.

The school bus had just arrived, and the children came directly to the classroom because they had heard they would have a new teacher. Through the door came happy, smiling lively children who first went to give and receive a hug from our teacher aide. Smiling, they came rushing to me. Without hesitation at all they asked my name and where

was I from. Next they asked if I really was their new teacher and if I was going to stay. I loved them already.

We struggled throughout our first day together. There had not been time to prepare lessons or activities, but my wonderful teacher aide was tremendously helpful as she guided me through the first day. She should have been the teacher because she was a natural teacher. I felt a bit intimidated by her. I was inexperienced and scared, but I tried to keep up appearances of a confident professional teacher. The students were courageous and brave.

I scanned the walls of the classroom to evaluate the kinds of activities in which they had been involved. Then I gathered up the reading and math textbooks to study at home. Over the first weekend I acquainted myself with their names, writings, and math papers. I wasn't quite sure where to begin. The previous teachers left no records, student file folders, or anything that would give me an idea of what lessons had been taught or how the students did. I perused the tables of contents from my college education textbooks and course notes from my classes hoping to find something that would help me assess my students' reading, writing, and math skills. I had left college assuming that if a student was a second grade student that student would have second grade skills. I assumed that the first grade teacher would have taught her first grade students everything they needed to know when they entered second grade. This was not the case. I was very naïve. As an elementary school student, I thought teachers knew everything and that's why they were teachers! So what was I doing in this second grade class when I certainly didn't know anything! The "new teacher syndrome" left me wishing our advanced college education classes included practice teaching. College did not prepare me to teach!

We bumbled along until we began to fall into a routine that seemed comfortable for all of us. My students were not naughty as I had been led to believe; rather they were anxious for learning activities that challenged their critical thinking. They certainly did not like sitting at their desks with mimeographed papers to work on. Out of desperation I had them work on left over language arts lesson sheets that previous teachers had used. I had no clear plan of education, goals or objectives for my students. If there were educational standards from the department of education or at the elementary school, I never saw them. I was at a loss as to what I would teach them or how I would teach them. I was completely stressed out, and my pride kept me from asking for help. I didn't want to be seen as an incompetent, inefficient teacher. After all, teachers were supposed to know everything and I felt I lacked scholarly knowledge.

On some mornings when my students asked, "Wat are we gonna do taday?" I would swallow hard, raise my eyebrows, smile and respond with, "It's a surprise so I need you to pay attention to make sure you don't miss it." It was a response given by adults in my family or community if anyone asked such a question. I learned much later that it was a response to teach patience. In the moments we had to wait we learned to be in our own silence. It was in that quiet place that we observed body language, heard quiet conversations of planning, listening, heard exchanges of ideas, and when a consensus was reached; we had some idea of what was in store. That quiet place taught us to observe, analyze, and anticipate so that inside our minds we could begin to form ideas of what our roles, behaviors, and actions might be. Silence is the place into which knowledge can speak. We were being trained to use our intuition.

I searched for resources that would provide language arts lessons. At home, buried in a box of textbooks and other educational material I found a book that provided suggestions for teaching particular lessons in language arts. It had examples of what to say to the students at the beginning of the lessons. The book was written by an educator so I thought, “She knows exactly what to say to students because she’s white and they know everything.” I had been brainwashed to believe that Caucasian people were superior to Indian people. They killed so many of us. They took our land. They took my grandparents, when they were children, to boarding schools, cut their hair, and made them learn English. In addition to that, they always seemed to have money, new vehicles, nice clothes, and white picket fences around their two-story homes. So, feeling insecure, I read the guiding sentences that were in the language arts book. I practiced speaking them. I was ready!

I stood confidently at the front of the chalkboard, faced my students and introduced our language arts lesson. I spoke the very words I memorized from the language arts book! The classroom became very quiet. My students sat erect, but their eyes were rolling left and right. They were trying to figure out who this person was who just spoke to them! Their intuition told them this person, the words, and the planned language arts lesson were unreal! They could see through me. We all recognized how phony my foreign attempts were. I felt sick inside. The confusion and the unreality was what I, too, had suffered as an elementary school student as I attempted to understand my teachers. This was the first and last time I would ever try to be someone I was not. It was the first and last time I would try to teach the way I had been taught throughout my school years.

Although I searched for more interesting experiential activities from which my students could learn, they were not to be found. The search for learning materials made me

realize there was something terribly wrong with school curricula, teaching pedagogy, and the prevailing view of what was to be done with Indian students.

Together, my teacher aide and I created materials to be used with the lesson plans I created for our students. She would get so excited about the planned activities that she started making manipulative learning materials at home for our reading, math, and social studies lessons. She was tremendously helpful to me and we worked as a team as we would have in a Pueblo community, because we, and our students, were Pueblo. We became a family of teachers and learners, regardless of age, in our classroom.

We decided to give the students and ourselves a break by watching a social studies documentary we thought would be interesting. Of course, we had not had the time to view it beforehand so we weren't sure what to expect. I had asked the students to pay attention to the documentary to see if there was anything similar or different from what we had covered in our studies. We sat down to watch. Oh, my, what a poor choice I made. It was incredibly boring and I hoped the students would just be Pueblo and watch anyway. Some of them did. Then there were those who made it obvious they were bored! They began to distract the other students by their muffled giggles and playful antics. Several of them had the confidence to inform me that the documentary we were watching was boring. That was the reason they gave for misbehaving. Ah, Pueblo honesty!

I took my "ornery" students aside and away from the rest of the students who remained watching the boring documentary. Poor things. In our little meeting, I asked them if they knew what the word "research" meant. They nodded their heads no as their eyes brightened with curiosity. I explained that research was a college word used by students to find information in a library about a subject they were really curious and interested in. At the

library, college students took notes about their subject and then wrote a report to present to their classmates. I built that image a bit more and it was the hook needed to challenge them. Once they understood the definition, they asked me enthusiastically if they could go to our school library and do some research. I asked them if they had an idea of what they wanted to study. “Yes!” they chimed in together.

Quietly they returned to their individual desks to pick up their tablets and pencils ,and we headed to the library. They each decided what they wanted to learn about. I informed our librarian about the students being bored with the film I picked and could she teach them how to conduct research. At first she was reluctant to accept them because of their previous reputation. I assured her that these students would behave, give her their full attention, and then do the work. My students smiled at her and nodded their heads in the affirmative. The librarian gave in, welcomed them, and proceeded to help. Their task was to research and write their findings. They were then to report their findings to the class the following week after they wrote over the week-end. When I returned to pick up my students I asked the librarian how things went. She was clearly happy to work with our students. She said that she was fearful they would misbehave but found them to be very serious about their task. She reported how cooperative they were while she taught them and was very impressed with the questions they asked. Once they found books to read, they sat quietly, read, and took notes. Then they asked if they could check out the books for the week-end. She was indeed impressed with them and told me they could come to the library any time. My students were very proud of themselves.

While out on the playground, they shared their experience of being “punished” to their classmates, which then inspired the others to ask if they too could be punished to do

research. I never did scold them for distracting their classmates, nor did I use the word punish when I gave them a choice. When they told me they wanted to be punished, I asked if what they had done had felt like punishment. They smiled at each other and agreed that it was fun and would like to conduct research again. After listening to my students, I realized that they had the desire to learn about things that interested them in their lives. They wanted something that was real and meaningful to their lives rather than to do the mundane. I understood that they needed something new and different and more challenging. They desired an opportunity to learn on their own, just as they would have done in the Pueblo. I then provided them with the world opportunity. It was to be given a chance, an opportunity to study what they really, truly wanted to learn about. Thus, the concept of being punished was changed to the concept of accepting an opportunity to learn.

Fortunately, the second grade students had been learning how to write essays so they knew that their report required a title, an introduction, a body, and a conclusion. Each chose topics different from their classmates. Those who chose to research in the library were excited to share their reports with those who watched the documentary. I did not make the rules for how the presentations were to be done, they did. The students reminded each other of how each had to “be quiet” while the students read. The students were practiced at listening to family members who spoke in their family meetings. They were also familiar with how tribal meetings were conducted. People and children sat and listened quietly to presentations made by tribal leaders. Now my students were following suit in the classroom. This cultural behavior was comfortable for all of us.

The presenters had organized themselves while they were on the playground. They had agreed on how to proceed when it came time to present to their classmates. One was

going to greet the class, as is the custom at tribal meetings, and explain what was going to be presented and who was going to present. I was unaware of this until it was time for me to call upon each one to come to the front of the classroom. When I asked if they were ready, they smiled and informed me that they knew what to do. I did not ask. I stepped aside as a teacher and became a tribal spectator of these young leaders.

Our classroom environment became a student tribal meeting room at times. I did not stay to the front of the classroom as a teacher normally did at the time. I sat toward the back and out of the way. I did not want the rest of the class to be looking at me to read my posture or to read my face. I trusted and yielded to the plans of my student presenters and I was not at all disappointed. The way in which each student conducted themselves impressed me. There was an air of curiosity, respect, integrity, and honor among all.

My quieter students fully concentrated on what was being presented. It gave them an idea of how to prepare. Their peers modeled for them ways in which essays could be written and presented. It gave them encouragement as well as confidence. The way in which we, as Pueblo people, learned from others was being acted out in our American classroom as we were familiar with the process.

After the presentations were over, time was provided for the students to interact with one another. The presenters became mentors for those students who were struggling. Mentors listened. Mentors read their mentees papers. Suggestions were made on how to improve. There were no criticisms of those who had difficulty with spelling, punctuation, or grammar. My teacher aide sat at her desk where children could come to her if they needed help. I circled the room looking over shoulders. When I found common errors, I went to the blackboard to teach, model, and demonstrate. We worked individually and in groups.

Working with my Isleta students was a huge learning process for all of us. We were teachers and students to one another. This classroom was my laboratory for observing their studying and learning styles.

The student interactions on the playground and in the classroom changed the social and academic atmosphere of our classroom. Several students approached me to make a suggestion. Their approach was similar to the way Pueblo families may start a meeting to discuss concerns that involved everyone. The students had evidently been having discussions about how English and mathematics might apply to them when they grew up. They wanted to know more about the kinds of jobs their parents had and what they had to know in order to perform their jobs. The students suggested that various parents be invited to speak to them about their jobs. Their suggestions made a lot of sense to me. They wanted to know the reality of how they would be using English and mathematics when they grew up, graduated from high school, and searched for jobs. In Pueblo education, tasks that individuals needed to learn to perform applied not only to their individual and family lives, but to community life as well. Mundane tasks of writing English that seemed to serve little or no purpose made no sense to the students. Solving math problems on paper did not make sense to them either. I had felt the same way when I was in elementary and high school, but my voice was suppressed. What I had to say was unimportant if it didn't have anything to do with academics. My students, on the other hand, had something important to say that would contribute to their understanding of how to prepare for their adult lives. They were expressing a Pueblo way of learning as they also included the use of speaking and writing in English as their second language.

I had my own thoughts about their suggestion. As a student just out of college how was I supposed to respond now that I was a professional teacher? What would be the objectives of or for student learning if their parents gave a talk? How was I going to arrange the parent visits if I agreed? Should I be agreeing with children, who according to American thinking were only children? What was my role as a professional American teacher? Could I combine my role as a Pueblo person with my being a professional teacher who needed to abide by the American educational policies? I promised to give them an answer soon.

My Isleta students pressed for an answer to their suggestion and request to bring their parents to class to speak to them. I had delayed somewhat in responding because I was having difficulty prioritizing my role as a teacher while I was a Pueblo person who was also a teacher. I prayed hard for guidance from my spirit teachers, guides, and helpers. My belief in them, as a Pueblo individual could not be separated from myself or anything I did in my life. As a Pueblo person, I had a life time duty and responsibility to guide those younger than myself to become decent and honorable human beings who would also have the same tribal duty and responsibility to their families and tribal community. As an American professional teacher I was to prepare students for the next grade level. How was I to do both? I was conflicted with how Pueblo students need to be prepared for life in America and still maintain their tribal language and culture. As a professional teacher, I was now in a role to oppress my students in the American educational system to assimilate into American society, though that realization didn't hit me until recent decades. There was, in this BIE School, an absence of tribal spiritual connection in student lives. We, students and I, were all trying to make sense of the reality of our lives in the present moment of that time. We all were confused in this unnatural American school environment. I believed strongly in them

and my own intuition. I followed that spirit of thinking and said yes to my students. They were overjoyed.

Our classroom became a student tribal meeting place where students had voice in their education. I did not lead the discussions for what was to be done. I allowed the students to discuss and create how they were going to make their idea a reality. As in a Pueblo setting, leaders emerged, suggestions and ideas came from other students and a plan was made. I did not interfere, interrupt, or negate. My teacher aide and I listened and responded when we were asked a question.

Each student shared the kinds of jobs their parents had. Lists of the jobs were written on the black board. From the list, students voted on which jobs they wanted to learn about. They limited themselves to hearing about four different kinds of jobs. Four is an important number to Pueblos. The students whose parents worked those jobs were the ones who were to invite their parents to speak to the class. An interesting thing occurred on this task. One of the leaders conducting the meeting asked if we could invite the parents in the way business was done in offices. They suggested inviting the parents via the principal's office telephone. They did not ask me to call the parents; they wanted to make contact themselves. The four children, with notes permitting them to go to the principal's office, left the classroom to make their calls.

The principal came by at the end of the day to share with me what my students did. They asked the school secretary if they could speak with the principal. In his office, the students explained their project, sought permission to use the school telephone, and invited the principal to come to hear their parents. He was impressed with what the students were planning and accepted my students' invitation to hear the parents.

In talking with their parents, the students explained the objectives of their presentations. My students set the speakers' schedule. When the appointed days came for the parents to speak, it was the students who introduced them to us, the audience. Students asked the parents why it was important to know how to read, write, and speak English, their second language. Then they asked what kind of math they needed to know in order to perform the kinds of jobs that were being discussed. They asked the parents if schooling was as difficult for them as it was for the students and how they learned.

After the parents left, we had a discussion about the subjects their parents presented. Students knew now that it was important to take notes so they could remember what was said. I was personally impressed with my students' self confidence to engage in discussions, offering ideas, and putting a plan together. There was an overall feeling of trust and being in a safe environment where children's voices were appreciated and where their knowledge was validated. There was also a change in attitude about performing in the classroom. There was no more testing the teacher, wasting time with idle talk, or playing around. My students became serious learners; they helped each other, and they progressed because they asked for more challenging school work. Ultimately, three fourths of my second grade students that year were promoted to the fourth grade. The following year, when I visited the school, the fourth grade teacher thanked me for my students. She said that she had been skeptical of receiving them because of their earlier reputation as rowdy students. She was happily surprised by my former students' enthusiastic desire to perform in class. The fourth grade teacher expressed her appreciation as to how my former second grade students made her job easier. I know for myself that they made me look really good. I felt like I merely followed their lead.

The Isleta second grade students were abandoned twice already with the reasons given that the students were difficult to handle. Such teachers do not realize or do not accept that Pueblo students' have voice and choice in their respective homes. It is one of their cultural ways of being that they bring into the classroom. Pueblo students often experience culture shock and confusion as they are oppressed with classroom rules and school rules that are considerably more restrictive than those at home. Non-Indian teachers have an oppressive tendency to tell students what they can or cannot do while Indian people simply allow their children to make their own decisions. Adults respected children's' autonomy and freedom to act on their own.

When my students demonstrated their mental disconnect from the documentary film, it was perfectly understandable. The topic of the documentary had little or nothing to do with their lives and they simply did not feel it was anything they could use. It was boring to them. They "voiced" their judgment about the film by behaving like children being silly when otherwise they tend to act responsibly in the Pueblo way. They had become familiar with the consequence of misbehaving when their non-Indian teachers' punished them. The punishment, in this case, was to be sent to the library to search for information they were interested in and write about it and tell about it. It wasn't until later that they realized they had not been punished. Rather, their Pueblo teacher had re-established their role of responsible young community members in our classroom Pueblo family environment. They had voice, and their voices were listened to. They had choice and their choices were respected. Being respected returned them to their Pueblo expectation of being responsible for their actions. Young Pueblo students are empowered when they act responsibly.

At the end of the school year, I didn't know what I was going to do with myself during the summer. As a new and inexperienced teacher I was unaware of how teachers survived three months without pay. I was broke. I was too embarrassed to ask. Since I was constantly busy with lesson plans and making learning materials I did not socialize in the teacher's lounge where I might have overheard information about how teachers got through the summer. I had to do something to survive.

I received a telephone call from the director of the new Indian Pueblo Cultural Center that had just been built. The director said that I was highly recommended for the position of education specialist and asked if I would be interested in the new position. To this day I have no idea who recommended me but I was grateful for the opportunity for a job. I really came to love teaching after my experience with the Isleta second grade students but I didn't know if I would be asked to return in the fall. I honestly didn't know how re-contracting worked. Jumping the gun, I assumed the worse. I reluctantly left the elementary school classroom to accept a position offered to me at the new Indian Pueblo Cultural Center in Albuquerque.

Chapter 6: Amazing Discoveries

Awesome discoveries that shaped my life occurred when I least expected. My world view changed drastically beginning with the first excursion along old Route 66 with my grandmother.

Hershey Bars and Little Lulu

My grandmother was my first teacher. She was very patient, gentle, and very kind. Without her realizing it, she also inadvertently introduced me to the English language even though Keres was our primary daily conversational language. It happened one day when my grandmother took me with her to sell pottery by what was then Route 66. Route 66 was a highway that passed through the middle of Acoma land. Tourists traveled that road from the east to the west. I had not known about it as a child but this small trek would remain forever etched in my memory.

Dyaonah had been making pottery off and on during the summer. Sometimes she gave me clay to play with. I had watched her fire the pottery a few feet away from our house near the horse corral. It surprised and amazed me to see how much they changed after the firing. They became beautiful because of her designs, but they were no longer fragile. She allowed me to hold a pot after firing. One hand must be placed beneath the pot while the other hand was placed on the main body to keep it well balanced.

I watched Dyao pack the pottery. First she spread a large white sheet on the floor. Next she placed a box in the middle of the sheet. After that she wrapped the pottery in what I later learned was a newspaper and placed each one carefully in the box. When she finished packing the box she wrapped it with the sheet. Two of the ends of the sheet were tied close to the box. The remaining two ends were tied somewhat closer to the edge. This was the

part she placed over her forehead and the package was suspended over her back. This was the way that most things were carried in those days when there were no vehicles.

With our lunch sack in one hand, I placed my other hand in hers and tried to keep up with her as we walked along the dirt road away from our house. Like other children in my village, I loved listening to the sound of water as much as I enjoyed wading in it. About a mile from our home was a small ditch that ran into our village not far from our house. Now I knew where some of it traveled. There were some lavender flowers that grew along the ditch. I had never seen flowers like them in the village, so I stopped to study them. Their shape reminded me of little ducks, but there were no purple ducks! Their fragrance was so wonderful that I could not stop sniffing in their unique scent. They became my favorite flowers.

Near the ditch, where I fell in love with the purple duck flowers, ran something unnatural. I asked what it was. It was a heeyanee, mishtutsi shruweemeh which translated to a trail like a black snake. After we walked along it for a distance I realized it was like snake because the black trail moved in curves like a snake. This black snake did not have designs like the snakes I had seen. In fact, to my child's thinking, its design was fairly simple as it only had dashes of white lines along its center.

Up ahead I saw shiny black rocks jutting up from the ground. When we came very close to them I saw that they had many small holes in them. I had never seen anything like that before. They were fascinating to me. We stopped at a small makeshift stand across from the lava rocks. There was a tall mesa behind the stand with a small ditch that ran along its bottom. I placed our sack lunch inside of the stand in the shade. Grandma unloaded her burden and put it on the ground. We went to the ditch to drink some water. The water was

so cool and it felt so good to get my face and my bangs wet. It tasted like rainwater. I walked back to the stand with my grandmother in case she wanted me to help her. Early on I already knew that I had to be helpful so that chores or tasks were completed before I could play.

Dyaonah untied the knots on the sheet and removed it from under the box of pottery. She picked it up and threw it over the long pole that stuck out from the top of the roadside stand. It would be many decades before I learned that placing the white flag on the pole meant that we meant no harm to anyone; it was safe to approach us.

Returning to the front of the stand, she cleared the ground of pebbles and sticks to make a smooth display place for her pottery. She then placed her medium sized water bowls toward the back, small turkey bowls in the middle row, and finally the smaller bowls and tourist ash trays in the front. Satisfied with her display she then sat in the shade to wait. All the while I wasn't sure why we didn't see anyone on the black snake trail nor did I know for who or what we were waiting. I had already learned to not ask questions and allow things to happen. I was left to figure things out.

I was playing along the ditch when I heard this loud, unfamiliar noise that frightened me. I ran to my grandmother and clutched her hand tightly as I peered toward the one curve along the lava beds toward the sound. The chugging sound became louder as it moved toward us. Finally, a shiny black monster with huge white eyes appeared. Seeing us, I thought, it slowed down and stopped in front of the pottery. I grabbed my grandmother's legs and held on tightly for I was now trembling for fear of what it might do. I was sure it was going to swallow me. Its sides opened up making a creaking sound. An extremely white lady with yellow hair, blue eyes, and bleeding red lips, fingernails, and toenails emerged from the monster. I watched as her bloody lips parted to show nice teeth. From around the

other side of the black monster walked a bald, fat white man wearing a Hawaiian print shirt, adorned with a black box on his chest. He wore beige shorts and brown sandals. I had never seen so much hair on a man's arms and legs but not much on his head. This was confusing to me because my uncles had thick hair on their heads but little or no hair on their arms or legs.

They walked toward us and stopped in front of my grandmother's display of Acoma pottery. I clung to my grandmother's leg because I didn't want to be grabbed and be taken far away. My imagination conjured up possible scenes of these strange people so I remained alert and on guard. They smiled as they said "Hello". Hello was the very first English word I ever heard, but I had no idea what it meant. Evidently my grandmother understood this strange language for she replied as best as she could the same strange word though with a Keres accent. I looked up at Dyaonah after she said "hadoo" because this word she uttered meant "container" in our language. I was confused. Why would they say "container" to each other? I repeated the word to myself so that I would remember it. I wanted to tell my cousins what I had learned from the white people who stopped to look at us. The lady kept looking and smiling at me. The man and woman squat down to have a closer look at the pottery. The man picked up an ashtray, turned it upside down, and twisted his head to look at something under it. Their strange mannerisms when they looked at the pottery were intriguing. The lady selected an ashtray and two small bowls. To my Keres ears the lady asked, "Hamush?" My grandmother showed the lady six fingers' signifying it was six dollars. Dyaonah then wrapped them in newspaper, gave them to the lady and the lady gave her some green paper and some pieces of metal. The man took their pottery and put them in the back seat of the car.

The lady approached my grandmother close to the side where I was standing. I moved farther behind my grandmother as the lady extended her hand toward me. I would not let her touch me. She turned her head and said something to the man. I wasn't sure what to think or what to expect. She got up and walked over to the black monster and then returned. She held a rolled up paper and gestured for me to take it. Dyaonah instructed, "Jayao-oo", so I took the rolled up paper and jumped back behind her. She told me to say thank you in our language so I muttered "Dawa-eh." The lady was trying very hard to befriend me but I feared her intentions. She got up once more, went to the car and returned with yet something else. This time, Dyao took my hand and had me stand beside her. The lady showed me a small package wrapped in brown with silver letters. She opened up the silver wrapper and showed me some brown squares. She took one small square and put it in her mouth and chewed it. She wrapped the small package and handed it to me. I didn't know what it was or how it tasted but I took it and thanked her by smiling.

The man and lady returned to their car and drove off smiling and waving at us. As they drove away I noticed a bag on the back fender. It was dripping so I guessed it was how they carried water for their monster or for themselves.

Dyaonah put the rolled up paper and small brown package in our lunch bag to take home. Although I had never seen anything like what the lady gave me, I did not think about those items until Dyaonah took them out of the paper sack to show my mother. I had no idea that what the lady gave me would change my life and alter the perceptions of my Pueblo life. It was my first glimpse into a foreign world I knew nothing about...American life.

After we ate dinner, my mother cleared the table. She lit the kerosene lamp so we could finally look at the paper and see what was in the little brown package. My mother

handed me the brown package and told me to open it. I was very careful to unwrap this very delicate gift that smelled sweet. After unwrapping it I asked my mother what it was. She said it was called a Hershey candy. Now I learned another foreign word Hershey. With Dyaonah's encouragement I broke off a square of candy and handed one to my mother and to Dyaonah. They told me to put it in my mouth but to not swallow it so quickly. I took a tiny little bite! Oh my, I had never tasted anything like it before. It melted on my tongue, and my taste buds loved it. I savored the rest of my little square piece of candy and thoroughly enjoyed it. There were four squares left, and although I was willing to share them, my Dyaonah said to save them for the next day. She allowed me to have a square every other day. Hershey candy was my treasure gift from the lady, and it became very special to me.

I had glimpsed at the paper gift the lady had given me. I unrolled it and found that several pages were somehow held together. I marveled at this strange gift. I had never seen any kind of book before. This one had many square blocks with many pictures of a boy and girl. The little pink girl's hair was arranged in tight curls hanging loosely around her head. She wore a red dress, white socks, and black shoes. The fat pink boy wore black shorts, white shirt and jacket and black shoes. He wore a small white sailor cap on his big head. There was a beach umbrella on white sand with a huge body of water behind it. There were many different scenes of them in the house, walking down sidewalks with a lot of grass growing and unusual trees with rounded tops. More often than not they were standing at a stand waiting for food while there was a huge body of water in the background. I asked my mother if she knew what this was called. She said it was called a comic book. More foreign words were to come into my English vocabulary without definitions.

I learned the little girl's name was "Little Lulu" and her friend's name was "Tubby". The Little Lulu Comic Book had square block sections in which the two appeared to have conversations. What fascinated me were the white clouds with black specks floating above the heads of Little Lulu and Tubby. I thought they were spirits. I asked my mother what the specks were. She said that the specks were words and that they were talking to each other. I laughed and asked in our Keres language, "How can they be talking to each other because I can't hear them?" She explained that the white clouds were where the white people drew or scratched in words in their language. This explanation was confusing to me. I did not understand how they could understand what was being said by drawing specks in clouds. Did the clouds above me that I saw every day also have words scratched on them, I wondered. I would have to take another careful look at them. Then I asked my mother in Keres, "Do you know what they are saying to each other?" She said, "Huh-uh" which means yes in our language. Every day, I badgered my mother to read to me. She placed her finger beneath the word as she read. I memorized the words. I pestered my mother into repeating the stories whenever she was in a good mood. I listened very carefully as she enunciated each word they spoke. My memory was excellent at that time so I learned to say the words they spoke but I didn't necessarily know what the individual words meant. My mother translated English to Keres as best as she could because there are no words in our language for umbrella, beach, ocean, sailor hat, or hamburger. I could finally understand what was being said in each box with the black specks inside the white clouds that floated above their heads.

