

Within Dinétah the People's Spirit Remains Strong

*These words are for my people, the Diné, who endured colossal hardship and near death and continue to endure*

In the people's memory are the stories  
This we remember:

I

Alkidáá' adajiní nt'éé'.

They say long time ago in time immemorial:

the stories say we emerged from

the umbilical center of this sacred earth into the Glittering World

smoothed by Twin Heroes,

sons of White Shell Woman,

who journeyed to find their father

and aided by Spider Woman who taught them

how not to fear the perilous journey.

They say the sun, father to the Twin Heroes,

gave them the knowledge to slay the monsters

so that the world would be safe.

We lived according to the teachings of the Holy People

to dwell within the sacred mountains:

Sisnaajiní rising to the east,

Tsoodzil rising to the south,

Dook'o'oskíid rising to the west,

Dibé Nítsaa rising to the north.

We raised our families,

planted our corn,

greeted the dawn with our prayers,  
and followed the path of corn pollen  
Everyday was a new beginning  
. . . in Beauty  
. . . in Beauty.

## II

The ancestors predicted it would happen,  
that the wind would shift and bring  
light-colored men from across the big water  
who would shatter our world.  
They would arrive wearing metal coats  
riding strange beautiful animals,  
would arrive in clothes that brushed the earth  
carrying crossed sticks to plunge into Dinétah.  
In their zealous urge they sought cities of gold.  
Later we learned they came to take  
our land, our lives, our spirits.

Did they not know we are  
all created from the same elements?  
Rainclouds for hair,  
fingernails formed from beautiful seashells,  
the rivers flow through our veins, our lifeline,  
from wind we came to life,  
with thunder voices we speak.  
We fought back to protect ourselves  
as we had fought with other enemies.

The world changed when  
the light-colored men brought their women.  
It was then we knew they meant to stay.  
They invented ways to justify what they wanted,  
Manifest Destiny, assimilation, colonization.  
And, most of all, they wanted the land.  
One day a man wearing red clothes appeared.  
“Bi’éeé’ Lichii’i, Kit Carson, sent by Wáashindoon.  
He brought many soldiers.  
They spoke with thunder sticks  
that tore into everything that we loved  
to burn our beautiful peach orchards,  
to slaughter our sheep in front of us,  
to starve us out from Dinétah,  
to do unspeakable things to us,  
to wrench us from our land.  
What strange fruit is this that dangles  
    from the trees?  
We feared for our lives  
and hid among the rocks and shadows  
gathering food and water when we could.

### III

What was our crime?  
We wanted only to live as we had  
within our sacred mountains  
seeking harmony, seeking long life  
. . . in Beauty

. . . in Beauty.

Others had their death march:

The Trail of Tears, Auschwitz,

The Door of No Return in the House of Slaves.

We are Diné.

We too had our death march forced on us.

When The Long Walk began we witnessed our women murdered and raped  
our children and relatives swept away in the rushing currents

of the Rio Grande river.

We heard explosions that silenced mothers giving birth behind the rocks.

We saw the newborn and the elderly left behind.

We saw our warriors unable to defend us.

And even now the land we crossed still holds

the memory of our people's tears, cries, and blood.

Kit Carson marched us three hundred miles away.

In the distance we saw our sacred mountains

becoming smaller and smaller.

We were torn from the land that held our birth stems.

We were taken to the land that was not us.

We were taken to the desolate place without trees or vegetation  
where the men picked out undigested corn from animal dung to eat,  
where young women were raped.

We called this place Hweeldi,

this place of starvation,

this place of near death,

this place of extreme hardship.

IV

We returned to our land after four years.

Our spirits ragged and weary.

And vowed that we never be separated from Dinétah;

the earth is our strength.

We have grown strong.

We are the children of White Shell Woman.

We are the people of the original clans she created.

We are female warriors and male warriors-- Manuelito, Barboncito

We are the Code Talkers who used our language to help save America.

We are Annie Wauneka who taught us to have faith in the white man's medicine.

We are the sons and daughters of activists and other unsung heroes

“when Indian men were the finest men there were.”

We are the hands that create fine turquoise and silver jewelry.

We are the women who resisted relocation when the government came with papers  
and fences.

We are teachers, cowboys, lawyers, musicians.

We are medicine people, doctors, nurses, college professors.

We are artists, soldiers, politicians, architects, farmers.

We are sheep herders, engineers, singers, comediennes.

We are weavers of baskets and exquisite blankets.

We are bus drivers, welders, ranchers, dishwashers.

We are the people who offer prayers during the cycles of the day.

We are Diné.

In Beauty it was begun.

In Beauty it continues.

In Beauty,

In Beauty,

In Beauty,

In Beauty.

—Laura Tohe