

On This Journey Together

Read Ephesians 4:1-6.

Allow me to translate this Scripture in the way my grandmother would have said it, “Our Sacred Father is in everything, made everything, controls everything and loves everything.”

I learned about relationships through the teachers in my life. I want to share with you the history of my teachers. To do that, I will take you back to my childhood, sitting around the dining-room table on Sundays or on a holiday with my family.

I see my grandmother. She is seated at one end of the table. Grandmother was of the Mohawk Nation, and she was a medicine teacher. At the other end of the table sits my grandfather. He was of the Seneca Nation and a keeper of the stories. I can see my uncle who was a United Methodist minister.

Across from him sits my mother. Mom was a medical missionary for The United Methodist Church. My father was a professional boxer and a dedicated horse trainer, and along with my two sisters, is also there at the table. My sister Pat is a special person. She is a “little person” and was born with physical and mental challenges.

Learning through Relationships

My mother, I am proud to say, was my best friend and my closest teacher. I want to share with you about her “bad” habit that drove us girls crazy. Mom loved to give. Momma said that when you could sacrifice and give from the heart, it was just like giving to God. Believe me when I say this, God got a lot of our stuff! Mom would sing an old-time gospel hymn, and then we would sit down to eat at the table. Often we were joined by several “poor, needy souls” Mom had brought home from church. We would ask for blessings and express our gratitude for our meal along with the several guests. We hardly got a taste of the awesome stew that had been simmering while we were at church. Our meal ended up heavy on the crackers and milk.

I learned about the power of relationship with “the least of these” from my mother. When we would least expect it, there would be a knock at the door and the “poor, needy souls” would be standing there with tears in their eyes saying “thank you,” and giving back all they had gotten and usually more!

My mother and my uncle told me they learned about faith and the Sacred Father from their mother, my grandmother – the medicine teacher, who had never stepped into a church.

One of my earliest memories is being stung by a bumblebee. I was on a medicine walk with my grandmother. She said some prayers, put some tobacco down and thanked the plantain for its medicine to heal me. She picked a leaf, mashed it up and rubbed its juices on the bite. The pain was instantly gone. By the time we arrived home, you almost couldn't find where I had been stung.

Life with grandmother was a busy life and a blessed life, too. There were many traditional stories that taught life lessons. They were filled with respect for the plant and animal brothers and sisters as well as for all humans. The Creator breathed his breath of life into us all. That makes us all equal and necessary to each other to live and survive. We must live in relationship with one another.

No longer does the word “medicine” only mean the prescription that we buy. Sometimes it means what the plant or animal brothers and sisters teach us. By watching them, we humans can learn of their strengths and weaknesses. We even rely on them for nourishment. The smell that fills us with joy, the beauty that makes our hearts sing, food that fills our tummies or just the pure wonder of nature. Both the plants and animals are good medicine.

From On This Spirit Walk, pages 24-26. Used by permission of author Phyllis Singing Bird. A Native American of Seneca and Mohawk descent, she is a member of the Dayspring United Methodist Church in the Illinois Great Rivers Conference.