Being with my grandmother to sell pottery at old Highway 66 was my first experience with meeting White people. It was definitely my first time to hear the English language being spoken. With the lady's gift of the Little Lulu comic book I now learned the foreign symbols used to communicate on paper. As I recall, my five year old tongue could barely pronounce the English words. I practiced Little Lulu and Tubby's conversations enough to sight read before I entered elementary school. This ability or accomplishment did not necessarily mean I knew what each word meant.

Little Lulu and Tubby became my window into a world outside of the desert range I lived in. I compared my physical appearance to Little Lulu since I had never seen anyone besides my cousins and neighborhood friends. Her hair was brown and tightly curled. The curls hung like caterpillars around her head. There were two round bumps of curls on her forehead. As for me, my grandmother parted my hair down the center then braided my long dark brown hair and placed them over each shoulder so they were over my chest. Little Lulu's mother had brown hair; she was tall and plump. My mother had long black hair which she curled with rags; she was 5'4" tall and slim. Little Lulu owned the one red dress she always wore in the comic. Compared to Little Lulu, I did own three dresses and one pair of shoes. The men and Tubby wore a style of clothing I had never seen. Little Lulu had a little pig out of which round metal fell out when she shook it. I had never seen a piggy bank and I certainly never saw money. They drank something from a glass through something that looked like a stick. I compared their home, their furnishings, their food, and their streets to my surroundings and realized there must be another kind of world somewhere else. I knew she and Tubby were not real human beings but their stories were enough to make me curious about what might be outside my realm of tribal reality.

One of the wonderful surprises that came from meeting white people at the pottery stand on highway 66 was their desire to educate me. I didn't know about post offices or mail as a child so perhaps names and addresses were exchanged between some tourists and my grandmother and mother. Gifts in the form of human looking dolls and story books began to arrive. One day I received a package in the mail. It was from a white lady who had purchased a piece of my grandmother's pottery. From the box I pulled out a little pink Caucasian plastic doll with long, blonde curls and blue eyes. She wore a strapless black velveteen evening gown with a white rabbit skin jacket wrapped around her shoulders. She wore black high heel shoes. She was a grown up doll. She was very beautiful. But, in play, I could not carry on a conversation in her English language because I did not know her language. Besides she was a grown up and did not belong with baby Katsina dolls that were not of her culture and language experience. She belonged with Little Lulu and Tubby. With Little Lulu and Tubby I felt they could be comfortable with each other because they seemed to be from some place outside of my village. I put the comic books and my pretty lady doll on one side of my mother's dresser so that their spirits would not be lonely. Besides, they spoke the same language and that was very important.

On My Own in San Francisco and College

I graduated from high school on June 6, 1960. I was seventeen years old. I was anxious to find a job but I had no money, no means of transportation, and I didn't even know how one found a job. Besides that, I lived in McCarty where there were no jobs to be found. My home life was so miserable and I wanted to be on my own as soon as possible. It didn't matter to me where in the world I went as long as I didn't have to suffer any more verbal and psychological abuse. As it was, I was walking on eggshells feeling intimidated, hopeless,

and powerless. I didn't want to ask my mother for anything because it would bring a barrage of sarcastic putdowns which were too humiliating to bear. I felt alone. Besides that, I was very naïve about many things but deep inside I must have trusted that my spirit helpers would provide me with guidance.

One day, I was visiting my friend who lived near highway 66 on the north side of the village. She told me she was going to California. My heart sank. I fought back the tears that were dying to well up in my eyes. She was the only friend I had. I didn't know why in my freshman year she, her sister, and their friend invited me to hang around with them in high school, but I was grateful. Up to then I was a loner. If she left for California I would have absolutely no one to interact with. I was feeling abandoned, envious, but happy that she was on her way to doing something with her life.

I asked my friend how she was going. She told me she had a couple of sisters who lived in San Francisco and they were who she was going to stay with while she searched for a job. I asked her when she was leaving and she replied it would be within a couple of days and would I like to come with her. I could not believe she was actually inviting me to come along! Oh, my goodness, my heart was beating so joyously about the possibility of going far away to find a job but my mind was being practical. Where would I get the money to go? My shoulders slumped when I told my friend that my mother probably wouldn't let me go and we didn't have any money. Deep inside, I would have rebelled and gone anyway only if I had money. She suggested we go together to my mother to ask her. My stomach felt queasy at the thought of approaching my mother. I surely did not want to be scolded or humiliated in front of my friend. My neck and shoulders tightened up. It was a dreadful trip back to the house but we found my mother. She was in a good mood. She and my friend

exchanged greetings and asked what we were up to. My friend told her she was going to California. I chimed in with all the bravery I could muster and asked her, “Can I go to California with her?” Surprisingly she replied with, “When are you leaving and how much do you need?” My heart leaped to San Francisco, wherever that was. Until then I had never heard of this city.

Did it scare me to leave familiar surroundings and family after high school graduation? No. I knew how to take care of myself. I knew how to cook, clean, wash and iron my clothes and I was resourceful. I had to be in order to survive. I had taken care of my little sister and myself for many years already. I had started cooking for her, my brother and myself since I was seven years old. I was set!

My friend and I boarded the Greyhound Bus in Grants. Freedom! Independence! The following morning we stopped in Barstow, California for breakfast. We returned to our bus to continue toward San Francisco. When I woke up it was nighttime. People and my friend were still asleep so it was rather quiet in the bus. I saw a glow of lights in the distance. When my eyes adjusted to the dark I noticed we were crossing yet another bridge. The bridge was made of steel and it seemed to reach for the sky. As I looked farther out I caught a glimpse of light reflecting off of a large body of water. My eyebrows raised themselves in alert as my mouth dropped open! My heart leaped as I exclaimed loudly in surprise, “Wow, look at all that water! We’re crossing a bridge over lots of water! I’ve never seen so much water in my whole life!” She quickly shushed me because people were still sleeping. I completely forgot about other people on the bus as my manners flew out the window. Besides, I had never ever felt free to say what was on my mind in my entire life. I was

embarrassed of my behavior. I apologized. She went on to explain that we were crossing the Bay Bridge and nearing San Francisco.

I kept my squinty eyes wide open to take in everything in sight. There were extremely tall buildings built closely together. There were hundreds of cars on the road. I was puzzled to see what I thought was a single passenger train running on railroad tracks in the middle of the street. As I stood gaping at it, my friend told me that was a Trolley car. A trolley car? It certainly didn't look anything like a car to me. I was baffled.

This huge city was lit up all over the place! There were traffic lights at every street corner. Neon lights were flashing everywhere on tall buildings in every direction I looked. As she pulled me along, I was amazed there were all kinds of people at the San Francisco Bus Station and they were not all white people! Then she spotted her sisters waiting for us to arrive. They were so happy to see her and they greeted me as if I were part of the family.

In traveling through the streets of San Francisco for the first time in my life I was amazed at how big tall buildings lined along steep hills. Streets went up and down the hills and then they came at an even level. I had never seen such convoluted streets anywhere before. This was an incredible city full of lights and people with activity happening even as late in the night as it was. We loaded into her family's car. Now we too were part of the never ending traffic.

I descended from the car, picked up my ugly suitcase and walked with the family toward a big building. It had a fancy door with glass almost the full length of the door! We started up the eerily squeaky stairs in the dark hallway that lead to the second floor. It was dark because the light bulb had burned out. I asked if this whole building was their house. They chuckled and explained this was an apartment building, and they lived on the upper

flat. I had never heard of or seen apartment buildings and I certainly didn't know what a flat was. A flat, to my understanding, was when a tire lost air in its inner tubes. We went down a hallway and into their flat. Their flat was very homey and comfortable. It was really nice to hear them speaking in our language as they unpacked their grocery bags. I was very grateful to my friend's family for making me feel welcome. I tried to stay out of the way or be helpful as much as possible so they would not be displeased with me.

The sisters informed my friend and me that the end flat was available for rent. They suggested we rent the apartment so we could be close to them if we needed them. They had already talked with the landlord about renting it to us. We were introduced to the landlord who then showed us the apartment. Now I was able to see the bay window from the inside out. Wow, what a view. The whole west end of our living room consisted of a luxuriously huge bay window. We could almost see the Golden Gate Park to the north of us, the apartment buildings across the street, and the street to the south of our building. The good thing was that we could at least see the street below us. Our bay window overlooked Ashbury near Haight. I loved it immediately!

It had two doors that led to the inner dwelling. The first dark brown door led directly into a tiny kitchen. Above the sink was a window with a view of alley below us. Next to it was a small stove and refrigerator with small cupboards above them. We were to become city girls who no longer had to haul firewood into the house for the wood stove. We didn't have to haul water into the house to use for drinking, cooking and washing dishes like we did at home. How easy it was to merely turn the knob to light up the stove!

From the kitchen we walked into the dining and living room area. There was a small dining table with two chairs close to a fireplace that now emitted heat from it rather than fire

wood. Another window behind the dining room table could be opened for a better view of the alley below. Next to the living room was the single bedroom with a huge closet. It too had a large bay window. The only concern I had was that we had to traipse down the dark hallway to the bathroom. It was such a thrill to view the apartment. To think of renting our own apartment made me feel very grownup. I didn't know if I was a grown up, a lady or a woman at the age of seventeen. Whatever I was, my only concern was about paying my share of the rent. I barely had enough money to pay my share for the first month but it was heavenly to be on my own!

Evidently my friend had been to San Francisco before so she taught me about how city bus systems worked. I held on tightly to bus transfers because I could not afford paying for extra fare if I lost them. I not only memorized the land marks of my route to downtown San Francisco but I had to learn the names of the streets and how to get around. If I didn't have enough bus fare to get back to the apartment, I knew which streets I would have to walk and how long it would take me to get home. I had no family to call if I needed help. No one in my pueblo owned telephones at the time. Even if I could reach someone I knew they would not have any spare money to send. I did not want to impose on my friend's family even though they treated me very well. It wasn't long before I felt confident enough to travel alone in the big city if I needed to do so.

On one of the days, before searching for a job, my friend's sisters took us to a fish market near a wharf. The smell of fish was new and offensive to my nostrils. It took some getting used to but viewing the many kinds of fish was really remarkable. There were oysters, octopus and seaweed. There were posters and pictures of many different kinds of

ships. There were seashells for sale. This was the first time I found grocery shopping to be very interesting.

I watched my friend's sister prepare to cook some strange looking species I had never seen. They had soft looking shells and tiny appendages. When she cooked them in a frying pan the gray color turned slightly pink. She called them prawns. For some years I could not tell the difference between a prawn and a shrimp! There I had my first taste of prawn with sticky white rice and some kind of greens. I loved the dinner we had that night as tasting this strange food was an invitation to try other kinds of food while I was in San Francisco.

Matching What?

I had learned in high school to dress in the latest style because of a comment made by my stepfather, Blas. I was dressing for school one day and I was at a loss for what to wear. The weather was slightly cool but still too warm to require a coat. I didn't own a coat. My stepfather was teasing me about pulling out my winter clothes and keeping matching shoes and purses organized. I gave him a puzzled look because I didn't know there was such a thing as winter, summer and spring clothing. I didn't have matching shoes or purses. All of my clothes were dresses. I did not own slacks or jeans. I began studying about the latest fashions by watching actresses on television shows. If there were fashion shows on television I listened very carefully to the descriptions given of the dress. The most common word I heard was that the model was wearing an *original*. That word stayed in my mind because it sounded important. If I liked something the actresses were wearing, I would search through the Sears clothing catalog, I studied clothing displays in store windows whenever we went to Albuquerque. It was then that I began to match my clothing with shoes, purses, and jewelry. I learned to shop carefully, three times a year, for school clothes and to spread the limited

funds given to me. So by the time I arrived in San Francisco I had accumulated clothing that I could wear in an office like a real secretary!

“Don’t Cry, Lie!”

My friend and I bought the Sunday paper to search for clerical jobs. Together we searched for the offices that advertised jobs. Over and over we completed job applications and took typing tests and hoped to meet their criteria. It didn’t take my friend very long to find a job and she started work long before I did. I continued to pound the streets in search of and hope for a job.

I was feeling very inadequate after a while because I kept being told I could not be hired. Not being hired meant I was not qualified for the job, and I fell into depression. I was ashamed to be jobless while my roommate was now making a living. I felt really, really discouraged. My clothing began to show signs of aging and I did not want to keep asking my mother for money to pay my share of our rent, food, and bus fare.

My friend suggested I apply at her work place because a position had opened up. I went with her one day to an area in China Town. There I moved among Chinese people for the first time and felt very comfortable. I liked China Town and hoped I would be able to find a job so that I could be among the Chinese people.

Although I was feeling somewhat ashamed and humiliated about not finding a job as quickly as my friend, I still held on to hope. I certainly didn’t want the embarrassment of being turned down at the office where my roommate worked. That would be the worse humiliation. Besides that, I did not want to return to New Mexico as a failure. Placing my faith in my spirit teachers, guides and helpers I asked them for help with any required tests I had to take and to find intelligent answers to any questions I might be asked for their clerical

position. After completing another job application I was directed into another room to take a typing test. I knew I would pass the typing test as I had done so with all the other tests I had been required to take. I had not failed any tests or interviews.

Once again I passed the typing test with perfect scores. The lady from personnel was very impressed. She told me that I had been the only person to have a perfect score but she was sorry she could not hire me. My heart sank as I went into depression mode. I tried really hard not to cry so I sat quietly until I regained my composure. The lady placed her hand over mine and apologized. She was very kind to me. I shared with her that I had been searching for a job for three months and had completed many applications and passed all of the typing tests I had been given. I did not understand why was I not being hired. She sympathized with me.

She then asked me how old I was. I told her I had turned seventeen in December and that I had just graduated high school in June. She then smiled and advised me to go home to have my parents write a letter giving their permission for me to work and I could bring it to her the following day. I told her that my mother lived in New Mexico so I could not bring a letter of permission. Then she asked if I had other family members who could write such a letter. I told her I had no one. She seemed very surprised that I did not have family in San Francisco and that I was alone in a big city at seventeen. I didn't think it was out of the ordinary because I had been considered an adult in Acoma since before I entered high school at the age of twelve. As far as I was concerned all I needed was a high school diploma to be hired. I had heard the advice from tribal leaders, high school teachers, and classmates that all we needed was a high school diploma to get a job. No one ever informed me that one had to be eighteen years of age to be considered an adult in the American society!

By October, the third month of being in San Francisco and not finding a job I felt I had to give up and go back to New Mexico. I felt very defeated. With my head hanging low I asked aloud, “What am I doing to do?” Probably feeling sorry for me, the personnel clerk then said, “Well, I guess you’ll have to lie about your age.” I looked up at her and replied, “I’m eighteen,” to which she said, “You’re hired!” My heart jumped with joy as she confirmed she would hire me and I could report to work the following day! I prayed blessings for her and thanked my spirit teachers, guides, and helpers for their help. I was extremely grateful and swore I would do my very best so the lady would never regret hiring me. I was finally validated! I regained my self-respect. I had honor again as well as self-confidence. I was going to be the best clerk-typist I could be.!

No More Broken English!

In my new job at the insurance company I noticed there were many different nationalities of people who worked there. I observed their behaviors and listened carefully to the way they spoke English. I noticed that there were dialectical differences as well as distinct accents of the French, Chinese, and German as they spoke English. My ability to speak English fluently was still far from perfect in my estimation. In my thoughts, I began to repeat English words the way that the different nationalities spoke it. Then, I would repeat words aloud when I was alone in a park or walking down a street. I then began to practice their hand and head gestures as they placed certain emphasis on particular expressions. Learning English in this way taught me how to manipulate outcomes I needed to maneuver through necessary processes of gaining favor for future jobs or for being accepted into educational programs. I practiced speaking English using gestures and body language in front of a mirror. I listened carefully to news reporters and actors as they enunciated words

on television or in the movies. Deep inside it was important for me to speak English without an accent so that I would not be discriminated against or seen as low in intelligence. I did not want to suffer humiliation again at any time in my life.

The salary I was earning as a clerk typist was barely enough to pay for rent, food and bus fare. For lunch I had pizza and an orange drink every day at Woolworth's fountain not far from where I worked. It was all I could afford. I did not take lunch because carrying a brown paper lunch bag signified being poor. I was poor but I didn't want to be seen as poor by anyone. I needed clothes but I could not afford to buy myself the nice clothes I saw in windows. Instead, I went to the bargain basement at the Emporium if I absolutely needed a new dress for work. Still there was some self satisfaction that I was earning a living and paying my way. I did not think of the future because being in the present meant survivorship. I had to survive in a strange city where I had no friends or family and I did not feel right to impose on my friend or her family.

My friend and I explored San Francisco. We often walked through the Golden Gate Park to get to the north beach. We had joined a youth group at a Catholic church in downtown San Francisco. On Fridays, we would go there to meet people and dance. Those were very enjoyable times that helped me forget the miserable life I lived in McCarty. There was another time when our catholic youth group went to a German festival north of San Francisco. I thoroughly enjoyed the music and bratwurst as I did watching some of the folk dances that were presented. We went to the Indian Center on Mission and sixteenth and met people from other tribes. Dances were held there on week-ends. It was always nice to meet other tribal people and learn about things we had in common.

Surprises

One Saturday evening at the Indian Center, we met a guy from South Dakota. He told us he was a Sioux from Pine Ridge and that his name was Barney In-the-Woods. My mouth dropped open in shock as I stared at him. “Oh my goodness, there are some of you still alive? I thought the U.S. Calvary killed you all off!” I blurted out. I could not believe I was looking at a real live Sioux survivor. The history books were wrong! The movies were wrong! For the first time in my life, I realized that white American teachers and movie makers were all wrong. Did they know they were wrong because they always talked down to us with such convincing authority? Why didn’t they teach us the truth about American history? Why weren’t they honest? Where was their dignity and honor? They lied! There were so many thoughts and questions running through my mind about the American society. My friend and I, as well as others of the various tribes had all been taught to be honest and truthful. We were taught to be shra-me toward everyone and with decisions we made for our lives and how we treated others. Why were Americans not shra-me?

Even a movie we saw gave me a frightening glimpse of how some people were not shra-me. We had gone to town to see Alfred Hitchcock’s movie *Psycho*. Briefly, a scene showed a psycho attacking a woman who was in the shower with a knife. That was scary enough, but what was really unsettling was the part where the psycho went up a dark stairway and into the bathroom where the single woman was taking a shower. The whole stairway, the closet at the top of the stairs looked like our place! After the frightening movie we both were reluctant to enter our apartment.

My friend and I stood outside of our entry door debating about who should go in first. The light above the stairs had not been replaced and it was still a dark hallway. There was a

hall closet just at the top of the stairs that squeaked when it was pulled open. She said, “When we get to the top of the stairs I’ll run to our bedroom door and unlock it.” She convinced me to go first. I agreed. She stood behind me with her hand on my back. We took a deep breath. I tried with all my might to walk quietly up the stairs. We were almost at the top. There were only four more steps. My heart was racing. Holding my breath I stepped up and onto an old loose board. It squeaked loudly and we both screamed! Now the both of us bolted for the bedroom door. She was fumbling with the door keys while I stood behind her glancing back at the upper closet afraid that something would jump out at us. She finally got the door open, flipped on the lights and we slammed the door shut and stood against it as we slid the bolt shut. Oh my goodness, our imagination really got the best of us that night. We slid to the floor laughing at ourselves. What a relief it was to be inside away from the squeaky stairs, closet and the darkened hallway. We slept for a few nights with the lights on.

It had been a year since my friend found her job at the insurance company. Now she could take advantage of the benefit of a two week vacation from her job. She decided to visit her family in McCarty during her vacation from work. I envied her trip and knew her family would be so happy to see her. It felt lonely returning to our apartment because she wasn’t there. I did not have other friends so I was completely alone and I missed her company. Toward the end of her second week of vacation I received a letter from her telling me that she was not returning to San Francisco. I shipped the rest of her personal belongings to her as she requested. Now for certain, I was completely alone.

Since there was no one to split the apartment rent with I had to find an affordable place to live. By then, I had turned eighteen and was now considered an adult in the

American society. That meant I could sign a contract for a dwelling. I found a tiny apartment closer to downtown so it wouldn't be far to walk home if I ran out of bus fare. It became very real how alone, lonely, and lonesome I was.

Fort Lewis College – Who Me?

I received a letter from my friend toward the end summer. She told me the reason she decided to not return to San Francisco was because she planned to go to college. She found a college in Durango, Colorado that accepted her as a student. It was about late August, 1961. College? Wow, she was accepted at a college. Naturally I had a lot of questions in my next letter to her. She wrote back to provide information on how to apply, where to go for financial aid, and what bus to take to Durango, Colorado. I was on the next Greyhound bus out of San Francisco on my way home. I was going to try to get into college even if my IQ was 75, according to my high school counselor, and even if I was not smart enough to go to college. I would at least be able to tell my children and grandchildren that I had gone to college, even though I had only walked through revolving doors.

Shortly after I returned home, I received an envelope with a return address of Fort Lewis A & M College. I held it in my hands trying to build up the courage to open it. The high school counselor's words, "Indians aren't smart enough to go to college," echoed through my mind. My IQ was 75...I was not smart. I sat and prayed to my spirit guides and helpers that if it was a rejection letter to please change rejection to accepted. Taking a deep breath, I ripped the envelope open with trembling hands. I closed my eyes as I opened up the letter for I was afraid to read it. The word accepted jumped out at me, and I cried with happiness. I was given a second chance at independence and a future.

The campus was small but beautiful to me. Approaching the administration building made me realize that I was now a real college girl, or would be very soon. After turning in my admissions paperwork, the admissions clerk asked to see my parent's tax return. That request was offensive to me because I was an independent girl who had worked as a clerk typist in the middle of China Town and had paid taxes earlier in the year! I offered my tax return. The clerk told me I had to provide my parents tax return because I was only eighteen. Here we go again, I thought. I stood and argued with the clerk until the supervisor came to explain that I was still considered a dependent of my parents until I turned twenty one. It was the law.

At seventeen and eighteen, I was not at all aware of the American laws that evidently I now had to abide by. The college administration decided to allow me to stay on the condition that I write my mother and have her forward her tax returns. I wondered what other American laws would prevent me from pursuing an education and future job.

There were only about twelve of us Indians enrolled at the college. We had not yet been labeled Native Americans by the United States Government yet. I remember thinking that all of the other Indians were probably very smart to have been accepted at Fort Lewis. I was the only dumb Indian in the group, who by some fluke, was admitted to attend. I knew that I would not be in college for very long because I was not smart. Being naïve and still too intimidated to ask anyone for information I still didn't know what college was supposed to do. I did not declare a major because I honestly did not know what I wanted to be. All I knew was that I was an excellent typist and if I failed college I could find a job as a clerk typist. My expectations were low. I felt beaten before I even started taking classes.

I was totally embarrassed to view my transcript from the first two semesters of college. The courses I selected were pitiful and my grades were pathetic. I had high hopes to become a better human being and I thought I could do that by shaping my life like the sophisticated characters that actors portrayed in movies and on television in the 1950's and 1960's. I had seen a lot of musicals, so deep inside I longed to sing and dance and play the piano. I would play dreamy music. I enrolled in classes that would provide thirteen college credits, that fall and spring semester, among which were music literature, chorus, piano, and what I hated the most. I dreadfully enrolled in mathematics. I had no choice but to enroll in an English class. At the end of the spring semester I received a letter informing me that I would be put on probation the following fall semester. If my grades didn't improve I would be suspended for a semester. Well, I thought I'd save them the trouble of putting up with me by withdrawing altogether. Besides, I didn't know what probation or suspension meant and it didn't dawn on me to pull open the dictionary or to even ask a counselor or anyone else. My pride stood in the way as much as my naiveté.

As I think back to that time in my life I realized that with all the dysfunction around me from elementary through my high school years, I really had to raise myself the best that I could. Speaking, reading, and writing in the English language were still very challenging as my thoughts were still in my Keres language. It was still necessary to attempt translations and interpretations between both languages. To begin with, I had been convinced by most of my teachers that there was something wrong with me. To them, I not only had behavior issues but I was deficient in intelligence and culturally deprived and besides that I spoke broken English or Pidgin English. I could not pinpoint during those early years that there were cultural differences of expectations and reality. There was only the feeling that

European art, culture, and language had more value than our Keres culture because we were forbidden to speak our language and there were never any lesson or discussions about American Indian contributions to the world. We had no value. I had no value. I was worthless.

Chapter 7: Exploring, Discovery, Practicing and Learning

One of our activities when we played school-school was to pretend we were reading from the Dick and Jane books. We had learned to recognize the words from rote reading. We repeated some of the English words that we had learned from Dick and Jane. If I said, “Oomitsa,” my students said, “Run” in their accented English. We had a difficult time with the word “Spot” which was the name for the dog so we used the Spanish word pinto.

In order to identify our play activity, the title of it would be repeated as in “school-school.” We also pretended to be white people whom we identified as “medicana-medicana.” Then there was, “store-store,” and “nuse-nuse” the pronunciation for “nurse.” Anytime we planned to play something related to the American culture, we pronounced the English name twice. Otherwise, in our Acoma language it was just a matter of saying, “Shrow nuwaweshaitiya” translating to English “Let us play.” Whenever the neighborhood children invited me to play, I was not only relieved but I was thrilled as well. More often than not, we played in my back yard or just north of my house close to the railroad tracks.

Consequences of Favoritism

It was about a mile from the school to my house. Some of my classmates hid behind boulders on the trail back to my home waiting for me. They would jump out from behind the boulders to call me names and to throw rocks at me or hit me with sticks. They chased me and taunted me because the teacher “favored” me in their eyes. Miss Oleman called on me often to answer her questions. I was caught in the middle. I knew, as a tribal person that I should help them, but if I helped them, the teacher would become upset and accuse me of cheating. This was the beginning of cultural conflicts between future non-Indian teachers with their American cultural beliefs and practices against our Pueblo cultural beliefs and

practices. I didn't know how to fix this and I didn't want to tell my mother about how my classmates were treating me. I had to run home most of the time.

It is interesting though that those same schoolmates who taunted me also wanted to play "school-school" with me. They would designate me to be the teacher, and they were the students. With a long stick we marked on the ground a large square that was outlined as our classroom. We smoothed out the ground and scribbled our alphabet with a short stick. Sometimes we formed the letters of the alphabet with small stones. Other times, if we found paper, we used charcoal to form our letters. Charcoal became tools for American writing.

At the end of the school year, Miss Oleman promoted me to the third grade from first grade. My mother, stepfather, and I moved to Grants where she enrolled me at the Grants Elementary School. The teachers were mostly Hispanic and a few Caucasian. The students in this elementary school were also primarily Mexican and Caucasian. This is why on the playground, I heard yet another language. It was the Spanish language. "¿Como se llama?" was the first question I learned. Two Hispanic sisters wanted to know my name. They wanted to be friends with me. When they learned that my name was Medina, a Spanish name, they did not believe that I was of the Acoma tribe. It was fun learning a third language. Rolling the r's was difficult for some, but it came easily for me. Although I do not speak it or understand it as much as I would like, I feel proud that I can enunciate Spanish words correctly. It helped to know a few words when I traveled to Mexico, later in my life.

