

Edith's Story: Reservation Life and Hope in Christ

By Randy Woodley © 2002

I was raised on the Wind River Indian Reservation in central Wyoming. My parents Joe and Billie Engavo were good parents. My mother is a Choctaw Indian from Oklahoma and her father was a Baptist minister. Dad was a Shoshone born and raised on the reservation-except for his school years at Flandreau Indian Boarding School in South Dakota. I am the youngest of 10 children.

Life growing up on the reservation was good and also hard. Until I was 10 years old we lived in a four room cabin with limited running water, outdoor toilet and only a wood stove for heat. As a child I had fun picking berries, riding horses and swimming in the river below our house. But it was also hard because of the wide spread use of alcohol on the reservation and in my family. Some of the results of these abuses contributed to the deep scars on my soul as a young girl.

By the time I went away to Oklahoma to college I had already experienced all the negative aspects of reservation life. At college things only got worse and with my world falling apart I made a serious attempt at taking my own life. Through a few Christian friends I was able to get into Teen Challenge-a Christian drug rehabilitation program.

While at Teen Challenge I fought hard against God's love. Finally, one day He broke me as I heard His words over and over again, softly saying "I love you..." I could not understand how God could love me with all I had done against Him and others yet, His love broke through and I accepted Jesus Christ as my personal Savior. I spent the next two years in a women's discipleship program studying God's word and listening for His plan for my life. I told God I would go anywhere He sends me and He gave me a special burden to work among my own Indian people.

Little did I know or expect to meet my future husband after leaving the program. Randy and I were married just a few months after we met. We knew God had joined our hearts together in Him. At the time I had a lot of questions about his radical approach to ministry. All my questions were eventually answered in time as I watched the fruit of the ministry blossom. As I drew closer to God I found places of ministry which allowed me to share my own experiences and to see others healed as I was.

In the meantime, I have become the mother of three children-which has become my main ministry. I love to see their faces light up when I come in the room. I realize how fragile and needy they are-always longing for the special love that a mother can give. Through this relationship I can see how God feels towards me when I look to Him-opening myself to my Heavenly Father-to His love and acceptance. I daily ask Him to live through me and to allow me to be the wife, mother and minister to others that He wants me to be. I can do this because I am secure in the fact that He

is always there with me. Though there have been many heartaches along the way the Scripture has always rang true to my heart:

“Praise be to the Lord, for he has heard my cry for mercy. The Lord is my strength and my shield; my heart trusts in him, and I am helped. My heart leaps for joy and I will give thanks to him in song.” Ps 28:6-7 (NIV)