

Debbie Tafoya Trujillo: Love, Faith, Security and a Smile



Debbie Tafoya Trujillo was born in Winslow, Arizona, the daughter of Willie and Dora Tafoya. She now lives in Gallup, New Mexico with her husband, four children and six grandchildren. She teaches special needs children and is active in her Catholic church, where she was working as a volunteer when we met her.

For Debbie Tafoya Trujillo, faith and family are the most important things in life.

“I have two things that were really difficult that happened in my life and that was the death of my father and the death of my brother. My brother died when he was 31 years old and I was 19. They overdosed him on chemotherapy and that was really, really hard. I was in college and that was probably the first hardest thing that I ever dealt with.”

“I never had anybody die in my family before and I felt that through my years up until I was 19 I was very, very religious. I always wanted to be part of the Catholic Church. I always wanted to be a CCD teacher; anything I could do for the church. When all of this happened, it was my parish priest that came and picked me up from college and took me to Tucson, Arizona and stayed with us. And it just showed me that they were behind me, that the Catholic Church was always behind me.”

“But I think the hardest thing I have ever gone through was the death of my father, which was about seven years ago. My father and I are two of a kind. They even call me Willie.”

“I just don’t think that you can get through anything without religion - without your faith. And it was through my faith that I did get through it, plus the support of my husband. I don’t know how people get through things without faith. You have to have faith.”

“My Catholic faith, my mom, and my husband give me great strength and support. My husband is a great supporter: anything that I want to try, anything I want to do,

he is right behind me, just right behind me, ready to help, ready to take on whatever I take on, together. He is a really big support.”

Debbie said the proudest moment in her life came with the birth of her children. “It’s absolutely amazing. At first I didn’t think I could have children, but then at the birth of my son, even the feeling of him inside of me, it was just absolutely amazing. And then after that, having my daughter.”

Just to know that she is a mother is Debbie’s greatest joy. “I just love it. I just hold on to them very dearly. It is hard for me to just let them cross the street at age 13 and 15, but probably their births were the best moments of my life.”

Debbie said her parents provided her a firm foundation of love and security. “I think I had a really great childhood. I know there are not a lot of people that can say that. I guess the greatest thing that my parents gave me was love.”

“My mother never worked outside of the home. My father worked as a construction worker in the wind, and the rain and the snow and would bring that check home to my mom. My mom would take care of the bills and make sure the house was clean, and we were all taken care of. And he was a very strict man, but I knew if I needed a hug, he was there. And my mom was always there. I came home to a home and I didn’t have to open the door by myself with a key. My parents were there.”

“I want my grandchildren to know that. I try to teach my children that you’ve got to be near your kids. We coach everything we can coach, my husband and I, so that we can be near our kids. I try to teach my older sons that. Your kids have to always be secure with you near. That’s probably it - love and security. I try and teach my boys, don’t ever let your kids be worried that you aren’t going to be right there. When they’re crying, just say, ‘It’s OK, I’m here.’ And get them to relax by that. But love and security is so important - and your faith of course.”

For Debbie, the most important advice she can share is the importance of providing children a model of faith.

“Teach them your faith and love them. Know that they don’t have to go to somebody else, that you are always open, that you are there for them, so that they don’t have to look for somebody to talk to. And if they have questions, if you can’t answer, go look for somebody who can. But you give them those answers from your heart and they will believe that. They will know that you are sincere. Don’t let them go looking at other places for things. Be there for them. And if you have to say no and have to disagree, let them know it’s still from love. It’s from love, and you want them to be so safe.”

As a teacher, Debbie said she learned another important lesson – the importance of a smile. “I have been teaching special education for 20 years and the one thing I do every single morning is I come in to my classroom with a smile. I might be the only smile they see that day and I think that is so important for these kids. You have to go in there and you have to show these kids that you care. And they will do anything for you, they really will. I walk into my classroom every day with a smile.”





Education

“Education is so important. A woman without an education is a woman without a plan.”

— Vera Earl

“When I went to college both of my grandmothers had a fit. But my father told them that I would be a better mother for it. And I firmly believe that. The nuns used to say, ‘Educate a man and you educate a person. Educate a woman and you educate a family.’ My father understood that.”

—Jeannette Turton

“And the second (most important thing) would be to try and do the best that each person could in receiving an education. And that education could be in different ways, not all of it had to be scholastic where everyone went to get their degree. But if they didn’t follow that route, which was an honorable one certainly to do, but to have some training in some field so that they would be able to work to raise their families. That was my heart’s desire, and hopefully to a limited degree, I have been able to do that.”

—Lauretta King