



Native



Sons



Equipping Native Leaders to Reach Native Americans

TINA PONCHO

- DID YOU KNOW?**
- Tina is wearing a bald eagle feather in her cap. It was given to her for earning her M.Div.
 - Eagle feathers are given as a sign of respect and honor for the achievement of a brave or noteworthy deed for the tribe.
 - An eagle feather represents freedom, power, wisdom, honor, strength, trust, Native heritage and much more.
 - Once given, an eagle feather must be worn or displayed prominently, to do otherwise is disrespectful.
 - By federal law, only Native Americans may wear or own eagle feathers or any part of an eagle.

- PRAYER POINTS**
- Guidance & understanding in developing pre-field training for missionaries to Native Americans.
 - The spiritual and educational growth of our students at AIC

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In September of 2012, Tina Poncho, one of AIC's brightest and best students allowed me to tell her story for this newsletter. During our interview Tina had discussed her desire to earn a Master's degree and possibly a doctorate. This past May Tina graduated with her Master's of Divinity (M.Div.) from Gordon-Conwell Theological Seminary (GCTS) in Hamilton, MA. Her graduation coincided with my arrival in Southern New England to begin the first leg of my summer itineration and so I was able to attend her graduation ceremony and spend time with her before she returned home. She again has kindly consented to allow me to write about her journey.

In the original newsletter Tina stated that she was living her dream because of the doors that God had opened for her to minister in Mexico, Puerto Rico, and Hawaii. However, God had said, "No, this is your dream just beginning." How true this has proven to be!

During her three years at GCTS Tina has engaged in ministry outreach in France to

Syrian Muslim refugees (primarily), did a study tour in Israel, a study tour that followed the missionary path of the Apostle Paul, as well as a tour of England, Scotland, and Ireland (and I am so jealous of all of this!). She was the sole GCTS gradu-



Tina Poncho, M.Div.

ate this year to win the full-ride scholarship to Edinburgh University in Scotland. She expected to be in Scotland at this time, but has needed to place the scholarship on hold because of multiple deaths and serious health issues in her family. She is currently at home in Louisiana where a number of people are encouraging her to apply for the position of director of the Social Services program that provides

counseling and drug rehab services. Currently this program lacks a qualified director and is somewhat adrift.

Tina chose GCTS because she liked my approach to biblical studies and knew that I had earned my M.Div. there. She also chose GCTS because of its emphasis on Greek and Hebrew. She loves Hebrew best because it is similar to her Native tongue. Tina is from the Coushatta Tribe of Louisiana. She notes that her language and Hebrew are similar in sound, but also in how ideas are presented. Hebrew is a pictorial language, while English and Greek are more linear. She says that when she learned Greek

she actually learned how English works (I had the same experience). She also learned Aramaic while at GCTS. Most students prefer either Greek or Hebrew, finding the second language difficult. Tina is one of the rare students who enjoys both languages and is equally adept in them.

While at AIC Tina had noted that she hated being in the spotlight because she is introverted, but loved to preach

ON A PERSONAL NOTE

Ten weeks away from home is a long time! My itineration went well and it was good to see many old friends and to make new ones, but its good to be back home! Again, special thanks to my friends Janice and Cappie and to the Manchester Teen Challenge in NH for putting me up this summer.

Theresa flew out to NC to meet me and spend time with our Lumbee family there, before traveling to GA for a brief visit with Caleb. It was great seeing Bro. James, Sis. Genette and the rest of the family again. Thanks for putting us up! It was great seeing Caleb again, but our visit was far too brief. He is doing well and continues to love his work as a paramedic fireman. They are fast tracking him for leadership at the station.

Theresa and I enjoyed a long awaited week of vacation in the mountains of Truckee, CA just above Lake Tahoe. Our trip there was stalled for 3-hours because of a fire in NV that had

come up to the road. Smoke hung over the region our entire vacation because of the many wildfires in the surrounding areas. We are both now back to work. I have begun researching and interviewing people to develop a proposal for training those that want to become missionaries to Native people. Theresa continues to enjoy teaching preschool, but it looks like the new building will probably not be ready for move in until sometime in November.

Levi and Alicia are well. Levi's fishing business is making a good start for a start up, although the heat of the AZ summer made the summer a bit difficult. He continues to look for a ministry position. Alicia continues to love nursing. Dillon has just entered second grade and Torrin is now in kindergarten. The whole family loves to watch American Ninja Warrior and the boys literally climb the walls now.

There is nothing quite so impressive as watching a 5 & 7 year old doing a spread eagle and climbing a hall opening in front of a door.

As always, thanks to all for your prayers and support!



Caleb & Theresa

God's Word so long as God was truly in the proclamation. Her passion and talent for proclaiming God's Word was noticed at GCTS. When she preached or spoke on subjects like cross-cultural ministry and Native American subjects others would always comment on her passion and compelling presentations. He preaching professor noted that her "superpower" is her ability to adapt



Tina, her BF Iris (left) & sister Candice Mingo

her message (contextualize) to her audience. Dr. Scott Gibson has been the head of the preaching department at GCTS for many years. Although Tina never took a course with him, she caught his attention. He has just accepted a position at Baylor University in TX and told Tina that he wants her to come and earn her Ph.D. in preaching there after completing her work in Edinburgh. Tina is praying about this, but wants to earn her Ph.D. in biblical languages and biblical studies.

