

VISIONS

Navajo Weavings from the 19th annual rug show
of the
Adopt-A-Native-Elder Program
Deer Valley, Utah
November 2008

It began as a vision.

While traveling on the reservation in the fall of 2007, Linda Myers, founder and director of the Adopt-A-Native-Elder Program, happened on a scene where the full moon was shining down on a cornfield. It was very beautiful. The next morning she went to the canyons to make an offering before the dawn of the new day. The beauty of the colors of the mesas and the dawn colors across the morning skies spoke deeply to her heart.



Offering Bundle

She had a vision---wouldn't it be extraordinary if the Elders could weave rugs based on the beauty and meaning of these scenes! They would be called *Offering* or *Moon Over the Cornfields*. In addition to the rug, the weavers would submit the story of what they had woven, and what that meant to them.

During the spring food runs, weavers were presented with this idea and were given bundles of yarn should they choose to participate. The colors of the bundles were inspired by Linda's vision and the cost of the yarn was underwritten by a generous donation from the W.H.O. Foundation.

Working only from the ideas as presented by Linda (no pictorial representation was offered), each weaver decided how to visually interpret these thoughts in the context of their own relationship to their culture.

The result was twenty-six unique rugs with their accompanying narratives in the weavers' own words, which are *presented here in italics*. Since many weavers do not speak or write English their stories were translated and transcribed by other family members. The creation of these rugs presented a challenge to



Moonlight Bundle

many of the weavers. Most of the presentations are in a pictorial format, and many had never woven this type of rug before.

At the annual rug show in Park City these rugs were all hung together. The common element of the colors contained in the two yarn bundles made for a striking presentation. There was a high level of interest among everyone who saw these weavings. All the rugs sold within the first hour after the show opened on Friday evening.



Weavers at Big Mountain Listen as Linda Describes Her Vision



The Rugs on Display

Audrae Benale

The corn is very sacred; it provides many ways in life. It is the pathway for harmony and balance, to live a spiritual life. The Creator made man to identify us with nature around us. This is how the Holy People and God will know us (who we are) and to walk in the way of beauty. The story of my rug is about the moon over the cornfield. My grandmother told me many times about the corn, to respect it and not abuse it in any way, but to make good use of it. It is my job to carry on this tradition for my children that my mother and grandmother told me.

The border colors are the colors in the sky in the evening and the dawn, the land is the center color and it represents Nature and Infinity. The upper half of the colors is the morning sky and the clouds; how it changes with the sun and moon. The birds represent the family, friends, and the future before us.



Audrae is a young weaver from Forest Lake, AZ. Holding her first rug she is shown with her Grandmother, Mary Lou Benale, who taught her to weave. She has dedicated her life to caring for her children and her Grandmother who has Parkinson's disease. Her weaving is how she supports her children.



Moon Over The Cornfield 24" x 35"

RUTH BENALLY

To the sacred mountains; all four directions for healing

The mountains are in all directions, and to them we can pray

the water can go through the mountain and all over the earth

the mind represented by the turquoise line.

Ruth is a medicine woman and she can help you in the midnight, she can help you to heal, she can talk to the rock and sing to finish it.



Ruth is from Big Mountain, AZ. At age 85 she is still an active weaver. She is also a medicine woman. Ruth supports herself through weaving, as do most other Elders in the Program. Ruth has been coming to the rug show for 19 years and has enjoyed sharing her culture with the many children who attend the school demonstration programs prior to the opening of the show. She has been adopted by a class at the Colby School. When she is at the loom she sings special songs about weaving as well as the story of Spider Woman.



Offerings - Four Directions 16" x 25"

CAROL BLACKHORSE

This rug represents the four sacred mountains which the Navajo people consider the boundaries placed in sun-wise four directions. The East is always white. At one time this was considered day when the people began their travels. They moved South and still it was day, and it became blue.

Finally they went West and they realized evening had come. It was yellow in the West and they all looked at one another. Some of the people in sacred times also saw the color red. They grew tired and traveled North; it was darkness there. It was black and they say the people lay down and slept.

Today the mountains are named in the Navajo language: Tsoodzil, Sisnaajini, Dook'osliid, and Dibe Nitsaa. In English this would be Mt. Taylor, Mt. Huerfeno, the San Francisco Peaks, and Big Sheep Mountain.