Student Teaching Internship

I did not consciously choose to become a teacher. I had no idea what I "wanted to be" nor did I know what I was capable of doing. I had many interests but not the self confidence to choose an occupation. After several years of "vacationing" in college classes,

the college administrators reminded me it was time to declare a major. I provided my roommate with my transcript to analyze and tell me what degree I could obtain.

I believe my spirit guides felt that my roommate was the bravest one to advise me on the direction to take with my career. When she suggested that I choose an elementary school at which to do my student internship I was shocked out of my mind! “No way!” I laughed with embarrassment and with total disbelief.

The principal at the experimental school escorted me to the second grade classroom where she introduced me to the teacher I thought would be my mentor. As soon as she left, the second grade teacher opened the door wider and with a smile told me, “Here’s your classroom, these are your students, good luck” and he left me standing at the door completely abandoned! I had no choice, I thought, but to walk into the classroom to introduce myself to the students who were just as puzzled to find their teacher gone. Fortunately, it was the end of the school day so the students left and returned to their dormitory. In the meantime, I looked through his grade book, studied his desk and calendar to make some sense of what he was teaching. There were no lesson plans! I searched for the principal but she was nowhere to be found for several days!

Out of desperation I threw some quick lessons together from my education methods courses in reading, math and social studies. I also started a chorus where they could sing Native songs. When a couple of other teachers heard about it they asked if I would take their students as well, which I did, and they left! The students were wonderful. They cooperated and worked diligently and helped me with keeping the classroom tidy. Not that they had to do that but they chose to return to the classroom during their lunch recess. Both the boys and girls gathered at a single table. On that day, their teacher surprised us with a visit. He asked

me how I was able to get the boys and girls together at the same table. He said each gender was usually off to their own activities separate from each other.

Since we were located near a beautiful mesa, I decided to take the students on an Easter Egg Excursion. We climbed the rocks among which I hid colored eggs. They had made their own Easter baskets so they filled them with the eggs they found. Soon it was time to leave. At the bottom of the mesa I had the students' line up so I could take roll call. With the kind of luck I was having since I arrived at the school here was another one. I lost a boy! The students and I returned to the top of the mesa to search for him. We could not find him. We had to return quickly to the school for them to catch their bus.

Running to the principal's office I reported that I lost a boy on the mesa. She told me to go to the third bus to tell his father who was a bus driver. My heart sank. I had to tell a parent I lost his kid. I was on the verge of tears. I was going to be yelled at. I was going to get killed. After I told him, the dad said with little concern, "Oh, don't worry, he probably walked home. It's only five miles away." He did.

After I completed the internship I asked her if I had enough credits to graduate. She again advised me to take a few more courses so that I could end up with two degrees. I graduated with B.A. degrees in elementary education and humanities from Fort Lewis College and a Masters degree from the University of New Mexico four years later.

Chapter 8: Students and Teacher Learning Together

Fantastic Fifth Graders

The acting principal hired me on the spot. Classes were to start the next day. It was late afternoon and there was no time to prepare. I had nothing but my wits to try to get us through the first day. The acting principal authorized my husband, Calsue Murray, to co-teach with me. I was happy and relieved that he would be in the classroom with me. Calsue had taught at diverse levels of schooling. We were a good working team in every project we pursued. I knew he would be a wonderful asset to our students as he would be specializing in mathematics.

On the first day of school I stepped into my dusty and disheveled classroom. “What an odd shaped room,” I thought out loud. At the back entrance, a turquoise colored door was to the left of two large windows cover with dark blue butcher paper. The sun rays came through the torn sections of the paper displaying torn and tattered story books scattered about. As I stepped through the door into the classroom, there were student desks with chairs piled high upon them. They were crowded up against the counter which ran from the entrance door to the wider wall at the front of the room. The old black chalkboard was covered with old language arts posters that had no more life. I wondered if the former teacher in that room ever made much use of the chalkboard since there was very little space to write. This chalkboard wall was the widest in front. A large, old, wooden teacher’s desk sat directly in front of it. A small space for a small bulletin board connected at the corner to a wide window wall where the inner central area of the upper elementary classrooms was visible. Students could see out and passers-by could see in! A door to the inner corridor was at the corner next to a wall of shelves which connected to the back windows. As much as I

had wanted to arrange the student desks in a semi-circle, I could see this was going to be impossible.

In my hurried attempts to organize the room I lost track of time. There hadn't been time to even start arranging the furniture when the bell rang, and the fifth grade students walked into the room. Calsue, my husband, and I were moving short bookcases and short tables away from the central part of the room to make space for the desks and chairs! I hadn't been at the back door to welcome my students in! My first day began chaotically! Without directions the students began to unload the chairs from the tables. Some students were pulling the desks toward the front of the room and arranging them into rows. A couple of girls grabbed paper towels, wet them at the sink and began wiping the dust off the tables and chairs. Oh, my goodness. What would other teachers and administrators in a public school like those in Albuquerque think or do in a situation like this? At that moment, I was grateful we were a BIE school on the reservation where this type of behavior or action was normal! These "take action" students were the ones, who had been handpicked for the new teacher, me, because, according to my informant, they were "uncontrollable and unteachable".

Student Takeover

That the students sized up the situation in our classroom and took action was perfectly normal in a tribal setting. There was no time for formal introductions! "You the new teacher?" someone asked as he picked a chair up off the desk. "Yes. I'm Ms. Medina," I replied as I jumped out of the way of a desk being pushed by another student. A couple of boys sat down by the window and picked up books and began looking through them. "You guys pick up all those books and put 'em on the shelf", a tall girl ordered. "Don't jus' be

sittin' there not helping!" she said with a stern look. The boys quickly got up, picked up the books, magazines, and torn posters and threw them on the shelves. Soon, with the help of the fifth graders, the furniture was arranged as best as possible for the time being. They showed me the way to the restrooms located just a short distance from our classroom. We were all dusty. We took time to wash our hands and tidy ourselves for the rest of the day. We returned to the classroom wondering what to expect of each other.

Much of the elementary schools' daily routine was provided to me by the students. There hadn't been any time at all to meet with the acting principal for an orientation. She provided me with the names of the students but nothing else. In looking around the room, there were no reading, math, or science textbooks at all. So what was I going to use? All instruction for that day and several days after came from my head to the chalkboard. Students who came prepared with paper and pencils shared with those who didn't. This first day was a wonderful display of students caring about others and sharing unselfishly. So why did they have such a bad reputation?

To Share or Not to Share – That was the Question

At the end of the day I went to the other fifth grade teacher's classroom. I had been advised by the acting principal to see this teacher about sharing new textbooks that had arrived for our fifth grade students. She had all the new reading and math textbooks under lock and key in one of her many cabinets. As I looked around her classroom it felt like I had just stepped into an educational supply store. Her room was filled to the ceiling with boxes of manipulative material, colorful posters on every subject on her walls and windows, dictionaries, and everything a teacher would want to have available for her students. Wow, what a great storeroom full of fifth grade supplies!

“I understand brand new reading textbooks came in for our fifth grade students,” I stated after introducing myself. “Yes, but there aren’t enough for both classes so maybe you can pick and choose from some of the old ones,” she replied as she gathered her purse and briefcase. “I really can’t open the cabinets for you right now as I have a meeting to go to, so come back early tomorrow morning and you can take a look,” she said as she headed for the door to leave. Well, damn! Why do white people talk down to us and expect us to be obedient? Now I was teed off. I caught up with her and told her to at least open the cabinet so I could take the teacher’s manual and a textbook to view them overnight. She refused. I was angry now, “You are being inconsiderate and uncooperative, and I don’t appreciate your attitude! You can keep the damned textbooks!”

“Did you really say those things to Mrs. Smith?” the tall, blonde Superintendent asked me. She had reported me to the superintendent and now I was called on the carpet. “Yes, I did.” I told him honestly as I remained standing in front of his desk. I blurted out how my classroom was a total mess and how the students helped me to arrange desks. I also told him there were torn and dilapidated bits and pieces of reading material but that there were no textbooks, dictionaries, or any other kind of learning material or supplies in my classroom. I told him that the acting principal had advised me to see the other fifth grade teacher as we were supposed to share new reading textbooks that came in but that she had told me there weren’t enough and I should use the old ones. I also told him that she wouldn’t even open the cabinet to let me have a copy of the teacher’s manual before she left me empty handed as she walked out the door. He listened and suggested I return to Mrs. Smith’s classroom later, apologize, be civil, and see what could be worked out. Me apologize? Who do these two people think they were talking to, I thought. “No, I am not going to apologize

to someone whose attitude was clearly negative and uncooperative. Perhaps she needs to be told she needs to be civil to the new teacher who doesn't have a single decent set of reading, math, or social studies books. I had approached her before noon to make arrangements to pick up my share of the reading textbooks. At that time, she asked me to stop by after the students went home. That's what I did and she, in my opinion, was rude, inconsiderate, and uncooperative." I refuted. He stood up, came around the desk, looked down at me, and said, "I will talk to her."

The assistant principal, Ms. Benally, a quiet, self-assured woman, asked me to come to her office. Mrs. Smith was just leaving. "Good morning, Mrs. Smith," I greeted the fifth grade teacher. "Morning" she mumbled as she walked quickly past me. "I just informed Mrs. Smith that the both of you will be sharing a teacher aide. You will need to meet with Mrs. Smith to arrange a schedule for when the teacher aide will be in your classrooms." Mrs. Benally informed me. We shared the knowing look Native people give each other when we know we have to deal with those who believe they are privileged, but that we, as Native people, have to tolerate. No words needed to be said. I marched myself immediately into Mrs. Smith's classroom. I smiled at her. She looked at the floor. "When would be a good time to meet?" I asked her cordially. We agreed to meet later in the morning while the students were out to recess.

We sat at a small round table in front of Mrs. Smith's desk near the chalkboard. We had our schedules in front of us. Ms. Yazzie sat quietly to my right. Mrs. Smith started with, "I'm going to need her in the mornings so you can have her in the afternoon" she stated as if Ms. Yazzie wasn't there. I asked Ms. Yazzie if that schedule was acceptable. She shrugged her shoulders, "I guess so." I looked at Mrs. Smith and told her that I, too, had reading and

language arts scheduled in the morning and that I could compromise in changing time so that Ms. Yazzie could either come to my classroom between 8:15 to 9:30 in the mornings or between 9:45 to 11:00 daily. “No, no, no, no, no. I need her all morning.” She insisted. “Well, then, how about Ms. Yazzie come into my classroom on Tuesday and Thursday mornings?” I asked looking at Ms. Yazzie. “I can reschedule activities on those days” I offered. “No, I already told her she can go to your classroom in the afternoons,” she stated with exasperation. “Okay, so you’re not willing to compromise, is that right?” I asked poignantly. “Well, uh, uh, I, uh, I really need her in the mornings,” she stammered. “Look, I need Ms. Yazzie’s services for at least an hour and fifteen minutes on a daily basis, but you don’t seem to want to yield that much time at all. You would be able to keep her for practically the whole day,” I stated. “I’m sorry to talk about your time as if your opinion didn’t matter, Ms. Yazzie, so what do you think?” I asked the teacher aide. “Well, I guess I really don’t have a choice. You both have to decide and I will report to wherever I’m supposed to go,” she said. I stood up and looked at Mrs. Smith and said, “It looks like you already had your mind made up that you’ll keep Ms. Yazzie all to yourself and that you are not willing to compromise.” I started, “so, you have your wish! You can keep Ms. Yazzie all day long for the next two semesters!” and I quietly exited the classroom as she tried to justify her wants.

“Yes, Ms. Benally, that’s what I said to Mrs. Smith because she would not budge on time” I explained to the acting principal. “She absolutely refused to allow Ms. Yazzie to come to my classroom for even just an hour and fifteen minutes. So, I let that service go.” I said with some exasperation. She accepted my explanation and allowed Ms. Yazzie to be Mrs. Smith’s teacher aide for the rest of the whole school year.

Students' Voice and Choice

I took advantage of the time I had with Mrs. Benally, the assistant principal, to ask her how I could order reading books for my students. She looked puzzled. Obviously neither Mrs. Smith nor Mr. Robertson had informed her of the complaint Mrs. Smith lodged against me with the superintendent. I explained what had happened after she had advised me to see Mrs. Smith about sharing the new reading books. We both got quiet. We knew. We had had years of experiencing the way white people treated us as the so-called minority. She let that issue drop. I asked her if I could order some reading books for my students. She directed me to the superintendent's office where the catalogs were kept. I told her I was willing to pay for them myself if I could at least find books I could use with my students.

Fortunately, it was a Wednesday when it was my students' turn to visit the school library. The librarian directed them to an area meant for fifth grade readers. My students were not at grade level in reading. In fact, they were very much behind. Except for three students, the rest of the seventeen fifth grade students were in a range between first grade and seven months and second grade and seven months. To save them from embarrassment I told the students to check out any books or magazines that were of great interest to them. They were relieved and happy to share with me what they selected to read in the classroom.

Once we were back in the classroom we gathered in a circle on the floor or our classroom. I asked them to share with everyone the kinds of books they checked out from the library. They were excited about their selections. A couple of the students asked when they would be receiving reading books. I explained to them that I was told there were not enough reading books for two fifth grade classes so we wouldn't be getting any. I could feel a sense of relief on one hand and a concern on the other. They knew the difficulties they had with

reading and were concerned that they were now the upper classmen in the elementary school and were still having issues with words and understanding what they read. So I told them that my husband Calsue Murray and I were going to Albuquerque on the weekend to purchase books for them. I asked them what kinds of topics they liked to read. If they had a choice in the kind of books they would like to read, what would they be? They became quiet for a few seconds as if they couldn't believe their ears. Then it hit them that they had a choice and began shouting out their areas of interest. I tore some lined paper into squares and gave one to each student. I asked them to write their name and their area of interest. It could be anything! I had discussed adventures, fantasy, true stories, non-fiction, art, science, mystery and other categories of books. The students took their little squares of torn paper to their desks and started writing. They were so excited!

My first thought was to order books through the school catalog so that we would at least have something to read. Alternatively, I thought of purchasing books for our students and pay from our personal checking account.

At the end of the day, I made my way to the superintendent's office where his administrative assistant barely acknowledged me. I told her that I needed to order books for my students and would she lend me a catalog to look through. She said, "Give me the ISBN number and I'll order them for you." I told her I didn't know what those numbers would be unless I looked at the catalog, found the books needed, and they would contain the required ISBN numbers which I could then provide her. She insisted that I have those numbers beforehand so she could order them if they were approved. Exasperated I told her I needed to see the catalog first and then realized she pulled us into a power struggle. I was definitely

getting very upset when I leaned forward on the counter, “Mr. Robertson, we have a situation here!” she cried out.

Mr. Robertson, the superintendent came rushing out of his office, saw me, and closed his eyes as if he didn't want to deal with me again. He swallowed hard and asked his administrative assistant what was going on. She pointed to me. I looked at him and repeated my exasperated request. She defended her response by repeating herself, “she has to give me the ISBN numbers for me to order the books she wants if you approve!” I repeated myself as well, “I don't have those numbers to give her. I need to look at your catalog to find the books and the numbers so that I can give them to her!” I nearly shouted. He looked sternly at her, “Give her the catalog.” She started to reach for the catalog and then remarked, “If she orders books they will not arrive here for about three weeks or a month.” Aaaarghh! “My students don't have three weeks or a month to wait for books to read; they can't read anywhere near grade level. They are still at first and second grade level and we need those books now!” I shouted as I pounded the counter near where he was standing. Silence. “I'm going to get fired now” I thought to myself. I told him to never mind and that I would travel to Albuquerque to buy books for my students with my own money. “Cut her a check for seven hundred dollars and give it to her tomorrow” he ordered. I became stoic the way my tribe had trained me for times of emergency. My heart wanted my body to jump with joy and triumph but I restrained myself. I whispered softly, “Thank you very much, sir,” and walked my dignified little self out of their building. Ha! Triumph!!

I spread my students torn squares of paper across my table at home. To my surprise, students wanted to read non-fiction and true to life stories, adventure stories, biographies, animal stories, sports and sports heroes, mysteries of the ocean and so on. There were no

requests for fantasy stories. At the time I reviewed my students' lists my mind was not on how I would start them with vocabulary building, spelling, oral language or writing. I was in a desperate situation. There were no textbooks, teacher's manuals, workbooks, spelling books, dictionaries, or any other kind of learning materials I could provide my students. All I could do, at the time, was to pick up reading material that my students could use immediately. The school's reading requirement was that students complete four book reports for the year. With the school's seven hundred dollar voucher for children's books, my husband and I headed for Albuquerque on that first week-end.

Feeling intimidated at the bookstore, I looked to my husband for support. How far could seven hundred dollars stretch? Would I be able to enough books to last us throughout the school year? I wasn't sure where to start, after all it had been twenty years since I was in the classroom and up to then I didn't know what changes had occurred in my absence or even what I was expected to do. I had never used textbooks or relied on a teacher's manual, yet my students did very well. The children's books I considered were ridiculously expensive. I needed to stretch the seven hundred dollars. Just as I returned the pricey book back on the shelf, my husband called me to another section of the bookstore. He pointed to a big sign!

We were in luck. Barnes and Noble had a huge sale on children's books. As I perused the titles I found that many of them were Newberry Award winners. Together, my husband and I selected books at multi-reading grade levels because my students reading test results showed them to be below grade level readers. Was it any wonder that these students misbehaved and gained a reputation as trouble makers? I had been in their shoes when I was in elementary school. It was damned humiliating trying to pronounce words in the foreign language of English and not know their definitions enough to understand what is read. It was

also damned embarrassing to be the kid the teacher criticized or mimicked as we attempted speaking English not even close to fluently. Such teacher put-downs were enough to make one hate reading and writing, not to mention speaking English. As far as I was concerned I needed to gain their trust so I could introduce them to the joy of reading. It didn't matter, at the time, what they read as long as they were reading!

Into our shopping cart went titles such as *Martin Luther King*, *Joan of Arc*, *Michael Jordan*, *Volcanoes*, *20,000 Leagues under the Sea*, *Flying Ace*, *Addy*, *Meet Addy*, *Dinosaur*, *The Lorax*, *Sarah*, *Plain and Tall*, *Black Beauty*, *Never Kiss an Alligator*, *Beastly Tales*, *Horse Heroes*, a dictionary and many other books we thought the students' would like and enjoy. We also had to purchase notebook paper, construction paper, glue, pencils, erasers, soap, scissors, and tissues. Seven hundred dollars wasn't enough for all the books we selected so we threw in another two hundred dollars of our own money.

As I typed out the inventory of our reading books, ideas began to seep into my thoughts about how we would cover vocabulary, spelling, and writing. My students' first language was Navajo. Since they lived isolated from nearby towns there was little need to speak English. Most families lived paycheck to paycheck so there was never enough to purchase books for their children. This was true for me as well when I was a child. When I asked to buy a book, the reply given to me was, "Are you going to eat it?" Food and household necessities were given priority and I understood that. I always considered my students' as extended family rather than other people's children. I think my students viewed me as a distant relative like an aunt or a grandma, but definitely an elder in terms of tribal familial structure. The ideas for teaching came from these considerations I mentioned. I would find a way.

On Monday morning I greeted my students happily. I told them we were going to have a meeting to talk about our duties and responsibilities as students and myself as a teacher. They almost immediately stopped their wiggling and giggling and came to attention. I introduced myself again, "My name is Angelina Medina. I am Acoma, Zia, and Zuni. I belong to the Bear Clan and I am a Little Badger. My father is of the Badger Clan and my mother is Bear." The students smiled, as someone whispered Shush. I looked around with a question written all over my face. I didn't have to ask. "Shush means bear in Navajo," one of the smiling boys volunteered. "Thank you, I will remember that," I promised. They in turn introduced themselves and told me where, in the Ramah area, they lived. They shared information about their families and about their sheep. They even told me about their dogs and their dogs' names. I listened as I visualized them either herding sheep or playing with their dogs among pinon or pine trees near their homes.

"Do we need to have classroom rules on the wall?" I asked. One boy pointed with his lips to a space on the wall and said, "Aoo', yes, pudem up der." "Are you sure?" I asked again. The smallest of the boys said, "Aoo". Are fourt grade teacher put roos on de wall. Thas de way we 'posed to bave 'cause were naughty" he said giggling. "Is that right, class? Are you naughty?" I teased. Several of the girls spoke up, "Ndaga." The older taller girl explained, "Jus' sum da boys sumtime dey ac naughty 'cuz dey uh, don wanna learn...dey don wanna do nothing what teacher tells 'em." "Okay, so you are telling me I have naughty students who don't want to learn, is that right?" I asked. Some said yes and some said no. "Hmm, I'm a little confused about that because what I saw on the first day of school were some really nice helpful boys and girls. You saw the messy room we were in, and you all helped put the desks and chairs in a nice arrangement. Then some of you picked trash up off

the floor and threw it away properly. There were those who straightened up the shelves in the back of the room or along the counter. Those were very smart and helpful young people who helped the teacher and who helped each other. I didn't see anyone acting naughty at all. I think you are fantastic students, don't you?" I asked as I looked around the room. Eyebrows lifted, smiles came to their faces, and their eyes lit up as they looked at and among each other. "Um, Ms. Medina, we know how to behave. We have to raise our hand when we need to use the restroom or when we want to ask permission to do something. We don't pose to talk 'cause we 'posed to be doing our work. And, we don't 'pose to bodder each other or draw spit balls," Adrian, the smallest boy, explained. I picked up a large, red poster paper and marker. "Um, Ms. Medina, we don't need that. We know what we 'posed to do in class," Adrian remarked as he glanced around the room and his classmates nodded their heads in agreement with him. Without taking a vote, as might happen in a regular public school classroom, we all recognized there was a consensus to which we, as tribal people, agreed. I put the red poster paper and marker away.

Adrian's name came up several times in the teacher's prep room as being the biggest trouble maker since he started school in kindergarten. All the teachers knew him and dreaded having him in their classroom. I found him to be a leader who was quick to read people, quick to analyze a situation, and quick to resolve issues. I wanted to hug him but didn't dare. It would ruin his reputation!

Straight Talk

The next thing I did was to hand each student a colored, folded paper with their name on it. I asked them to not open it until I gave the magic signal, a quick nod of my head. I also told them that once they opened up the paper they were not to speak the numbers on

them and they were to not share their information with their classmates. These numbers were theirs alone and the numbers must remain a secret between them and me. Looking around the classroom with smiles on their faces they were clearly dying to open up their papers.

I wrote “Comprehension” on the chalkboard and underlined it. Then I wrote the numbers 4.1 underneath. Then to the far right I wrote 5.5 and 6.0. I asked, “How many of you remember taking a test at the end of the school year when you were in the fourth grade?” Most of the hands went up. “How many of you know what the test was about?” I asked. Blank faces checked other blank faces as they nodded their heads and shrugged their shoulders in the negative.

The students’ not knowing what tests measured was typical because such information is rarely shared with them. I felt it was important for them to know more about testing, their results, and what that meant. I explained as simply as I could with the hopes they would understand. Even as a child in elementary through high school, I had no idea what the end results were or what it meant for me. Tests and end results were always a puzzle. I wanted my students to hear my explanation and perhaps they would begin to understand how the results affected their lives. I didn’t think they were “just children” and wouldn’t understand. In tribal communities, children as young as eight years old were considered old enough to share concerns with so they could develop their critical thinking skills, analyze their information or what they saw, and then determine what they need to do.

I explained that they had taken a test for reading and math. The end results for each student showed teachers if they were at grade level. “In other words, are you reading at fifth grade level or are you reading at a higher grade level, or did you miss some lessons along the

way and you might be reading below grade level?” leaving the question in the air for them to think about.

“Now, I have written *Comprehension* on the board. Underneath it, I wrote 4.1.” At the far right I wrote 5.5 and 6.0” I explained as I pointed to the information. Comprehension means, ‘You understand what you are reading or have read.’ The number 5.5 means a student is reading and understanding what they are reading at the fifth grade level and at the fifth month. Or, perhaps a student is reading and understanding what they are reading at the sixth grade level. Do you understand, or did I confuse you?” I asked with a worried voice. The students became silent. I paused for a few minutes giving them time to think about the information I shared with them. Most of them looked somewhat concerned. I scooted into the Pueblo mode of mentoring. I explained, “If you had paid attention to your previous teacher’s lessons and you did your assignments, then your scores would probably be very good.” Eyes rolled as if they were searching their minds to recall what they did. I pressed on, “If you did not pay attention and you did not do your assignments or homework, then they might have missed out on some important lessons that could have helped you in the tests.” Now think back to last year and ask yourself, “Did I pay attention to the teacher’s lessons? Did I do my assignments and my homework? Did I read and understand what I read?” I remained quiet as they also were quiet and checking their memory. I could see some very disturbed faces.

“Okay, well, let us find out how we did on the test you took. Place your hands with your folded paper on top of your desk in front of you. Eyes only on your paper. Listen. After you open your paper, look at the numbers and think about it,” I advised. “Get ready, set, open your papers but say nothing,” I instructed as I nodded my head.

The sound of crackling, dry paper could be heard as the students opened up their mystery paper, a paper that would make a huge difference in their lives in the coming months. The room became extremely silent. Several chins dropped to the chest with shoulders shuddering. Hand to forehead as eyes stared at the numbers on the folded papers. Two faces were smiling happily. My students' reaction to their personal scores brought them to a shocking reality of the grade level they found themselves to be. Their extremely low scores and their looks of sadness made me feel sad also. As I collected their bad news papers, I told them they each were the only ones who knew what their score was and that there was no need to share it with anyone else.

The students remained quiet as I praised them on how brave they were to be learning a language that was very different from their own. I said, "It takes a lot of courage to memorize the English alphabet and then to arrange letters to form into words. You not only have to write them but you have to be able to recognize them when you read a story in English. Then, teachers expect you to understand what you read. That's hard. It can be very frustrating, especially if you don't recognize words that you and your family don't ever use. Yet, schools test you and expect you to know as much or more than those who speak only one language...English. So, although your scores are not where you would like them to be, it's okay. It's okay because now you can change that. It's up to you to decide whether you want to be a better reader, writer, and speaker of the English language or you can decide to not try and stay with me again next year!" I smiled at them, "Do you want to be with me in the fifth grade next year?" My last question may have convinced them that I was not going to pass anyone to the next level unless they were at grade level. I realized my students had been receiving social promotions because of their behavior. They were not taught!

We took a short break to relieve the stress that came with the bad news papers. At recess I led them through aerobic stretches and a quick jog around the small basketball court, and then I released them to play. Some played and some stood under a pine tree talking.

