

## **Caroline Wilson: Carrying on the Teachings**

*Caroline Wilson, Julia J. Curley's daughter, helped with the translation when we spoke with her mother. Afterward, concerned that her mother had not been able to share all she had wanted in English, Caroline began to talk about her mother and share with us some of what she learned from her mother when she was growing up.*



“My mother refers to my grandfather’s teachings a lot and the reason she does that is that a lot of the teachings came from him: more so from him than my grandmother. He was the one that was very compassionate with her when she was little, but who was also strong with her. He raised her in a way that was like, if she was being punished for something, he just didn’t do it just to do it. He would explain to her afterward, ‘This is the reason why I punished you.’ He didn’t do it just to do it, just to be mean or something. And that is why she refers to him a lot. He taught her how to shoot a gun, how to go hunting deer, how to skin a deer, how to butcher. She used to butcher a sheep in under 10 minutes and she would weave a rug. She wove saddle blankets. Surprisingly my grandfather got her the spindle that you make the yarn out of. And he taught her that she should get up in the morning and run towards the sun, to meet and greet the sun. He taught her how to pray - a lot of things that is just the person that she is. She is very compassionate, she is very kind.”

”We live in an area that the land has been frozen for over 40 years. If you really look around, if you take a couple days and you drive around in this area, you’ll see homes that have been depleted. People live in shacks. There are hardly any jobs. My mother had to work as a maid - clean rooms in motels, and things like that, to raise her children. She married my father in her early 20s and he was very abusive. She came out of that marriage and married another. The man that she later married really cared for her, and to this day, she – after he passed away - she lives on his pension. That is kind of a reward for her because in her early days she didn’t have anything.”

“To this day she doesn’t live in a grand house or anything. She was supposed to be given a house by the Navajo tribe, but she allowed a younger family to take over that home because she said that they needed it more than she did. For her to raise 10 children on the pay of a maid, and then for her to allow her kids to go to school somewhere else, it must have been hard on her, but she did it anyway.”

“The reason we are the way that we are is from her. She is just the strength that we look to. If you ask any one of my brothers and sisters, they will tell you the same thing. She has taught us to be good to people that don’t like you. To pray for them regardless of how they treat you. You treat people as your equal, whether they are white, black or other nationalities. “

“She just teaches us that you have to do for yourself. You can’t depend on other people, or the government, or your tribe because it won’t get you anywhere. She teaches us to be compassionate towards other people when they need help – if you see other people that need help, you help them. You just don’t look at somebody, when somebody is in need; you help them out. That is why when she says, ‘If your grandmother or your auntie, if you see that they don’t have any wood, you go get wood for them. Or you go over there and you chop wood for them, you fix dinner for them.’”



“These are the teachings that she taught us. Don’t be greedy. Just little things like that over the years, because of the hardships that she has gone through in her life. She has kind of given it to us and we know what she has gone through and from that we have learned a lot, a lot.”

“And I think we get a lot of the teachings from her instead of from somebody else. Some of us are traditional and some of us are Christians in her family. And she accepts that. I am a Christian more than traditional, and I respect what she believes and I respect the way she prays. And the way the family members are part of another religion, but I respect that.”

“She is an advocate for children. She has her own child with Downs’ Syndrome. She teaches us not to belittle other people because of their handicaps or the way that they are. Because it is a teaching that when you are given somebody like that, it teaches you to be compassionate towards people - to be glad that you are whole.”

“Don’t sleep late. That is one of her greatest teachings. Don’t sleep late. Get up. Learn to do for yourself. Learn to do the traditional things. Make bread, fry bread. Butcher, plant, learn to do those things because in the modern days now you don’t know how long those type of things are going to be around, because you are going to have to learn to live the old ways again one of these days. And so she just teaches us a lot.”

“I go traveling with her other places and when I travel with her she just tells me stories. When she was a young girl, she tells me one story where her father, my grandfather, would tell her to get up before sunrise. And they didn’t hobble horses then, they just let them go. She was only maybe seven or eight years old and he would get her up early and the horses would be maybe 10 miles away. It didn’t matter that she was little or that she would get hurt running to get the horses, and she would. She would take off and she would run those 10 miles and she would find them and somehow she would get on and she would bring them back. And then he would take the horses and hitch them up to the wagon and go get wood. She did a lot of things that men do, even though she was a woman. She was a sharpshooter. She can shoot a target like most young guys. They can’t do the things she can. She is just unbelievable, the things that she can do.”

