

Dee Thompson takes her aunt's story to the people

Written by By Dee Velasco For the Sun
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TALE OF TEMPTATION, TRANSCENDENCE

*"Everyone has a story inside of them, we just have to find it and let it out," James Harjo says. These were the words that were spoken by Harjo, husband of Dee Thompson, author of *Shattered Dreams, Bondage, and Hope* as she told her story about the amazing life of her aunt, Sariah.*

Thompson held a book signing Jan. 11, at the Octavia Fellin Public Library to promote the book before an intrigued audience. In a light-hearted tone, Thompson said she had never attended a book signing and this was new to her as well. Accompanied by her husband, the two greeted the audience, shook hands, and made small talk before the presentation. Currently living in Gallup, Thompson considers herself a "homegirl."

Thompson, who is Diné, comes from the Navajo Nation. She spoke of her education having attended Rehoboth Christian Mission, as it was called back then. After 12 years there, she went to college at Haskell Institute in Kansas where she obtained a Bachelor of Arts degree. She then worked for the federal government, met her husband, and retired. It was during this time away from her family that she felt the need to come back home and settle down.

After 40 years she began to reconnect with her family. She visited with her aunt, Sariah, drinking tons of coffee. As she listened in awe to her aunt's adventures, she heard a tale of despair, heartache, and freedom. Thompson began to take notes and soon found herself

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holding the threads of a story that she wanted to share.

“As she unfolded her life before me, Thompson became very dear to me,” she said. “I was really amazed at the type of woman she was, the strength she had [and] so forth. What struck me the most was the traumatic experiences she went through like losing her husband, some of her children, and coming out of her addiction. Those are some of the things that I was impressed by.”

Thompson says it was good to work with her aunt on the book and she found her to be helpful and agreeable. She said she found her to be very humble and gentle. Thompson said Sariah was easygoing and often laughed at herself.

“I began collecting these recollections from my aunt, memories from relatives about her and - the book just happened,” Thompson said.

The book is about her aunt Sariah who grew up on the Navajo reservation and spoke only Navajo. Sariah had dreams of learning to read and write and of pursuing an education. But this never happened. She found herself at a young age succumbing to the glitter and lights of the city. Thompson said her aunt went through a lot of challenges that were often faced by her people during that time.

“It was often emotional hearing my aunt speak of the things she had to go through and face,” Thompson said.

Not to give the story away, Thompson said it's a book that anyone who has faced addiction, abandonment, and loss of hope can understand at a profound level. Her aunt went through so much and tried to loosen the grip that was holding her, often losing to that grip and finding herself much deeper in the chaos. Sariah knew she had to do something to change her life and she did this in a dramatic way, according to Thompson.

“I tried to express it in the book, as it was very emotional being told to me, and I wanted to express those emotions as she expressed [them] to me,” she said.

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Having heard about the book signing through social media, Charlene Pablo, of Gallup came out to hear more. Pablo could identify with the struggles facing numerous Native Americans. She was raised in a Christian home, never really experiencing the traditional Diné background.

“It was inspiring to learn that a Native American wrote a book that helps others like us come out of our shell,” Pablo said.

Thompson spoke on one problem that her aunt and many other Natives faced and still face today - alcohol.

“It’s a universal problem and prominent especially here on the reservation,” Thompson said. “Our problem is not going away, but only increasing, I noticed that there’s a whole new generation cropping out [up]. There’s more people on the streets than there was (sic) at the time my aunt was walking on the street.”

The book has a surprise at the end, but you’ll have to buy it to find out. Half of the proceeds for *Shattered Dreams, Bondage, and Hope* go to building a new church in Church Rock.

Thompson said her aunt’s war cry would be “keep the faith.” She had a “can-do” attitude and a powerful zeal for God.

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