Inside of this place is like a hogan, always with an east entrance. The people of Big Mountain believe a blanket is placed at the West end for Blessing Way songs and prayers which is also a ceremony basket where all life comes from. The corn is the main stalk that covers the great Navajo Nation by the sacred saying "Tsi ahna naghei bik'ehozho --- of long life and happiness".

At age 94, Carol, from Forest Lake, AZ, is still riding horses and weaving rugs.



Offerings 23" x 31"

ELIZABETH CLAH

This is a small representation of a sacred traditional nine-day healing ceremony. This ritual is only performed during the winter months. Various medicine men are called upon to sing and pray for the patient who has any kind of major illness. Throughout the ceremony there are many offerings given to our Mother Earth and the Holy Beings in our culture. These offerings are made in order to heal the ailing patient. Dancing is also a part of the ceremony; young men and women dance before the patient to restore their mind, body, and soul to fully cleanse and heal the patient. Many colors and ribbons are used in this long-established dance ceremony; most colors represent fire or warm colors, which is what they mainly use to help the patient.

I am one of few women chosen to weave this design or style of rug. It is truly a great endowment.



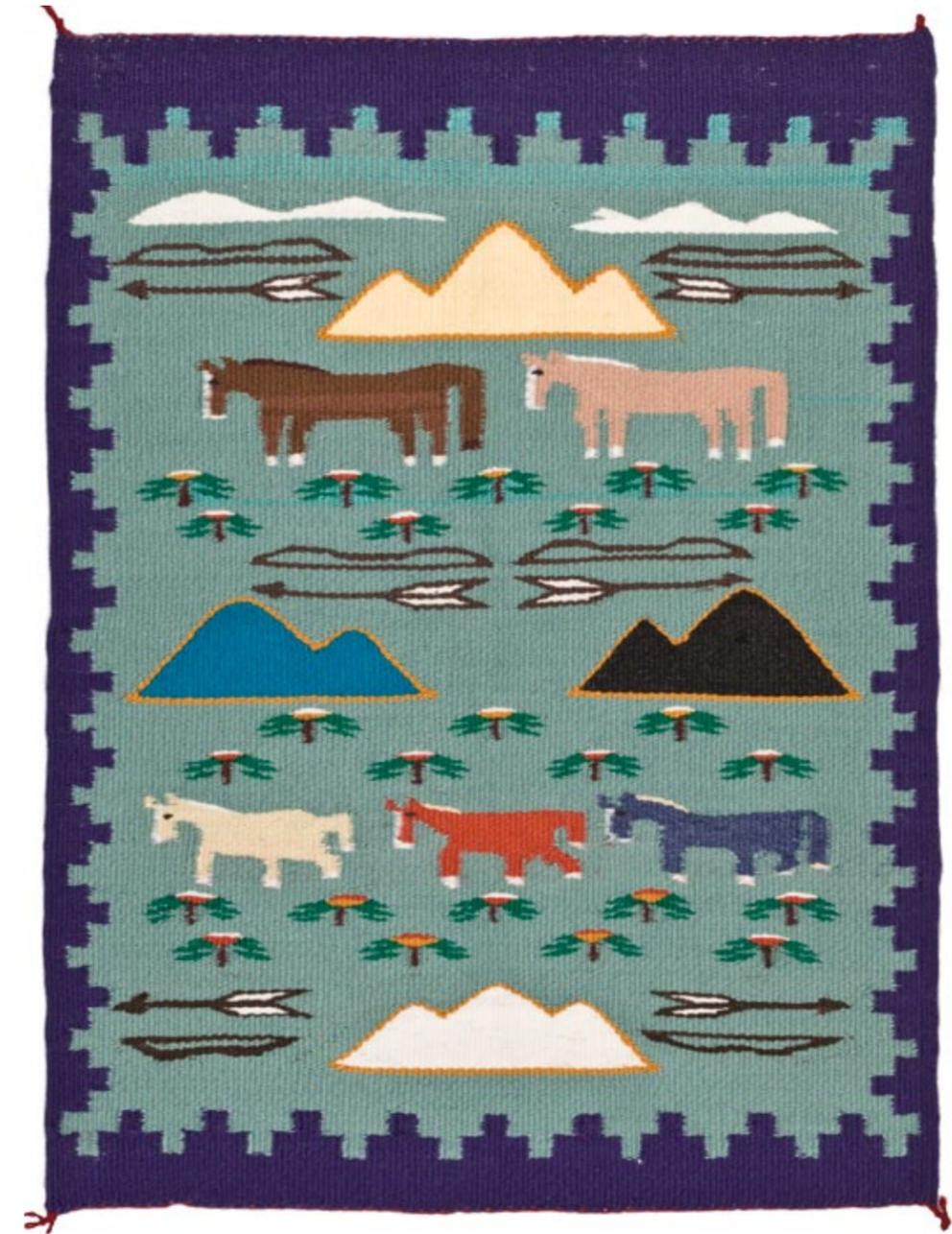
Elizabeth, age 76, is from Many Farms and has been weaving to support her family since she was a little girl. In recent years she has become well-known for using bright colors in ceremonial designs. For Elizabeth, weaving embodies her culture and is part of a traditional Navajo life.



