

Giving and Compassion

Our Family's Heritage

Renee Chaco-Aragon

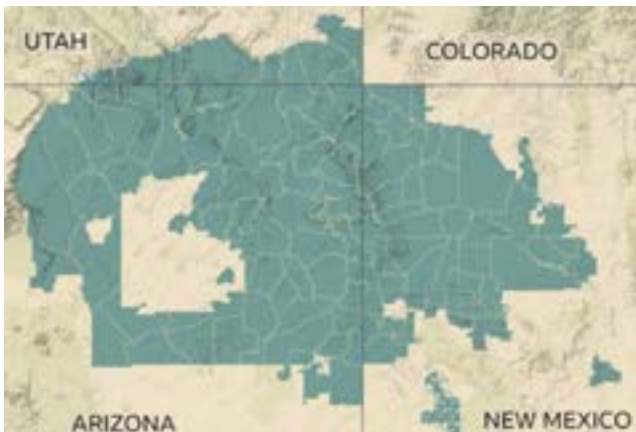
BEFORE YOU READ: Have you received teachings from your parents or grandparents that have helped you through hard times? What are they?

My Family Comes from a Long Line of Struggles

My name is Renee Chaco-Aragon, and I am a member of the Navajo (Diné) Nation. I live in Tohajiilee (Drawing Water), New Mexico, which is part of the Navajo Nation. I belong to the Zia People Clan (Tlogi) born for the Red Running into the Water People Clan (Tachiinii). My parents are Eddie and Angie Chaco. They have been married for almost 50 years now. I have learned many teachings from my parents. My family comes from a long line of struggles; however, the teachings of my parents and grandparents have sustained us through our hard times.

My Mom Taught Me that Giving is a Blessing

My mom became an orphan when she was very young. Her dad, in a drunken rage, killed her mom and took his own life. Despite this loss, my



A map of the Navajo Nation (in green).

Source: <https://dinelanduse.org/boundaries/>.



Renee Chaco-Aragon with her parents.

mom had her grandparents to raise her with all the love and care a little girl could hope for. My dad came from a broken home with no father to guide him. Through God's love, he provided for twelve children, four being stepchildren.

Talk about compassion! Through these struggles, my mom became a giver and my dad became compassionate but also cautious.

The teaching my mom passed on to me is: giving is a blessing. There are so many hidden treasures in it. My mom would say, "Money will not return and say how much it loves you. Money will not return and respect you. And money will not be around forever. So, use your money to give to others, to give life, to lend a helping hand without wanting anything in return. Use your money to help the elders and orphans. You can

never give more than God gave us. He gave us air, water, fire, and everything we need to survive, so use what He gave us to give to others.”

My Dad Taught Me Sacrifice and Compassion

My dad would say, “Be careful what you get yourself involved in.” He would say, “Not everyone will watch out for you. You have to watch out for yourself.” My dad took care of my mother by taking over where her grandparents left off, trying his best to give her what she wanted. He took in her four children as his own and provided for us all. Through this, my dad has shown me what true sacrifice and compassion is.

I Share Their Teachings

I am grateful for these teachings, I try my best to pass these teachings on to my children. As a mother of two biological, two adopted, and three step-children, I often resort to these teachings to get through life. I look and see my parents getting older. However, what they taught me will be passed on for generations to come.

AFTER YOU READ:

1. How did Renee’s parents communicate their lessons?
2. How do you communicate about values in your family or community? Do use an oral tradition (telling stories)? Do you act as a role model?
3. Renee wrote another article for *The Change Agent* called “Children Count.” It’s on pp. 39-40 of [Issue #50](#). Consider that story in light of the values she learned from her parents.
3. Read more articles by and about Indigenous people in [Issue #48](#) of *The Change Agent*.

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The four elements: air, water, fire, earth.
Photo from <https://commons.wikimedia.org>

Nation within a Nation

Under federal law, Native American tribes are considered “dependent domestic nations.” According to the [Federal Bar Association](#),

“As sovereign entities, Indian nations are guaranteed the power and/or right to determine their form of government, define citizenship, make and enforce laws through their own police force and courts, collect taxes, and regulate property use. Yet the fight to preserve tribal sovereignty and treaty rights has long been at the forefront of the Native American civil rights struggle.”

What nations of indigenous people are in your state? Find out about it and share what you learn in an essay or a slideshow presentation.