Our newly purchased paperback books and magazines were spread out over a horseshoe table I managed to confiscate from the hallway of the elementary school. Before the students returned to the classroom I told them that Mr. Murray and I did our best to select books according to the wish list they provided us. Some had washed their hands so they would not “dirty” the books. They walked around the horseshoe shaped table to view the books. The boys were especially excited that there were books about sports race cars, Michael Jordan, and scary stories. I told them they could spend some time looking at the books before we left for the cafeteria to have lunch. There was no grabbing or fighting for any of the books. They selected their books and returned to their desks. Soon they were grouping together to share and talk about the stories or pictures they found interesting. It felt natural for them to group together. It’s what they would have done at home. It’s what happened in Pueblo homes when something new came into the house. They were not loud or rambunctious at all. They were happy and excited that they would have these chapter books to read instead of what they called boring reading books.

As the students perused their new books, I called them to my station one by one. My station was off to the side of the chalkboard in one corner of the classroom. I wasn’t yet certain, in those moments, how I would begin teaching reading or writing. What I did feel was an urge to be brutally honest with my students about their reading scores. Being very honest with ourselves and with others was a Pueblo teaching I practiced throughout my life. Honesty is a tribal value practiced by many other tribes as well. Being able to speak the raw

truth helps us to evaluate where we are in life and how we can solve challenging issues. The issues and the reasons my students had become rebellious had much to do with the frustrations they felt in deciphering unfamiliar words in their reading texts as well as the lack of English vocabulary and definitions needed for writing in their second language and then being punished for not meeting their non-Indian teacher's expectations.

Smiling at my student I asked, "What do you think about the reading books we bought you?" I asked. "I likem a lot. Um...I don know wich to read first," Alex replied. "Do you like to read?" I asked. "Um...I don' read good." She responded nervously. "My teacher, she gets mad when I don' say a word right and I read slow. I can't say the big words so I stop reading, and um..don know what they mean. Is hard," she admitted.

"Okay, so let's take a look at your reading score first so we know where we have to start," I suggested. Alex left her scrap paper folded as she pushed it toward me. Her shoulders slumped slightly forward as she pressed her lips tight and stared at the floor. I was very familiar with the change in her posture for I had reacted in the same way with the teachers who intimidated me when I was in elementary school. I knew that she was anxious and not really wanting to hear the bad news that she anticipated. I also knew that putting her head down and staring at the floor was a posture for listening intently and to prepare to analyze the news and think about what needed to be done.

We looked at her vocabulary score of 1.4 and reading comprehension of 1.7. "How do you feel about these scores?" I asked. "I feel stupid and dumb. I feel bad." Alex replied. "Well, I don't blame you for feeling bad but you are not stupid or dumb. In fact, you are a very brave girl, did you know that? You are learning a second language, a language that is very different from your own. You not only have to learn to speak it but you must also learn

how to spell and try to write sentences correctly. So I agree with you that reading is hard, but you can do it, and we'll work together to get better, okay?" I touched her hand. There are big English words you never heard but you can learn them because you are smart. We just have to take some time to learn how to say the word or words and we need to make the dictionary our best friend. So don't worry, you are going to do just fine!" I reassured her. Alex smiled and returned to her desk.

More than half of the class had similar scores, several were below third grade level, and two were at grade level. I went home wondering how I was going to organize our reading program. I had been out of the classroom and college teacher training for fifteen years, so I honestly didn't know about the latest strategies for teaching reading or even aware of up-to-date research on teaching Native Americans. I didn't have time to research. I had to depend on my own intuition and creativity immediately because I was in the situation NOW!

Planning for the Future

The next morning, I called our class meeting to order and told them I wanted to talk seriously about what we were going to do about the reading scores. I pointed out what they all knew now about the grade levels they scored on the test. I told them that the scores did not mean they were stupid and dumb as someone had said. I advised that most had missed out on some very important lessons somewhere between first grade and now, the fifth grade. Did they miss out on the lessons because they were not paying attention and were maybe playing when they should have been listening and doing their assignments? Did they miss out because they could not understand what the teacher was trying to explain or what happened? I advised that there will always be people who know more than we do because they did their lessons and took the responsibility to learn more. There will always be people

who may know less than we do because they missed out on some important information that would have helped with the next bit of information. Maybe they missed school because they were sick or they had to go somewhere with their family. I explained there were many reasons, in their case, why they got behind but that they could do something about it.

I repeated to the whole class as I had told them individually that they had to learn a second language which was not easy, often times confusing, and how English had too many rules that the Navajo language did not have. I reminded them that the Navajo language had not been a written language before but that the tribe had begun to write it. There was no choice for Indian children across America but to learn the English language because they would need to know it in order to pass to the next level throughout their schooling and to get jobs in the future. I also pointed out that many stories they were required to read might be hard to understand because such things did not exist in their culture. I gave them many explanations for their not learning to read and write in English. It was important to me to compare the Navajo culture with mainstream American culture so they could see the differences. I could feel a sense of enlightenment and relief among the students.

“To each of you...you are the only one to decide what and how you are going to change study habits and behavior habits to do better for yourself...not for me, the teacher, but for you because you are important. You can decide to work hard to catch up and go to the next level or you can avoid doing assignments and be with me again next year because I will not pass you if you don't make the grade.” I could tell they were thinking about what they just heard and processing this information to determine how the information might apply to their life experiences. “Any questions or comments?” I asked my now serious looking group of students. One weak voice in the class, “But it's hard, teacher.”

“Yes, it was hard for you but it doesn’t have to be. I will share everything I know of what the school expects from you. I will show you how to study. I will not tell you what to do and how to do it, but I will show you. I believe in you so you must believe in you also.” I encouraged them. The students remained quiet.

“The first thing we need to do is go back and relearn those lessons you missed along the way. I will not start you, yet, at fifth grade level for reading, writing, spelling, science, or social studies. That will come when you are ready for it, maybe by January or maybe sooner. It will be up to you.” I told them. I told them that as far as their school was concerned, they needed to do four book reports for the whole year. They groaned. “It gets worse” I told them, “I will expect you to write a book report for every chapter book you read. I will pick four of your best book reports.” “Nooooo!” they cried in unison. “Yes, my dear little ones. I will guide you every step of the way, until you can do it on your own. By writing book reports you will learn new vocabulary words that will help you with your reading. You will practice writing complete sentences so that you will recognize when you need to put a period, question mark, or an exclamation mark at the end of a sentence. You will also know when to start a new paragraph. Just as important, you will learn the writing process so that you will know how to write a book report. With all this practice you will soon pull yourself out of the grade level you tested at. Don’t worry. I am here to help you. Whatever you learn yourself you can help others. You can work together to help each other just like you would do at home when you help your little brothers, little sisters, cousins, or your parents or grandparents. How does that sound?” I asked the class. “Scary...a book report for every book? Eeyah! Oh, no!” numerous voices chimed in. I had not planned beforehand how we were going to learn language arts until I spoke the words. I was scared, too!

On the first few days of the reading period things were a little disorganized and chaotic to say the least. Students began to leave the first books they selected for some reason and picked up another. A couple of students complained that the book they wanted to read wasn't available because someone already had that book. The boys, especially, were squabbling over books until Darlene scolded them. The boys looked at me and I looked at Darlene, "This needs to stop, so Darlene, what should we do?" She picked up her binder, pulled out a sheet of paper, drew lines, and told the boys, "You have to check out the book you want to read and hold on to it until you finish," she ordered. The boys looked at each other and picked up the ones they had started with. They mumbled under their breath as they wrote in their names and the title of the book they had to check out. My mind was so busy with all that I had to prepare because we lacked so many things that I didn't even think about a book check-out system, "That's a great idea, Darlene, thank you." We decided that students would be responsible for the same book and check it back in when they completed their book report. Until then, none of the students had read chapter books.

One might ask why I allowed Darlene, a student, to take charge when in a public school the argument typically, would be or should be settled by the teacher. In a Pueblo household, and in a Navajo household as well, how Darlene settled the argument was as normal as her solving the problem of how the issue was to be settled. The way in which the boys responded was also a normal response because she told them what they needed to do: she provided the guidance needed to know what to do the next time. Besides that, I asked her what needed to be done, she knew, and it made sense. If there had been an issue or if the boys had challenged her, I would have had to settle the challenge.

Before students could actually assign themselves a chapter book, I listened to each student read. Was it any wonder these fifth grade students were behind? A majority of them couldn't recognize words much less pronounce them. If they had phonics in previous years they still had difficulties sounding out words. I found that when they didn't recognize a word or couldn't pronounce the word they skipped it, thus, they read hesitantly and their reading overall was choppy. Since they couldn't recognize or pronounce words they obviously would not be able to comprehend the stories they read. I gave them a choice. First, they could keep the book they chose if they also kept track of words they knew they could not pronounce or know the definition, or the next choice was that I would give them an easier book to read. I could feel their pain and their dilemma. The choices were tugging on their pride and their integrity. I gave them the night to think about it. They could give me their decision on the following day.

The cafeteria and the school playground became my students' meeting places. From within hearing distance I could hear them discussing the way I taught and the lessons I provided them. This time they were discussing the choices of keeping their chapter book, writing words they didn't know, or accepting an easy reader. It was a hard choice. None of them wanted to be caught with an easy book. They didn't want anyone making fun of them or criticizing them. By the time we entered our classroom they had made a decision, not just for themselves individually, but as friends and classmates.

Learning Big Words

I settled in at a student desk to the side of the classroom where I listened individual students read to me. Soon I was surrounded by students with serious looks on their faces. They were nervous. "Ms. Medina, um, we don' wan' easy books. How, um, how we gonna

do dis, write words and all dat? It's gonna be hard, but we wanna learn big words and read good. We talk 'bout it already." Adrian explained. There were murmurings of agreement among the students. They had reached a consensus in much the same way as decisions are made in tribal meetings or in family meetings. I was so proud of them.

Throw Out the Spelling Book!

As was the case, many new and inexperienced teachers, whose teaching internship were also less than mediocre; I had no clue as to how to integrate vocabulary with reading and writing. I was shown a spelling book with student spelling workbooks. According to my principal, all I had to do was start from the beginning of the book and have students learn ten words a week, beginning on a Mondays with spelling tests on Fridays. The students needed to memorize their spelling words, find definitions in their workbooks and match them to the spelling word and, supposedly, that would be enough to build their vocabularies. It was not long before I realized that learning how to spell words and their definitions was not helping them with their reading comprehension. Their writing did not necessarily improve either. I knew vocabulary was important, but the spelling words they learned did not coincide with words in their readings.

It took a couple of weeks before I learned to listen to my students' complaints about their not knowing the "big words" in their reading books. My students and I had a meeting to discuss how we were going to solve the problem. Should we keep our spelling books and add five words from our readings to the spelling words every week? Almost in unison the students shouted out, "Throw out the spelling books" and unofficial voting hands flew up into the air. Then I asked them what they had in mind. One replied that it would make more sense to select eight words from their reading and have a spelling test that would include

definitions, instead of using ten words from the workbook. We agreed to try that to see if they would do better in spelling, definitions, and in reading and writing.

That was when I designed a cover for their personal spelling books. Together, each student selected two words from their current reading that gave them the greatest challenge. A student volunteer gathered those words and wrote them on the chalkboard. Out of the list of words on the chalkboard, the students voted on the eight words they would study. This did not mean that the other words would be eliminated, rather; they decided to spend at least five minutes after their reading period to work in teams to study at least two other words which were not selected. They decided that the eight words would be their focus for memorizing both the spelling and definitions. These particular eight words were ones they had the most difficulty with in understanding the stories they were reading at the time.

They were excited about this new vocabulary challenge. They took the new words home on a Friday. On Monday, we sat on our rugs on the floor to read aloud. Not only did they read more smoothly, but they made connections to the context of the readings. It does seem that my students, unbeknownst to them, created their own plan for vocabulary instruction where they related the new to the known, promoted active, in-depth processing, had multiple exposures, and constructed their strategies for learning new vocabulary.

I had students exchange papers after the test to help me check them. I would say the word, spell it, and give definitions. If a student's definition was different it would be read aloud and then usually given credit because they were rarely mistaken. At the top right hand corner of the paper, the student grader wrote the word "right." Next to the word the student grader would then write in the number of correct answers. Beneath the word "right" would be the word "wrong." Next to that the student grader would then write in the number of

incorrect answers. After that, I would provide the graders with a score which they wrote in large letters at the top right corner of the paper. Then they would write “graded by” and their name. This was to double check with the student in case a mistake was made. What I loved about this checking and grading system were the encouraging comments written by the student graders. For instance, there would be comments like, “Good Job Derrick” when a student did a good job! Or, if a high number of mistakes were made, the student graders might write something like, “Keep trying, you’ll do better.” These were comments student graders chose to write on their own.

Students who did not do well on their tests were given a chance to improve. Shortly after the spelling test was over and students received their graded papers I gave them time to look them over. Students, by choice, shared their test papers with one another.

Automatically, they looked up the correct spellings or correct definitions and teamed up with a classmate to help them memorize the words so they could retake it when they felt ready.

Sometimes, they would take the words home to have their parents help them. Then they voluntarily let me know when they were ready to retake the test and I would have one of the students administer the test. They tested only on the ones they missed. They were determined to improve before the end of the second semester.

These fifth grade students continually impressed me with their strong determination to do better and their deliberate change of behavior. It was the girls who disciplined the boys when they became a little bit too rowdy to tolerate. This disciplinary action was a common practice in many Native homes so it was natural for all of us. During the time I had these students I never had to send any one of them to the principal’s office or to call on their parents for a conference.

My husband, Mr. Murray, was hired to teach third grade students at the same school in October after their teacher quit. The students and I missed him. He was the pillar of patience and the students always felt very comfortable seeking his help, especially for math. With the assistant principal's approval, we arranged for him to teach my students math during the time his students had to leave for physical education. That time was meant for teacher planning, but he enjoyed working with our students. This worked out really well for all of us.

Fifth Graders Meet Third Grader's Challenge

One day he asked if I would accept one of his third grade students for reading. She was an avid book reader who took home at least three extra books a week. She was already reading chapter books. Now she needed practice in writing book reports. She would fit right in with what the fifth graders were doing, or would she?

At our classroom meeting, I announced that we would soon have a third grade student joining us during our reading time. The news certainly surprised them as eyebrows went up and the students looked at one another. I told them that this little girl took home several books to read each day. "No way!" they exclaimed. They thought she was taking home picture books until they witnessed for themselves the types of books she did take home. I was rather skeptical myself. I asked her to read her selections to me. I opened up the pages randomly and asked her to read. I was floored! Then I asked her to tell me a little about the stories she read. Now I was impressed.

At the end of our reading session, Britney (pseudonym) asked if she could check out three books. The books she chose were short stories but it was still commendable because most students hated taking books home to read. All eyes were on her as she calmly and

quietly wrote her name and the titles of her books on the check out-sheet. The room was silent as she left our classroom. As soon as the door slid closed behind her, the rest of the class expressed their doubts. “She’s not gonna read them. She’s jus’ showin’ off,” They exclaimed. “We’ll find out tomorrow,” I teased. Thinking about Britney that evening, I decided to find a way to keep track of her readings so I could report them to Mr. Murray.

I’m not sure where I had heard about or even seen a book worm to give me the idea of making one. She was in third grade, they still liked cutesy things and she was a book worm. She loved books so why not use book worms to keep track of her readings? I cut out oval shapes from green construction paper I had at home. The following day, though eyes were on their books, my students’ ears were focused on Britney’s oral book report to me. Silently, behind Britney’s back, my fifth grader’s eyebrows went up as they looked at and elbowed each other. Now we were all convinced that she was not putting on an act.

I gave Britney three green Book Worm oval shaped bodies for each book she read. We went over the information that was needed: Date, name, title of the book, and number of pages. She proceeded to complete them. We then stapled the bodies together. She studied her book worms. Something was missing. “Oops, Ms. Medina, it doesn’t have a head!” she exclaimed with a smile and a hopeful look in her eye. I told her she could make a worm’s head in class if she wanted. She asked if she could take it home to decorate and bring it back the next day. I gave her permission; indeed, she brought it back the next day. It had a happy smile and antennas on its head. I placed her book worm on the wall, just low enough for her to read and add to it.

I showed the students the green book worm I would require Britney to complete each time she completed the reading process. “Do we have to do that, too?” whined my little boys. “No, I wouldn’t do that to you,” I teased.

After Britney returned to Mr. Murray’s classroom, my students talked about the number of books she read and how she had no complaints. Most importantly, they realized she was voluntarily reading other unrequired books just because she liked the stories! There was an excited buzz throughout the room as they glanced at the books she had read. What a huge difference this little girl made in my classroom! She undoubtedly inspired my regular fifth grade students to read more. They now wanted book worms after they saw hers grow by the day. They wanted to be included. They asked if they could take books home to read to their siblings or to their parents. I gave them little green worm bodies for those. A large worm body meant they had completed a chapter book. Soon our walls, windows and ceiling were crawling with book worms that became centipedes. For our classroom I checked out large numbers of leveled books which fortunately had recently been added at the school library. One girl was in charge of the chapter book check-out sheet while the other was in charge of the library book check-out sheet.

Now we added a new form to keep track of their chapter books, library books for extra reading, oral book reports, written book reports, and their grades. One of the changes made on the reading track sheet by the students was to add on the date they started reading a chapter book followed by the date they completed it. They asked for this to give them an idea of how long it took them to read one whole book. They continued to challenge themselves as they worked toward reading more chapter books in less time. They loved

growing their book worms, which were now attracting a lot of attention as students and staff passed by our window wall.

The students were electrified now with reading. I began to hear them share stories they read and in which book. They recommended books to each other as they also helped with pronunciation or spelling of words. They were learning to remember topics, characters, main characters, main ideas, as they practiced oral book reports and as they learned to organize their written book reports. The books were beginning to show wear and tear with their worn out spines, torn corners, and their dog ears.

Overcoming Writing Challenges

The written book reports were taught using a writing process that previous students found easy to use and from which to learn. It was an introduction to writing in a format most elementary teachers require. To begin, I made a book report template that was simple and easy for students to follow. With practice, I hoped that students would know where to place the title, skip a space, and write their introduction, the body, and the conclusion. They knew what a title was but were unsure of the rest of the process. It was necessary to guide them along as they learned what needed to be said in the introduction. They had extreme difficulties with writing complete sentences so we practiced with very simple sentences so they could identify the subject and the predicate. The words *subject* and *predicate* had to be defined repeatedly. Perhaps those words are easily understood by monolingual English speakers, but it definitely is not in the daily vocabulary of bilingual speakers. Even the local Navajo parents could not easily remember the parts of a sentence to help their children. I created sentences using student, family, or animal names to teach nouns and that nouns are often the subject, the who, or what, in sentences. It was not easy to explain. Worst of all,

writing sentences could not be explained in Navajo because their language was not expressed in the same way as English. The words *subject, predicate, noun, pronoun, verb, etc.*, did not exist in the Navajo language so English language arts rules and sentences were completely foreign in concept at any level of schooling for my Navajo speaking students. I had to literally show and model for the students how to write simple sentences and to even remember to use punctuation.

With input from the students themselves, they freely and enthusiastically shared their own experiences when they found something in the social studies book or the science book to they could relate. This was exciting because much of what they shared became lessons in writing sentences. The sentences were used to identify parts of speech and to strengthen their use of periods, questions marks, and other mechanics of the English language. Sometimes when I found common writing challenges, I would pause the writing time in order to attempt to explain why some of the challenges were there. I would remind them that they were learning a language that was very different from their own language. English was a foreign language, a second language, a language that had symbols they had to learn to put together and that because their own language was not written, there would be English writing challenges throughout the grade levels into high school. I would phonetically write a simple sentence in the Navajo language and compare its structure to that of the English language so that they could see the difference and understand why they were having difficulties. Once they understood at least some of the differences, I would tell them to congratulate themselves for taking on such heavy challenges and to be proud of themselves for learning a foreign language. English was foreign to their Navajo language. It was wonderful to see the light in

their eyes when something clicked in their minds about the differences between what was Navajo and what was from the outside.

Curiosity Earns an Excursion Trip

After comparing the Navajo culture with American culture and learning what some of the differences were, a couple of students asked about people from other countries such as China and Mexico. I marveled at my students' curiosity about countries outside of the United States considering we were in a very isolated area. It was rare for many of them to take trips to Albuquerque to visit museums. Most went to Albuquerque to shop for farm or ranch supplies, clothing, and to see a movie. So when they asked about other countries, I informed them of Santa Fe museums that had exhibits of different tribes including the kinds of homes they lived in, the different styles of clothing worn by various tribes, and the art, pottery, and jewelry made from shells, seeds, metal, and paper. They became so excited about seeing such a place and asked if we could take a field trip to Santa Fe! We were all caught up in the idea of traveling long distance to visit museums that would show us about other tribes in New Mexico. When I told them about the folk museum that included exhibits from around the world, they pleaded with me to take them to Santa Fe. I promised I would ask the acting principal for permission.

My students cheered at the great news that the acting principal had approved! I told them the school would provide us with a bus and driver but we had to raise the rest for lodging and meals. The students immediately began thinking of ways to raise money. The realist that I am, I had to bust their balloon and bring them back to academic reality! I told them that this was not a reward trip or a bribe trip...there was school work to be done on this trip. They became quiet and listened. They kept their smiles and their eyes told me they

would accept any challenge they were about to hear from me. I told them to think about the things they had already learned and to ask themselves if there were more things they wanted to learn from this trip. I asked them to create a journal in which they would write the questions they still had. They would seek answers as we meandered through the museums. They were informed that upon return to our classroom, they would practice oral presentations. They had to decide what subject their presentation would cover. I was not going to give a topic assignment. They had to use their personal dictionary they individually created in the early fall. Their dictionary contained words they had never heard before. Some chimed in, “we know, complete sentences, correct spelling...punctuation...we know.” My students were accustomed, by the spring semester, to open discussions and to helping each other. Any “talking” to each other in the classroom had to be about school work. None of the fifth grade students were discouraged. They were ready to take on any challenges to make their field trip excursion to Santa Fe and Albuquerque a reality.

Experiential Learning

Since it was close to Valentine’s Day, I showed them a Valentine flower made from Hershey Candy Kisses. It was wrapped with red cellophane attached to wires wrapped in green floral tape. Once they saw the flower they came up with more ideas about how they could be arranged as bouquets in a glass or wrapped in lacy Valentine paper. They suggested taking the Valentine bouquets to local offices located in our school complex to sell to employees. The students made suggestions and came up with a business plan without realizing that’s what they were doing and soon our Valentine project turned into lessons for mental math, learning the difference between cost, wholesale, and retail prices and

accounting. Their ideas included writing receipts, counting money, giving change, advertising, and marketing.

On a weekend my husband and I traveled to Albuquerque to purchase candy kisses, cellophane, floral wraps, wires, lacey paper, and tubular glasses. We also purchased receipt books the students could actually use to write receipts.

The students worked hard to complete their reading and writing assignments. Amazingly they asked to give up their recess time to make the flowers. Our classroom became a factory full of enthusiastic students ready to manufacture their Valentine flowers and bouquets.

After I showed the students the parts that were needed to make the flowers they were ready to give it a try. I had cut the cellophane squares, wires, and floral wraps for each student to create a candy kisses flower. Next, I guided them through each step to complete a flower. Of course there were those who made them without any difficulty and then there were those who simply could not do it. Try as they might, a couple of boys and girls became frustrated and gave up. They volunteered to cut the cellophane squares and distribute them as needed. They measured the wires needed for four inch, six inch and eight inch flowers for the different lengths of flowers needed for sweet short bouquets, single flowers, and bouquets in a glass. Others measured the green floral wraps and cut them. Another student took charge of organizing them in an orderly fashion on a table while another distributed them to the flower makers. I didn't have to make assignments. I circulated the room and helped those who needed me.

Students whose fingers became sore took a break from making flowers and created flyers. One of the lessons we had during language arts was on advertising. We looked at

newspaper ads, advertisements that came to the school, or they brought some from home. Rather than my telling them what is needed on a flyer, the students studied them and discovered another way of using who, what, where, when, and why. There were talented artists among them who drew pretty colored flowers with leaves as borders. Before we took the flyers out to post, we placed them on the walls for students to edit. Soon the posters were up in our hallways at the elementary school, the middle school, and the high school. During our recess time we took them to the post office, the clinic, grocery store, and to other buildings in our complex. The students practiced asking permission of people in authority to post their flyers. They even had thumbtacks, scotch tape, or masking tape if they needed them. Asking permission was not only a practice in business but it was also helping them with the use of the English language. It helped them with their enunciation, speech, and tonality as it also built their self confidence.

On another day, we traipsed over to the local radio station with our flyers. A couple of boys volunteered to ask the radio station manager to announce our upcoming Valentine's Day sale. When we arrived at the station the music was playing but there was no one about even though we had made an appointment. Not to be deterred, the boys went in search of the manager and found him. What a great feeling it was to witness the boys' self-confidence. They didn't even look to me to make the decision to search for someone to talk to. The manager and the boys went into a small room to talk to yet another person. That person would be the one to read the announcement. The rest of the class and I stood in the lobby waiting. We were trying to be really quiet so we could hear what was being said. When the boys and radio station manager came into the lobby, my students surprised me when they each went up to shake the manager's hand to thank him. They made me so proud.

During math we studied accounting. We pretended we were a business that made and sold flowers made from candy kisses. I explained the importance of keeping track of funds that were spent on supplies to make the flowers. As business owners they needed to calculate the cost of making the flowers and to set wholesale prices for other businesses they might buy from them. In our case, since we were going to sell our flowers to the local employees, we had to set retail prices.

We started with calculating cost. On the chalkboard I wrote the prices for the bags of candy, wires, green floral wrap, doilies, and glass containers. We broke into three teams. One team was to open up a bag of candy kisses to count how many was in each bag. They had to determine how much each piece of candy cost. The second team was to calculate the cost of wires and floral tape. The third team was to calculate the cost of doilies and glass containers. It took several days to begin to understand about wholesale and retail. Since we were selling our bouquets at retail prices the students had a better understanding of the profit they would be making from a single flower, a bouquet of six, twelve, or a bouquet in a glass container.

Another practice we undertook was that of writing receipts. Once we knew what the prices of our bouquets were going to be, it was easier to write receipts. Some of the students became pretend customers who were buying floral bouquets. Others played the salesperson who also had to write a receipt. No two people ordered the same thing, thus the sales people had to add, subtract, multiply and divide. All of them had to practice being sales people before we broke into role playing. The students took turns with the role playing as it gave them practice in salesmanship, in writing receipts, and using mental math. Later on, I had

them use actual cash to make change because they would be receiving cash from their customers. They needed to be prepared.

During oral language, the students' role played sales people. They had to approach people courteously and start their sales pitch, "Hello, my name is Patrick and I'm in the fifth grade. Our class is selling Valentine flower bouquets to raise funds for our field trip to Santa Fe and Albuquerque where we will visit museums. Would you like to purchase a bouquet for your mom, sister, auntie or somebody in your family?"