Offerings - Fire Dancers 28" x 20"

ELIZABETH CLAH

This rug signifies the four directions, which give us our basic beliefs and values. Shown on the rug are the four sacred mountains that surround the land we originated in. Every mountain is symbolized by colors that come from our Creation Story of the four worlds we emerged from. The first mountain to the east is called Sis Naajinii (Blanca Peak). Its color is represented by white shell, and that is also its stone. This direction guides our thinking (Nitsahakees) and mental strength. We use this to analyze ourselves through the principles of logic, creativity, and cognitive processes in order to make wise decisions. The mountain to the south is called Tsoodzil (Mt. Taylor). Its color is blue and the stone is turquoise. This direction teaches about planning (Nahatah). We use this to positively demonstrate the skills, abilities, and attitudes in order to receive a good education and live life. To the west is Dook'ooosliid (San Francisco Peaks). This mountain is yellow and its stone is abalone shell. This is where we widen our social development (Iina). We use this in order to display our social learning and personal relations. The last mountain to the north is Dibe Nitsaa (Mt. Hesperus). Its color is black and its stone is black jet. This direction represents our awareness (Siihasin). It is also translated as reverence, respect, protection, and self-awareness. This is utilized every day and teaches us to live in peace and harmony with all living creations. Together these directions help form the true principles of Dine: learning, behavior, and understanding of life.



Sacred Mountains 21" x 28"

LENA COWBOY

My name is Lena Cowboy. I am originally from Hard Rock, AZ, and this is my story: As long as I can remember while growing up I have always known how to weave. I remember weaving my first rug when I was twelve years old. I decided to name my rug "In the time of need" because it reminds me of the hardships that I had to go through when I was starting school away from home. My family never had much and always relied on weaving to make a living, which I still do today.

The story on my rug starts with the four sacred mountains which are very important in the Dine culture and to me. The livestock also represent my way of life and survival. Above the livestock is the basket with the corn better known as the tree of life, meaning I use the corn for eating, praying and also use it as offerings to the Holy Spirits. The hogan with the corral represents my way of living. Most Dine people live in hogans and keep a corral nearby for their sheep. I included a bag of corn pollen and a feather which represents that I pray every day in the morning and in the evening for well-being and safety for my family. The scenery with the birds is just one of the many beautiful sights of my homeland.

Lastly, the clouds and rainbow represent the rain, and I used the cradle board design as my outline. This is how I present my rug to you. I hope you like it.

Lena is seen here at her loom during a school demonstration program.



Offerings 20" x 31"

DELORCITA FRANCIS

This rug demonstrates traditional offerings made to the deities of our tribe, the Navajo Tribe. Traditional Navajo people make these offerings or prayers to show appreciation of what they possess. This is done to the East in the early morning with the first light from the sun shining on the ground. This is the time our deities are walking on our lands.

White corn is used as the offering because it is pure. We pray or give thanks for our lives, our families, and anything we hold dear. We also pray for things to be in balance and in harmony for the better of everyone.



Delorcita, age 51, from Chinle, AZ, is a dedicated weaver, spending eight to ten hours at her loom every day. She typically weaves rugs in the Teec Nos Pos style, complex designs utilizing many different colors. This was her first occasion to weave in a pictorial style which she found to be a challenge.



Offerings 19" x 14"

DARLENE FURCAP

I made this moonlight over the cornfield rug. Mostly cloudy, and made the cornfield colorful; with blue and white clouds, and gray represents moonlight. It is also in the summer time; it is the season of the corn.



Originally from Hard Rock, AZ, Darlene, age 41, now lives with her children in Glendale, AZ. Here she is pictured with her daughters, Patrina and Dianna. Darlene, a master weaver, weaves to support her family, and is known for her ability to weave many different designs.



