

## **Finding the Balance...The Vision Story that led to A retrospective of images and stories from 1977-2022.**

In carving out the contours of my evolving life on Dine' (aka Navajo) lands, I deepened seeing with my heart. My intuition was becoming more focused and was open to the delicate cues that kept me on my soul's road. As I embraced this process of trusting, layer upon layer of fear and uncertainty peeled away. By learning the art of being still, I discovered my own serenity and strength. Within I felt something very familiar, something that reminded me of humility, to accept the lessons as they came, and to open my heart to others on this journey.

Black Elk said, "The first peace, which is the most important, is that which comes within the souls of people when they realize their relationship, their oneness with the universe and all its powers..." In essence, we all belong to the story, the unfolding, the miracle that we call our humanness. So when my friends Terry and Michael called me and asked me to come to Colorado and pray with them, I went. In the course of that visit, that prayer, that heart's opening, this book was born.

Terry and Michael lived amidst the pine and aspen trees west of the Flatirons overlooking Boulder, Colorado. I arrived on a Saturday in early November. We took a short walk together and then returned to their home to pray. Before long, a vision to which I was both witness and participant began to unfold. Before me was a beautiful mountain meadow of tall grass. The sun was warm, the sky azure. With the help of a rather comical looking yet extremely wise little golden-colored man, I was led out of a glass house doorway and into the meadow beyond. He smiled, providing assurance that I was on the right track.

Within moments of my emergence in the meadow, Mary, a tall, slender and beautiful woman of American Indian and Spanish descent approached from the south. She had long, shining black hair and her smile radiated the deepest love and nurturance I had ever seen in a woman's countenance. We joined hands, and in that moment of exchange, a loving calm filled me to the core. My search for a lifetime companion was put to rest.

Mary and I walked through the lush meadow. Softness prevailed; no danger or fear existed. We were led to a newly forming natural spring lightly bubbling through the grass. We followed the damp earth until we discovered a stream that meandered west through the bottom of the meadow. Southwest where the stream was flowing, a doe emerged. While she walked and grazed contentedly, she led me on a journey back to Dine' country.

Looking over the land of the Dine' from Window Rock to Rough Rock, I recognized several friends. They immediately joined Mary and me by appearing first in the clouds and then descending into the meadow. Mr. Anthony, a Navajo Hathaalii or Medicine Man who performed various ceremonies over the years for me in the Rez, brought with him a large crystal. Fred Bia, a talented Navajo painter and photographer, brought tobacco. Eugene Blackbear, an older Southern Cheyenne Peyota Priest and healer, held an eagle feather. Each man took his place around the water. Looking up at the ridge in the distance, we

saw an assemblage of Indian men on horses, many painted. Fred Bia motioned with his lips to one of the chiefs at the head of pack, who then dismounted and walked down. He brought a pipe to our growing circle. Fred handed his tobacco to the pipe-carrier. Once the pipe was prepared—blending Navajo wild tobacco from the Chuska Mountains, a little Bull Durham, and a pinch of “Life Medicine” tobacco from Fred’s father’s recipe—Mr. Anthony lit it with his crystal.

Each of us in this vision had his or her assignments, and each of us followed them to the letter. It was understood that Spirit had called for this prayer in order for me to more clearly define my path. As each of us prayed in spoken and unspoken words, we were embraced by the awesome and absolute presence of love. Tears of gratitude spilled freely from my eyes. Feeling the presence of the blades of grass, I witnessed natural law manifesting around me—horses, feathers, deer, human beings, water, and the eagle that would soon appear. We were reduced to the essence of creation within timelessness.

I looked at Mary and watched as her life unfolded before me. Her hips widened slightly. Her hair developed gray streaks like feathers starting from her temple and flowing back above her ears. Her eyes spoke of deep wisdom, and the promise of a long life. Her face reflected pure love that flowed from her soul like water from the stream in front of us. I watched the encapsulated story of Mary’s spiritual and physical evolution. She then morphed back into the physical form of the moment.

The sacred blend of burning tobacco rose into the air to the west of us. Within its blue gossamer smoke, the image of this book was revealed. The cover of the book was revealed—a vertical color image of Cynthia Ben’s Kinaalda’ (a puberty ceremony). Other images appeared in the smoke, along with the stories they recalled—some humorous, some sacred, and some captured through the lens of my camera. I became vitally aware of the assignment at hand. The Navajo and Cheyenne brothers who surrounded me, those lining the southern ridge on horseback, the doe, Mary, the anticipated eagle, the sacred water that flowed from the earth—all had come to help me. They were asking me to tell their stories, to represent and honor them with appropriately, to let the images of their sacred lands, people and ceremony take flight.

Three books and part of a fourth were revealed to me on this brisk November day more than forty years ago. As the last of the images dissolved into a broader column of smoke, a golden eagle appeared. He gathered the smoke into a carefully wrapped bundle. The blue sky was his backdrop, that place where color shifts from pale blue to deep turquoise. Gathering his wings back, he performed his assignment with care, firmness and resolve. Understanding his purpose and direction, he reminded us how life unfolds preciously when we act in correct timing and follow our deepest intuitive leanings.

The eagle then spoke a question while looking to the southeast, “What am I to do with this?” As soon as I heard the words, my eyes were led to the grassy rise between our circle and

the Indian brothers and their horses on the ridge. There, in physical translucence, stood Jesus. He held a staff in his left hand while he gazed up at the eagle. Jesus answered, "Take these prayers to the Father and let them be so." And with that, the eagle disappeared into the turquoise sky. Jesus remained on the hillside for a few moments while we all savored this moment of splendor, grace, and absolute rightness.

The deer looked on with a soft eye as we disbanded one by one. No one spoke, no need for words. Mary and I walked together back toward the glass house. We entered and looked back toward the now empty meadow. Embracing, we said goodbye, and held each other deep within loving gazes. The house dissolved and Mary took her leave to the south, becoming invisible as she approached the place where Jesus had stood.

I returned to Dine' lands. Shortly thereafter, my brothers and sisters there encouraged me to tell the story of my life with them. And so, forty plus years and countless life experiences later, the time has arrived to do so. I have taken these stories and images deeply through sweat as an expression of refinement. I've added more images, stories and reflections from my travels. The cover image has changed after my time documenting in Standing Rock North Dakota and the uprising there. The horse is our timekeeper, keeping us in rhythm. I have done my best to let Creator breathe Spirit into them so that they may carry the proper medicine. You see, through ceremony, elders, wisdom keepers and the like have assisted in breathing in the right energetics into my words and images, so that each who experiences them, will receive a teaching, a blessing. I have prayed for innocence and truth to accompany me on this journey.

May you find yourself within these pages.