

Adelina Alva-Padilla: The Creator is Good



Adelina Alva-Padilla is the spiritual leader of the Chumash tribe of California. Born in Santa Barbara, California in 1936, she is the mother of seven, the grandmother of 36 and the great-grandmother of 34, "with four more in the basket." We met Adelina after we went searching for a member of the tribe whose traditional homeland was

the Ojai Valley – Santa Barbara area, and were told to head to Santa Ynez. Waiting outside the Chumash tribal health administration building on a Sunday afternoon, a young man drove up to wait for other tribal members to join him for a presentation back in Ojai about the Chumash culture. When we told him what we doing, he immediately pointed to a home a few hundred feet from where we were standing and told us we wanted to speak with the spiritual leader of their tribe. He made a phone call and a few minutes later Adelina Alva-Padilla walked out to greet us and welcome us to her home.

Adelina Alva-Padilla has two last names and two fathers. "My step father is Patrick Martinez, Jr. and my mother's name is Juanita Salsa Kitano Pena. "Alva, which I now found out it's really de Alva," she said, "is my real father's name. Padilla is my children's name. My real father is Vincent de Alba. They spell it with a 'b' and I have it with a 'v.' They found me 15 years ago."

Adelina said overcoming the difficulties in her life has been a very, very long journey.

"From the time my mama left me with some strangers there were many, many difficult years. Even after my foster family and step dad's family was taking care of me, there were many trials and many things, from the time I came back at eight-years-old until I was going to be 17 and they married me off. By the time I was 22, I had my seven children. There were many difficulties. And what overcame my difficult years that made me put them in a bundle and put them in back of me and leave them there? Difficulties always hurt. They always touch your heart. And I think that is

what makes you want to embrace the gifts that the Creator gives us, just to try to hug it a little bit more and embrace it a little bit more.”

“I was drinking a lot and I was out there doing things I shouldn’t have done. My young son was seven years old, going to be eight, when my husband left us. He had just gotten a wonderful job that was going to be more money, more everything... But when the sun shines, always darkness comes in. And he fell in love with someone else and left us. And so it was a very difficult time.”

After her husband left and she was alone, Adelina suffered another trauma. “I had a stalker and the stalker mutilated me and raped me. I had moved because he threatened to kill my young son, so I moved to an apartment. While I was there, he broke the door and that is when everything happened.”

Shortly after that, Adelina’s mother was diagnosed with cancer. “So every day I would go and see her because she lived in the next town, Los Angeles. She would tell me to leave – ‘You don’t have to do this.’”

“She got worse and worse and finally three days before she died I was saying the Rosary by the window and she called me to the bed and she said, ‘I made three headbands - one for each year that you will learn who the Creator is, who God is.’”

“I was still wearing tight Levis and tank tops and my hair was all ratted. I was hoping whatever happened, happened, so I could take my next drink.” For three days Adelina’s mother asked her to take the headbands.

“On the third day, the doctor called me into the office and said my mother was not going to last the night. As I walked into her room she told me, ‘I made these three headbands out of shells. One for each year you will learn who God is, who the Creator is.’ And she asked, ‘Would you wear them?’ And I told her, ‘Yes.’ It was the most wonderful thing that I think a daughter could receive.”

“We brought her back to the reservation and they buried her. They sang her songs. They drummed. They drummed all night. And we buried her and I went back.”

Adelina said she didn’t think about the headbands until a few weeks after she returned home when she visited her dad. “‘How do I look today,’ he said. And I said, ‘You look fine dad.’ He asked again. ‘That woman, she came to me last night and she sat on the bed.’ I said, ‘You are not supposed to have any woman in your room. You know the rules!’ And he said, ‘No, your mother, she came last night and she told me I was sick.’”

Although Adelina wasn't sure what to believe, she took her dad to see her doctor. "And the doctor said, 'Let's take him to the hospital. He's ready to have a heart attack.'"

"So I went to look for the headbands. I went to look for the little box where she said she had made these headbands. I went to go get the little box and I put the headband on and it fit. And so, for one full year, I went on a journey. It was a journey of where there was one bead and that represented me, and all the rest of them represented the rest of the people."

"So when I went back to work I took this - the first year - it was the bag of prayers. I went to work with my braids, my feathers and my headband and when I went in everybody was laughing. They said she's not going to last a week like that. The boss knew already, because I had asked permission to go back to work that way. They couldn't believe my pants were a little bigger, and my shirts a little looser, and no makeup. I had this empty bag that I carried with me."

