Cheryl Yazzie

Yáʼátʼeh. My name is Cheryl Yazzie and I am a member of the Navajo Nation. I am from the Salt Clan and born for the Bitter Water People. My maternal grandparents are the Water Edge People and my paternal grandparents are from the Bear Clan. This is how I identify as a Diné woman. I hail from the “suburb” community of To’haijéé which is located west of Albuquerque, NM. I have three wonderful and amazing children – Dikohat, Anahe, and Zachary.

Cheryl is a full-time undergraduate student majoring in Native American Studies and a minor in Psychology in May. Her time at UNM is supported by her family, she says, “I am extremely grateful that with my family’s support, I can focus on my education and being an active community member. Along with my sister, we take care of our mother and two elderly uncles.”

Cheryl’s educational journey started “years ago,” but she had to hit the pause button to raise my three children. There have been many hats that I have worn during my various career paths such as an athletic director in my community, a database administrator for Chicanos and Native Nation Industries, and program coordinator for the State of New Mexico. I am also a former board member of the Caroncito Health Board Center Inc. and the Albuquerque Area Indian Health Board. My term ended last year. In that time, I saw the need to improve the quality of our health services for our people. In this journey, the obstacles I think all Indigenous nations face is funding and the pleasurable oversight of federal funds from Congress.

Cheryl would like to return back home to bring awareness of culture, tradition, language, ceremony, and reclamation. She eloquently says, “Decolonization is not just remembering who we are as a nation, but to reclaim what has been taken and to honor what we still retain. There is a conscious effort between the mind, body, soul, and emotions. My dream is to see our tribal nations heal from past historical trauma, so we can continue to build upon the foundation of our elders.”

She observes this today as, “There is a paradigm shift in Indian Country. More Indigenous People are returning to pursue their educational goals. We are in a time of progression, activism, and revitalization to drastically improve the sustainability efforts of our Indigenous communities. From the unity of tribal voices at the NODAPL movement, DOODA Fracking in Chaco Canyon, Missing, Murdered Indigenous Women, and efforts to protect the rain forests by the Kogi brothers. We are at a pivotal point to protect our Mother Earth. Our Crazy and Holy People have made each of us stewards of this land and all that it encompasses. Our younger generations are using their western education in their efforts to decolonize, resist assimilation, and revalorize our language to restore harmony within our communities.”

Cheryl has some advice for her fellow UNM Students: “Find your strength through the stories of our ancestors and elders. Listen as they transfer their Indigenous Knowledge through their lived experiences. As Indigenous Peoples, we are bound together upon the foundation of our creation stories, language, songs, ceremonies, and prayers. The tides are shifting as Indigenous Nations are beginning to reclaim their rights to govern themselves. Now is the time to be part of the movement to shape our future utilizing the seventh-generation philosophy: Never tire of the love of learning. Remember that we are strong, resolute, and powerful together. Using our western education, we will challenge the colonial oppression that demands complacency from our people.”

Thank you very much for taking the time to read our newsletter. If you have any questions please contact:

Kevin Brown, Program Specialist, aketoby@unm.edu