Moon Over the Cornfield 23" x 16"

DARLENE FURCAP

Prayer rug design

My story of the rug is the arrowhead all around us for protection, just like our symbol on the Navajo Nation flag. The light blue is the river that surrounds us, also for protection and boundary lines of the reservation.

I put a Navajo basket with corn pollen bag, white and yellow corn for offerings.

I put a feather for prayers and bible for prayers. All this represents prayers I put out daily for blessings on the reservation for our grandmothers and grandfathers.

I put a flag up for our country, soldiers, and for all people of America. I put morning stars and beautiful morning colors right before sunrise, where Creator set the daylight for us on Mother Earth; as His blessings---which I was taught in my growing up years and now I live it.



Here Darlene helps school children try their hand at weaving during the rug show.



Offerings 23" x 24"

KATIE FURCAP

The white line around the border represents the Colorado River, for protection. Inside the Colorado River are the four sacred mountains. On the Navajo reservation the Navajo traditional way of life, the cattle, the horses, the sheep, goats, etc.

I put different colors meaning different directions and the early morning dawn, representing the morning sunlight.

The green represents different healing medicine and food. The Hogan is used for many purposes. The offerings for morning are corn pollen or white corn meal to the East.

In my prayers, I ask the Spirit for blessings for my family and for all people good health, harmony, and long life.



I made this particular rug from my heart and my spiritual thoughts.

Weaving is Katie's only means of support. At age 75 she still can weave eight or more rugs per year. Many years ago it was Katie who first asked Linda if she would take her rug and sell it in Park City. From this request grew the Rug Show as we know it today. Here Katie is singing at last year's rug show.



Offerings 24" x 35"

GLORIA HARDY

The moon is rising over the cornfield in the early night

Moon is one of our protection Guardians

The corn is the path of life

There are prayers to the moon, for protection at night

So, here in the picture; the moon is protecting life at night



Gloria, age 47, is shown here with her mother, Louise Reed, from whom she learned her weaving skills. At the May food run in Tsailé, AZ, they have just received their yarn bundles with which to make their special rugs for the show. Gloria spends up to eight to ten hours a day, year round, at her loom.



Moon Over The Cornfield 17" x 20"

GLORIA HARDY

The man is praying to the sunset

with his eagle feather, asking for blessings

All the beautiful colors in the sunset

bring all kinds of wonderful blessings to you



Gloria's favorite style of rug is pictorial. Linda often calls on her to make special rugs to honor particular volunteers and donors. Here she is with a rug she has woven for Kimberly Perkins who was instrumental in procuring the donation of a new van to help carry out the work of the Program.



Sunset Offering 16" x 20"

VINA HORSEHERDER

My weaving is called Dawn

Blessings and offerings, praying in the morning

A lady is praying for all living beings, humans, animals, earth, water, air, and even our grandparents (ancestors) who once lived.

It also brings good prayers, things from the four directions



Vina is a 56-year old weaver from Big Mountain, AZ. Her grandmother, Sadie Robertson, taught her to weave, and also taught her to sing traditional weaving and spinning songs to bless her loom and her rug. Vina prefers weaving in the winter.



Offerings 20" x 24"

ANITA JACKSON

The border of my rug is black, I call it the universe of the earth

The corn represents the cornfield

The orange color represents the mountains, the white cloud represents the rain

The shade house represents where we can eat watermelon, corn and other vegetables where it is cool

The mother represents the dawn of the early morning prayer and offering

The gray color represents the early morning dawn; that is when we do our prayers



Anita is 77 and still weaves up to eight to ten hours a day when she is feeling well. Known for her original Mountain Spring Snowflake design, Anita says of weaving, "This is my life, it keeps me in harmony and balance".



Night in the Cornfield 25" x 21"

ANNA JACKSON

According to our great forefathers, the teaching of the spirits of our clan system

Self-image and self-identity are like a seed and image of corn

From the top of the corn we get the corn pollen to use in prayers

At each ceremony we use the ceremonial basket

Sacred Directions and Mountains

North: Mount Hesperus, Obsidian Mountain, sacred color Black

East: Mount Blanca, White Shell Mountain, sacred color White



South: Mount Taylor, Turquoise Mountain, sacred color Blue

West: San Francisco Peaks, Abalone Shell Mountain, sacred color Yellow

Anna, from Teesto, AZ, is 74. Her favorite design included in her rugs is the Navajo basket. It has many stories and much meaning associated with it. She is well-known for weaving rugs that she makes into pillows.