"As the weeks went by I had this lady come up to me and she said, 'What do you have in your bag?' And I said, 'My bag of prayers.' 'No, what do you have in your bag?' And I said, 'Nothing.' And she asked me, 'Can I put my name there?'"

"Before I knew it, there were a lot of people and they asked me, 'Can I put my name in your bag of prayers. Before I knew it, I was dreaming about them and I knew exactly what they had. And I was wondering, 'What's happening to me?'"

"And then the spirits, they told me to make a hole in the bag and to make an altar. And I did and they told me that I didn't have to go to the cemetery to pray to my mother because she was all over, and all I had to do was to make a cross and I could pray anywhere, anywhere. So that was my year of the bag of prayers."

"And the second year - each year I learned something. And the second year was the year of the herbs. I learned that not all herbs were for me and that God, the Creator, was going to take care of the people and not me. But there were certain herbs that I would be able to carry and I would plant these. I would powder them and I would put them in an urn. ... And I had to make everything part of me. And I had to touch it, and I had to hold it - part of me, part of me. And I used to take a bath and I would hold it and wash with one hand. Or pray and it had to be part of me. I used to sleep with it. So then I learned."

"So then came the third year. And the third year I learned to walk with the staff and be proud of who I was. And to be proud to the Creator and the ancestors, so they would take me to places I had never been. They took me to a lot of places. And I learned to be silent with my staff. And so, at the end of the year, the spirits came to

me and the ancestors and they told me to go to the mountain. I went to the mountain and they told me, 'You bury your headbands, you leave your staff and your urn here in the mountains. And you go down the mountain and you will forget everything that you have learned. Everything will be erased and you will be the woman that you were. But if you go down with all your sacreds, you will follow me – and everything we taught you.'"

"But I accepted because during that time of the bag of prayers the stalker came back and he took me away to another place. But there was a purpose for it. A purpose when it was far to another nation. And there they took me to a sacred place that I still go to. Because when I got there to the entrance of this town, I turned around and I saw an Indian. He called me and I went there. And he said, 'This is yours.' It was a coat. It was something I still have and it looks like its new and it has been years. And he told me it will be alright."

"When they took me to this place, I saw the nine Great Chiefs of Gold in the sky. After I received this, the people used to sleep around the bed and I could never get out. And I remember that night the spirits spoke to me and they said, 'They will be asleep and you will come out to us and you will see us. So I looked up in the sky and the nine Great Chiefs of Gold and they all spoke to me. And they said, 'Each of us will give you a gift, a gift of life.' And the ninth one, when he spoke he said, 'When I speak again, get ready for your journey to come home for you have listened. And he told me, 'Tomorrow everybody will leave and there will be a man that will come and give you money. Then there will be a taxi. You go to the airport and you go home.' And it became so and I came home."

"And the journey began: the first year, the second year, the third year. Then they sent me to a journey up in the north in the mountains in California. And they spoke to me. And they told me that the journey would keep on going."

"I had an aunt in my foster family and she had a child - a woman - and she had AIDs. And when I stopped to see my auntie, she told me. I told her that every weekend I will come and clean your home. Her granddaughters were on drugs and her daughter had AIDs. And every weekend I would go and I would clean her house and then that is where I met my husband now."

"One day my uncle came in during that journey. My uncle was Yaki. He said this young man is looking at you. And I said, 'I don't need anyone in my life.' I had had it with men. My uncle said, 'No, he is a good man.' He said the man was outside and saw me throwing out the trash. And he said, 'Who is that young woman there?' And my uncle told him, 'Oh, she is an old chicken and if you put her in a pot of soup and you want to eat the meat, you cannot eat the meat. That's how old she is. But if you come and you sit with me for three years, I will introduce her to you

because she needs to be treated good. She needs to be loved and she needs a lot of caring.' So he sat with my uncle for three years. And then my uncle said, 'He wants to take you to go meet his family.' And I went and I said, 'Oh my gosh, I don't want any part of this.' We went to a small trailer at a ranch. And I said, 'Oh my, all these people are outside and who knows who is inside.' But I went in and then I met his grandmother. His grandmother was in there and she was cooking. And she said, 'You are so beautiful. All I ask is you be good and just love my grandson. And so we have been married for 25 years. Her grandson is 45 now and I am 72. And he still loves me. He still cares for me. He ain't a perfect man, but he is all right.'"

"So the journey goes into my elder here. When I first came back to the reservation it was in the 70s. It was 1983 when I decided to stay. But the journey wasn't over yet, for it is the hardest thing to go back to your people, for they do not understand you, especially when you are speaking another language that the Creator has given you and your songs are different and your prayers. And you are not the person that you were, but you are the person that the Creator wanted you to be. I came back with my headbands. I came back with my dreams. Many, many trials. They didn't want me here."