Since we would have to pay for hotel accommodation and meals, students had to determine how much it was going to cost for all of us to stay in a hotel. I brought a couple of menus for them to study as they also had to have some idea how much our meals would cost. We were all in shock to learn the different costs for the same kind of meal and drink. Worse yet was the shock of learning what a night in a hotel would be even though we would be sharing rooms. There would be a chaperone for the boys and the lady bus driver and I would chaperone the girls. More calculations needed to be done when we learned we would be given a discount for our stay in a hotel in Albuquerque.

Oh, it was a very busy second semester. When students asked questions during our manufacturing time, their questions gave opportunity to teach lessons in language arts, mathematics, social studies, and/or science. I had to think and do on my feet as there never seemed to be time to write lesson plans ahead of time. There wasn't time to prepare lessons so I had to either write on the chalk board immediately or pull something together as I was explaining.

The students took on various jobs in our classroom factory so we would be completely ready to sell. None of the students ever complained or tried to get out of doing

something. They worked cooperatively together. Leaders emerged among the boys and the girls as they performed different tasks. Without my supervision, the students managed to organize the various floral arrangements on the evening before our sale date. The girls had the boys pick up paper and other litter off the floors. We had taken the receipt books apart and stapled them into ten sets per student. Pens and receipt books were ready.

On the morning of our sale, a boy and girl stationed themselves at the floral counters. They handed each student the kinds of flowers they wanted to sell so they continued to have voice and choice. Another student distributed the pens and receipts as classmates walked to our back door. After all the flowers were distributed we walked in a line from our classroom down to the parking lot. We were going to the offices first. My students were so well behaved when we went anywhere. We had a front and back line leader to keep everyone on track.

When we were in the middle of the parking lot, one of the boys broke out of line and ran down to the superintendent who was walking across. We heard him say, “Hey, you wanna buy some flowers for your wife and your mother?” “So much for the oral practice of salesmanship,” I thought to myself as I stood in shock with the other students. The superintendent reached into his pocket, gave my student some money, and received his flowers. He bought all five arrangements! My student came back toward us with the biggest smile on his face and a wad of bills in his hands. “Where is your receipt?” I asked him. “He didn’t want a receipt” he replied as he grinned. “Do I still gotta write a receipt?” he asked. “What do you think?” I asked smiling at him. “Okay, I will write it cuz we hafta do accounting” he responded. Students who had extra bouquets gave him the extras. Both line

leaders reminded him he was supposed to stay in line with the rest of the group. He just smiled and took his place in line.

We were in an orderly line when we arrived at the school administration building. But as soon as we stepped into the lobby, the students took off in all directions! The manager had just come out of his office when one of my other students approached him with her flowers. He chuckled as he reached into his pocket. She said, "Thank you very much. Let me write you a receipt." He was impressed. "They're even writing receipts and giving change?" the manager commented. He went on to express his appreciation for what we were doing. He said he was glad to see them using actual math in business practice. Students began to return to the lobby with empty arms, copies of receipts, and cash in their money envelopes. Some staff came to see who their teacher was and expressed their appreciation of the students friendly demeanor and salesmanship. These were the Fantastic Fifth Graders of 2001-2002. They raised enough money for the two day excursion.

These hard working Navajo children were practiced in observing proper etiquette and behavior from their adult models in their home communities. What they learned from family and community members guided their actions and behaviors at appropriate times. Their participation in helping the household or participating in community activities helped them develop their self confidence. It is desirable, in my opinion, for non-Indian teachers to facilitate grouping of students to permit them to team up and work together. Cheating is not likely to take place because one of the Native practices is to show others how to do something. This often comes with an explanation of why things need to be done in certain ways. Students will often behave like members of an extended family-assisting, supporting, and encouraging each other. Students also know they are held accountable and will often

make extra efforts to help other individual members toward assisting whole group be successful.

Happy Days

At the end of the semester, results of their reading comprehension scores were incredible. Four students who initially scored at first grade, seven months, and at second grade, five months, scored above fourth grade level at the end of the year. Three scored at the sixth grade level, four were at the seventh grade level, and one was at the tenth grade, fourth month, level. They were the Fantastic Fifth Graders who surprised the school community with the fact that they read at least twenty chapter books with the highest number read being thirty two.

Chapter 9: Why, How Come, Because...

English. I hated English. My inner thoughts were in my Keres language, the unwritten language of my tribe. It was in no way related to the Latin language as was the Spanish language. There were Spanish speakers in our school and since I had taken a Spanish class I realized there were many English words that came from or were similar to Spanish. There were so darned many rules to try to remember and I never could memorize all of them. There was no way I could even translate words or sentences into my first language and visa versa. So many English individual words just did not exist in Keres so any attempts to translate either languages was a lost cause.

Language Conflicts

There were so many times when I would be so frustrated with my English teachers for expecting me to write in their language. I'd be angry because I had to learn and know two languages while they only had to know one. It took years to learn how to speak a decent sentence and even longer to write it. There were so many mixed messages from the teachers that I seemed to be continuously confused.

One day in high school, I remember writing a sentence using ink. I ran out of space on the line for the ending period! I didn't know what to do. I couldn't erase it; it was ink. What to do, what to do, I kept asking myself. I was too embarrassed to ask for advice from the teacher. I knew the period had to come at the end of the sentence but there absolutely was no place to put it. I knew she would scold me but I did it anyway. I placed it at the beginning of the next line! I knew I would be called on it but I didn't know what else to do since it was ink and the teacher didn't want us to cross out or scratch out words. I swallowed hard when I gave her my paper. I would just have to take whatever came.

Her face turned crimson as she glared angrily at me. With her thin lips she proceeded to embarrass and humiliate me in front of the whole class. Here we go again. I should have been used to it. I did not react or respond to her scolding. There was nowhere else to look except at my shoes. I did not cringe, cry, or protest. To have done so would have pleased her. Teachers seemed to get some sick pleasure from pointing out my mistakes.

Another time, my high school English teacher gave our class an assignment to write an essay about any topic. That wasn't easy to do because I didn't know what a topic was. I stood closely enough to my classmates in the cafeteria line to hear their discussions about our class assignment. After gaining some information from their closed conversations, I chose to write about rickets. For the life of me I don't know how I chose that subject since I had never heard of rickets! I headed for our school library. There I read everything about the disease that I could find.

For the first time in my life I enjoyed the process of researching and writing. I felt empowered and confident in a way I had never felt before. I was careful to remind myself of the who, what, where, when, why and how questions that needed to be addressed in my essay. I wrote and rewrote. Heavens, I even used the dictionary and encyclopedia! Feeling proud of my essay, after checking it for grammatical errors and misspellings, I submitted it. My teacher's taut face and angry looking eyes didn't melt me this time. I knew deep inside that my paper was thoroughly well written in my teacher's English language! A few days later, she called me to her desk. I approached her desk skittishly because of the angry look on her face. She demanded to know who wrote my paper. I could feel eyes on the back of my head as I heard my classmates' soft gasps. I looked into her eyes, something I rarely did, and told her in a strong warrior voice that I had written it while I was in the library. She

accused me of lying. Lie? Me? As a tribal person I had always been advised to never lie. Honesty was a code of behavior that I practiced early on. I could not lie to save myself! She asked again who wrote it for me. Raising my voice in anger, I told her that no one had written it for me. I wrote it. Her head was nodding in the negative as she stated that my essay was an “A” paper, and she knew I didn’t write it because, “You are not capable of writing a good paper.” With deep anger she wrote a letter grade of “C-” and threw my essay at me. With anger and humiliation, I walked back to my desk. My classmates’ heads were focused on their own papers. I knew they were hoping they would not be subjected to such hateful treatment as I had. The pride and self confidence I had built up while researching and writing was now shredded to pieces. I could not cry in front of her or my classmates. I took a deep breath, swallowed my tears, and stared arrows at her. The next time she looked up she saw me staring at her. With that she called me back to her cluttered desk, handed me my report card and told me to have my mother read her comments and sign the report card. While I stood in front of her desk, I read her negative comment about my essay. Now I was really teed off. With an amazingly quick reflex, I grabbed her pen, signed my report card and threw it back at her! Her mouth dropped open as she jumped up and stared at me. I told her I wasn’t going to show it to my mother or have her sign the report card. We argued. She left the room in a huff and came back with the other English teacher from across the hall. My teacher commanded me to step into the hallway. There, in the hallway, the other teacher, tall, large boned, piercing blue eyes and light brown hair above her wide forehead stood with her arms crossed. I remember her stance. Her white long puffy sleeved blouse and beige skirt, for some reason, reminded me of pirates. Coincidentally, Pirates was the name of our athletic teams. Without another word, the other teacher grabbed my shoulders, pressed me

against the wall and held me there while my teacher paddled me with a thick wooden board. I was both angry and humiliated. I was scolding myself inside for allowing myself to tolerate this embarrassing punishment. My anger must have numbed my behind because I didn't feel the board. I don't know how many times she swatted me but I do know she was out of breath. When I straightened up the other teacher scurried quickly back to her classroom. She actually almost looked ashamed for having been a part of this scene. I returned to the classroom, acting like nothing happened. But I couldn't resist the opportunity to embarrass our teacher. Since all eyes were on my re-entry, I motioned to my classmates what the teachers had done to me. I slapped my hands together to give the sound of the board hitting my rear end. My teacher, walking behind me, threatened me with another paddling. This time I faced her and challenged her. By now I was so angry with the mistreatment at home and then at school that I wasn't going to allow myself to be anyone's target anymore. My Keres speaking classmates uttered "nai-ee" under their breath but my teacher heard them. Nai-ee is a word that anticipates there will be some kind of consequence resulting in the teacher either punishing me, or it signaled my doing something I might regret later. My teacher's face turned scarlet as she turned her back to me and returned to her desk.

I was so happy for the day to end and looked forward to the long bus ride home. After I dropped off my books at home, I walked up the hill from my house, climbed up over rocks and cactus to the mesa above my village. I could feel my stomach tighten up as tears began to well up in my eyes. I found flat sandstone rock jutting out from the hill beside a plant. I told the rock, plant and sky what had happened to me at school, and then I cried. When my sobbing ended, I dried my tears and opened my eyes. There were sunrays spreading out through an opening in the cumulous clouds to the west. I knew that my spirit

guides understood my pain so nature provided the sun rays to reassure and encourage me to be strong. That reassurance strengthened my confidence in the powers to which I learned to relate.

Throughout my high school days I avoided conversations with teachers and classmates. I closed out almost everyone around me unless it was absolutely necessary for me to speak. I really didn't have any friends. I avoided volunteering to answer teachers' questions about our lessons because of their tone of voice and piercing angry eyes directed at me. I remained silent to avoid being scolded and to keep peace, for my own sake. Being silent or not initiating conversation became a lifetime habit. I needed to keep from going crazy. My total focus was to get through or squeeze through all my high school classes.

Put Downs

Our high school counselor called me into her office a few weeks before graduation. I could tell by the frown on her face that she was not thrilled to have me in her office. She opened up a file folder with my name on it. She didn't hesitate to tell me that I barely had enough credits to graduate high school and that my grades were not anything to be proud of. She also told me that I was not very smart because some test results showed that I had an IQ of 75. My heart sank. She was confirming my feelings of inferiority. I fought back tears. My stomach was churning. I feared for my future. She told me to not even think about going to college and that I should enroll instead in a vocational school and maybe I could become a clerk typist.

Throughout my high school years in Grants, the teachers, the principal, and the school counselor had never mentioned college after high school graduation that I remember. When the counselor advised me to forget about going to college, I had no idea what college was. I

didn't want to ask anyone because I was afraid someone would confirm I was stupid for not knowing what college was. Instead, I kept my ears open to conversations between my white classmates in the cafeteria. I heard that one of my classmates won a scholarship to go to MIT. Darn, what the heck was MIT? What was a scholarship? There were oohs and aaahs generated from that piece of news so MIT and a scholarship must have been an exceptional accomplishment for my classmate, I thought. I heard white girls giggling in the girls' bathroom as they talked about going to college to find a husband. Husband? Why find a husband to take care of you, I thought. Why can't you take care of yourself? I didn't want to depend on someone else to take care of my needs. I wanted complete independence but I still didn't understand what college was or why it was important. Ultimately, I bought into my counselor's advice that I become a clerk typist.

I thought becoming a clerk typist was an honorable job and I prided myself for being a fast and efficient typist. I had to be concerned about supporting myself because there was no one in my family who seemed to care enough about me to take me under their wing. Becoming a clerk typist meant I could survive with a small salary. So if I wasn't smart enough for college I decided I was going to be the best and fastest clerk typist at wherever I was hired.

I Can't Be One

My worst school experiences of racist treatment were during high school. It seemed to me that I was targeted by the white teachers, the school principal, and the school counselor. It was during those high school years that I decided to try to change my appearance and image. I became motivated to attempt to "act white." I closely observed

those white school personnel. I took note of their speech, their body language, their hair styling, and their fashion trends.

Privately, I practiced, in front of a mirror, how to stand and walk and gesture. I practiced losing my Indian accent in order to speak English fluently and flawlessly. When television came along, it gave me the audio and visuals that I needed to hone my image. It was those television actors who taught me survival skills. But there was no way for them, or anyone in my life, at that time, to know what I was actually feeling deep inside myself. Although I was convinced that I was being successful in my efforts to fit in with the white people around me, I was not happy because I still felt myself to be an outsider. I knew that something was wrong, but I did not know how to fix it.

As I think back now, I realize that I was actually attempting to self-assimilate myself into mainstream American culture. I was losing my identity as a Pueblo Indian woman. The hidden anguish of that realization, long bottled up inside of me, burst forth a few decades ago when I wrote, "I Can't Be One."

Caught between two cultures

I ponder every day

My existence and usefulness

In this confused world

Expectations high from both sides

I can't be both

I can't be both

I can't be one

I can't be none

*Though I long to walk
In the footsteps of my ancestors
Living all that the Creator taught
Living with few conflicts
I know that I cannot
College bound to erase the old
I'll walk from there, I'm told
With those all important papers
To help me climb that tall ladder*

Hope

After enrolling in three courses at Fort Lewis College, I called the All Indian Pueblo Scholarship Office to ask if they would fund the next semester. After a few minutes there was some hesitation that let me know there was a problem. The counselor there was very direct when she told me that they probably would not fund me because of my past academic history of bad grades. She said it would be “too risky” to fund me because it was believed I was not serious enough and probably would not make extra effort to study. I anticipated this very reply and I understood why their records would bring them to that conclusion. There were too many negative issues in my life that I had to cope with, including a relationship that should never have happened. My spirit was broken and I had to find a way to heal the pain that kept me in depression since I was ten years old or so. With all the strength I could conjure up to keep my voice from breaking, I pushed on and tried not to sound like I was begging the All Indian Pueblo Counselor, “I know that my academic records are really bad. I don’t blame you for not wanting to ...well, um, I’m really serious this time. At least serious

enough that I saved some money for this semester so I'm paying for myself. So, um, if I make better grades this semester, will you take a chance and pick me up next semester?" Silence. My heart was beating fast, I held my breath. "Yes, if you raise your grades, but I don't think you will" she replied. Deep breath. "I will raise my grades, I know I will" I told her, trying to sound confident. She said, "Alright. I will come to check on you around mid-terms and then we'll see." Needless to say I was overjoyed. I knew I was going to be really broke but I would suffer the consequences of my bad choices.

Third Time Around – Revolving Door

In the fall semester of my third time around or third attempt to get through college I became overly ambitious. I enrolled in seven classes that were a mix of theater art, dance, teaching seminar and physical sciences! During that semester I arose early to dance, act, and conduct experiments in the science lab. After dinner I was rehearsing in a college play. After rehearsal I reported to the third floor of the college library to study and write until it closed at midnight. For the first time in my academic experience I worked and studied like never before. Although I struggled with my essays I managed to submit them before deadline my grades improved tremendously. I proved to myself that I could achieve once I applied myself.

At mid-term, two counselors from the All Indian Pueblo Scholarship Office came to Fort Lewis to check on the students they were funding. Both of them sought me out and took me to dinner. I had kept contact with their office by sending updates of my course grades. They were very impressed with academic improvements considering the number of credits I was carrying and being active in theater. The lady counselor told me, "I really honestly didn't think you would bring your grades up, and to think, you were carrying sixteen hours,

plus you were in a play! That's a heck of a lot to do in one semester, but you did it. So, we have decided to give you another chance, and we will fund you for this next semester." I was so relieved. I thanked them over and over and promised they would not regret their decision. I tell this story because it is one of hope, regression, resilience, and determination that I hope will inspire those who have experienced negative judgments, put-downs, and setbacks to never give up on themselves.

No Piano Lessons for You!

I still had not consulted a college counselor after the negative experience with my high school counselor. I still had no idea what my major should be. Earlier on I had made some major mistakes in the courses I selected. But perhaps those negatives had positive lessons for me. As I studied the college catalogue, I tried to conjure up some wisdom from somewhere to plan my academic studies. In doing so, memories of past erroneous choices cropped up.

When I enrolled in a piano class, I was feeling bold, and obviously over-confident to attempt to learn how to play a musical instrument for which I had absolutely no background! I thought it would be as easy as learning the keyboard keys on a typewriter! I was soon to learn otherwise.

I entered the college theatre where the piano classes were to be held. As I walked down the aisle of the theatre I wondered why it was quiet why there was only the light beaming from the stage. There was only one piano below the stage! There was no one there but me! I sat down at the piano ecstatic and dreaming that one day I would play beautiful melodies like those I had heard in classical music. I plinked a couple of keys when I heard a loud voice from behind me, "Do you know how to play the piano?" I shook my head in the

negative. “Do you know how to read music?” he barked. I looked up to find a stern white disgusted face staring down at me. That familiar stare melted my confidence and burst my balloon. My invisible dream shattered, he scolded me with, “You can’t take this class unless you can read music! Go drop the class and take something else.” My heart sank, and my stomach churned. I exited the theater with great shame and embarrassment. I bit my lip to keep from crying. I had not yet learned to fight back.

Grade Theft?

Another time, I enrolled in a course called “Art in the Elementary School.” Much of it was hands-on activity creating lessons that would supplement language arts, social studies, and science lessons using art. I searched and found textures and shapes on buildings, grates, and sidewalks that were similar to Native American pottery designs. I placed drawing paper on top of the designs and used colored chalk to bring out the designs. I then created a lesson plan to teach geometry using art. In another project, I cut out lizards, desert turtles, and dragon flies from construction paper and placed them on a cardboard. This project was to be part of a science activity in which students would have to describe the life cycles of the animals and their biomes. I saved them in a small cardboard box.

At the end of the semester when I received my final grade for the art in elementary course, I was stunned to have received a B. All of my art projects and assignments were marked with A’s! By this time, I had been pushed to the edge too many times by white teachers. I gathered all of my art assignments with the A’s marked on them and took them to a meeting I scheduled with my professor. I asked him why I received a B grade when all of my projects had earned A’s. He told me that was the grade I deserved and that was the grade he gave me. His reply made no sense to me and it angered me. I demanded that the art

teacher do the honorable thing and give me the grade I deserved based on all the A's he marked on my assignments. There were no assignments graded lower than an A. He refused to change my grade but I would not back down. I told him I would go to the president of the college to show him my projects and grades. At that time, I had a campus reputation as an activist and the president had befriended me. After I stared him down, the art instructor took out his pen and said, "I'll give you an A out of the goodness of my heart." His face turned red after I blasted him with a few choice words about racism. The pride that I felt in creating unique pieces of art that could be used with students lifted my spirits and validated that I could be creative. But to re-experience negative attitudes and actions was a blow to my self esteem.

You Were Supposed to Punish Him!

The second grade Caucasian teacher came into my classroom to ask if she could send Roscoe (pseudonym) into my fifth grade classroom the next morning in an attempt to change his hyperactive behavior. She explained that Roscoe disrupted her class on a daily basis and would not sit still enough to pay attention to her lessons. She wanted him to experience another teacher in an attempt to change his hyperactive behavior.

Before my students were released to catch their bus that day, I informed them of the second grade teacher's request to allow one of her student to join us the following day. They broke out in smiles because they knew immediately who I was talking about. I asked them for their advice on how to treat him the next day as we continued with our daily lessons. They immediately suggested that we treat him the way we treated each other – with respect! The boys suggested that we place him between the two girls. They also suggested that he do the same assignments that they had to complete. It was agreed that we all would act as

though Roscoe had always been a member of our class. He would not receive any special attention.

The following morning, my students helped to rearrange our room. The boys borrowed a student desk from another classroom for Roscoe. The two girls welcomed him to our class and guided him to his desk; they provided him with a pencil and paper. They also explained to him that it was important for him to pay attention in order to learn. Otherwise, he might miss a lesson that might be needed when he became a fifth grade student.

I proceeded to share with the students our daily agenda; we would begin with language arts. We covered the subject of the sentence, the verb, and the object. As I modeled a sentence, using the scaffolding method, the girls showed Roscoe what to do. Roscoe was confused about verbs and did not really understand their purpose. When Roscoe still did not understand verbs, the boys asked me if we could go outside to show him verbs. On the playground, the boys had him join them as they practiced verbs. They ran, jumped, skipped, and hopped. For every action they performed, they had him say the verb for that action. After about five minutes, we returned to the classroom.

In all the time that Roscoe spent with my fifth grade students, he paid close attention to the lessons. He participated in everything that my students did. Not once, did he misbehave. He seemed to feel very much at home with my fifth grade class. When he saw his teacher coming for him, he groaned. He clearly did not want to go back to his classroom with her. Before he got to the door, he turned around to ask if he could come to my classroom again. I told him he was welcome anytime, providing his teacher gave him permission. His teacher opened my door, looked at me and smiled. I wished I had him in my

class because he was so involved and quick to learn. I think he would have done very well with us.

After I left the cafeteria, I walked over to the playground behind our elementary school building where she was on duty. She was talking to another teacher and looked very upset. When she saw me she said angrily, “You were supposed to punish him! He said he wants to go back to your classroom. Why didn’t you punish him?” I told her that I did not punish students. She was very angry. It was no use to try to have a reasonable conversation with her. She was not going to listen. I excused myself and returned to my classroom wondering why she had assumed that I punished my students. Her negative attitude and demeanor toward me was surprising and brought back memories of former elementary teachers when I was a student.

If anything I felt as an elementary student progressing through high school it was to hold in the anguish I felt from the way white teachers looked down at and talked to me. The anguish I felt as a young student was retriggered as I witnessed several of my colleagues mistreating their Native students in much the same way I was mistreated. The following poem came as if I had returned to being a student, and I was joined by other voices from decades and a century or so ago:

It’s Your Turn

You speak my name with venom

Your eyes spark a hatred flame

Your body stiffens to control

The way you feel about me

*Though my body is young
My ancestry is over a thousand years
The memory of the last five hundred years
Is as vivid as when the old ones were here*

*It hasn't changed
So little has changed
In the attitude of your ancestors
Which you still carry inside of you

That same smile is still plastered there
To match your haughty walk
Your words still have double meaning
Always, underneath there is a demand*

*You tell us we're no different
That we all have equal footing
You tell us we're bright and intelligent
So you assume we should be like you*

*In flattering yourself then
Your attempts are still to change us
For deep inside you don't believe*

The words uttered by your forked tongue

Your words and actions carry yet another tone

Filled with obvious intolerance

And a tremendous need to control

So you raise your voice

To feel powerful to force us

To move on your command

At the pace set within your head

The manner in which you speak

Is demeaning to provoke

There is an absence of respect

There is a lack of kindness in your being

By this manner you reject

My people's cultural practice

Of moving slowly in unmeasured time

To reach our eventual destination

It irks you now as it did then

That I don't move any faster than

*My grandfathers or grandmothers
When they were in your schools*

Your pioneer ancestors provoked mine

My ancestors remained silent

Your superiority or inferiority complex

Provokes my own peace – I react

The words I shout at you

Are words you have taught

Through television and magazines

And graffiti on your own city walls

For you see, in our language

There are no words such as yours

So you've taught us well

To give them back to you

Yet, you cannot see or hear

The messages on their return

For you choose to avoid

The truth that is there

*Let me ask you now
Why you don't ever bother
To learn about our culture
Or our language so that you can understand*

*Why cannot you see
There are major differences
In the beliefs, practices and
Ways of my people*

*Why do you believe so strongly
That we should be the ones
To continue to change and adapt
To be like you*

*You're the alien among our people
Though you've been treated well
And with sincere hospitality
Yet often with unspoken tolerance*

*Why do you so much
Want to strip my soul
To belittle and humiliate me*

To criticize and punish me

Why is it so hard for you to understand

I don't want to be like you

Yet I know I have learned well

To act like you

Melica, it's your turn

It's time for you to make the attempt

To learn more about us

To feel what we've felt and feel now

Open your mind, your eyes

To accept the responsibility of

What your ancestors

Caused us to become

Yes, we've become a lot like you

We toss back your ugly insulting words

We resist, we rebel, we defend

The struggle for power increases

So it is time now, Melica

To speak softly, kindly and honestly

To give respect if you want respect

To treat us like the human beings that we are

It is time, Melica

To learn – to know – to be

Chapter 10: Recognition – Skill Sets Appreciated!

Interesting things happen when we least expect it. A temporary employment agency that found me the job at General Electric called me with a lead to another job. The lady who called told me that my clerical experiences were exceptional, and that I should apply to San Jose State University for a position in the president's office. Gulp! Who me? My heart sank. Did I really have an exceptional background that a university would want to hire me? Oh my goodness and in the university president's office. No, I couldn't possibly qualify, could I? I thanked the lady for calling, but I would have to pass. I found myself walking up the stairway to the second floor where the university president's office was located. Tower Hall was one of the oldest buildings on campus. There were three large office desks that took up most of the space in the secretarial section of the president's office. One secretary sat in front of where I was standing, the middle desk was empty, and the other secretary sat at the other end. The president's office door behind the first secretary to my right was closed, as was the vice president's door behind the second secretary who sat to my left. I told them I was there to be interviewed for a position. The president's secretary smiled and directed me to the middle empty desk because there was no other place to sit. I walked around her to get to the chair of the middle empty desk along the wall.

I noticed several over packed-boxes overflowing with papers beneath the desk at my feet. A lady emerged from the president's office with folders in her hands. "Hi, I am the president's administrative assistant. You're here for the interview...I will be right with you," she said as she rushed by us into the vice-president's office. Within a couple of minutes she rushed out of the vice-president's office back into the president's office. She was rushing back and forth, but I sat patiently. After a few minutes she once again emerged from the

president's office, handed me a couple of papers and said, "Here, type these" as she continued into the vice-president's office. I quickly found paper, fed it into the electric typewriter, and typed two letters from the written drafts she handed me. I handed them back to her as she walked past the middle desk where I remained seated. In those few seconds she quickly glanced at them, stopped and declared, "These are perfect and beautifully framed letters. You're hired! Report to work on Monday!" Wow, so what was I worried about? I was thrilled to death! Never, in my insecure world, did I ever expect to be hired so easily for a position in the president's office of a state university!

