

**These Are My Blessings**  
**By JAN TYLER**  
**Denver Correspondent**

Tradition is important to Blanche Zembower. To this day, she still dries corn each August at her home outside Denver. She remembers life on the Pine Ridge Reservation in South Dakota fondly: “We used to run in the fields as kids and mark wild turnips with a stick. The men of the tribe would follow behind us and pull the meat of the plant out with tire irons. The grandmothers still carried babies on their backs and wore long dresses. We spoke our native Dakota ‘D’ language.” In fact, Blanche was amazed when her family moved during her teen years to the Crow Creek Reservation, and the people there all spoke English.

Blanche’s respect for her people was handed down from her great-grandfather, Chief Husha-sha. Abraham Lincoln once intervened and spared the chief’s life, along with 550 others in his tribe, at the request of Episcopal Bishop Henry Benjamin Whipple. Thirty-eight others — the ringleaders of the 1862 uprising in New Ulm, Minn. — were hanged by local government order. Red Leggings, as her great-grandfather was also known, had fought to help his people hold on to their land, then acted as a mediator between the settlers and his people. For his spirit and bravery, Bishop Whipple gave Red Leggings the Whipple name, which the chief considered a great honor.

Her father, in turn, was an Episcopal priest who traveled long distances to be with the sick and dying on the reservations — Pine Ridge, Crow Creek and Lower Bruele. “We never even knew if he would come back to us, especially during winter blizzards,” she says. “He taught us how to live for others by example.”

Now Blanche Whipple Zembower shares the spirit of her ancestors with all native people through the Caring Association for Native Americans, a non-profit organization dedicated to bringing comfort and assistance to Native Americans who travel to Denver for medical care. Often the patient is alone or his or her family members have no place to stay while in Denver. Traditional social service programs rarely assist these people, so CANA steps in to close the gap.

Blanche understands the problems that face these people in crisis — she has faced crisis in her life, too. Blanche donated one of her kidneys to her brother 10 years ago. “It meant so much to me, my life, to give my brother life,” she says.

Blanche gives to each person as a brother, without judgment about the why of their sufferings. She accepts their hardship as her opportunity to serve. Her rewards, she says, are many.

“A young Assiboine Sioux from Montana came to Denver for a kidney transplant,” she says. Blanche visited him so often he began to call her Grandma.

When he returned later for a check-up, he joyfully told her, “Look, Grandma, I can run!” And he started running.

Another boy, paralyzed from the waist down and in residence at a local hospital specializing in spinal injury rehabilitation, asked Blanche to be his mother and go with him to a Mother’s Day tea.

“These,” she says, “are my blessings.”

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