"I would find my animals and I would bury them, but I stayed. I would walk the mountains and I would say, 'Lord, Creator, let me go. My people don't want me here.' But I would hear that voice saying, telling me in the wind, 'You need to stay, you need to stay,' so I stayed. And finally with many trials and tribulations - not that they really accepted me - but something happened. I had walked my talk with them, and so as I walked my talk something tragic happened and the council called me and asked me to be the spiritual leader of the tribe. And I said yes. And since 1994 I have been the spiritual leader of the tribe. And I try to serve my people well, for they are all my people and they are all good people."

"During the time of the bag of prayers and the urn and the staff, when they asked me to bury everything and leave it there on the mountain, I love that place of dreams, of hearing, of knowing that I didn't have to go inside a church. I didn't have to go inside a building. I knew the Creator that created the earth would walk with me if I believed. So when I came down with my bag of prayers, with my urn, with my staff, I walked down the mountain so proud because I was free - free from the little girl who was tied to a tree and raped every single day, free from the woman, that when I got my first job, I was raped and left there like I was nothing. I was free from everything that ever happened to my body. I was free because the Grandfather, the Creator of this earth, set me free to accept my bag of prayers, to accept the carrier of the herbs, the urn, and the staff that taught me to be proud."

“I was part of a tree - the tree that had roots, the tree that embraced the earth, the tree that had the trunk. And I was the trunk and my children were the limbs, and my grandchildren and my great grandchildren and all that was to come were the leaves that would fall from the tree and let me know that I was free.”

“... And so I know that the Creator speaks to me, to everything that is in the earth and walks with me and every single leaf, every single tree, herb, and every single plant. And my ancestors, through the clouds make forms that I can see. I can see them. I come from the Bear Clan and the bear speaks to me. When I visited one of my elders - he was the spiritual leader of the tribe - when I went to visit him he told me, ‘They will ask you to be the spiritual leader of the tribe and you accept that. And go to the Bear Clan and talk to them. And I told him they will not accept a woman because the Bear is danced by the men. He said, ‘They will accept you. And bring the Bear Ceremony back to our people.’”

“On the first year that I took care of the ceremony, I went to visit the men that are the caretakers of that ceremony. My gift to the first man was Condor feathers, for it is very strong and it does a lot of healing. So I took the Condor feathers and I asked. I said, ‘I want permission for you to dance for us.’ And he took the Condor feathers and he asked everybody else, ‘Should we accept them?’ So for the first three years they came and danced and danced. ..And so now after the four years I brought the dance back to our reservation and they danced it for our people. Then I brought it here and I brought it here to take it away from the political place because it needs to be nurtured, it needs to know it is free. “

“My elder, our spiritual leader, he is in the spirit world now. He was and is a good man. He started all the dances here. He worked hard, very hard, to bring to his family the traditions, the ceremony, all that there is and all that there was. And the spirits they took him home and he is in the spirit world. But his legacy will be forever. My children say, ‘There is a legacy with you, mother.’ I don’t feel that.”

“From the time that we learn that there is the seed, and it travels and it travels and it has a lot of detours. And when we think we can’t get over things, yes we can. The only thing that takes us there is the old ways of the people - the fire. And that fire will always burn as long as it burns in the heart of every Indian person and their spirit. Our mind can go crazy on us and take us in every different direction, but a heart, a heart knows loves. It just goes to sleep for a while, but it knows love. And that love needs to be nurtured and given. And that is what the fire does for us; that is what our traditions do to us. They bring it back and when there are hard times, we go to our fire. We go to that tree, to that wood we put in the fire and it brings all the stories out and it brings all the things we need to know. Our ancestors want us to

acknowledge them when they appear in the clouds, when they appear in the sky or in the night. Or when the rain drops and we think they are crying for something. Or when the storms come and they are telling us, 'We send you the storms so you can learn. Know that if you ask us, we will be there for you.' There is no storm that we can't get over, no tragic thing that comes in our lives that we cannot override. For the Creator is with us and walks with us in everything that happens."

