

Human Interest Story

Editor's Note: This letter was found on the desk of Jack Shryock, Leader Of Bands, in Springfield, Missouri. It dates back a few years and was addressed to his wife Phyllis. It was written by a 104 year old Navajo woman and gives us insight to her life which is not so different from that of any Native American some years ago.

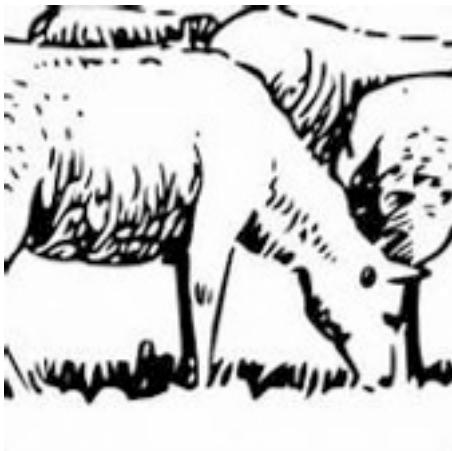
October 5, 2005

Dearest Phyllis,

Hello, my name is Fannie Tsinnie. My clan is (paternal) Rock Gap, (maternal) Near Water. I'm 104 years old. My birthdate was June 15, 1901. I was born in Kerley Valley, about 5 miles from Tuba City. The place where I live is about 35 acres of land. It is mainly farm land. I plant crops, such as watermelon, squash, cantaloups, and sweet corn or regular Indian corn. But, this year I am not able to plant because of my weak knees and I really can't stand long periods of time. My mother's name was Flornee and my father's name was Bernard Tohannee, both of which are now deceased.



When I was young I used to herd sheep and travel in wagons. We had a lot of sheep, goats, horses, and mules. I used to weave rugs, back then, now I don't weave anymore. I had one sister. Her name was Alice. My brothers, Tommy, Thomas, and James, they are all now deceased.



Back then, I only grew up with corn, gravy, onions, and other many types of recipes, which I can't recall. We used to live in dug out holes with "shades" that were put together with limbs and branches and shades made from flour sacks. At times we also lived in "hogans". Our clothes were also made from flour sacks, or even canvass or other cloth just sewn together. Our blankets and beds were made of sheep skins. Our shoes were made out of rabbit skins, sheep skins or canvas. They were much like moccasins and everybody wore them.



I went to school up through the 7th grade. I was put in school when I was 15 years old. In school, I played basket ball. My team won many games. I used to sometimes fight with the girls because of our winnings during our games. I also used to work in the cafeteria and the laundry room. I took classes for sewing and ironing. One time I burned one of the shirts with the iron and I got in a fight with my teacher over this! Back in those days, in school, we used to get punished and get a whipping with a horse hair or leather rope. Nobody was able to back you up as everyone was afraid of our teachers. Our teacher was a fat lady. She was real greedy land stubborn. During the night, she really snored. So, one time, we made a plan and sneaked into her bedroom and we colored her face and we put peas into her nose! She was mad and everyone got a spanking! We could hardly stand her. She was mean and always told us to get on our knees and scrub the floors. That took us from morning until nightfall.

After I left school and moved back home, I met my husband James Tsinnie. We lived together and moved away with our stocks of sheep and built us a hogan. We used to work for the military making bombs, grenades, rifles, and we worked on railroads which i didn't get to work for that long, because i was pregnant at the time.

Later we also went to Idaho where we worked on potatoes and onions. We moved around a lot and we also worked in Utah picking apples, oranges, cherries and onions. Well, this is my life's history and story! i just thought I would share it with you.



Now days I just stay home and play cards and work on some sewing. My eyes aren't that good anymore and besides I have a hearing problem also. Things are slowing down on me.

Thank you so much for the money you have sent me. It really helped me out.

Sincerely,

Fannie Tsinnie

