

Wind is rushing past my face. I'm traveling fast and high up, watching the scenery a ways ahead of me, way beyond me, and just around me. I see the mountains, full of rocks and trees and dust. I see endless sky, full of white cotton balls and smoky billowy forms of clouds. I also see the garbage left by passers-by—empty liquor bottles of various shades of green, plastic bags of a multitude of stores, and soda cans of every possible flavor, all littered carelessly, poisoning the land of the people of the world, destroying it slowly yet surely.

I saw all of these on horseback, riding across the Navajo Nation to Window Rock, Arizona. Every year council delegates from the Navajo Nation, and various family members, make a one week journey across the land to the start of the summer meeting. Every year they go from chapter house to chapter house, each one providing food for the various riders. These chapter houses greet everyone warmly, with smiling faces and jaunty laughter. They tell of the problems they are facing—no running water, a severe drought, or finding more money for the schools. Every year the delegates go to the meeting and talk about these problems, trying to find solutions, yet every year the same problems persist and more are brought up (Begay).

My long-term goal is to help my people and my land. They have been under poor conditions for so long, and often these problems are secondary to the ones that the White people, or Bilagáanas, see and recognize. It is necessary for me to do this—I am Diné, and I know the problems my people face. To do this I need education. I need to go into the modern world and soak up all the knowledge I can, and then go back to my land and help my people. Coming back to the land isn't always easy. In my culture, many elders worry about their children leaving their homes and never coming back; they are afraid that they will become entranced by all of the world's possibilities and forget about the Navajo Nation. I am determined to come back and help my people. I am determined to learn about the world while not

forgetting about mine. I am determined to find a balance between the modern world and my traditional one.

I think my grandmother represents this idea of balancing two worlds. When I think about being a part of both worlds, I think of her—a woman with silver-streaked hair pulling out rolls of yarn. When I see her in my mind, she is sitting before her loom, pulling out rolls of yarn—white, turquoise, maroon, and black, the colors of the sky and the earth. Before her lies her design, planned out on paper, for what she is about to craft. It is intricate, yet simple—the beautiful use of sacred shapes and figures are used throughout. She carefully uses her large wooden fork, called a weaving comb, in order to place the yarn in its place. She does this row by row, interchanging color as her design depicts, in a meticulous manner. What she is making is a Navajo rug—an art passed down to her from many generations before hers.

In order to accomplish this feat, she will use her loom—massive, concrete, and metallic. The metal is painted over with a turquoise-coloured paint, patches where the paint was scratched off being visible all-over.

**\*Bring\*Bring\*Bring\*Bring\*** “Shiphone,” My phone she says. She gets up cautiously, and walks over to the kitchen where the device is kept. She looks at the incomprehensible scribbles of hieroglyphs on the oddly colored light bulb. She still cannot make sense of many of the words, yet she recognizes the name of her son, James. She presses the green button, just as she had been instructed to do so in order to talk through the device. “Yá’át’ée’h, shiyaazh.” Hello, my son, she says.

Shinali, or my grandmother, is someone who has influenced me greatly. In her ways, I can see how she has balanced her traditional ways, and yet has learned and accepted modern technology. She makes her traditional Navajo rugs on a metal loom, which is sturdier than traditional looms, but she has painted it a turquoise colour, reflecting her culture and the modern world intertwining together. She is a role model for what I hope to be in the future—someone who can balance the modern

aspects of the world while still holding onto my culture.

Shinali does this very well. She uses a refrigerator to store food, a truck to travel around, a cell phone to call people from far-off places, and a radio to listen to the news. She keeps her traditional ways by keeping and caring for her sheep, by cooking traditional foods like squash and mutton, and by speaking Navajo, the only language she knows. Most of my life's memorable experiences have been while living on the Navajo Nation, and so I have been brought up with many cultural habits and knowledge that I love and want to share with other people. I also would like to learn about other cultures too. I hope to be able to learn everything I can about the modern world everywhere, and still keep my cultural ties to the Navajo inside me, just as my grandmother has done.

My short-term goal is getting an education. I would like to get an undergraduate degree, and then pursue a doctorate. My passion is engineering and economics. I feel that knowledge in these areas will do the best for my people—engineering for the greater access of water and economics for the creation of jobs for the people. While these two topics interest and fascinate me, what drives me toward them is that they will help me help my Nation.

**Work Cited:**

*Begay, Sararesa. Navajo Nation Council Office of the Speaker. July 3, 2007.*