"When I thought that I was in the worst part of my life, when I thought that I was with the headbands - that it was over because I learned, I obeyed, I wasn't. But when the nine Great Chiefs of Gold appeared and told me, 'We will always be there for you. And when the ninth one speaks, get ready. Put your hair on the pillow so they can lay you down.' All these are things that they taught me. 'When I speak you start working and putting all these things together to come home.' It will be a good journey when I go home because I know that all of them going to be singing the songs. They told me the story of going home. My spirit will go to a special place where the salt water will wash everything away. Where I will travel across the spiritual river and the ancestors are singing the songs. And then they part and the Grandfather will come through and embrace me and tell me I have done good. I listened. I heard. I did it. I had this dream and I followed the dream."

"On the third year of the Bear Ceremony that my elder told me to do, I had a dream of this bear claw. I woke up in the night and I told my husband, 'I had this dream.' ... And the next day we woke up and we went to this ceremonial place and I walked up to my fire keeper and I said, 'Why do you have this fire keeper over there when you are the fire keeper?' And he said, 'He asked me if I would teach him and I said you wouldn't mind if I did.'"

"So I go up to the new fire keeper and the first words out of my mouth I said, 'What's your occupation?' And he said, 'I am a tattoo artist.' So I just asked, 'Would you come to my home and would you do some tattoos on me because I had a dream?'"

"When I went to New York for a premier movie where they used my songs, there was a lady there that I had met at a Sun Dance that I had supported for about 10 years. And her mother comes up and said; 'I heard that you never say no to elders.' And she said, 'Would you come to South Africa?' I left in July to go there with my grandson and my son to South Africa."

"It took me a month before I met the person that I was supposed to meet. His name Craedo Matu. When I went up to Craedo, he went ballistic and I thought, 'What did I have that I had offended him with?' It ended up that he came out and he said, 'This is yours.'"

“I was always saying, ever since I started, ‘We are like a spoon in a pot of soup. We are only here so it don’t get burned.’ And he brought out a spoon that was in a little bag that his mother had given to him. And he told me, ‘My mother, in 1932, told me to give this to you.’ And me being human, I told him I wasn’t born in 1932. I was born in 1936. And he told me, ‘Don’t ever underestimate the power of the Creator. For a thousand years before you are born he knows you are coming. My mother carried it with her and she made it for you. And she told me to tell you, you are the woman of peace and you will travel all over and bring that peace to people.’ And that was my journey to South Africa. And I asked him how he recognized me. And he said, ‘My mother said you will have a bear claw on your right cheek.’”

“So the ancestors, they are out there and they want to listen to us. Our strongest element is our voice. They want to hear us. They want to see our tears. They want to see that we know that they are still around - that we still embrace them with everything.”