Night in Cornfields with Sacred Mountains 23" x 30"

LOUISE REED

This is a ceremonial rug. The ceremony takes nine days.

Here the ceremony shown is in the Hogan. The lady is the patient.

She is praying and offering corn meal to the Ye'i' Bichei for healing and good health.



Louise, age 67, lives in Chinle, AZ. Her favorite weaving styles are the Chinle Star pattern and rugs depicting ceremonial Fire Dancers. She likes to use earth colors and gathers wild carrots to produce brown pigments and rabbit brush to make yellows. Louise travels as far as thirty miles to find the wild carrots for her dyes.



Offerings 17" x 20"

LOUISE REED

The stars and moon lights over figures of corn is representing peace and calm.

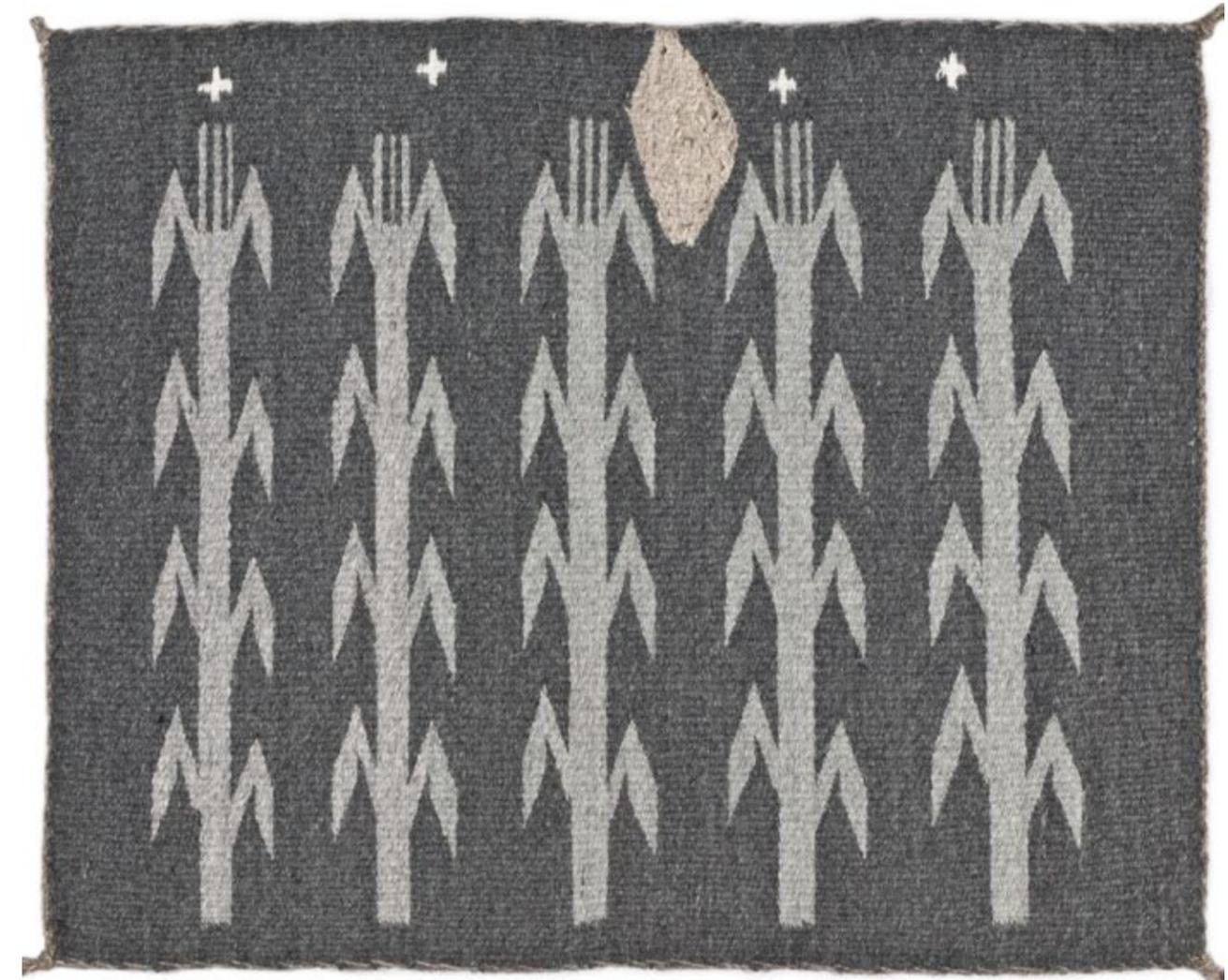
The moon goes through different shapes in a month.

