

My "Ma Sani"
By: Jackie Nez

I cherish the strong connection with my sweet, loving, and very wise grandmother. At a very young age, my Ma sani (grandmother in Navajo) Mary Nez and I spent a great deal of time together. During the day I would go to her house. I would ask her, "Ma sani, can we do something together?" She was very creative in many different ways, and used her creativity to teach me something new for each day. She would teach me new words or songs in our native language, Navajo. The first song I was able to accomplish in Navajo was a song called, Lord; I want to be a Christian. Sometimes we sang along with a Navajo performer on CD, or we sang without accompaniment. We always had a blast in everything we did together. It is these special bonding moments I remember most.

I live on a campus at the American Indian Christian Mission, which took me away from my family. During the week, I could not wait to go home on weekends to spend more time with my grandmother. I would ask her, "Ma sani, what are we going to do today?" She would say, "Let's work on my rug today." So, all day, I would learn the art of weaving Navajo rugs.

Ma sani also taught me to count in Navajo as far as she could; I did this by repeating after her. She would coach me, If I miss-counted, she would tell me, "Restart and try to get it right this time." My goal was to learn my Navajo numbers, T'aala'I (one) to Naadiin (twenty). My grandmother helped me accomplish my goals. I was so proud of her and myself for what we had achieved together.

We also enjoy many hours of laughter. If I did something funny, or said something hilarious in Navajo, it always made grandmother laugh. My antics would make her day if she was in a melancholy, sentimental mood. I would ask her, "Ma sani can I brush your dentures?" She allowed me to play with them after I'd brush them. I would say the most hilarious things on earth; and put a great big smile on her beautiful face, just to hear her laughter. Knowing that she was happy was a great comfort to me. Later I would ask her, "Ma sani, can you tell me a story about when you were growing up? She would tell me, "When I was growing up everything was so different from this century. We did not have electricity on the reservation back then. My chores had to be finished early. My father made me get up at 4 a.m. in the morning, before the sun rises, to take the sheep out of the coral. I had to stay with the sheep all day. When it was sunset the sheep had to be counted, before they were put back in the coral. If there was just one missing, I would have to go back and look for the lost sheep. It did not matter if I had to stay out in the dark all night or until morning came, as long as I found the lost sheep." She would say, "Today you don't even have to herd sheep. The kids around here are too lazy and have everything done for them." She told many stories about her growing up years.

Fridays were exciting for me; I went home to see my grandmother. I would run to her house just to get a hug. I can still feel her warm hugs and see her big smile.

My grandmother loved God! When things went wrong in her life, her faith in God did not waiver. She always solved her problems by being calm and prying about them. Somehow her problems would solve out themselves. It was very surprising to me! She was rarely angry. Grandmother would sit on her bed and talk to God very early in

the morning (before the sun would rise). She would pray and pray about so many things in life, things I would not even think to mention to God. She would talk to God throughout the day; in the morning, afternoon, in the evening, and before she would go to sleep. My grandma would pray for protection of the family and herself. She would ask for her forgiveness to God of the sins she has made in her life.

My grandmother and I would go to church or revivals together. I was not always eager to go, but grandma loved taking me. One can not imagine how God can work in people's lives. God healed my grandmother. She was able to walk on her feet again! It was amazing! I thank God for that. I was so happy just to see her walk, and she was happy to be herself again.

She loved hearing God's word. She would tell me to look in the Bible for the book, chapter, and verse, the Pastor was preaching on. Our favorite verse was Philippians 4:13. She taught me that verse in Navajo so that we could say it together. "Christ sidziilgo asosinii bee t'aa altsoni adeeshliilgo bineesh'a." We laughed as we quoted it because, grandma says, "silippians" then I tried to tell her to say, "Philippians." I would say, "fish, Ma sani, fish" she would just laugh so hard. This was another fabulous bonding moment. We spent fifteen minutes just saying the word Philippians. We enjoyed saying the verse together, no matter where we were.

To this day, I still remember my loving, caring, sweet grandmother who went home to be with the Lord. It has been two years, since that tragic day in May 05, 2006; this was the most tragic day in my life. Grandmother was the first loved-one I have lost; a day I thought would never happen. When my great grandmother passed away it was a tremendous loss for me to deal with. Every day I still miss her laugh, her smiles and her hugs. However, I treasure the time we spent together and the things she taught me. My cherished memories of her lift my spirit. When I am down, I recall all the Bible verses she helped me memorize; I hide them in my heart, and repeat them often.

She's happy to be with Lord; in a place where there's no pain, no sorrow, a place of joy and praising God. I know she wants me to be happy and not to grieve for her. I find a lot of comfort in my life knowing; on that glorious day I will see her again. She is not here, but she is in my heart forever. I cherish the strong connection we had together, and I will do so for my entire life. She told me, "Jackie, shi yashi, (my sweetie) sing and play the guitar to warm my heart when I am called to be with the Lord, I will hear you in heaven. By doing so, you will make my dreams come true."