



## **The Storyteller Radio Broadcast**

### **Arlene Edd (Navaho)**

**Hello, my name is Arlene Edd. I'm a Navajo from the southwest United States in northern Arizona. We normally, in the Navajo tradition, introduce ourselves with clans to identify between the families, and I would just like to introduce myself in that sense. I'm of the Bitter Water clan born for Arrowhead people. My maternal grandfather is the Many Goats clan and the paternal grandfather is Edge Water clan.**

**But in the spirit I am a child of God.**

**I was raised in a Christian home. My mother... as a little girl, my mother took me to church. About a mile from where we lived, there was a church growing, starting up, and there was a group, and my mother attended that church and she took us; I have one sister and four brothers. I had two other sisters, but my older sister, she didn't make it about a month after she was born, and I had an younger sister who died at age eight, back in 1987.**

**My mother started going to church. I guess my family, most of my family, are traditional. My mother has... she started going to church to find comfort in the Lord, and she found comfort in this church that was growing near by. It's the only place that she found love and she found people that can accept her as herself.**

**When we were growing up, we had a hard time; there was a lot of tension among our families, and because of my mom's condition, which was epilepsy, she was always depressed and always trying to learn how to deal with herself.**

**My mom and dad, they married in 1959 in a... it wasn't really a wedding ceremony - it was more like an arranged marriage that they were brought together. My grandfather went out to one of the ceremonies nearby about a way from where they lived, and he met my father and my father brought him home and told him, "Here's my daughter. I want you to marry my daughter and have a family and take care of her."**

**My father was a very traditional man, and being traditional, he was honorable to what others said to him and expected of him. He took it very serious and when he was told here was a wife for him to take care of now, he couldn't say no. He had to take on the responsibility of starting a family.**

**About a year after they were married, my older brother was born, and I'm the third one in the family.**

**Through the years, my father found out that my mom was epileptic, but for him it was, he couldn't just leave... he was, he couldn't even think of it. It was too late; because he was an honorable man he had to stay and take care of his wife and be there for his kids.**

**During those times there was a lot of ceremonies done for my mom to help her to deal with this condition. In a way, there was a lot of healing ceremonies and a lot of different types of ceremonies that she went through, but none of them helped. It just brought on more tension to the traditional family, my aunt and my grandma. They viewed her with this curse that was put on her, and she couldn't socialize with them because they viewed it as a curse.**

**In very traditional sense, when you have healing ceremonies done for you and other ceremonies done for you, you can't allow any curses to come into your home, into your families. It is kind of like disruptive, is viewed as very disruptive. So my mom had to deal with a lot of neglect and a lot of people not coming to her and being with her. She was more like shunned by her mom and dad, her sisters and her brothers.**

**So at this church, you know, about a mile from us where this church was growing, was the only place she found comfort. She took us there when we were small. We took part in the singing and the hymns.**

**When she was a young girl, my mom, she went to school for a while, but she had to come back because she had to deal with her epilepsy. But it didn't affect any of her memory.**

**She had good memory and she had good sense. So, in her own way, she started learning to read the Bible, especially in Navajo. And I remember when I was very young, she used to teach us to read the songs and sing the songs with her. That's how I learned a lot of the hymns, Navajo hymns, from the old hymn books.**

**Through the years, when I was in grade school, my brothers and sisters were in grade school, we were at boarding school. We'd spend the week there and she'd come and get us on the weekends. During those weekends, or throughout the summer, we'd teach her math, reading and writing. It helped her a lot to gain knowledge. It helped her also to read the Bible more.**

**To her, it brought her comfort, it brought her, helped her, to teach the word of God to her. And though she was depressed and stressed a lot of times, which brought on her seizures, you know, she'd try to calm herself down, but a lot of the times, because of the tension among the family, this brought on a lot of seizures. It brought on a lot of depressed moods for her.**

**And through my teenage years, I didn't know how to deal with it. I started developing anger towards my family, towards my mother, because we were treated... as her kids, we were treated like we were the black sheep of the family, and we didn't know what else to do. We didn't know how to deal with it.**

**My grandmother, at times she would be nice to us and other times she would be telling us that we come from a family that is cursed and we weren't allowed in any of the regular, normal activities. That was very hard on us.**

**My brothers and sisters, they... at an early age, we all decided that we were going to leave home and we were going to build upon this and get out of these situations, do something with ourselves.**