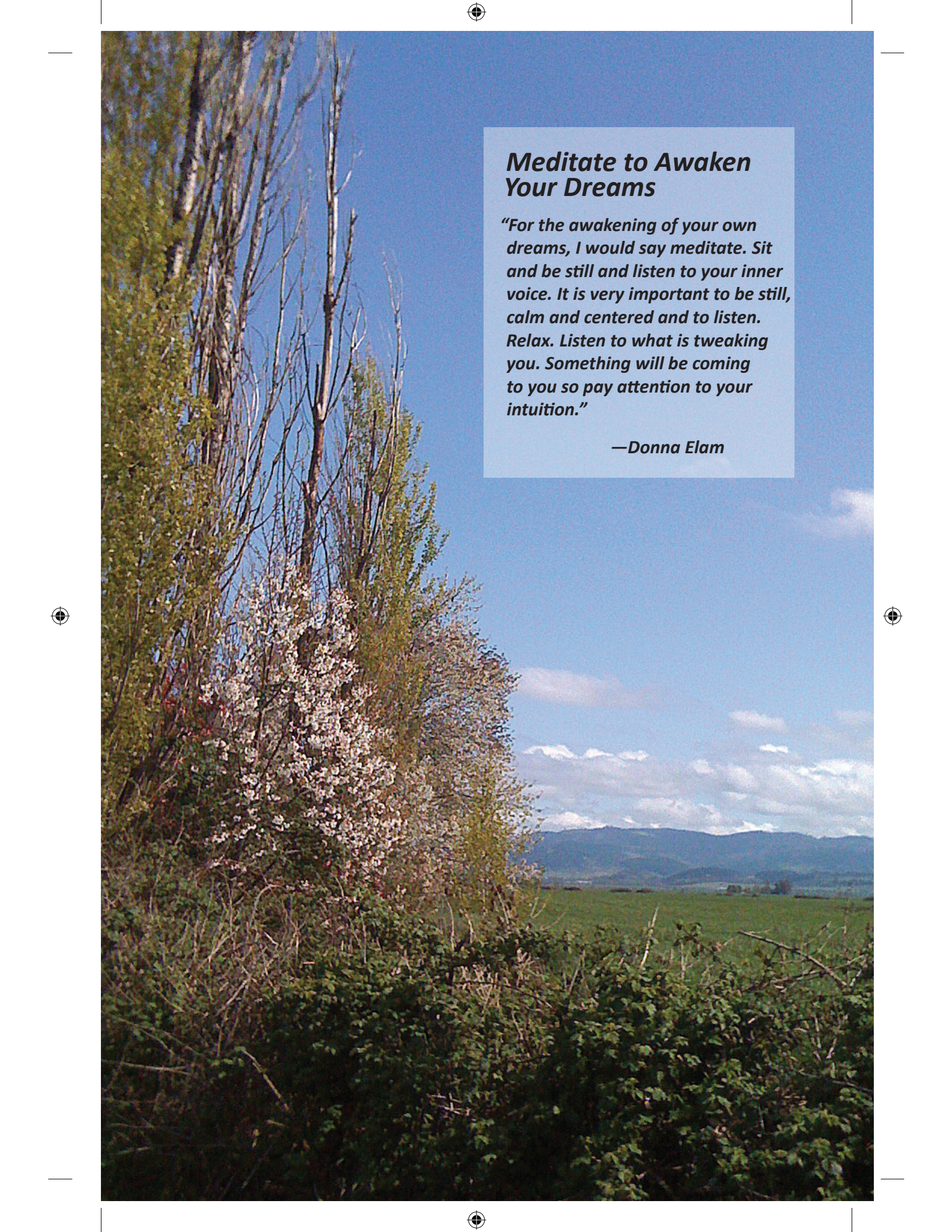
“... We are Indian people. We have warriors. We have our people that we pray to. We have our lodges. We have our circles. We have the four directions that teaches us the way it was taught to me. We are Chumash people. We are people of the western gate. We are the caretakers of the western gate. That is why our pole is black, for we are caretakers of that. And the south, they teach us it is the blood of our people and it is the site of the children and we take care of our children. And there is the white. There is the knowledge of our elders that is hidden inside of them, those stories, the ones with the white hair, the ones that carry the wisdom, the wisdom keepers. And then the sun in the east that teaches us to go out in the morning and embrace her and ask her to give us the energy to survive one more day - the beginning of life, the beginning of a new day. And then we honor the earth that is beneath us for we are going to go back to the earth. And we honor the cloud people and the clouds that roam. And we honor the sun and the moon and the stars all over, for they take care of us. And we honor all that is around us on the earth, for we are part of everything. We are only here for a while and I am so happy to the ancestors that they showed me this way, that they embraced me, that they loved me enough to give me the gift of life. For without them I’d be nothing again. I’d be that little girl. But I remember that each time that something happened to my body, I would run to the swing and swing as high as I could so that I could touch God. But now I know that he or she has touched me so that I can walk upon the mother earth with all the wisdom that they have given to me.”

“Wisdom is not born at birth. They say wisdom is lost. It’s not lost. It comes in the wind. It comes all over. It surrounds us. It comes in our dream time. It comes in our hearts, in our blood. But because we walk upon the mother earth in a different time

we forgot. But the tree has a voice. And the wind has a voice. And the star people have a voice. And the mountains have a voice. And the earth between us, underneath us has a voice. And all that is about has a voice. The elements. We are part of that. And I am so happy that they chose me to be able to be, to be able to be a wisdom keeper. For the people that wish to hear and the people that wish not to hear. For the tears will always come, but that is how rivers are made - with the tears of all women in the world.”

“The Creator is good, for he brings everything to us. He might bring us some hard times, but he gives us some good times. And all we have to do is just open ourselves, embrace it. Embrace the medicine that the elders and the ancestors have to give.”

“When they tell us, the white man, your language is lost, your songs are lost. But here is a book. I wrote it and it is true. You will learn it. We forget that they are out there just waiting for us to wake up and listen to them and hear the songs. And believe in our dreams that they bring. And believe and enjoy the atmosphere of the world, the earth. For everything is still there.”

A landscape photograph showing a green field in the foreground, a line of trees with white blossoms in the middle ground, and distant mountains under a blue sky with scattered white clouds. The text is overlaid on a semi-transparent light blue box in the upper right quadrant.

Meditate to Awaken Your Dreams

“For the awakening of your own dreams, I would say meditate. Sit and be still and listen to your inner voice. It is very important to be still, calm and centered and to listen. Relax. Listen to what is tweaking you. Something will be coming to you so pay attention to your intuition.”

—Donna Elam