Tina often wonders if she is really capable of fulfilling her goals. I remind her, "GCTS is a prestigious school, the University of Edinburgh is a world-class ivy league school. To simply attend either, let alone earn degrees from them, demonstrates that a student is the top of the top of the heap." I mentioned Diane Bonito's statement (Apache, June 2018 newsletter), "I never thought I could make it

outside the Rez. On the Rez you are stuck in a little hole... there is nothing to do, there are no jobs." Both Tina and her best friend Iris, a Navajo, agreed that this is how Rez life feels. Tina went on to describe feeling sucked in by the apathy and hopelessness of her reservation during her two years back home after graduating from AIC. In truth, there is actually a kind of shame that Native people often feel when they succeed and excel above their elders and peers. Tina's achievements are remarkable for anyone and as the Lord has already told her, "This is your dream just beginning."

Dreams do not become reality without hard work and perseverance. Tina thoroughly enjoyed her studies at GCTS and appreciated those who mentored her. She made many good friends, but also experienced prejudice and thoughtlessness. On one occasion she was eating dinner with a group of students, one young woman asked Tina to pass the salt, which she did. Tina had not yet used the salt and asked for it back afterwards, the young woman made a crack about Tina being an Indian-giver. This was offensive and when Tina indicated this the woman brushed it off. On another occasion a man at church made a racial slur against Native people. When Tina confronted him he initially rebuffed her, but some weeks later returned and apologized for his insensitivity.

Tina went with a team of other students to minister to Muslim Syrian refugees in France. The school had appointed a young woman as the team leader whose parents and grandparents had all been missionaries. The young woman was hard to teach and often offended the refugees. Tina tried to speak with her about different ap-

proaches, but she became offended and would not listen. Tina was well accepted among the refugees who even invited her to regularly eat with them. The invitation to eat with others is a massive show of acceptance and hospitality in non-



with mentor Dr. Emmett Price

Western cultures. The refugees talked openly with Tina, but would clam up in the team leader's presence. On one occasion, two volunteers were asked to be a part of a class discussing refugee needs. The team leader volunteered, but the person leading the class picked Tina and another person instead. When I asked after the high level of acceptance that she experienced among the refugees Tina apologetically stated, "It's because I am not white and because my culture is much closer to theirs, I know how to behave respectfully which is something many whites do not understand."

It is my goal to see those I teach excel me and return and take my job. Tina knows this and states, "I hope I can do what you have done." I remind her, she has already excelled me. She wants to return home and make a difference among her people, she also wants to continue to do missions work, and she wants to return and teach at AIC. I asked her how she will balance all this. She stated she did not know, With God all things are possible and this is just the beginning of Tina's dream. I am so proud of her and thankful to have been a part of her life.

The Coshatta Tribe of Louisiana



Coshatta Nation Seal

The Sovereign Nation of the Coshatta Tribe of Louisiana are a federally recognized tribe with about 865 enrolled members. There is also a small reservation in Texas

of the Alabama-Coshatta Tribe.

Originally from the areas that are present day Tennessee, Georgia, and Alabama the Coshatta began moving south and west after Spanish explorer Hernando DeSoto stumbled upon a Coshatta village on the Tennessee River island in 1540. This contact caused a series of migrations in the attempt to avoid European encroachment. By the 1700s they had resettled in Alabama and become a part of the Creek Confederacy while maintaining their own culture and language. In 1979 Chief Stilapikachatta, also called Red Shoes, led 400 Coshatta to Spanish Louisiana, in 1804 another 450 joined them. The group continues moving from place to place in Louisiana seeking to remain in neutral territory between the French, Spanish, Mexicans, and Americans. In the 1880s about 300 Coshatta settled in Bayou Blue

where they have remained. After this tribal leaders sought to ensure the well being of their people by engaging the US government.

In 1935 the government granted tuition funding to Coshatta children and in 1945 contracted medical services were extended to Coshatta community members. In 1953 the Bureau of Indian Affairs (BIA) terminated all community services without congressional or community consent. In 1965 the tribe began efforts to regain federal recognition and by 1970 it began petitioning Indian Health Services for medical care which was finally restored in 1972. In 1973 the tribe had its federal recognition restored. Since that time the tribe has invested in a number of business enterprises to provide revenue for the tribal



Coshatta Reservation

government and community members. The Coshatta Casino Resort opened in 1995 and is today the second largest private employer in the state. The tribe also operates nu-

merous other small businesses, as well as health, educational, social and cultural programs.



Pine Needle Baskets

The tribe owns about 6000 acres of land in Allen Parish and other surrounding parishes. Tribal housing, rice and crawfish farming, developing businesses, and the Tribal Government and various Tribal Municipal services are housed on the reservation.

The Coshatta are matriarchal with clan membership passed through women. They speak their traditional language, Koasati, which is part of the Muscogean family that includes the Choctaw, Chickasaw, Alabama, Apalachee, Mikasuki, and Creek languages. Koasati has been transposed to written form and an alphabet was approved by the tribe in 2007. The Coshatta are also famous for their pine needle basket weaving.

Information for this article from www.koasatiheritage.org