



# Native Sons

## Equipping Native Leaders to Reach Native Americans

**DEBRA YAZZIE**

**POINTS OF INTEREST:**

- The term "Navajo" is of Spanish origin. According to some it is a reference to farming, but according to one of the Navajo at AIC it means "thief".
- The Navajo do not like the this word and call themselves "Diné" (pronounced "Din-nay"), which means "the people".
- The Navajo are the largest federally recognized tribe in the US with over 300,000 enrolled tribal members.
- The Navajo Reservation is the largest First Nation Rez in the US spanning 15,000 square miles with territory in AZ, NM, & UT. It is as large as MA, CT, & RI combined.

**PRAYER POINTS**

- New financial partners
- Increased enrollment and finances for AIC.
- Favor for Theresa as she looks for a new job.

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"What better place to develop myself and multiply ministry than developing other leaders?" Debra was talking about her return to AIC in 2013. She had attended AIC from 1990 -93 earning an AA in Business. Since then she has been many places and done many things growing spiritually and professionally. She is currently the Resident Director at AIC living and working with the students. She orchestrates the college's music ministry, leads campus outreaches, and is also a student (again) working on a BA in Christian Ministry.

Debra is Navajo. She grew up on the Rez in the "Checkerboard Area", so named because nationalities other than First Nation People also lived there. She grew up in church and has many generations of Christians in her family. She was raised by her grandparents. She was especially close with her grandfather. "He spoke infrequently, but when he spoke what he said was very wise. I never heard him cut anyone down. When I struggled with acceptance issues at school, my grandfather encouraged me stating they were jealous and reminding me of my good qualities." At seven, she played with matches and nearly burnt down her grandparents hay house. She received the first spanking ever from her grandfather

and was heartbroken because of it. Afterwards, she crawled up onto his lap and found him crying, "We could have lost you today." She knew his love, afterwards it kept her from doing anything to disappoint



**Debra Yazzie**

him . Her grandfather went to be with the Lord when she was 15. He had been her anchor and without him she dislodged from her moorings. Some of her friends drank and when they did they would talk about their problems. She joined them, it seemed to help and it helped others to accept her

more. She also began smoking marijuana. When she was 17 the guidance counselor at school brought met with her; she was behind and needed to go an additional year. Debra sought for alternatives and help, but the guidance counselor offered none. "I felt she did no care." She dropped out, took a job in a fast-food restaurant and was promoted to assistant manager after a month. She was making good money and thought, "This is the life", but also felt something was missing.

One night, a girl Debra knew came and spoke with her. Debra had felt unsettled the entire week, she says, "I was not complete. I felt empty, unsatisfied, like something was missing." Sharing this, with the young woman began to share her own story about her relationship with Jesus.

Debra realized that what was missing in her life was God. She went to speak with an uncle. He told her that she needed to ask Jesus into her life and prayed with her. "Something happened... I opened my eyes and felt something beyond being high." She was so affected by God's presence that when her aunt arrived, she thought she was high!

**ON A PERSONAL NOTE**

Theresa and I are well. The fall semester is in full swing for me and I am again very busy developing and teaching my courses. There is a new sense of expectancy at AIC that is good to be a part of. I have started a Ph.D. program at Assemblies of God Theological Seminary. My first course begins in late October, but I am already working on the reading and first two papers (due before class begins!).

The job Theresa began over the summer came to an end due to the business not taking off with the release of a new app as the owner had hoped. They would like to hire her back if business picks up, but she is now searching for work once again.

Caleb surprised us a month ago with the announcement that he was getting engaged, a few days later he was married. We have only met his new wife, Natasha, through Skype. He will be finishing his time in the Marines around Thanksgiving. Natasha is in the Navy and has just been deployed for 2 years to Italy. Please keep them in prayer.

Levi, Alicia, and the boys are doing well. Alicia is now on day shift. Levi is back in classes. Dillon is now in pre-school and Torrin at daycare when his parents are working. They are growing fast and we hope to see all our children this Christmas—Lord willing.



**Caleb & Natasha**

She then went with her grandmother to town where her grandmother bought her a Bible. Debra chose a "teacher's Bible" because she wanted to learn as much as she could. When she read Jesus' prayer for His disciples (Jn. 17) she realized, "He was praying for me too!" She hungered for God and wanted more.

She knew that the Holy Spirit was the Helper and began asking, "Give me the Holy Ghost. If He is going to be my helper, I want Him too." As a child she had seen people rolling around on the church floor while she was playing under the pews and wondered if this is what would happen to her. One night she arrived early at a service where she was part of the worship team. Her uncle, the evangelist, announced that they were going to pray. She went behind the drums and began praying, "I want the Holy Ghost!" She felt someone's hand on her shoulder, then a warm sensation in her belly. She was praying, "Jesus, Jesus, Jesus" but then went off into a language she did not know. "I was wondering, 'What is this?' But I could not say it in English! I felt such electricity shooting through my body! It seemed like I was praying for 10-15 minutes, but when I was done I had prayed (in tongues) for an hour and a half!" She thanked her uncle for praying for her, but he told her he had not touched her. She told him what had happened. He hugged her and encouraged her to continue in the gift.