**My father, during that time, he was away most of the time, he worked on the railroads and sheep ranches up in Colorado. He would be gone for months at a time. When he'd come home, my mom looked forward to those days when my dad would be home, knowing that he'll be there cause, you know, like I said, my dad's a very honorable man; even though his wife had this condition he took care of her. He took the responsibility to be with her.**

**And he told us, as his kids, to be strong and keep going to school and get an education. He told us, he says, "You know, it's not going to be like this forever, it's going to change. The only way it's going to change is if you kids grow up and use your education and use your knowledge, what you've learned, use that to further yourself and make a change in your life." And that was the motivation that my dad taught us.**

**He would also tell us stories through the Navajo coyote stories, and it was... I don't really know how to explain. It was when you're going to church you're listening to Bible stories and then you go home your dad tells you coyote story; I guess as a young kid you're just confused.**

**But you know, I didn't know the Lord was teaching me through the Bible stories. He was laying upon my heart the verses, and I grew up with these verses.**

**Like I was saying, I developed an anger towards my mother, and in 1977 I met my husband. And I was to the point where I didn't want to go home, I didn't want to deal with my family, deal with my mother. I just wanted to get away from all that tension, all that being in that, viewed as a cursed child. It was really hard. I didn't want to go back, I was so developed a stubbornness that it was really hard.**

**When I met my husband in 1977, his family was really different. At first, I couldn't show the affection that they showed me. I was taught in a way where, you know, you have to conduct yourself in a certain way as a woman, as a Navajo woman, and a lot of the affection that my husband's family showed me that I was never taught and I held a lot back. It wasn't normal to me.**

**But I was with my husband for five years. In 1982 we got married. And during those years when I, from my early childhood to my teenage years, I went to church, always thought that I was a Christian. I viewed myself as a Christian and I thought I was a Christian.**

**I met this pastor, his name was Reverend Herman Williams. I started going to his services because my husband's family attended his church, and I started attending over there. I remember the times when he used to say... you know, I didn't know what a backslider was; I didn't know. And he explained a lot of us are grew up Christian lives, our parents, our families are Christian, and we know the verses, we know the songs, and we feel like we're**

**Christians. But he says, “Have you really confessed, have you really confessed with your mouth, and just come back and laid your life before the Lord?”**

**And it really put in my mind a lot of confusion. In 1984 we were at camp meeting, Wakefields, Arizona, and I remember at the meetings there, and they were doing invitations. They were asking if any of us wanted to rededicate our lives, and I went up there, and it was the summer of 1984. I told the Lord, “Here is my life; I don’t know what You want to do with me, you know, but I want to serve You and I want to live the life You gave me.”**

**And a lot of us, you know, we think that when we say that, right away we’ll feel a rush around us, or some type of change, immediate change, but through the years I learned that knowing the Lord and walking with the Lord, it wasn’t easy, it’s rough.**

**At times you doubt yourself, and at times you will tell yourself, “I asked the Lord into my life; is He really there, is He really with me?” Those are the type of questions I went through.**

**But Reverend Williams always brought out a verse: it’s one of the verses that really has been with me, and it’s really been the foundation to my faith, my growing faith in the Lord, through the years. It’s Hebrews 12:2. It says “Fixing our eyes on Jesus, the author and perfecter of faith, who for the joy set before Him endured the cross, despising the shame, and is set down at the right hand of the throne of God.”**

**Reverend Williams brought this verse and he says, “For all of you, for all of you who are doubters, you don’t know what’s before you. You don’t know what you’re trying to overcome, what you’re trying to get to.” And he told us, he says, “This verse will help you if you read it; it will help you to focus on the Lord, knowing that at the end of that tunnel or at the end of that road, you know, that Jesus is the one waiting for you. And He’s the ultimate price, for He died for your sins, and He sacrificed a lot for His grace; by His grace you will enter His kingdom.”**

**This is the verse that really, I guess, helped me through the years, and it’s really been a part of me, that I can be an example for Him, if I stay focused on Him. And it’s really helped me through the years.**

**I think about my mom, going back to when I was really angry with her. It took me several years of building my faith and growing in the Lord, and then there was another sermon that I heard where we were told, “Have you ever forgiven anybody, forgiven somebody that you’ve had anger against?” It was really hard for me. I didn’t know how to deal with it, I didn’t know. I guess I was just ashamed because I had so much anger, not only against my mother but my family. But the Lord, through a lot of love, the Lord showed me I can forgive as He has forgiven my sins. I need to step forward and forgive others around me.**

**One of the things that I have done since then is, I went back home and I told my mom, I said, “I need to talk to you.” I just told her, “Mom, I’m asking you for forgiveness,” and**

she didn't know what to say. I told her that I'm sorry for the way I treated her when I was growing up. I told her I didn't understand at the time, and she just looked at me and she just started crying. She didn't know how to express herself. She just said 'shiasha.' In the Navajo, you know, you say 'shiasha' which means 'my little one'. Don't matter how old you are, you know, when your mother, your parent, says 'shiasha' that means a lot. And that's what she was telling me.