The vice-president and my supervisor were very much impressed with my work. I was often called upon to type the president's press statements or letters to political entities, especially during the student sit-ins and other student protest demonstrations that occurred in the 1960's at San Jose State. One day, my supervisor and the vice-president took me aside to advise me to think about completing a college degree. Oh my goodness, to hear this from a my supervisor and the vice-president was thrilling and encouraging. I had been trying to save money for tuition and other college costs on my meager salary. The waiting for a miracle continued.

Miss Indian Expo - Key to College

On my desk one morning was a newspaper clipping about a pageant in Los Angeles offering one thousand dollars in prize money. One thousand dollars could pay for college room, board, and textbooks. Dreams about my friend completing college came more frequently, now so college was on my mind but this morning newspaper provided hope, an opportunity. I entered the contest for the thousand dollars it offered.

My competitors were already very experienced at winning pageants. I overheard their conversations about the contests they won, the talents they had and they were obviously very confident in themselves while I was not. Believing that I was going to lose I no longer paid attention to the emcee's announcements of the runners up. The girl next to me poked me in the shoulder and said, "You won!" "What?" "You won" she shouted over the noise. Here came the smiling judges with a bouquet of roses and a large blue trophy that they placed in both my arms. A plain white envelope containing the thousand dollars was placed in my fingers.

When I got back at the house where we contestants were staying all was very quiet and empty. I was alone with my crown, trophy, roses, and a white envelope with a green strip of paper that said, "I owe U." "What?" I asked myself in shock. This envelope was supposed to either have a check or cash for one thousand dollars! What does this mean? Does this mean that the sponsors were going to pay me later? Why hadn't anyone explained this to us at orientation or at any other time? I felt sick inside and honestly didn't know what to do. I was made a fool.

I returned to work the following Monday. The college president, the vice-president and my immediate supervisor congratulated me on winning the Miss Indian Expo title. I thanked them for their support and faith in me and for their help with the speech. I was too embarrassed to tell them about the empty envelope with green strip of paper. I had to move on. Even though I did not have the thousand dollars I had to find a way to get back into college.

So why didn't I confront the pageant sponsors about the empty envelope? This episode of my life still makes me sick inside as I think about the ups and downs, the

uncertainties, the tremendous need for love and support I didn't have, and not knowing where to go to seek help. I felt humiliated, embarrassed, and totally heartbroken to have my psyche beaten down once again. I was at a point where I no longer had the inner strength to take on another issue. I was disgusted with my weakness. My past and current life experiences were too much to bear but I had to get a grip and move on. I struggled to save as much as I could toward college expenses.

In the Shadow of My Dreams

In recurring dreams, for about three years, I sat in the shadows of a darkened auditorium as I watched my high school friend walk proudly across the stage in her cap and gown. She smiled happily as she received her college diploma. She walked into the darkness at the end of the stage. I remained in the shadows feeling sadness. I awakened from this repetitive dream with tears in my eyes. The repetitive dream seemed to beckon me to move toward returning to college. The dream haunted and taunted me. The urge to return to college became stronger and stronger but on my meager salary saving for college was virtually impossible.

In a conversation with someone I trusted in San Jose I confided that I needed to return to college but that I didn't understand what I was being taught, and that I didn't know how to study, take notes, or to even ask questions. I was just a dummy. He said, "There are lots of dummies who get through college and get degrees." Believe it or not, those words gave me additional incentive to pursue a Bachelor's degree! Fort Lewis College, I was certain, took pity on me to allow me to return while I was on academic probation.

Chapter 11: Birth, Identity and Roots

As I sat trying to remember something about my birth, my infancy, and the place I was born, I could not help but to mourn the loss of my baby dress that my grandmother must have made for me. I remember the tiny blue dress. It had been made from a blue cotton flour sack imprinted with dark and light blue tiny flowers. The front chest area was faded out from the many times I must have dropped my food or drooled on it. It was hard to believe that I fit into something so tiny. I learned that the few dresses I had were all hand sewn from similar flour sacks. They were passed on to other relatives' babies. During those years of many lacks, clothing, food, and tools were shared among relatives and neighbors. I am sad that I don't know what happened to it. Nor do I know what happened to the male and female blue corn that had been gifted to me at the name I received my Acoma name. The corn gift was to have been used to start my first garden from which I could harvest the corn, save seeds, and continue to plant them to feed my family for the rest of my life. They are gone. Also gone is the small squash blossom necklace that I wore when I was a child. It was made of handmade silver beads with a silver squash blossom. The small squash blossom was enhanced with a small round turquoise at its center.

I once saw a picture of me as a toddler. I had bangs across my forehead and my hair was cropped below my ear all around the back. There was a strand of either coral or turquoise beads around my neck. On my wrist was a bracelet made from turquoise. I recall another picture of me dressed in American clothing. I wore a baby bonnet that was the style in the 1940's. The photographs were in black and white because film came only in black and white. I don't know what color my fancy bonnet was. I am guessing that my mother must

have sent some clothing for me from Illinois where she was working. My grandmother took care of me from infancy on until I met my mother when I was about five years old.

Obtaining information about my birth and family was incredibly difficult. To ask my mother anything, I had to find her in a good mood to feel safe enough to ask her questions about me. She did not seem to want to discuss my entering this world except to say that I nearly killed her during childbirth. My grandmother delivered me. I can only imagine that the pain must have been great since she gave birth to me without pain medicine. I was born on the second floor of our ancestral three story home in Acoma. I got the feeling, from her punishing statement, that my birth was insignificant to my mother. I was unwanted.

In a conversation with my aunt in our third story kitchen in Acoma, I learned that I was born on the day that the Kupistaya healers came during winter solstice. This surprising news brought a smile to my face. That I was born on the day that the healers came was significant to me. My spirit was timed to arrive with the healers. Its meaning is still coming together for me as I have not yet come full circle with one of my life's purpose.

As a child I enjoyed riding in the back of my aunt and uncle's horse drawn wagon loaded with food, blankets, clothing, and cousin Guyaspa. The large, strong horses pulled the wagon along the dirt road situated between short, green cedar trees toward old Acoma. We bumped along noisily, laughing and trying to make sense of our silly conversations as our voices seemed to rattle as loudly as the wagon wheels. My cousin and I squealed as the horses traversed the curved road down the side of the mesa to the floor of the valley of sculptured sandstone rock formations. As we passed some of the rock formations, my aunt, a walking encyclopedia of Acoma history and culture, would identify particular statues we were passing, like the bears, or the family of rock statues, that stood for centuries watching

our people trend toward our ancient village. Acoma's actual name Haaku is interpreted to mean a place to prepare. I was born in a place to prepare. A lifetime question was not only about the beautiful mesa on which I was born, but of my own being. Prepare. Prepare. I have grown old and I still don't know for what I was to prepare or for what I was prepared. The question of preparing was often in my thoughts through the many spiritual activities and events of my "born to" people.

Part of Acoma was the northwest villages Deetsiyama (McCarty) and Deechuna (Acomita); they became year round living areas because of the deechuna (north river) that ran through to provide irrigation water for people's gardens. These three villages contained the living energies of the universe; my relationships with all socio-cultural-spiritual interactions which produced or shaped my personality.

Winter Solstice

During the winter solstice my ancestors, and eventually my family, and I gathered at the southernmost cliff near the Catholic Church in anticipation of the arrival of the healers. The evening lavender and gray striations of the south mesas and valley below often felt majestic and mysterious. At some time in the past there were fields of corn but now it was bare and marked with ancient trails. During solstice, I joined others in the cold of dawn to watch small bonfires being lit in the darkness. First a few sparks, then a small flame growing larger. A few minutes later another spark and a flame then another bonfire each ever closer to Acoma.

Watching the traveling bonfires beneath the twinkling stars in anticipation of community healing was exciting to watch. Feeling the presence of our ancestors at this time was comforting. Soon the bonfires disappeared from sight as they reached the base of our

mesa. I walked quickly to the street to wait with other spectators and practitioners. In the cold, we formed a quiet line on each side of the street giving the healers wide enough space to move through. I heard the sound of their staccato cries causing me to look in their direction.

Unrecognizable dark shapes approached us until the rising sun cast long shadows behind them. With prayer meal in hand, I offered prayers for family, friends, community, and the entire universe that all be healed and blessed with health and happiness. I sprinkled prayer meal ritualistically in front of each to honor them, a gesture to provide a pathway toward their destination.

Naming Ritual

On this annual event I had a present glimpse of the event that welcomed me at birth. In the winter of my birth, Dao-nah, my grandmother performed the naming ritual. She wrapped me in a light blue, tattered blanket and took me outside. As freezing cold as it was, she stood on the third floor of our house and began her prayer in the silence of the pre-dawn morn. The twinkling stars were vivid against the dark blue sky while the moon waned toward the west, leaving very little light. In her prayers to Father Sun and Mother Earth she gave thanks and asked blessings for me to always be in good health. She asked that my life be guided to do what was right in thought, in word, and deed. As she stood trembling from the cold, dawn began to break. Just as the first rays of sunlight peaked over the Enchanted Mesa, she presented me to Father Sun and named me Shruwasitai, Kuhaya Hanu. My name, Shruwasitai, would root me forever to the Zuni Bear Clan of Haaku, my place of power and my place to be prepared.

It would be many decades before I would have a better understanding that Father Sun and Mother Earth were representatives of the androgynous Creator we honor. Although it took a few decades, I learned to understand that the Creator's creative energy permeates all things and all life forms that are visible and invisible. I learned many years later that we humans are imbued with power that may or may not develop completely throughout our life time.

After introducing me, Shruwasitai, to Father Sun and Mother Earth, Dao-nah turned to walk back to the entrance of our home to knock on it as if we were visitors. Pretending they did not know about me, my aunt opened the old, home-made wooden door with a leather strap pull to invite us in. Stepping through the short narrow door into the small dark third floor kitchen, she told the rest of our family that this newly arrived Bear Clan baby, Shruwasitai, chose to live with them.

Upon handing me to my mother, my grandmother and the rest of the family took turns washing my hair, my face and my hands. After dressing me in a soft flour sack dress that she made, my grandmother placed me in a traditional flat board cradle. Deer sinew straps crisscrossed over the blanket covering held me securely to the cradleboard. Three willow hoops which were secured to the top end of the cradle could lay flat or be pulled up and over the head to provide shade.

The cradleboard, with a very smooth and shiny surface, was one that our family used for other babies before me and after me. There had been a homemade mattress made of several rabbit skins sewn together for comfort and warmth. After decades of use the rabbit skin mattress wore out to be replaced with a flour sack filled with soft sheep wool. My tiny

pillow was also home made from a plain flour sack stuffed with a small amount of sheep's wool. The flat cradle board with straps provided security and a feeling of being held.

Traditional Pueblo Upbringing

My grandmother's home in Deetsiyama is also known as McCarty. Our two room house was spacious. The walls were smoothly plastered with a mix of clay, sand, and straw. The walls were whitewashed with Kaolin, fine white clay diluted with water. It had a soft pink border that ran along the bottom wall and bordered both doors located on the south sides of both rooms. I often sprinkled water on the walls just to breathe in the smell of fresh rain. Sometimes I would lick the white walls because it tasted so good. The larger room had a tall ceiling. And oh the windows on the west side were a small window that framed the cottonwood tree that reached for the sky. I loved that window, for I could look out to see what my neighbors were doing. Four large pieces of window glass made up the north wall of our house. From inside I could look out and watch the noisy, smoking trains rush along atop a manmade hill supporting the railroad tracks. Above and beyond the train tracks was Mount Taylor, our sacred mountain. If I wanted to I could actually place my little elbows on the window sill and watch the clouds float by. That's how low the giant window sill was.

I vaguely recall that it was just grandma and me living in the big two-room house by ourselves. Dyaonah was a thin, short lady with brown skin. Dyaonah is an affectionate name for my Dyao. Dyao means grandmother in our Keres language. Black bangs covered her forehead and her ears. This was the traditional hairstyle for a married lady. Her long hair was wrapped up in a traditional Pueblo bun at the base of her neck. I used to enjoy the days when she washed our hair. Dyaonah would pour a bucket of lukewarm water into a large tub which was also used as a bathtub. Into the warm water she soaked and stirred up soap using

yucca roots. She would wash my long curly hair first, wring it out, and send me outside to dry it in the sun. A few minutes later she also would come outside to wring her long hair of water then twist it into a bun at the front of her forehead. She would pretend to be a monster and chase me. I loved her playing with me like that because she made me laugh, and she made me feel loved. After we stopped playing she would give me a bath in the soapy yucca water. Since we didn't have running water inside the house in those days, we could only take a bath once a week. I think I took mini-baths in the small river that flowed through McCarty village. Our chuna, which means river, was just a very short distance from the house. There were a few tamarisk trees that grew alongside the chuna. I was always curious about the small spiders that lived in the water. I also enjoyed the blue damsel flies that hovered above small bushes nearby. Sometimes small green frogs would jump into the water from their hiding places. I liked watching the frogs but I was a little afraid of them.

Wading in the chuna where tsi-tsi, or water, came up to my knees gave me a feeling of being very brave and strong. Minnows swam so closely they tickled my ankles. I challenged myself to catch them because they were so cute. I found a small can with holes at the bottom that I used to attempt to catch the little fish. I moved very slowly through the water, placed the can gently into the water and waited. The minnows were smart, and swift, but I was determined to catch at least one. It wasn't very long before one swam into the can and I clamped it shut with my hand and pulled it out of the water. I then deposited it in a small pretend dam that I had built before I waded back in to catch them. Before long I caught a few others and put them all together in my little dam just to watch them swim. When it was time to leave the chuna I opened up the little dam and watched them flood out.

My grandmother called me Dyao and I called her Dyao. Dyao means both granddaughter and grandmother in our Keres language. I loved hearing her call me Dyao, or sometimes she would revert to my birth name Shruwasitai. But my grandmother, and other relatives around me, continued to call me Shruwasitai.

Storyteller

Living in a tribal community was very safe for children when I was growing up. Biological relationship or not, adults and older children had the duty to look after other people's children with the authority to discipline them if they were not, shra-me. We had a lot of freedom to go where we wanted at any time without adult supervision. If someone didn't know who we were, they would ask who our mother was and what clan she belonged to. With that we gave her name, identified ourselves as Bear Clan and our family would be recognized. This also let them know we were in their area of the village should someone be looking for us. There were eyes everywhere.

One summer day, my brother Guyaspa and I decided to explore the southern part of McCarty where our blind grandfather Daodiya lived with his daughter, my aunt. Daodiya was part of our extended family. Older adults, relatives or not, were referred to as grandfather. He was a favorite. I liked that part of our village because it was a mesa of rocks and boulders with a lot of good hiding places to play hide and seek. It also had a ditch with running water where we could swim and maybe catch minnows. We loved climbing rocks, playing hide and seek, and swimming so it was an adventurous place to have fun with other children. As we approached Daodiya's house, some of our friends came running down to greet us. We played hide and go seek for a long while among the sandstone rocks and bushes on the hill that made up part of the mesa, a flat mountain. Then when my brother peeked

from behind a rock he saw our grandfather walking back toward his house from the field nearby. His name was Daodiya. Daodiya was a short old man with gray hair cut into forehead and side bangs. He wore a red, paisley print headband around his head and simple teardrop turquoise earrings. His faded denim pants were baggy and rolled up at his ankles showing his faded old red moccasins with worn out soles. He walked slowly, allowing his old sheep camp wooden cane to guide him along the uneven dirt trail toward the house. His deep connection to the earth energies made it possible, I believe, for him to find his way between his house to his field of corn and melons. He had been blind since childhood.

As we walked with grandpa, several of us asked him to tell us Tzikinuma. Tzikinuma in the Keres language means stories of old. We knew he would pretend that we were being pesky and refuse to tell us a story, but that was our game with him. He pretended he was too tired, too thirsty, or too hungry. Once he was in the house, we made sure he was comfortable. We brought him water to show our respect. We gathered together and sat on the floor in a circle. We promised to sit quietly to listen, pay attention, and not interrupt him. My aunt brought a basket of parched corn for us to snack on and placed it in the center. We all became quiet, but there was no formal beginning. Intuitively we all uttered, “eh-heh, an ancient Keresan generic word signaling that we were completely at attention. If anyone was wiggling, that person was quietly and lightly elbowed to pay attention. Then the story would begin with “Mishru hama ehchaaytra” (It happened a long time ago). During pauses, we encouraged his story to continue by repeating “eh-heh”. Daodiya told us the Akumeh creation story. This story took us into the depths of our people’s history when we lived in the first world before we arrived, at this, the fourth world. During the story telling, I conjured up images in my mind to try to connect the spiritual adventures with my own life.

After the creation story he wove a story that predicted the future. He said that there would be “double headed” people from all around the world coming “duweh” (here). It would be decades before I understood that he meant there would be an influx of foreign immigrants moving into this country. He said they would mistreat our people, take our land, steal our water, and sell it. He foretold that they would destroy Mother Earth to obtain metals, wood, stone, and other things they would sell to become rich. Much harm would come to the visible and invisible beings of nature. He predicted that a time would come when the foreigners would push our people as far west as they could and when we finally had nowhere else to go our people would begin to push back. He said that there would come a time when Indian people would bring attention to the world that there were many wrongs being done to us and we would fight back in the ways they taught us in our schools. He said that there would come a time when metal birds would drop from the sky, crash into buildings, and people would “nawee dutsah” (their spirits would leave). Although the beings of nature would be patient and tolerant of man’s destruction, they would tire of it and begin to show us that humans cannot survive without nature because beings of nature do not need humans.

We humans depend on nature for the air we breathe, the water we drink, the food and medicine that plants and animals give us, the rocks, water, clay, and fire to build our homes. It was somewhat frightening to hear about the future but his predictions also prepared us to be on the alert, respect and reciprocate with all that is natural, and continue to do the right things in our lives and with the lives of other natural beings.

Daodiya said that in the future when humanity, animals, plants, and other gifts of the Creator began to be destroyed to the point of no return, then all beings in and of nature would

begin to fight for their survival. They would reclaim, restore, and replenish their purpose for existing. The water beings would reclaim their ancient paths by washing away manmade roads, destroying man made dams, and make floods that wash away homes or anything else that is in their way. He described how lightning, winds and fire would work together to create whirlwinds that would become stronger and stronger and turn into funnels, creating and moving fire and destroying buildings and other things to send a message that man cannot control what is natural.

Daodiya's stories helped me to understand the importance of listening, of thinking, of not interrupting, and respecting other people's mental and physical space. Listening to adults talk became a lifetime habit. I was curious about adults and their conversations of the goings on at sheep camp or at Spider Mountain because of the interesting things that happened to them, other people, or the animals. When I was spotted as the only child sitting among them, I was told to go outside to play with other children. Other children didn't want me around either so I would end up finding other things to do, like studying moths which were abundant by our house. Their fuzzy wings and quick darting movements fascinated me. Then there were the large red ants or the tiny black ones busily building their hills. Even so, I was soon back in the room with the adults because I would sneak back in and find a place to sit quietly behind some furniture or I would sit in an adjacent room so I could once again listen in on their conversations.

The stories they told helped me understand the reasons for doing as I was told as one day I would have to implement the parenting skills being imparted to us at such a young age. I did have to take on adult responsibility by the time I was about seven when I had to cook for myself and my brother because the adults often left us alone at home. Sometimes we

would have to go without food and occupy ourselves with play in order to forget about eating.

I especially liked stories that made me curious about other animals. My curiosity came as a result of having been told, in other stories, that we had mishru-hama (time long past) had conversations with other animals and plants. Since then, I have continued conversations with animals, plants, and other life forms.

The fox, coyotes, and wolves, like many other animals, were smart and cunning. I never did see a wolf while I was growing up, but I could hear the coyotes when I was at my aunt and uncle's sheep camp. Foxes were also very rarely seen but there was a kind of game adults played with us when we traveled someplace. Whenever we passed under a bridge we all would say emphatically, "I have become a fox!" And then we would laugh. But in pretending to become a fox we were learning that they lived in a burrow, a fox hole, where they could escape to when being chased by a prey. Just in passing, we learned that they ate rabbits just as we humans also ate rabbits. Every animal, like humans, had a home, family, and ways of being able to survive in and from those things in a natural environment.

Resilience

Birds were fascinating as well. As pre-teens, my cousins and I would hunt for robins after there was an abundance of berries. They would sometimes eat so many berries that they couldn't get themselves up off the ground to fly away. That was a bit unfair but we took enough to feed our families and left the others. We took the feathers off of them, cleaned them, and our mothers and aunties cooked them. There wasn't a lot of meat on them but what we did get was so delicious, especially since the berries they ate gave them a special

flavor. Our menu consisted of freshly made tortillas, chili, and rosin. It always made us feel good to share in some of our responsibilities to provide a meal and to enjoy a meal together.

Daily Life in Our Ancient Dwelling

Our three story house, built from rocks and mud plaster, in Acoma was situated like apartments in the city with a few exceptions. Our dwelling consisted of the store rooms on the first floor, winter bedroom and storage rooms on the second floor, and a tiny kitchen and living room area which was a dining room during the day. The third floor had a front and back patio. At the front were two small windows made of a slab of mica with a hole to peer through and a short homemade door with a leather handle. Mica windows did not let in enough light so the door was often left open during the warmer days. To the right of the door on the inside was a box crate that held an aluminum basin for washing hands. Two worn out towels were hanging from nails just above the wash basin. To the left, just behind the door were three gray barrels that held water. These were the barrels that we had to replenish on a daily basis. Next to them were buckets with flour sacks and gourds to be used at the cistern.

As children, we were often reminded to help others. It didn't matter if they were related or not related. Helping others and acknowledging what they were doing was practicing shra-me, doing the right thing. One of the expectations of children in households was to fetch water from the cisterns to bring back to the house for drinking, cooking, and washing up. I liked doing this with my cousins or even by myself.

After a day of eventful activities, I returned to the house and grabbed an empty bucket, a tea towel made of a flour sack, and a gourd from the corner stand and made my way down the wooden steps from the top floor to the second floor. Then I carefully maneuvered my way down the ancient stairway, where slab rocks which were once organized

steps had slid away from the mud and straw mortar that once held them together. I reached the ground floor and there was sand over rock everywhere. I made my way through walkways between the two rows of houses toward the water cisterns located just north of the last row of mud plastered houses. There I was able to look in any direction and totally enjoy the panorama of ancient sandstone statues standing in various places in the valley below. To the distant north stood the majestic lavender Mount Taylor surrounded by white cumulous clouds. Closer to Acoma were the beautiful light gray walls of clay among sandstone boulders and rock mesa. To my right were Enchanted Mesa and many other mesas that led to Laguna Pueblo. There was beauty everywhere!

As I walked over sandstone rocks I saw other water cisterns that filled from recent rains. Stepping closer to them I saw them filled with tadpoles. They were always so much fun to watch, especially when they moved up toward the surface to catch a breath of air, their puckered lips sometimes making bubbles. I sat down to rest and to watch these interesting tadpoles wondering in my child mind where they came from. There was no one to ask. I saw that others had been there or near there because names and dates had been scratched into the soft sandstone where others took time to rest. I got up to continue toward the main water hole. As I looked up there were adults and other children with their water buckets. We passed one another, smiled, and greeted each other, not with a word like hi or hello because we have no greetings like that. Instead we acknowledged the present moment of being at task. I greeted the adults walking toward the south with “wehtsikuwa which means “this way south.” (To translate our greeting into English and to interpret it further to mean “this way south” sounds rather odd in English. But to our way it acknowledges a person’s whole being, the being walking south after having obtained water. It acknowledges that person’s

spiritual act of shra-me or doing the right thing. Their greeting to me is, “tru-shti” translated into English as asking the question, “You come for water?” Their question acknowledges that I, too, am doing the right thing. I am going to obtain water for my family because I am making a contribution to the household’s needs. These are important acknowledgements that make a person feel needed by performing a simple task like fetching water. I walk away with a smile because I am feeling appreciated, at least.

I climbed down an ancient stairway where steps and handholds had been carved by my ancestors centuries ago. The steps were well worn as they were continually being used. It felt good to feel the spirits of my ancestors in this place where I heard the soft conversations and laughter of other people who had also come for water. We greeted one another. I walked to the edge of the water where I knelt down to cover my bucket with a tea towel. I dipped the gourd into the water and then poured the water into the covered bucket. I picked up the tea towel filled with a few squiggly tadpoles and tossed them back into the water. I continued to do this until my bucket was filled. Then I ascended the stairway to return home. I knew there was a time before aluminum buckets existed that my great grandmothers made and used pottery water bowls. The pottery bowls were filled with water and carried on top of their heads back to their houses. I visualized my grandmother having done what I was doing when she was a child.

Weedima and Chuyai

Then there were those times that I spent with my aunt Weedima and uncle Chuyai in Acoma during the summer and winter solstices. I did not enter into any conversations with her or my uncle when I was with them rather I listened and did as I was told. Both spoke Keres to me as they rarely used English. Weedima and Chuyai were very different from my

mother in that they were very kind, wise, and holy in my eyes. They were also very poor according to American standards, but rich in spiritual knowledge, stories, and experiences with nature. It was always a happy occasion when my uncle came home in the evening from sheep camp. Chuyai would sit to one side of our small room and sing corn dance songs. Sometimes, he would pick me up and bounce me on his knees as he sang. These were times I was extremely grateful. Later in the evening, my cousins and I would prepare for the night by placing mattresses and blankets across the entire length of the floor. This particular space was our living room and dining room during the day. It was necessary to move our eating table aside. We would leave the small trap door open for air to circulate. We all happily slept together with my aunt and uncle sandwiched somewhere between four children. My cousins and I would become quiet to signal that we were waiting for a story. I loved his stories for they told of the powers of various entities that made their visits to the Acoma people. Stories of beings in the Universe and how they, plants, animals, rocks, mountains, clouds, and we were all relatives meant to take care of each other. Hearing his stories and experiencing metaphysical happenings added to or validated my beliefs and understandings over time. My uncle's songs and stories strengthened my spiritual beliefs.

My Brother, My Teacher

Elmer, my gee-gee, meaning brother, was one of my earlier teachers whom I so appreciated because of his patience, kindness, and encouragement. My first cousin, whom I have always called my brother, lived with us since he was a toddler. He and I were the same age. There is no word for the English term cousin in our Keres language, rather there is the concept that our male cousins are our brothers, and female cousins are our sisters. Sharing stories with my teachers about my brothers or sisters caused some confusion for the teacher

as I was asked, "How many brothers and sisters do you have?" That was when I learned there was a difference in how American people, white people, considered their relationships as separate from themselves! As best as I could, I learned to explain that my cousin was considered my brother by referring to him simply as brother or as my cousin-brother. That seemed to explain that my mother did not give birth to him. So I referred to him, interchangeably, as gee-gee, brother, or cousin-brother, Guyaspa, or I would use his English name, Elmer.