A group from AIC ministered in her area and encouraged her to attend. She went to get her GED scoring one of the highest scores ever and was given her high school diploma as a result. At AIBC she continued playing in the worship band. Her favorite teacher was a Bible teacher. She was intrigued by the prophetic typology of Hebrews and felt a connection with the Jews of the Diaspora (Dispersion). She wondered if God was separating her from what she had known and what more He

had in store for her.

After obtaining her AA in Business, she returned to her Navajo Reservation and worked for the tribe in the Community Development Project. She was discouraged by the corruption she saw, but worked hard and did well. Her boss was leaving and wanted Debra to fill her position. When Debra uncovered embezzlement and brought it to light, it caused problems including loss of her promotion. At that point she felt she wanted something different.

An opportunity presented itself for her to go to the Shoshone-Paiute Reservation in Nevada. There she met an old friend, someone she could talk with. She decided to stay. She found work as a high school substitute teacher and deputy prosecutor. As she worked with teens and those in the courts she was impacted by the problems of absentee parents, drug & alcohol abuse, etc. "Lots of kids want out, but they don't know how." Debra notes that many of the school youth who gave her the most trouble were the most upset when she left and expressed their thanks to her for helping them.

Debra spent 15 years in Alaska and considers the possibility of returning to minister. "It is isolated and the people need pastors." While working with church youth in Alaska, Debra focused on spiritual development. This took place as did numeric growth; her one youth group grew from 25-30 kids to 60-65. She took them on numerous evangelistic outreaches, both local and national; among the places they traveled to were the Navajo Rez in NM, the Mohawk Rez in Akwesasne, NY, and the Tohola Rez in WA.

Alaska was Debra's formative desert. Far from home and the support of family God kept confronting her with her past, her hurts, her problems. She sought to avoid the issues and began smoking pot again, but the harder she ran the more tormented she felt. Eventually she admitted her problems to a pastor.

"He did not judge me, but he did remind me that pot was illegal. He encouraged me to run to God and cast my cares upon Him, but warned that it would be hard. I learned to face into the pain." One issue for Debra was "built up hope & disappointment" especially in regards to the "public face vs. the private self" that often occurs in church and ministry. She was especially afraid of this in herself and felt ashamed of pretending that everything was alright when she knew it was not. Humbled, she pressed in closer to Jesus in prayer and began taking responsibility in a new way for her thoughts and behaviors.

Debra has served in a number of churches in AZ and NM helping to develop music ministries, youth groups, and sound financial practices. AIC's Administrative VP approached Debra while she was serving at a church in Flagstaff, AZ about ministry at the college. She prayed and spoke with her pastor. Just a year before she had been weeping and interceding for the school when she had heard that it could close. God reminded her that she had a burden for AIC and the development of young leaders.

Now back at AIC Debra states, "AIC helps to establish foundations in our relationship with Jesus. It helps prepare for ministry, but it also helps to lay life foundations for those who will enter the secular workplace. AIC is a small school with a close knit community. It is easy to approach others including students, professors, and the administration with any sort of question or problem. It is a great place to launch for a young adult leaving home for the first time."

I have had the privilege of having Debra in several of my classes. She is a great student and a great example of God's work here at AIC.

## Cobell vs. Salazar: One Example of On-Going Treaty Breaking



For 14 years, Elouise Cobell from the Blackfoot Tribe in MT has been battling the federal government in court over the mismanagement of Native monies and lands. The lawsuit addresses the federal government's failure to provide an historical account for Individual Indian Money (IIM) accounts, the mismanagement of funds in these accounts, and violation of government responsibilities in the management of the land, oil, natural gas, mineral, timber, grazing and other resources. Funds are held in trust for Native landowners in exchange for the lease of tribal land and the resources a part of them. The financial mismanagement aspect of

Cobell's suit addressed the failure to deposit funds into these accounts and the mismanagement of the funds in them.

The lawsuit resulted in a 3.4 billion dollar settlement with individuals receiving app. \$1800 apiece. However, trillions of dollars were taken, so in spite of the seemingly sizeable settlement, pennies on the dollar are actually being returned. Those with active IIM accounts will receive their allotments without the need to take further action, but an estimated 500,000 Native people will need to contact the government to either register to receive payment or to exclude themselves from the settlement in order to sue the government as private citizens. A 45-day time limit was established for those eligible to register for their claim when the settlement was finalized in and a fairness hearing occurred in the spring of 2011.

Settling a lawsuit is not the same as winning it.

Settlement means coming to an agreement, but the alleged wrong-doer does not admit wrongdoing. Instead, they agree to a compensation that they can live with and the individual bringing suit chooses to accept the agreement. In this instance part of what is at stake in the settlement from a First Nation perspective is the many elderly people that are sick and dying that need compensation and help now.

Individual First Nation IIM holders can receive benefit from this settlement, but tribes will as well. The checkerboard area of the Navajo Nation will receive funding designated for scholarships and the repurchase of tribal lands.

As of August 5, 2014, four years after the approval of the petition this settlement has still not been paid to its beneficiaries.

Info from: [www.reznetnews.org](http://www.reznetnews.org); [indiantrust.com](http://indiantrust.com); & [indiancountrytodaymedianetwork.com](http://indiancountrytodaymedianetwork.com)