In Navajo (belief) religion the moon is an important guardian, and the corn is an important plant.

It is life and we feed on it (nourishes us).



Louise is pictured here at the show working on a Fire Dancer rug. She sings special songs for putting up the loom and weaving and always has positive thoughts while working on a rug.



Moon Over the Cornfields 23" x 19"

ALICE ROBERTSON

*This rug displays the value of prayers in the morning and evening
White corn meal is offered in the morning to the East direction with prayer
Yellow corn meal is offered in the evening to the West direction with prayer
The Holy Beings that receive the prayers watch over us day and night
The totem pole in Monument Valley is chosen to bring focus to Navajoland
Feathers represent protection
Colors represent all seasons*



Alice is 44 and from Hard Rock, AZ. She is a full-time weaver, and this is the way she supports herself and her two children. She learned to weave when she was only five or six years of age. Her favorite design is the storm pattern.



Offerings 25" x 26"

MARY ROBERTSON-BEGAY

In the darkest of nights, just when you begin to believe there is not a moon, the outline of the corn is seen. The sustainer of life for us, the Dine.

At this time of night only the moon is able to give colors. The most beautiful colors are seen at this time. It is early morning. The stars are close enough you can almost touch them. They all look like glowing crosses. The smallest of creatures stir. Water bugs of all sizes gather the moisture that will later be a thunder storm. The earth needs cleansing. Too much sorrow, selfishness, meanness, corruption of mankind---it all needs cleaning. A quick thunder shower will take care of this.

The unseen, the iinilt'ani (one who helps crops to mature) is hovering above the corn. Later the bright morning sun will bring about happiness. The corn proudly stands tall.

Water puddles everywhere, dew drops on the silk of corn.

It is a beautiful day.

Mary is 48 and has been a key supporter of the Program for years. The Big Mountain food run is held at her homeland, and she is often called upon by Linda to help with translating both on food runs and at the rug show. Her mother, Sarah Robertson, taught her the importance of preserving Navajo traditions. Mary learned to weave as a child of six.



Moon Over the Cornfield 24" x 25"

RENA ROBERTSON

The za'há laní sings its peaceful songs at night. It has to be the only bird that witnesses the sunset of growth in the darkest of nights. As the moon slowly comes out – the corn turns a yellow color. The reflection of the moonlight changes the pale yellow to a beautiful gold. The lightning from the storm pattern is seen across the night sky. The water sustains life. Creatures stir, knowing the symbol of protection the arrow is seen. The night is again very beautiful. Heaven is the dark part because we haven't seen it. And it is from heaven our prayers are answered.



Mary's sister, Rena, also helps to host the Big Mountain food runs at their homeland in Hard Rock. She carries on the Robertson family tradition of fine weaving and has passed this along to her daughters, Miriam, Marty, and Bobbi Jo.

Rena is known for her finely woven rugs that tell stories. She likes to weave horse rugs. Her rugs tell the stories of traditional songs that are the teachings of the Navajo way of life. She is a master weaver and can weave all designs. This is how she supports her family.



Moonlight Over the Cornfield 30" x 33"

ELSIE SHAY

Colors of the four directions:

Navy blue represents the beginning of dawn colors

Light yellow represents starting of sunset

Dark yellow represents sunset and orange

Brown represents right before night

Black represents the night time

Stars---design from grandmother's weaving

The cornfields, hogan stand for Navajo lifestyle

Also, there is an apple tree to represent food, below are animals, which also represent food

The pattern on the top and bottom are from saddle blanket design

I want to also mention that it has taken me a lot of time and effort to start and complete this rug

I had no prior experience in weaving pictorial rugs.

Elsie, age 64, and her sister, May, live in what is perhaps the most remote area of the reservation, Big Mountain. Both have been active in the Program from the beginning and have attended rug shows since they first started 19 years ago. Elsie's favorite patterns are the Yei design and chief blankets.



Cornfields 25" x 39"

MAY SHAY

The colors represent the dawn and evening colors of the sky.

Red represents the evening sunset, gray represents the earth.

Black and white represent the darkness at night time.