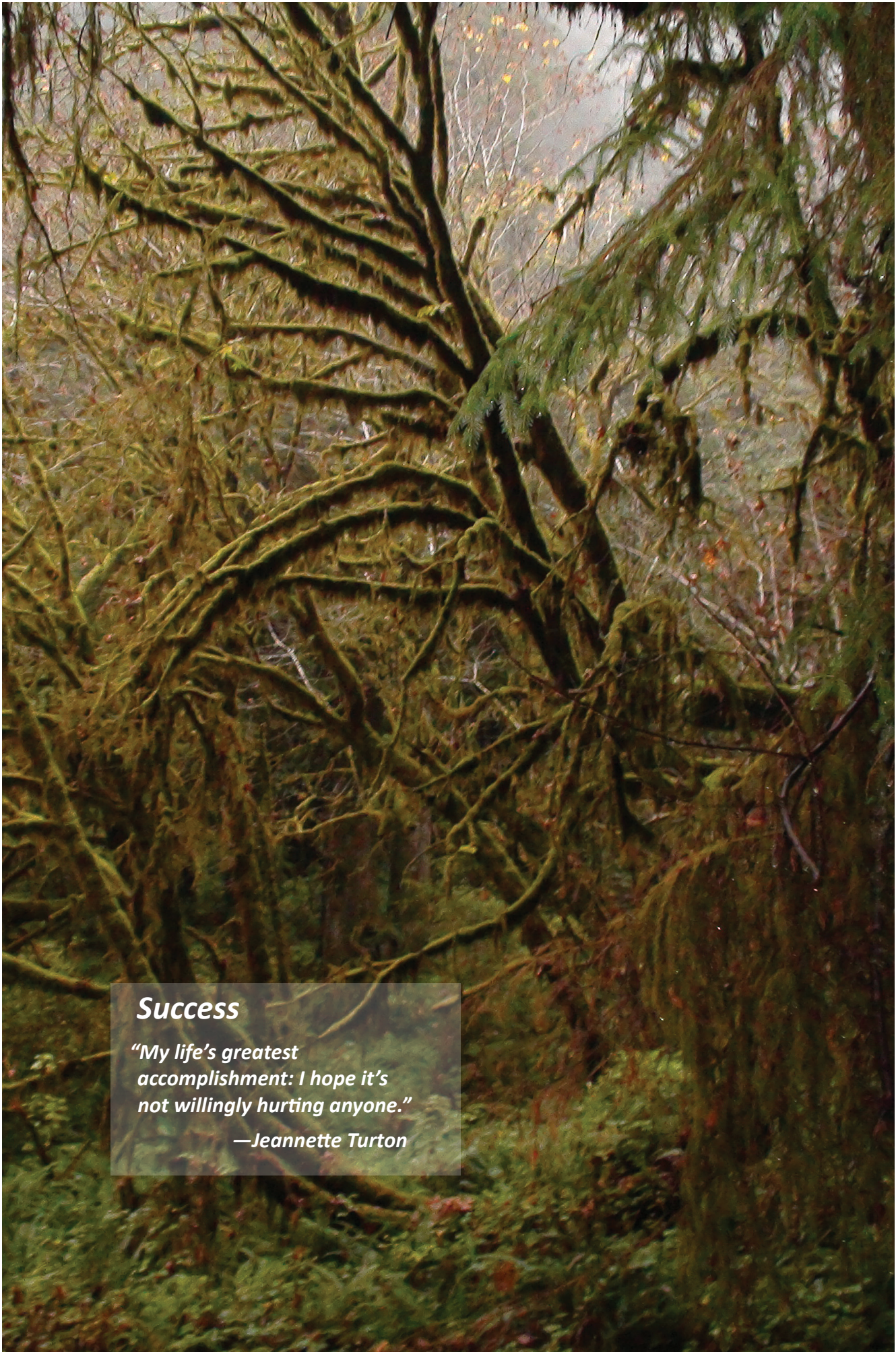
“She is a great teacher. When you have Council, like you have chapter meetings, she will be there and she will be one of the main ones that will be saying things for her people. She knows what they need because she has lived in the area.”

“Right now her grandkids have gotten together. Her children and her grandkids have gotten together and they are building a hogan for her, over where she keeps her animals. If you were going towards Cameron you could see it. It’s really in a

beautiful area. And they got together and it shows the love that they have for her - to be able to have a nice place like that to stay in. It is just her reward just having grandkids, I guess. She will have 75 this coming spring and they all love her. They just want to stay with her. They want to herd sheep for her. She has horses, so they come around and they ride horses. She still rides horses at her age. And she thinks she is still young. She still wants to do all these things that she did maybe 20 or 30 years ago, and it's getting to the point where she can't anymore. She gets aches, body aches and backaches and things like that, but she thinks she is still strong. And I believe she is, in spirit you know. Maybe not bodily, but she is in spirit."

"And she's always a teaching person. Whenever her kids or grandkids get together, she always has something to teach. And she tries to do it in English because a lot of her grandkids don't speak Navajo. And she goes out of her way to speak English to them. She will go back and forth between Navajo to English teaching them. Sometimes they understand and sometimes they don't."

"She teaches the way of the cradleboard. She teaches her granddaughters that you need to put your babies in a cradleboard. You need to do it this way; you need to have this done for them. Some of them do and some of them don't. It all depends on what they want to do. But that is just her way. She is a wonderful mother."



## *Success*

*"My life's greatest  
accomplishment: I hope it's  
not willingly hurting anyone."*

*—Jeannette Turton*