

## Lori Arviso Alvord, "Walking the Path between Worlds"

### MULTIPLE CHOICE

#### Lori Arviso Alvord, *Walking the Path between Worlds*

Today Navajo children are still standing on the playgrounds where I stood, facing the critical decision I would face after I graduated from high school: to leave the rez, or to stay and cleave to traditional ways. To let the desert live inside them, or to try to wash it away. They too hear the voice of the wind and the desert, smell the strong smells of our people, and feel the ways we came from. "Decide," the world whispers to them, "you must choose."

I chose to leave and get an education, following the path of the books I loved so much. But leaving Dinetah was a frightening prospect. Navajo people believe we are safe within the four sacred mountains that bound the Navajo reservation — Mount Taylor, San Francisco Peak, Blanca Peak, and the La Plata Range. In our creation stories it is the place of our origins, of our emergence to the surface of the earth from other worlds below, the place where Changing Woman and First Man, Coyote, the Twins, and the monsters in our legends roamed. These mountains are central to everything in our lives. To leave this place is to invite imbalance, to break our precious link with the tribe, to leave the Walk of Beauty, and to court danger. It was a dangerous step, that into the unknown, unguarded world.

If I left, I would leave the enclosed and sacred world within the strong mountains, standing out.

My college plans were modest; I assumed I would attend a nearby state school. But then I happened to meet another Navajo student who was attending Princeton. I had heard of Princeton but had no idea where it was. I asked him how many Indians were there. He replied, "Five." I couldn't even imagine a place with only five Indians, since our town was 98 percent Indian. Then he mentioned Dartmouth, which had about fifty Indians on campus, and I felt a little better. *Ivy League* was a term I had heard, but I had no concept of its meaning. No one from my high school had ever attended an Ivy League college.

At my request, my high school counselor gave me the applications for all the Ivy League schools, but I only completed Dartmouth's because I knew there were fifty Indians there.

I waited anxiously, and one day the letter came. I was accepted, early decision. I was only sixteen years old. As I was only half Navajo in blood, I wondered if this meant it would be only half as dangerous to me to leave Dinetah, the place between the sacred mountains. Half of me belonged in Dinetah, but the other half of me belonged in that other world too, I figured. Still, in my heart I was all Navajo, and I instinctively felt afraid of the move. I had seen those who went away and came back: the Vietnam veterans, broken and lost, who aimlessly wandered the streets of Gallup, the others who came back but had forgotten Navajo ways.

If the physical contrasts were striking, the cultural ones were even more so. Although I felt lucky to be there, I was in complete culture shock. I thought people talked too much, laughed too loud, asked too many personal questions, and had no respect for privacy. They seemed overly competitive and put a higher value on material wealth than I was used to. Navajos placed much more emphasis on a person's relations to family, clan, tribe, and the other inhabitants of the earth, both human and nonhuman, than on possessions. Everyone at home followed unwritten codes for behavior. We were taught to be humble and not to draw attention to ourselves, to favor cooperation over competition (so as not to make ourselves "look better" at another's expense or hurt someone's feelings), to value silence over words, to respect our elders, and to reserve our opinions until they were asked for.

I remember, distinctly, feeling alienated while walking around Dartmouth's campus that first year. By my sophomore year I understood what it meant to be invisible. People looked right through me — I moved around the campus as unseen as the air. Outside of my freshman roommate, Anne, I never made a close non-Indian friend. I wonder if other students of color felt the same way.

Some years later, reflecting back on my college experiences, I realized something else. The outside, non-Indian world is tribeless, full of wandering singular souls, seeking connection through societies, clubs, and other groups. White people know what it is to be a family, but to be a tribe is something of an altogether different sort. It provides a feeling of inclusion in something larger, of having a set place in the universe where one always belongs. It provides connectedness and a blueprint for how to live.

At Dartmouth the fraternities and sororities seemed to be attempts to claim or create tribes. Their wild and crazy parties that often involved drugs and sex seemed to me to be unconscious re-creations of rituals and initiation ceremonies. But the fraternities emphasized exclusion as much as inclusion, and their rituals involved alcohol and hazing initiations. Although they developed from a natural urge for community, they lacked much that a real tribe has.

I began to honor and cherish my tribal membership, and in the years that followed I came to understand that such membership is central to mental health, to spiritual health, to physical health. A tribe is a community of people connected by blood or heart, by geography and tradition, who help one another and share a belief system. Community and tribe not only reduce the alienation people feel but in doing so stave off illness. In a sense they are a form of preventive medicine. Most Americans have lost their tribal identities, although at one time, most likely, everyone belonged to a tribe. One way to remedy this is to find and establish groups of people who can nurture and support one another. The Native American students at Dartmouth had become such a group.

1. In the first paragraph of the passage (lines 1-6), the author uses imagery and figurative language for which of the following purposes?

- I. to document a typical day on the rez
- II. to illustrate the difficulty of the choice Navajo children must make
- III. to suggest that a sense of connection to nature is part of Navajo identity

- a. II only
- b. I and II only
- c. I and III only
- d. II and III only
- e. I, II, and III

2. Paragraphs 1 and 2 (lines 1-16) imply all of the following EXCEPT

- a. Navajo children are protected if they stay home.
- b. The Navajo people rely on tradition and nature to guide them.
- c. Creation stories can play an important role in cultural identity.
- d. The author left because she stopped believing in Navajo traditions.
- e. Remaining in Dinetah has both advantages and disadvantages.

3. The overall method of organization in this passage can best be described as

- a. process analysis
- b. cause and effect
- c. compare and contrast
- d. definition
- e. extended example

4. A major transition in the piece occurs in
- a. paragraph 5 (lines 27-29)
  - b. paragraph 6 (lines 30-37)
  - c. paragraph 7 (lines 38-48)
  - d. paragraph 8 (lines 49-53)
  - e. paragraph 9 (lines 54-60)
5. The tone of this excerpt can best be described as
- a. sentimental and sad
  - b. humorous and ironic
  - c. lyrical and nostalgic
  - d. cynical and regretful
  - e. poignant and optimistic
6. The sentence that begins “I thought people ” (lines 39-41) features which of the following rhetorical devices?
- a. paradox
  - b. jargon
  - c. allusion
  - d. parallelism
  - e. metaphor
7. The author’s primary purpose in paragraph 7 (lines 38-48) is
- a. to describe the contrast between life on a reservation and life on an Ivy League campus
  - b. to alert the reader to the value of moral codes embedded in Navajo culture
  - c. to judge the moral character of non-Navajo students
  - d. to remind the speaker to become more competitive and place value on material wealth
  - e. none of the above
8. In the concluding three paragraphs (lines 54-76), the author emphasizes
- I. the similarities between fraternities/sororities and tribes
  - II. the immorality of the parties hosted by fraternities/sororities
  - III. the natural urge people have for community
- a. I only
  - b. II only
  - c. III only
  - d. I and II only
  - e. I and III only