

Donovan Pete

IRLS 550

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Cultural Heritage Autobiography

Ya'at'eeh, shi Donovan Pete yinshiye, Naakaii Diné nishli. Ziil'tah Kinyaa'aanii bashishchiin. Ma'ii Deeshgiizhnii dashicheii. Na'toh Tachii'nii dashinali. Tsin nabas si'a naasha. It translates to, Hello, I am Donovan Pete, I am of the Moving People clan born for the Towering House clan. My maternal grandfathers are of the Coyote Pass clan and my paternal grandfathers are of the Red-Streaking-into-Water clan. I was born in Chinle, AZ, which is in the Western Agency of the Navajo Nation but I was raised in both Holbrook, AZ for 10 yrs & currently in Smith Lake, NM, where my family resides.

I have younger sisters, Marell and Raelene Charley, the only reason our last names are different is because my father did not know I was born, my mom and dad had a fight 9 months prior to when I was born and also my father was stationed in Dallas, TX, during his time in the military. All of those factors played into them not talking for approximately a year and a half, and eventually my dad took on the responsibility of being a father and took care of my sisters and me since then.

My sisters have the same clans as I but we just have different last names, often people mistake Pete for being our other brother but it is our mother's maiden name and I have inherited it. I like to tell people for Navajos, it should not be the name that matters but the clans that you have. The clans will continue to strive for as long as you keep it that way, if you don't and decide the name is, then slowly our culture fades away.

My mother, Marietta Pete, is originally from Greasewood, AZ which is located in the Western Agency and my father, Dana Charley, is from Smith Lake, NM which is in the Eastern Agency of the Navajo Nation. My maternal grandfather (shi cheii) is named James Pete, he is from Beesh Bitoo (Silver Springs), AZ, which is located 15 miles northwest of Steamboat, AZ and my maternal grandmother (shi masanii) was named Mary Pete, she is from Greasewood, AZ, who unfortunately passed away while my mother was a freshman in High School.

My paternal grandfather (shi nali) is named Hansen Charley currently resides in Second Mesa, AZ, where he is a medicine man but is married to another woman there and has his own family. My paternal grandmother (shi nali) is named Frances Charlie; she currently resides in

Smith Lake, NM too, she is great in providing life lessons to everyone in our family and shows how strong and resilient she is for raising 6 kids all on her own.

My family is generally spread out across the 4 corners; my mom has 1 sister and many clan brothers and sisters that reside in Arizona, New Mexico, Colorado and California. My dad has 3 younger brothers, 1 younger sister, 1 older sister, & 5 step-siblings that are spread across Arizona, New Mexico Nevada & Washington and a lot of clan brothers and sisters who are spread across the western portion of the United States.

My ethnic heritage is of Diné or Navajo, and as far as anyone knows in my family could remember we have kept our family as Navajo by way of marrying a Navajo man or woman, which is always emphasized by the older generations on to the next. My family places a strong need to always speak in Navajo but we do a mix of both Navajo and English in our home. The clan system is called the K'e system which is used to identify ourselves to Diyin Dine (Holy People) and to other Navajos. Often times, when you find yourself in a new place, most Navajos like to find other Native Americans, when they do that, many look for Navajos and when they do, it's always very common to hear clans being exchanged.

I remember being out in Providence, RI, for 4 years where I felt like the only Navajo there until I met some members from the Native Americans at Brown student organization at Brown University, turns out I had some brothers, sisters, aunts, uncles, cousins and nali's in the mix. For Navajos, the way it breaks down is that if the individual is related on your mom's side, you are considered, brother/sister, aunt/uncle and if you do really love them your mom or dad. If they are related on your dad's side they would be considered almost the same as your mother's side. As far as maternal and paternal clans, they would be considered your cheii/masanii or nali.

For Navajos, the language helps express the Navajo culture, because many songs, stories and teachings count so heavily on the individual speaking and listening. My sisters and I are getting into the hang of speaking and listening in Navajo. For the generations, they have been put into boarding schools as children, which placed the upmost importance for them to speak in English and would look down & chastise the individuals for speaking Navajo. This led to my father not wanting to teach me Navajo as I was young. As my sisters and I grew older, my father realized the importance of teaching my sisters and me. I am very fortunate to have the family I do have, they have shown me so much in the 23 years I have existed, without their support or love, I don't think I would have the opportunities I do have.

When our home used to have a fire stove, many of my weekends were spent always going up into the mountain to go haul a truckload of wood to warm our house, during the week I would split the logs and would always have to start the fire in the morning and when I would get back from school. Heading into the mountain on the weekend was great because I got to see the beauty of nature around my home and if I had a camera for every moment that I was finished and seen open areas that look gorgeous, I think my career path would be different. Many of my summers were spent helping out with ceremonies either with my immediate family or among my extended family, often it would be to haul wood, water, sheep, butcher sheep, running small errands or setup shade houses.

My family is the center to my life, they are the ones I can count on if the days are not so well or I can look to cheer them up. I have countless stories but it is hard to recollect and tell them all. When I was younger, I was told once that Navajos are rich; I thought it was a joke and did not think much of it. Until it truly did matter, that's when in the back of my mind I heard the individual say, "Navajos are rich, we are rich in culture, we are rich in language, we are rich in family, we are rich in land, we are rich in memory, we are rich in respect, we are rich in love, we are rich in harmony and we are rich in knowledge."