My brother was often at his mother and father's sheep camp just above Acoma. Sometimes he returned to his mother and father's home in Acomita so he was with us in McCarty off and on throughout eighteen years. It was at his parent's sheep camp that he learned to cook. His mother taught him how to make tortillas while his father showed him how to select the "right kind" of cedar or pine to chop for use in either the kitchen or the outside bread oven. He was taught by his father the different ways of chopping cedar or pine wood, and then he taught me. When he was in McCarty with my mother and me his duty was to chop wood. Mine was to gather the wood he chopped to take into the kitchen area of our home. We shared the duty of gathering kindling in a large basket to start the fire in the cooking stove or in the potbellied stove for winter.

Elmer came to my aid one time when I was trying to make tortillas. I had watched my mother make them many times, but she had not taken time to show me so I decided to try on my own. I learned early on that it was my responsibility to make tortillas when there were none left. My mother was not home, I was hungry and there were no tortillas left to eat in the house. So I took it upon myself to make my first attempt to mix the dough. I remembered

how my mother measured the flour, baking powder, lard, salt and water using just the palm of her hand. I felt proud that the dough seemed ready to roll out.

It was important for the tortillas to be rolled out so that they were thick and round. I was a bit concerned that mine would not be round like the ones my mother rolled out. Perhaps it was the fear of the tortillas not rolling out round that caused them to come out in odd shapes. I was feeling very frustrated when they would not roll out round and instead took on very odd shapes. Guyaspa, whose Acoma name coincidentally meant Dough Boy, came home from sheep camp to find me flustered in the kitchen. He checked my dough and told me it wasn't mixed right so he proceeded to show me how to measure flour, baking powder, salt, and shortening. We did not have measuring spoons or cups so we used the palm of the hand and finger digits to measure the dry ingredients as well as the shortening. He showed me and then had me do the same. After pouring small bits of water at a time into the bowl, I soon learned the texture and softness of the dough would roll out smoothly and easily.

I had wood burning in our cooking stove already so it was just a matter of placing a small round tortilla on the lid of the stovetop to know when the temperature was just right to cook the flat tortillas. Using my fingertips, I flipped each tortilla over very quickly so as to not burn my fingers. It was fun to watch the tortillas bubble up before turning them over. Now that Dough Boy taught me how to roll out round tortillas I didn't have to cut around the round, metal coffee can lid I cheated with!

As the tortilla making learner, I quietly observed my brother's measuring techniques remaining respectful of his verbal instructions. I felt comfortable enough to practice as he observed me in action, silently but respectfully correcting my mistakes, and then praising my

success by teasing me and telling me that I already knew how to make tortillas. His smile and sparkling eyes made me feel so good inside that I would do my best in other tasks at home.

I believe it would help non-Indian teachers to take this teaching strategy into consideration when planning lessons and find ways to implement it. This culturally relevant style of modeling tasks or lessons are, for most Pueblo students, a habit they are accustomed to because they have ownership of their knowledge and conscientious of their duties and responsibilities when given the respect they deserve. This learning interaction with my brother reflected the mentoring practice we learn as children and continue to practice for the rest of our lives. Such modeling, mentoring, and scaffolding as pedagogy was lacking in the public schools I attended. I became quiet in the classroom for two reasons. One was to respect my teachers' space and position and the other was the discomfort I felt with teacher expectations to answer her questions in front of classmates. Previous experiences taught me that if I did not know the answer, there would be public admonishment and the feeling that I had caused disharmony. Disruption and disharmony within a group is unacceptable to the Pueblo way of learning and mentoring. Humiliation caused me to sit quietly in the back of the classroom with the hopes that I would not be called upon to respond to my teacher's inquiry.

Tsiya aka Zia

Shortly after my Acoma grandmother died, my mother and stepfather took me for a ride, they said. I had been asleep on that long drive. When I awakened, we were in an unfamiliar place called Tsiya. My mother told me to get out of the car just as people came out from an adobe house smiling, laughing and happy. One by one they embraced me. I did

not know who they were. A man with a big smile came out and walked happily toward me. My mother told me he was my father. I was rather shocked as no one had ever mentioned him. As I stood there looking at the strangers surrounding me, my mother and my stepfather drove off. My father picked up a suitcase he carried into the adobe house. I was confused and scared.

As years passed, I came to look forward to visiting my Zia grandmother and grandfather, and uncles. I would see my two aunts when they came home from the city of Albuquerque. Here was my father's family providing me with a sanctuary that was peaceful, calm, and harmonious. They involved me in the many Pueblo activities of communal life. They taught me about reciprocity, duties, responsibilities, prayer, and meditation. My family in Zia was a powerhouse of history, spiritual action and involvement that I did not understand until many, many years later.

I love Zia. I love my family in Zia. I love the community people of Zia. They all have been wonderful to me ever since I was first taken there. This is where I met my father for the first time. There was grandma, grandpa, my three aunts, and four uncles and more in my extended family. So when I think of about my life experiences there I tend to see my family and the community in quite an idealistic way.

When I think of Zia the vision that comes to mind is a grayish mesa rising from the red river, surrounded by tamaracks, that curves around the Pueblo as it heads toward Santa Ana, our neighbors to the east. On top of the gray mesa are two and three story buildings with two white plastered kivas beneath a billowing cloud. There is a rainbow arching from the moving red river over the Pueblo connecting with a billowy white cloud.

Peering out of the window of our house on the plaza I see and hear laughing nude children running barefoot while at play. Barefoot young mothers and grandmothers appear to be wearing their hair in bangs across the forehead, in front of their ears, and tied with a red woven sash to hold up their long dark hair in the back in the ancient traditional style of our ancestors.

Men, dressed like my uncles, wear black leather wrist guards. Short white cotton pants from the waist to the knees are tied beneath the cotton tee shirts, the only sign of a modern style brought home from a nearby town. On their feet are old, worn out white moccasins hand sewn of stretched, softened deer hide.

This vision is deeply embedded in my mind because this is how I saw the adults and children of Zia. As I listened to children at play, I noticed that their conversations were similar to my language of Acoma. A majority of the children and adults did not speak English, although in becoming better acquainted, school age children used English to ask my name and clan. All of the people used their Zia names and I was the only one with an English name. That soon changed as I became Shreesiyai. My grandfather's sister came to our house and with a quick and simple ritual she named me and she became my mother. She, like my grandfather, had blue eyes.

Our house consisted of four large rooms whitewashed with white kaolin with a one foot pink border running along the bottom of the wall and around the doors. The floors were plastered with mud and straw but later covered with linoleum. The front room near the plaza was our living room and bedroom, although those labels were not used at the time. This room was fairly bare except for a standard sized mattress which my grandparents rolled up every morning and placed by the entrance to the kitchen. Pillows and blankets were placed

on top of the roll and covered with a very nice Pendleton blanket. The ceiling above supported a long wooden pole suspended by wires. On it were the finer blankets and traditional clothing, belts, and sashes used by our family. I slept on the floor in the large room with my grandparents.

The entrance to our house from the plaza led straight through to the kitchen and then to the outside. It was a pathway for numerous community people or family who joined us for a bite to eat, if we happened to be eating. Anyone who was passing through was invited to eat. The individual would approach the table, pinch off a small piece of tortilla, dip it into whatever we were eating, eat, say “Nydra (female word for thank you)” or “whowaheh (male word for thank you)” and continue on after a short bit of conversation.

The third room was directly south of the kitchen. It too was bare save for a suspended baby cradle suspended from the ceiling. I had never seen a cradle woven of deer hide and sinew. It was lined with rabbit skins & turkey down feathers woven together. The willow reed support on the oval shaped cradle had soft leather ties to secure the baby to avoid fall outs. Mattresses and blankets were rolled up along the corners in the same manner as the one in the large front room.

My grandfather slept on two, fairly thick cotton stuffed pillows that my grandmother created. He was a short, skinny man with gray hair that refused to grow as long as it once was. Still he had my grandmother place a small roll of what was once his own hair into his traditional knot in the back. With half closed eyes I watched grandpa’s morning ritual. Before he rolled out of bed he would reach for his red handkerchief headband that lay beside his head. He would sit up quickly as if he was doing sit ups and place the headband carefully on his head. Once up, he walked toward the kitchen doorway where he reached for cornmeal

(prayermeal) contained in a basket on top of a homemade cupboard. Then he would walk over to the screen door, open it, offer his prayer and make his offering. Our doors were never locked at night. Grandma and I arose after grandpa. We washed up, served breakfast, and didn't see him or my uncles, because they left to work at our ranch, until they came home at suppertime.

Grandma and I, individually, made our offerings as well. I loved sharing the morning ritual with them and with the community. Since we lived in the plaza we listened to the daily announcements made by the town criers. They made their way toward our plaza from the north side announcing the community activities for the day. They announced future meetings or reminded the community of things that needed doing and ask for men or women to volunteer. I thoroughly enjoyed hearing them, even though all three announced at the same time, and I couldn't distinguish their words well enough to know what was being said.

In the summer months, after school was out, I happily went to Zia to visit my grandparents. My friends and I played in the sand in front of our house. That is, we played after our chores and tasks were done. We all knew we were needed to help in our homes or at relatives homes so none of us complained. The chores and tasks assigned to us were considered part of our duties and obligations to home and community. Our play, usually in the late evening, would cease when we heard men singing somewhere in the village. We sat against our house to listen. When it became dark the stars were so vivid it almost felt like we could pluck them out of the sky. Being together and listening to the drums and men singing was so peaceful, safe, and enjoyable. This was a time we practiced being in a sacred space with our own imagination of what our harvest dances would be like in August.

Sitting barefoot with sand squishing up between our toes was our connection to Mother Earth. We tapped our feet to the beat of the drum as we gazed at stars. These wonderful times reminded me of the first time I saw the Harvest Dance or Corn Dance as it is also called. The most fascinating sight to me was how the men's bodies were painted in turquoise blue clay. Their thick, long puffy hair danced as parrot feathers bounced rhythmically to the beat of the drum and dancing feet. Of course, the white shells strung from their shoulders to the waist were equally beautiful to see. The hand embroidered designs on white kilts were spectacular, as were the sashes with representative rainclouds suspended at the ends reminded us of the importance of the dance. The Corn Dance, Harvest Dance, Buffalo, Deer and every other dances performed throughout the year were truly powerful and significant.

One August, when names of volunteers for the Corn Dance were being taken, I heard my grandmother mention my name to them. My heart leaped when I heard her give them my name! I was thrilled! There was no end to the tears of joy I shed in private, outside under the stars!

In preparation for the big day, my aunt cut my bangs. My grandmother and aunts gathered together the traditional black, woolen manta, the red sash belt, jewelry, and black wrist beads that would adorn me on the eventful day of prayer!

When the Gweedana dressed in the ancient way, came singing down the plaza, I was ready! We covered ourselves with our individual fringed shawls. She reminded me to take prayer meal from the basket that sat in its own space. We walked barefoot toward the kiva to join others who were also headed in the same direction

My first Corn Dance was the most thrilling experience of my young life. I danced every year after that. In the four days of practice were teachings and practices of caring, sharing, helping, cooperating, lending, borrowing that also involved the propriety of etiquette. Proper rituals of offering appreciation and blessings for those to whom we loaned paraphernalia or from those who borrowed from us were true practices of prayers and blessings. The thrilling part of the exchanges of prayers and appreciations were the sound of the Keres language with NO English words! It felt like I was in an ancient world with the spirits of all my ancestors surrounding us, listening, praying with us and giving us blessings. My Tsia name, Shreesiyai, was intertwined in the prayers as it brought life giving energy to me and to the historical ties of all who lived before me. I was one with them. Knowing this gave me a sense of power I would need at various times in my life.

My Many Names

My Acoma name, Shruwasitai, is what my family called me, although I would learn later that I had yet another name. I loved hearing Shreesiyai when I was in Zia and Shruwasitai when I was in Acoma. I would learn, over my lifetime, how it seemed that each of my names had their own identity and power to connect me to metaphysical experiences or to get me through some very tough challenges. Frances, though the name was not used in my early childhood until I entered an American school, was shaped by Acoma and Zia traditional practices. Frances would be the one to experience the criss-crossing of the Pueblo traditional way of life and experience the choppy waters of the American way of life as she experienced them in schools. Frances was the tough gal who could jump into challenging difficulties and stand victorious because being shra-me, she helped us survive.

I began using Angelina when I turned seventeen and searching for a job in San Francisco just after high school. Completing job application forms was a new experience that was repeated many times. At the first, second and third employment offices, I would hear the clerk calling for Angelina. At first I didn't think anything of it because I never heard anyone call me that. Since the application forms asked for the first and middle names I guessed it was mandatory to write in Angelina under the first name section and that's what I did. So when the clerks called my name, I remained seated until they raised their voices calling for Angelina then I realized they wanted to see me next. After that, I decided to give Frances a break and let Angelina take on the tasks required in the outside world until such time credit for some high achievement could be awarded to both.

Chapter 12: In Beauty It Begins

Fortunately, I had heard about a Native science class being taught by someone at the University of New Mexico whom I met so many decades ago. I was curious to learn what Native science was and if my Tewa professor would remember me. I had purchased and received the required text book. In my excitement I opened up the book selecting a random page and read, *In Beauty It Begins!* That quote was a message from my spirit teachers, guides and helpers. There were more messages, lessons, insights and enlightenments to come. I held my breath upon reading information that confirmed my own beliefs since I was a child and a student in high school. Finally, here was a course that validated the beliefs and practices of my ancestors for which little or no credit was given. There were so many life science contributions for which there was no acknowledgement or validation while I was in high school and college. Now in this Native Science course my life was healing and changing in ways I find difficult to explain. There was finally the freedom to express and to voice our feelings without fear of impunity. My heart and spirit were lifted.

My classmates and I were gaining knowledge from wonderful, helpful references to articles that would help us design curriculum based on Native science by which we were being validated. I was thrilled because I realized that in self-contained classrooms I had subconsciously used Pueblo epistemology and pedagogy being described in this course. Now I could draw upon my own knowledge, experiences, and skills while being guided by the teachings of my professor.

Through this course I finally was able to begin to create a life science curriculum based on the teachings and ways of teaching of Pueblo people. This time I spiritually entered an ideal reality with no American based standards, mandates, or threats. In my ideal world

and through my curriculum, I was determined to enlighten pre-service and seasoned teachers to learn about the differences between American and Pueblo culture and language. It has been long past due. Future teachers and seasoned teachers, I felt, needed to understand and know how those differences conflict and confuse Pueblo students entering school systems requiring racist mandates. They needed to know that Pueblo students did not belong in special education just because they had difficulty with speaking, reading, and writing in the foreign language of English or because certain students react negatively to the way they were being taught. Perhaps together we could begin to improve on pedagogy, but most importantly, we could just be decent human beings in the business of guiding students to also become decent human beings.

In my ideal world, Native teachers would be teaching in both their tribal language as well as in English. They would use Pueblo cultural practices to reinforce the metaphysical teachings of reciprocity between human beings and the visible and invisible beings in the natural world. They would be teaching to the whole child, physically, mentally, and spiritually.

In the real world of having worked with my students, I made a list of what they taught me. They were given voice with decision making in my classroom that made life a little easier, more interesting, and we continued to work together as we would have in our own tribal communities. What my students taught me is what will drive the way my Pueblo Life Science Curriculum is created.

Although there are other Native American educational curricula on various websites, I quickly found that training on cultural differences was lacking. Because those important teachings on tribal epistemology and pedagogy were not made available to teachers who

would be using the curriculum, old habits, naïveté or misunderstandings would return and once again the curriculum would be ignored and unused. There has to be a guide that explains the background of Indian students, the challenges they face, and some insight into the Pueblo traditional way they are taught.

My first task, I told myself, was to write a memoir which described those life experiences which influenced and/or inspired the way I taught Indian students at the elementary school level. The memoir would begin with descriptions of my roots, birth, identity and traditional upbringing in a traditional Pueblo community. This portion of the memoir would give an inside view of an Indian child's life and how identity and self-esteem is rooted in place and power according to tribal spiritual beliefs and practices of that child. The next portion of the memoir would describe the fracturing of early Pueblo childhood ways of being upon entering the Bureau of Indian Affairs elementary schooling and its oppressive curriculum. There would be a few short stories of what I considered racist attitudes and mistreatment by primarily non-Indian teachers in those schools. Finally, the memoir would provide stories of struggling elementary students whose tribal ways of being were respected, honored, and facilitated their learning and academic achievements. Those experiences, I believe, built a tough resilience to racism enabling students to hurdle huge obstacles that enabled them to achieve and succeed while holding on to tribal spiritual beliefs and practices.

Pueblo Life Core Curriculum

What made me ill enough to leave education were the educational mandates implemented in schools where I taught. Required professional development required on how to teach second language speakers were unrealistic, prejudicial, discriminating, and virtually made it impossible for students to advance. The educational philosophies of American

society and Pueblo communities continued to be in conflict. It was because of those ill-designed, ill-fated results that I chose to write a Pueblo Life Core Curriculum.

My Pueblo Life Core Curriculum will deliberately leave out educational mandates and recent state required standards. Their “scientific researches and findings” were not implemented with Pueblo students or other Native American students in other parts of the United States. While portions of their requirements may possibly be used for guidance, the ugly truth is they have not worked with a majority of Native students. The curriculum I design is for my Pueblo ideal world and it may not fit anyone else’s reality. In fact, the curriculum may not be the view of all Pueblo teachers; it would realistically be impossible because we, within our Pueblo societies, are very diverse. I trudge ahead on this mysterious journey to see what the next mountain peak or valley has to offer and teach.

Exploring the Natural World

My students really enjoyed the study of various animals and their biomes. They were thrilled to learn that many of those mammals described in their science textbook actually lived in their backyard! Without reading a science book the students could describe where the deer, elk, fox, wolves, rabbits, prairie dogs and other mammals lived. They also knew about the crows, hawks, eagles, hummingbirds, blue jays and other birds in their local habitat. They knew which animal was either a predator or prey and if they herbivores, carnivores, or omnivores. Natural science seemed to bring the best responses for writing. The boys especially were curious about the deep sea biomes and the lives within. The fifth grade students chose the study of animals to research for their final grade.

My students were very enthusiastic about their research. They shared pictures and facts with me. They wrote and asked for help. If anything I wished and wanted for them it

was for them to actually experience the hands-on exhibits at the Albuquerque Natural History Museum. They would be able to see exhibits of ancient animals, skeletons, and hear explanations that might help them with their studies. We could see a movie about animals on the large screen at the museum. We could view the stars in the planetarium. We could take a study excursion trip to Albuquerque and Santa Fe.

I told the principal about our scientific studies and the research papers the students were involved with and asked if it was possible to take the students on a two day field trip to Santa Fe and Albuquerque. The principal, a local Navajo, said that the school could only provide a school bus, the bus driver, and a lunch for one day. He apologized that it couldn't be more because it sounded like a trip worth taking. He said that if funds could be found to cover the hotel expenses, meals, and museum fees, then he would approve the trip. I almost danced out of his office because I knew his news would make the students happy—even if they had to raise their own money!

When I told the students that the principal would approve our trip if we raised funds to pay for our hotel and meals, they cheered! When I told them they would have to take a notebook with questions for their research paper they groaned. When I told them where we would be going in Santa Fe and Albuquerque, they cheered again. So the question in early February was how we were going to raise the money for our hotel and meals. At the end of the day, I asked the students to tell their parents about the potential two-day trip and our need to raise money for it.

Fundraising

Since Valentine's Day was soon coming up, I suggested to the students that we make hand painted jewelry. I showed them pre-cut wood pieces on which I outlined pottery designs in pencil. Their job would be to outline them and paint them with acrylic paint. I could see they weren't too excited about it but were willing to try. Unfortunately, it turned out to be a flop.

Next I told them that some years before, my other fifth grade students had made flowers from candy kisses. I showed them an example of a candy floral bouquet similar to what the previous fifth grade students had made and sold. They liked the idea.

My students now knew that we never did anything that didn't involve reading, writing, or math. As with my previous fifth grade students, my present students not only made Valentine floral bouquets but they also had to make flyers to post around our school complex. They, too, had to learn about marketing, salesmanship, and accounting.

In addition to the Valentine floral arrangements, the students also made cupcakes decorated with red, pink or white frosting with silver sprinkles. We also sold heart shaped cookies on a candy stick with multi-colored frosting. Customers came to our classroom door to buy the cupcakes and cookies. I remember one of the security guards came into our classroom during our lunch time asking for a couple of cupcakes. One of the girls grabbed a couple of undecorated cupcakes, scraped the bottom of the can for frosting, quickly covered the cupcake with it and handed it to the security guard. I stood in amazement at the quick thinking and quick action of my student because I was about to tell him we didn't have any more cupcakes!

During math period, when my students calculated costs, retail cost, and profit from our sales, we found that we made less than four hundred dollars! It was going to cost nine hundred ninety four dollars or so for our hotel and meals all together! We all were so disappointed and the students had worked so hard. There wasn't anything we could do because the fifth grade students were scheduled to test in March. As disappointed as they were, the students focused even more on their ecosystem research, writing, and mathematics. They were determined to reach grade level or higher in all subject areas.

Dedication and Diligence

One of the things I wrote in my narrative to the principal described my students' dedication to learning more, "The students have worked diligently for the past several months to prepare for state tests, giving up recess and sometimes a whole lunch time period. They are anxious to take on this challenge of studying, taking notes, discussing their experiences, all of which will culminate in a major expository essay and oral report for grades in social studies, science and language arts." My students did in fact give up a lot of recess time to complete their assignments. When they did have recess, I had them do five minutes of aerobic exercise before they went off to play. On stressful days I led them through meditation or qi gong. Some days when they gave up their lunch period, they would pick up their trays at the cafeteria and eat in the classroom. After that, they would go on to complete tasks that were urgent for them.

The goals for the excursion to Santa Fe and Albuquerque were to "...study about ecosystems on land, air, and deep oceans and to study about local and international cultures to compare and contrast." Each student had study sheets with questions to complete their research papers about the ecosystems they were studying. In the evenings, after dinner, a

small amount of time was spent discussing their visits. It was then that they helped each other with answering questions in their notes because they missed the information.

The field excursion was rescheduled several times. We had hoped to take the field trip in March but the spring tests prevented that. We tried for April, but other school testing took precedence. For a while, it looked like we would not be able to go. The students' became anxious about the excursion because they were afraid to miss out on important information that could be added to their research papers. Besides that, of course, it would be a treat to get away from the stress of testing.

During our English writing period, I shared with the students that there might be times in their lives or in their jobs where they might have to write a letter to request something from particular businesses to fulfill their needs. In reality, this was one of those times. One of the student's mothers had suggested the teacher write a letter to the Navajo Nation to request funds for the student science excursion. The students, I felt, should write their own letters to their tribal leaders to understand one of the purposes for writing. I brought this to their attention and asked if they would like to write to their tribal leaders. Were they willing to do it? With great big smiles on their faces and hands clapping, they said, "Yes!"

Several drafts later, the students now knew where to place their return address, the salutation, body of paragraphs, an appropriate closing and their signature. The students checked each other's letters for complete sentences, correct grammar and spelling, punctuation, and penmanship. I had them address envelopes to the President of the Navajo Nation into which they deposited their letters.

There was no way of knowing whether or not The Navajo Nation would fund them. In that case, the idea was to move on and try making the money themselves. They must not depend on donations. They must do their best to work toward reaching their goals however they could.

Seven days after our Valentine's Day floral sales, the assistant principal came into our classroom and handed me an envelope. It was addressed to Ms. Medina and the Fifth Grade Students from the Navajo Nation in Window Rock, Arizona. I called the students together so they could hear what the letter said, for I presumed it was to acknowledge my students' request for funding. There was no letter. When I saw what it was, I pulled it slowly out of the envelope, looked teasingly at my students, and announced, "You have just received nine hundred ninety four dollars from the Navajo Nation!" Cheers! My students jumped up and down at the wonderful news. We all were so very, very happy and grateful.

My students' persuasive letter writing assignment paid off. The students experienced the letter writing results that could happen and did happen for them. It was the second time their letters brought them a reality lesson and great experiences as a result.

The Field Trips Became a Reality

Finally, dates were set for the field trip! The timing was way off because the trip couldn't happen until May when school was just about to end. Two trips, the first one to Albuquerque and the second one to Santa Fe, had to be scheduled instead of the one which would have included an overnight stay in Albuquerque. The first trip to Santa Fe was scheduled for the first Friday in May. The second trip was set for the following Tuesday when we would be able to travel to Albuquerque. The students' anxiety went up because now they had fewer days in which to complete their twelve page research papers. My

students' research submission deadline left them with only three days to complete their final assignment!

At 7:30 a.m. the ten students, school bus driver, Calsue Murray, and I boarded the school bus that was to transport us to Albuquerque. The school provided us with breakfast burritos, juice, and fruit so we were all happy with that. I thought the students would fall asleep but they were too excited to sleep. I really appreciated them because they were so well behaved and not loud at all.

We arrived at the Museum of Natural History in Albuquerque around 9:45 a.m. Oh my goodness there were so many interesting things to see. It was hard to keep up with the students for they wanted to go in different directions. I know that teachers are supposed to make certain the students are together in an organized line, but heck, being Natives we knew that wouldn't work. What did happen was that the students would let us know where they were going to view exhibits, and then after they viewed the exhibits they reported back to us before they went to another exhibit. They were not rowdy; they were respectful to the docents in charge. They obeyed the museum's rules and they didn't touch anything unless they knew it was okay to do so.

We spent an hour and a half visiting exhibits on the huge main floor and the upstairs. It was a relief to sit down at the planetarium where we watched their program, "The Enchanted Skies." Using dome projection technology, they showed imagery of the constellations and planets from what they called The Hubble Space Telescope. The students' absolutely loved watching the stars. When the lights came on after the show was over the students remained seated. They were totally relaxed so we stayed for a few minutes until everyone else left the room. I was so sorry we didn't have time to study astrology. As it

was, I had made time to teach reading, using science textbooks, partly because we were not supplied with reading textbooks. But even then, we didn't have time to cover the constellation.

After we had lunch in the museum's café we headed to the Lockheed Martin Dyna Theater at the museum to watch *Dinosaurs Alive!* None of the students had ever seen such a wide screen as the one in front of them. They oohed and aahed as they viewed animated dinosaurs of the Triassic Period and their descendants that were found in Mongolia's Gobi Desert and in New Mexico today. The students were excited to know they had seen the kinds of dinosaurs that once roamed New Mexico via the computer-generated animations shown on the gigantic screen. They compared what they saw on the screen to what they had seen in the dinosaur exhibit.

By the afternoon we had viewed the constellation, animals of the earth, and now we were ready for *The Living Sea*. Being from the mountain desert the students were truly amazed at the height of the Hawaiian ocean waves shown in the film. They couldn't believe the size of the humpback whales, sharks, and ocean turtles. Several of the boys who were studying organisms that lived in the dark and deeper level of the ocean were so happy to view them on screen. They had seen only magazine pictures of them, but the ones on screen gave him something more to remember. The boys were discussing the findings of their research and comparing them to what they had seen on screen. They seemed really proud to have done the amount of reading about their subject that the film must have answered their questions.