May is 85 and has attended all the rug shows from the outset. She leads a simple traditional life in the remote Big Mountain area of the reservation. This region was part of the bitter land dispute in the 1980's between the Hopi and Navajo people. As a result her family homeland ended up on the Hopi side of the new boundary. She must now lease the land that her family had lived on for generations.

May will tell you that her weaving is how she keeps herself healthy. She likes to weave the rug designs that her mother wove, and it helps May to remember her.



Offerings 20" x 30"

ARLENE WHITEHAIR

The basket represents our Navajo universe.

It includes our sacred mountains, and the clouds which carry moisture.

The corn is very important to our way of life.

Not only do we use it for food, we also offer it to the Holy Beings as offerings.



Arlene is 70 years of age and lives in the Hard Rock area. Despite having had coronary bypass surgery she still weaves up to three hours per day. As they have done for generations, Arlene's family raises cattle and churro sheep. She still enjoys going out and watching the livestock.

As a weaver, Arlene is self-taught. She is known for weaving the more difficult and challenging rugs and patterns.



Offerings 18" x 27"

MIRIAM WHITEHAIR

The Navajo basket is an essential tool for the medicine man. It shows the heritage and the love of the people. The white area radiating from the center shows “emergence” of the people from previous worlds, life and birth.

The black steps portray the lower worlds and the rugged exit the early people made. Red represents the joining of blood, marriage, children, and family as well as the red earth on which we walk.

Navajo baskets are made from three leaf sumac and sometimes we substitute yucca or willow.



The black design symbolizes the darkness or night and clouds that bring rain. The white part inside the black represents the sacred mountains. The white area represents the dawn and is tied together with the outside rims which stand for thoughts, prayers, and values.

The red part within the black design represents the life-giving rays of the sun.

At age 19, Miriam is the youngest participant of the group. She inherits a strong weaving legacy from the Whitehair and Robertson families.



Offerings 17" x 19"

WILLIAM WHITEHAIR

Prayers and offerings are an important part of the Navajo traditional way of life. We are taught to rise early in the morning and pray to the Holy People or our grandfathers.

This rug represents the early morning deities who watch over us and put good things in our paths.

In this rug I have included many elements of our tradition. Offerings are made to the holy people to appease them and ask for forgiveness for our trespasses to their laws. I have included the four sacred mountains with their respective colors. I also included the red mesas of my homeland. The rug represents the holy people that pass over us in the early morning hours. We were taught to rise early in the morning and go running. "While you run, scream as loud as you can, so the gods can hear you and notice you." When they notice you, they will put blessings in your path.



William is 38. After living some years off the reservation he made the decision to return and live a traditional lifestyle. In addition to weaving and tending the family's livestock, William plays a major role in caring for his mother, Arlene.



Offerings 33" x 48"

GRACE SMITH YELLOWHAMMER

When the moon begins to rise

It will greet all the mountains

Wedding basket (being) has life

And all the plants will blossom and grow

At night, plants (food), animals grow and

Sometimes sheep will have lambs at night time

Very sacred time.

Told by my grandmother --- Haasbaa' Kanuho



Grace, 74, is seen here with her husband, Richard. Although currently residing in Winslow, AZ, she is originally from the Teesto area. As co-founder of Adopt-A-Native-Elder, Grace was a great help to Linda when the Program was getting started on the reservation. Gaining the trust of the Elders was not easy and Grace helped facilitate this. She continues to assist with the food runs on the southern part of the reservation.



Offerings 17" x 26"

During the year leading up to the rug show I was aware of Linda's project. At the spring food runs I watched and listened as Linda presented her vision to the Elders. I took photographs as wool bundles were passed out to the interested weavers. But nothing prepared me for the impact of first seeing the finished rugs. The creative forces that were unleashed through this effort left me deeply moved, and I felt that something should be done to record the results.

Although all these rugs contain traditional design elements, none are woven in a traditional pattern. The challenge of weaving each rug to represent one of the themes resulted in this burst of spontaneity that gives us a glimpse into the personal world of each weaver as well as an intimate look into the world of Navajo culture.

The ultimate credit goes to Linda for not only having the vision that led to the themes but also for the ability to bring this project to life. That a Bilagaana (non-Navajo) could bring twenty-two Navajo weavers together in response to a common idea such as this is a testament to the love, reverence, and respect with which she is held by these people.

I feel humble to be able to present this singular event to you.

John Aldrich, December 2008