And to me, that was, that was everything. All the love she felt, and that one little word said 'my little one'. And I always tell her from then on, I said, "Mom, I love you>"

My dad was a, like I was saying, he's a very traditional man and he's worked on the railroad and he's a sheep rancher. But about twenty years ago, probably more like twenty-five years ago, he came home, decided to stay home.

I had a little sister, and she was born in 1979, and my mom, it was kind of a surprise to my mom. She didn't really expect another child. My parents were really happy and a lot of her discipline came from my brother along with my parents, and she learned a lot. She was a joy to my parents. She spent eight years of her life with her parents.

In 1987, we were up traveling up north to a conference. I had two little boys and my mother in-law and we were on the road to Indian Bible Conference up in Minnesota. When we got into North Dakota I called home, just to say hi and tell everybody we were doing okay, and my husband told me that he didn't want to say it on the phone but he says, "You better turn around; there's been a death in the family." I asked him who it was, and he said, "It's your little sister."

He didn't tell me right away what had happened to her. He just said, "You better just come home; your parents need you."

So we turned around, probably got home within 24 hours, got home late in the afternoon. Got up to my parents, my dad was sitting there. My dad, he's a very reserved man, not the type to show a lot of emotion. But I knew that he really cared for his kids, all of us, cause we felt it. His love was there for us, each and every one of us. And it was very for him when I entered his house and he was sitting there, and he just broke down when he saw me. And I asked him what happened?

I guess my little sister was out horsing around at the corral. My dad was just over the hill herding sheep, and my little sister, she's always out there walking in the forest or, you know, just tracking horses or sheep. She was helping my mom, come home and help my mom, and that afternoon she was just waiting for my dad to come home. And she was down at the sheep corral horsing around on the logs, and just hanging around. And I guess that part of the corral where she was swinging around on the logs, it gave, and they were big logs, and I guess it the whole part of the corral caved in and just fell on top of her.

And my mom was at home and she was preparing for my dad to return, and, you know, she's always checking on my little sister, her name is Yolanda; you know, I guess she

started to wonder where she was because she hadn't come in, skipping into the house or anything for the past 30 minutes. So she went out there and started looking for her, started getting concerned, calling her name. She went out towards the corral and she saw the logs, and she noticed my little sister laying under the logs. She was still breathing but she was unconscious, and there was a lot of blood and I guess she started, she got up and started yelling for my dad. My dad was just over the hill.

My mom said she raced back to the house and grabbed a blanket and she went back out there and tried to comfort, cause the logs were too heavy for her to lift. My dad finally came but by the time he came, I guess my little sister had lost a lot of blood.

She had head trauma, it hit her on the head, and by the time they got her back to the house and had her covered with blankets and everything and called for help, she was already gone.

So my dad, being a traditional man, he can't talk about death. But during that time, he wanted to have that hope, knowing where his child was. You know, this was his child and this was a part of him, and he couldn't just not talk about her, and that really affected him, and he just couldn't not talk about her.

So we buried my little sister. You know, my mom was... she was still going to church and getting closer with the Lord. She says, "I know where my daughter is."

My dad saw that closeness and that hope, and he wanted to know where his daughter was, so he started attending church and he became a Christian after my sister died. He goes to church and he encourages others. He doesn't avoid talking about death anymore. He comes out and he talks about, he tells us, those who should hear about it when there's a death in the family. Other families, he goes over there and he tells them, "You guys don't know where this person is, but it's your chance, it's your turn. You guys are still here, you know, you guys need to get to know the Lord."

He tells them to come to repentance and get to know the Lord, because eventually there is life after death, he says. He says that's the hope he has for him, his wife, his kids and his grandkids.

You know a lot of us, we... it's really sad that, you know, life changing experiences, especially with death. It's so sad that death is probably what can finally make us realize that there's God, that there is hope for those of us that are still here.

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