The next field trip to Santa Fe took place the following Tuesday, May 6, 2008. We left the school parking lot at 7:30 a.m. and arrived at the Santa Fe museums around 1030

a.m.. It was a long trip. We had stopped at McDonald's across from the Sky City Hotel to pick up breakfast and ate on the way. The weather was comfortable and everything was peaceful.

We were scheduled to tour the Museum of International Folk Art with a docent at 11:00 a.m. My, how the students enjoyed this museum! When they saw figurines or pictures of people from Asian countries, one of the students' commented, "Ms. Medina, they look like us!" A couple of the boys came after me to view an exhibit which they found puzzling. It was an exhibit of one of the Middle East countries showing people in their traditional clothes. One boy exclaimed, "Ms. Medina, you know what, those men are wearing dresses!" Their eyes drank in every scene which showed different styles of clothing, headdresses, shoes, and jewelry. They viewed scenes in which men or women were tending llamas, deer, sheep or other animals.

The students were newly informed about the many different kinds of food that people ate. They were also impressed with the way women from Mexico, China and other countries to the south wove blankets, belts, and other items made into clothing. They pointed out the cultural similarities or differences compared to the Navajo. It was truly a pleasurable experience to witness the students' reactions or responses to exhibits they found fascinating. Before we left the museum we stopped to express our thanks to the docent who met us at the door. She put huge smiles on my students' faces when she declared to them, "You students are so well behaved. I enjoyed watching you as you went about the exhibits. Thank you for visiting us and please come again." Naturally I smiled and swelled with pride, "Yes, thank you, these are the fabulous fifth graders who are very hard workers."

After we ate at the Museum Hill Café, we reported to the Indian Arts and Culture Weaving Tour. The students were excited about this because they were going to be taught how to weave on a cardboard by a Navajo teacher. This was where students learned to weave by a Navajo teacher. The teacher took them on a quick tour of exhibits displaying Navajo weaving from the past. She explained how Navajos wove from wool when sheep were introduced by the Spaniards. The students viewed how their ancestors set up looms under a tree or somewhere outside of a Hogan. They were very familiar with sheep herding because their families owned sheep. They saw exhibits of tools and other implements they were also familiar with such as the homemade loom, wooden tools, spinning wheel, and natural dyes. They felt right at home and certainly enjoyed the two hours of viewing exhibits and learning how to weave. They were very proud of their end product which they happily took home.

Researching – A New Experience

At school, the students had started typing their papers before we took the field trips. I had trained them in the correct use of the keyboard shortly after school started. I made copies of the keyboard for them to take home so they could memorize it and be able to locate the keys for punctuation. They practiced every chance they had and I knew it would take many more months before they could type without looking at the keyboard. I admired their ambition and dedication to learning how to type. For their science research paper, they drafted their paper in pencil first, revised and then edited. After that they used the library computers to type their final paper. I really felt for them and had considered reducing the number of pages. It was ridiculously high and I knew it was too much to ask, but they persevered. If they had asked me to reduce the number of pages, I would have hugged them

and said okay. They indicated their desire to add pictures to their document. Why not, I thought, and told them to include their pictures. They had learned how to download pictures into their word documents. The pictures took up space but that was alright.

Each student chose their own animal of interest to study. The only two girls in class decided to study the desert biome but they chose different animals, such as Perenty Lizards, a Bilby, the Blue Tongued Skink, and other exotic animals within those biomes. Four boys were extremely curious about animal life in the deep sea. Their pick of animals were interesting. There were Siphonophores also known as the Portuguese Man-of-War, Ctenophores, Firefly Squids, and a wide range of sharks. Those who studied the Wetlands were especially interested in snakes, such as the Cottonmouth and the Water Rattle, as well as Water Spiders and alligators.

The students spent many hours after school and on weekends to do their research. They even asked to skip recess so they could do their research in the classroom; thus, the floors of our classroom were filled with books, papers, and pictures they had collected. Their sharing activity and team work was similar to what happens in Native homes when tasks need to be completed. The “work” becomes the focus of fun for everyone. They were very pleased to have a voice and choice in their topic. They also were comfortable with working independently, in teams, or in groups.

As the children completed their research papers and inserted them into plastic covers with colorful bindings, each stared at their completed work with great pride. They barely finished their papers on time as school let out in May. There never was any time for them to present their oral report, not that they were saddened by it. I knew they would have done an excellent job of that as well. Some of the comments made in the conclusion sections read:

“I hope the students will like my research paper...I hope they will learn something from my research paper.”

“I had fun learning and teaching myself.”

“I really like doing my research paper because it was really fun...I liked learning about different animals.”

“I enjoyed learning about the many different kinds of animals in the Wetlands. I hope Ms. Medina enjoys my research paper. It was kind of hard doing this research paper.”

“I enjoyed researching and writing and learning about as many sea animals as I could. It was hard to choose because there were many different kinds of animals. It was hard to write about the deep sea animals because there was so much information.”

Chapter 13: In Beauty We Were

My students had had a reputation of being disruptive, unruly, and disrespectful. They had been weeded out, by previous elementary school teachers, to be placed with the new teacher. I, a Pueblo Indian, was that new teacher. I was not immediately informed of my students' previous behavior issues. All I knew was that most of them were not even at third grade achievement levels.

On the first day of school, I found a set of reading textbooks with a teacher's manual that I quickly claimed. The students, who were familiar with the reading series, balked at the stories in the textbooks claiming they were made for kindergarteners. There were odds and ends of supplemental booklets that came together but they were incomplete sets. At least there were additional take home books and an intervention handbook I found useful. In addition to these, I purchased additional chapter books to add to our classroom library. They, like the fifth grade students I taught previously, wanted non-fiction and adventure stories. They were particularly interested in science. Fortunately, there were several different sets of unused science textbooks. We used the science textbooks as our main reading books.

As would be done in our Native homes and community, the students and I held a classroom family community meeting to strategize how to reach our reading goal. As a teacher who also happens to be a Pueblo person, my students very often referred to me as "auntie" or "grandma". As a professional teacher, I did not reject the honor they bestowed on me. Thus, we all subconsciously recognized and accepted that I was their elder extended family. I, as a tribal elder could discipline my students as well as to guide them or otherwise play a direct role in educating each child.

Part of tribal teaching is in recognizing that no two children learn in exactly the same way. Rather, there are varieties of ways in which they learn and at their own pace, depending on how they critically perceive, analyze, and resolve issues which they are quite capable of doing. This is important and students need to be respected for the life experiences they come with at each grade level. Their cognitive abilities earn them the right to voice their opinions and to have a choice in how best they can learn.

In our classroom family community meeting I introduced them to a problem solving process that was very much in line with tribal family or community discourse, planning, and consensus decisions we were familiar with. This made our communication easier and students', I think, felt they could freely express suggestions or concerns.

Learning is not always an individual task where Native students are concerned. Caring and sharing are major core values we grow up being reminded about and encouraged to practice. Surviving fearful challenges and tasks require community support and team work. As the teacher and elder of the children, I was responsible for their educational nourishment. Raw truth and honesty is a tribal teaching that arms us with dealing with life issues. Our issue was in learning to speak, read and write in the foreign language of English. I asked them to speak their raw truth, not to humiliate them, but to understand the problem. How were we, together, going to help each other to solve the problem?

They lowered their heads and eyes because it was painful to think about. The issue of not reading, writing, and speaking English fluently was a tough reality. I shared my personal story with them about how I could not speak English when I first started school. I shared how very difficult it was for me to speak it and the added pain was in having to learn how to

write it. I told them how mean the teachers were if they caught us speaking our own language. They remained quiet.

I gave them the space of time to run their thoughts through their minds because of their personal involvement. Each was at a different place and level with their second language. After a few minutes, they began to share their frustrations. Some of the statements included the difficulty of pronouncing unfamiliar words, lack of vocabulary to understand what they read, and recently how most of them regressed on reading tests the schools reading coach gave them. They could not connect the stories to their lives so they didn't like what they were forced to read. They, at fifth grade level, could not write a complete sentence nor did they know how to use punctuation.

One of the girls got up from her desk and went to the whiteboard. She picked up a marker and made a list. So now we knew what foreign language issues they encountered every day from the list they on the whiteboard. Now we needed a plan. What were we going to try to accomplish? The students referred to their class goal to reach grade level. How were they going to accomplish this? The students wanted to learn more about animals they were not familiar with. They knew about rabbits, prairie dogs, elk, deer, rattlesnakes, eagles, crows, and other local animals. They wanted to learn about the natural world in other places and how other tribes spiritually reciprocated with and honored those animals. They knew they could not learn about other tribes and other animals from mandated reading programs, so the students agreed to use our science books to learn about animals as well as for every aspect possible in language arts. They opted, after lengthy discussions, to accept reading and writing challenges they feared in order to improve.

How were we going to do the change? The students made many suggestions but had to pare it down to tasks that were doable. It was, as usual, truly interesting to watch them work together. Sometimes they teamed up to discuss ways of solving issues. In the end, they shared their ideas and suggestions for how they were going to study and learn science words, including definitions. They had a desire to read about ecosystems and biomes which they agreed among themselves to share with the whole class. I concurred. The students would act on their plan and periodically return to their studies to determine where they were, revise their plan and do the revised plan. It was interesting that my students rarely complained about their academic tasks. Instead, they provided feedback about what worked for them and what did not. They were also capable of making suggestions for what and how they could improve in their studies.

I do believe that my students became well behaved, hardworking students within the first few weeks of the school year because they had voice and choice in the lessons and activities that involved them. They all were very comfortable with each other, helpful to each other, and it was the girls who kept the boys in check. I involved them in decision making when it came to lesson plans. They were well aware of the New Mexico Standards and Benchmarks because we regularly discussed them.

Refreshed Determination

They could not wait to visit the library to search for information. They had family members helping them to find information on the web and downloaded information to bring to school. They even helped each other with researching articles and sharing. Our classroom floors were covered with articles, pictures, magazines, and books. Students made use of

scissors and scotch tape as they cut and pasted information they felt would be useful for their paper.

The students read their articles during our reading period. Sometimes they read to each other. They would take notes and then use them during our writing period. This was when personal dictionaries were put to use. They were better skilled at using the writing process. Although writing paragraphs was a challenge for them they persevered. They studied how paragraphs were arranged in articles and tried to follow suit.

Months before, when we began writing I had told them that there would come a time when they would have to write some very difficult essays. They would have to use correct grammar in their sentences, when and which punctuation to use, how to write paragraphs, and how the conclusions connected to the introduction. They accepted the straightforward challenges I put forth. They seemed to know that I was always available to help them.

As time passed and they began to write, they sometimes fell into plagiarizing. I brought this immediately to their attention that no student at any level of schooling was ever allowed to plagiarize and that there were unpleasant consequences. I knew paraphrasing would be extremely challenging for them but they were very willing to try. They struggled. They became frustrated. I understood their challenges, struggles, and frustrations because I had suffered from elementary through high school as they were also at the present level. I felt they needed to know what to expect when they entered high school.

By the end of the second semester they were very familiar with the writing process. They had practiced and experienced pre-writing, drafting, revising, proof reading and publishing many times. It was exhausting but they chose to understand this crazy new

language and improve as much as they could. They were diligent, determined, and committed. They owned it all.

My students were feeling confident. They accepted the challenge of writing as they began to understand the process. Armed with their vocabulary notebook, a sharp pencil, a clean paper, and surrounded by caring classmates, they began. Reluctant writers or avoidance writers did not hesitate to participate because all were informed that “we” would all be making mistakes and that it was mistakes that taught us ways to make corrections – even with spelling and punctuation errors.

Please Donate Computers

One of the sad situations for our poor classroom was that we had only one computer. It was a dinosaur but we had limited use. It didn’t work most of the time so we relied on the computers at the library. I had read on the web that some places donated computers to students. I couldn’t find a source for my students, but I had heard of someone who was working with our students who owned a small computer business in a local town.

I modeled the formatting of the letter on the chalkboard. I also posted a model of a persuasive letter on the bulletin board. Their assignment was to request a donation for used computers for our classroom. In their letters, the students’ were to state their purpose for writing, present their position and support it with relevant arguments. Each of the students started with a first draft. We checked for place of the return address, salutation, and the body of the letter. Most of the students wrote more than two or three paragraphs. I’m not certain how it happened or if the students talked among themselves, but they must have reached a consensus that their selling point would be how hard they worked. They targeted the emotions of the addressee. They related the fact that they were at lower grade levels in both

reading and math in August at the beginning of the school year. By January, they either reached grade level or surpassed it. A couple of students said they reached their goal of growing in grade level by one year but would improve if only they had a computer in the classroom. One boy pleaded, "We really need computers to do our work. Our 5th grade class wants to ask you to please think about donating enough computer(s) for each student. I will be good to the computers. I promise I will take care of it." One boy laid it out heavy when he said that we only had one computer and "...we still need to do our language arts, math, reading, writing, science, accelerated math, and also our Star math and our Starred Tests." An accomplished student wrote, "I could use the computers to get my reading and math grade higher and higher to get past high school level."

The students received a surprise visit from the business man to whom they wrote letters, to donate computers to the class. He and his assistant brought pizzas and sodas for the students. He congratulated each of the students for their accomplishments in reading and math. He encouraged them to continue to work hard, and do their assignments, so that one day they would use their skills in college and in whatever job they took. He apologized that he could not give our class computers and wished he could. The students were especially proud that their letters were acknowledged by this important man and his assistant and that he thought highly of them. They thanked him for the snacks and asked him questions. They wanted to know why math was important in the computer business. They asked if he had to write letters in his job and did he have to talk to a lot of people. They were seeking answers to real life situations and experiences. We later learned that our school received donations of computers that replaced the old ones in the computer room where the students took their reading tests. We never learned who donated the computers.

Chapter 14: Sacred Space

There were, in my earlier experiences of American schooling, a few Caucasian teachers' racist acts of meanness, unkind words, and undeserved punishment. Did I somehow bring them into my reality from my thoughts, my fears, and my youthful uncertainties? Were they all meant to happen? How could it be that the diverse experiences, as a Pueblo person in the villages of my parents and later in American cities, eventually led me toward becoming a teacher when that was not a conscious intent? Was I somehow intended to create sacred space for other students, who like myself, were subjected to belittling criticisms that damaged their self esteem?

Ultimately, I had to take responsibility, as a teacher who happened to be a Pueblo person, to create sacred spaces for my students by becoming firmly grounded in our individual truths, honesty, and sincerity with the intention of becoming shra-me and to bring back to ourselves spiritual wholeness.

I now believe we die into the night giving thanks for the day's lessons to ask for dreams and visions that will guide our lives. The dreams and visions, whether we remember them or not, do provide information and guidance for what we need to do, what needs to be set right, and for what we need to prepare. As we journey through our lives to do what is shra-me we began to heal the past, present, and future almost simultaneously.

Epilogue

I had hoped to rest my weary body after defending my dissertation, but I am not yet done. I am still floating. I am still wearing a happy smile that I hope will become a permanent fixture on my face from now on. I want to hold on to the experience of this beautiful day.

It was a very cloudy day. I remarked to Calsue that the clouds could not seem to decide whether or not to rain or snow. The sky looked very much like the afternoon of my first day in class with Dr. Pence in 2010. I had walked out of her class wondering what I was doing in a doctoral class and if I had the passion to pursue research studies or to even complete the Ph.D. degree!

As Calsue and I walked out into the open from the parking garage, we were met with sprinkles of raindrops. The raindrops danced on my face, my eye glasses and on my shoulders. I laughed as they danced vigorously on my head. I was delighted with the blessings of shiwana. Yes, I was meant to be in my chair's class back six years ago. Today was going to demonstrate the passion I had for my research. Yes, I was going to meet whatever challenges the dissertation committee might have in store for me. Shiwana was blessing me as I strode toward the Tech Building on campus. I am a Bear Clan woman whose ancestors were encouraging me with the breezy whispers of Gu-meh Shruwasita. Gu-meh is a powerful encouragement to engage my spiritual power "like a woman." Shruwasita is my Acoma birth name.

Was I nervous? No. Did I practice for my defense? No. Did I fear failure as I had many times previously in academic environments? No. I had decided early on that I would not stress about it this time. I decided I would be myself and allow myself the right to be

center stage. And, no, I was not going to defend my dissertation slide by slide. That technique is foreign to me and unnatural. I was just going to tell my story. However I started was going to be the manner in which I presented the rest. That is exactly what I did.

After my presentation came to a close, the committee members were invited to ask me questions, but there were practically none! Rather, each committee member, with smiles on their faces, graced my whole being with compliments, praises, and continued encouragements. Oh, my goodness, I could not believe what I was hearing. No instructor from all my school years had ever paid me compliments such as I was hearing now. It was as if each positive praise closed and healed past wounds of pain embedded in my heart by previous elementary through college level instructors. The audience and I were asked to leave the room so that the committee could discuss my dissertation and my defense. While waiting to be called back in, several people congratulated me on my defense. They expressed their enjoyment indicating they had never seen anything like that.

These friends, Calsue, and I sat at a round table immediately outside of the room. In a few minutes, I heard the door open behind me. Dr. Pence placed her hands on my shoulders and announced, “Congratulations Dr. Angelina Medina, you have passed your defense.” I screamed happily! I turned to give my wonderful committee chair a big hug of appreciation and gratefulness. I allowed my tears to flow with happiness.

As I stepped back into the room, Dr. Cajete smiled and also announced the magic words, “Congratulations, Dr. Medina, you have passed with distinction.” I screamed again. More tears. Dr. Lopez stood beaming as he congratulated me and hugged me, as did Dr. Zancanrella. I felt like I could now walk on water!

Later my Nigerian “nephew” described my defense with such beautiful verbs and adverbs. I wish I had recorded his description of my performance. I listened to his story as if he were describing someone else. Honestly, I felt so good deep inside to think that, according Daniel’s description, my presentation truly was sincere, with emotion, with humor and with continuous, unpredictable movements. I felt like I had accomplished something beautiful, great, and different.

As I ponder how I got to this moment, I better understand Villanueva’s (1993) claim that memoria can be a friend to those of us who have responded to the call of academia and who have sought to live in multiple and dialogic cultural spaces. Writing this memoir has been an exciting, sometimes dreadful, but healing experience. The past had to be relived in order to help future and seasoned teachers to understand some of their students’ experiences both within and outside the classroom. My experiences with teachers throughout my American schooling are often true for my students in present day America. Villanueva (1993) explains that narratives such as mine fulfill “the need to reclaim a memory, memory of an identity in formation and constant reformation, the need to reclaim a memory of an identity as formed through the generations” (p. 12). My story needed to be told for the sake of students like mine and for future Native American students, with hopes they will be better understood and that they will be given voice and choice.

I appreciate my committee’s willingness to allow me to make my private story public (Villanueva, 1993) in an effort to allow others to enter into my experience and perhaps feel some of the same things I felt. I wanted to go beyond logical explanation to present my early life experiences in my Pueblo and my older experiences outside of my Pueblo in a way that goes beyond explanation. Through this reflective process, I explored and hopefully

demonstrated how my identity as a Pueblo Indian and my style of interaction developed and eventually shaped my perceptions of and interactions with my Pueblo, Navajo and Apache students. These were the times when there were the multiple layers of my consciousness in my life that connected with my culture and those of my students.

My stories focused on fragments, floating into focus on the waters of my memory. I took each one up, inspected it, polished it, and arranged it in relationship to my other stories in order to evoke connection with my readers in a way that transcends explanation. It is my hope that my memories will “jog our memories as a collective in a scattered world and within an ideology that praises individualism (Villanueva, 1993, p. 16).” I have come to see the power of pathos as a valuable tool within the academy.

Earlier, I said I was not done yet and I’m not. So, what now? This is the exciting part. I was so inspired by both the Native Science and Curriculum Development in Multicultural Education that I was able to create lesson plans from course assignments. I enjoyed learning about writing workshops, the reading process, and teaching the whole child from several other courses. I have begun to develop a curriculum. The curriculum began to take shape and took on a life of its own as ideas from my graduate work intertwined with my reflections on my life and classroom experiences.

I have not settled on the name of the curriculum yet because it is very different from other Native American curriculum guides and multicultural education curricula. I will temporarily call it the Pueblo Life Core Curriculum. It is designed for the upper elementary level of fifth grade. I presented it at the La Cosecha Conference in Albuquerque in 2013 under the title of *Development of Bi-literacy Through Pueblo Life Science Integrated Curriculum*. The curriculum is composed of integrated content, including English language

arts, including Pueblo storytelling, social studies, Pueblo science, Western science, visual arts, and mathematics. The experiential lessons are intended to be taught in the language of the students and in English. Many of the lessons will be based on Pueblo culture because students, I presume, will already have some life experiences that will enhance their studies and be able to team up with classmates to practice cooperation and modeling. There is much still to be developed for this curriculum. Important aspects of its success may depend heavily upon teachers' learning from *Memoir of a Bear Clan Woman's Educational Journey* prior to training and implementing the curriculum.

I feel strongly about the design of this curriculum because as I reflected on my Pueblo background and teaching I realized what an asset that was. It is, I believe, the Pueblo metaphysical teachings of my Zia grandparents that built who I am as a person and as a teacher. Teaching the whole child took place on a daily basis in our community according to life activities in the household or community. Perhaps this is when I realized that we are all students and teachers to one another. Adults and siblings taught younger children, and children brought attention of unusual or out of the ordinary situations to adults that perhaps needed solving. Errors or mistakes were not reasons for punishment; rather they were opportunities to learn. Those knowledgeable would demonstrate or model and then allow the learner to make the attempt. Children were not sent elsewhere at times of birth, illness, weddings, death, celebrations or rituals that needed to take place. Children's questions were responded to by siblings, any family members or community members. Community games, hunts, and play were all part of learning to be. So there were the socio-cultural-spiritual events that offered many opportunities to learn one's duties and responsibilities to self, family, extended family, community, and tribal officials. These were our lessons to grow

from to become decent human beings, to be shra-me and in the state of spirit as much as possible.

In contrast, learning about America in American schools created confusion and conflict for me. The lack of honesty in American history, the lack of empathy for Native American students who refused to harm animals in biology courses, and the lack of understanding and patience in English language courses were difficult to maneuver. These oftentimes led to anger and disgust about teaching American history and being witness to the damages done by the United States government. There were the injustices against Indigenous people and animals that would give rise to resentment. Although there were many wonderful things to learn in school, they were things that could also be left at school. As American teachings filtered into Native community, the potential losses of language and culture were yet unseen.

Having lived in cross-cultural environments, it was necessary to constantly be aware of those instances of teaching that might be confusing to the students. I had to be alert to the body language of my students in order to determine whether understanding was taking place or if there was confusion and frustration. My students and I had to trust one another because of our being taught about truthfulness and honesty. Our classroom had to be a safe, comfortable and loving environment for students to freely speak their truth and know that criticism and humiliation would not follow just because they didn't understand or didn't know. This sacred space and place is what I learned from my Zia family and this is what I practiced with all of my students and all of the classes where I taught. The goal of my curriculum will be to guide other teachers in how to make their classrooms sacred.

To add to the curriculum, I am revising a couple of children's stories I wrote years ago. One is about the Pueblo Revolt and the other is about a young boy's questions about Thanksgiving Day. There may be yet another story about a young girl learning about pottery making. Perhaps these stories, once completed, may be part of the history and language arts lessons.

I am excited about completing the curriculum, even while knowing that it may not be acceptable in American mainstream standards. Its design is for my ideal world to add to the sacred wholeness of young Pueblo/Native American students that will encourage becoming shra-me, decent human beings in pursuit of spiritual connections and reciprocal interactions with all life forms, visible and invisible.

In my personal history, I was considered not shra-me by various professional individuals and a parent. Their negative assumptions tore me up inside thus leaving me feeling insecure, with little or no value, and forever lacking self confidence. A great deal of personal healing has taken place for me through the graduate courses I took and through the writing of my memoir. I had undertaken this qualitative methodology to write about how Pueblo style interaction with my students had helped them take responsibility for their own education, at an early age, and became honorable, assertive students who succeeded in their endeavors. I wrote to give an inside view of Pueblo ways of learning so that pre-service and seasoned teachers might add my memoir to their resources so they could open themselves up to understanding that their diverse students' experience were indeed very different from their own. I knew unpleasant and painful memories of my educational experiences were very similar to the educational experiences of many Native American students so I was willing to dive into those memories as I had always faced issues head on. This was no different. I

wrote at odd hours of the night and wee hours of the morning. I hurt. I cried. I felt sorry for that little girl who went through inner hell to be good but wasn't good enough. I consoled myself and reminded myself that I had never failed at anything I tried, afraid as I might have been. But at the moment of writing, the painful "onion skin" layers did not immediately disappear.

The layers of experience could only be pulled away as I read from books and articles about oppression in American schooling. I understood now of the racist behaviors and actions of the teachers in mid-twentieth century era who belittled and humiliated me. I was enlightened about the school curricula that were meant to shape me into somebody I could never be or wanted to be. I now understood my own negative behavior toward my Caucasian teachers was resistance against oppression. Those negative behaviors and actions toward me added to the increased dis-ease of depression. It was not about the well intentioned, good person I felt myself to be but, at the time, I did not have enough world experiences to know how very intuitive and intelligent I truly was.

Test taking, in all of my courses and classes, affected my confidence to the point of my sabotaging myself. I, over time, became overly anxious, fearful, and stressed out before major examinations that I would literally run to the nearest restroom to vomit. It continued into adulthood when I had to take teacher examinations in order to be certified. Yet, I never failed an exam.

I have received many compliments about my ability to write essays and poems, to my disbelief. Writing, for most of my life, has been for my eyes only. Throughout my schooling in American schools, I dreaded, even hated to write! Imagine the fear of writing that grew from early elementary through college level schooling when I feared the RED INK! Imagine

our bilingual students' fear and hatred of writing because they are learning a foreign language. With Pueblo students whose language was not written or based on Latin, the fear was, is, tremendous. For me, it was agony. I had known only the Keres language before entering school. Now I had to learn someone else's language? RED INK crept into my dreams just before having to jump in the school bus to be driven to school far away. I **should** breathe easily now. After all, I did pass my courses with high grades, held a very high GPA of 4.11, became a member of The Honor Society of Phi Kappa Phi and , and now I soon upload my dissertation, a memoir, as a final act for my doctoral degree.

Yes, this final degree has disintegrated many fears. It almost feels like the mental prison I endured throughout my life has been unlocked to finally recognize the wise me. I can, and have for the most part, forgiven those who acted on their own fears to negatively target me. I can bring back Frances, the warrior who protected me, Angelina. Frances is my middle name and personality. She has been my inner strength and support. Frances had already, by age ten, experienced the hardships, humiliation from criticism and physical, emotional and psychological abuse enough to want to leave the world of unkindness she had known for too long in her short life. I take her strong hand to walk with me once more. We offer our love and prayers for all within our world.

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