

CROSSING BETWEEN WORLDS

The Navajo of Canyon de Chelly

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Wake Forest University

with Lupita McClanahan

PHOTOGRAPHS BY CHARLES WINTERS



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Frontispiece: Looking out toward hogan at Junction Farm.
All photographs by Charles Winters. Additional photographs on pages 113, 117,
and 118 by Donatella Davanzo.

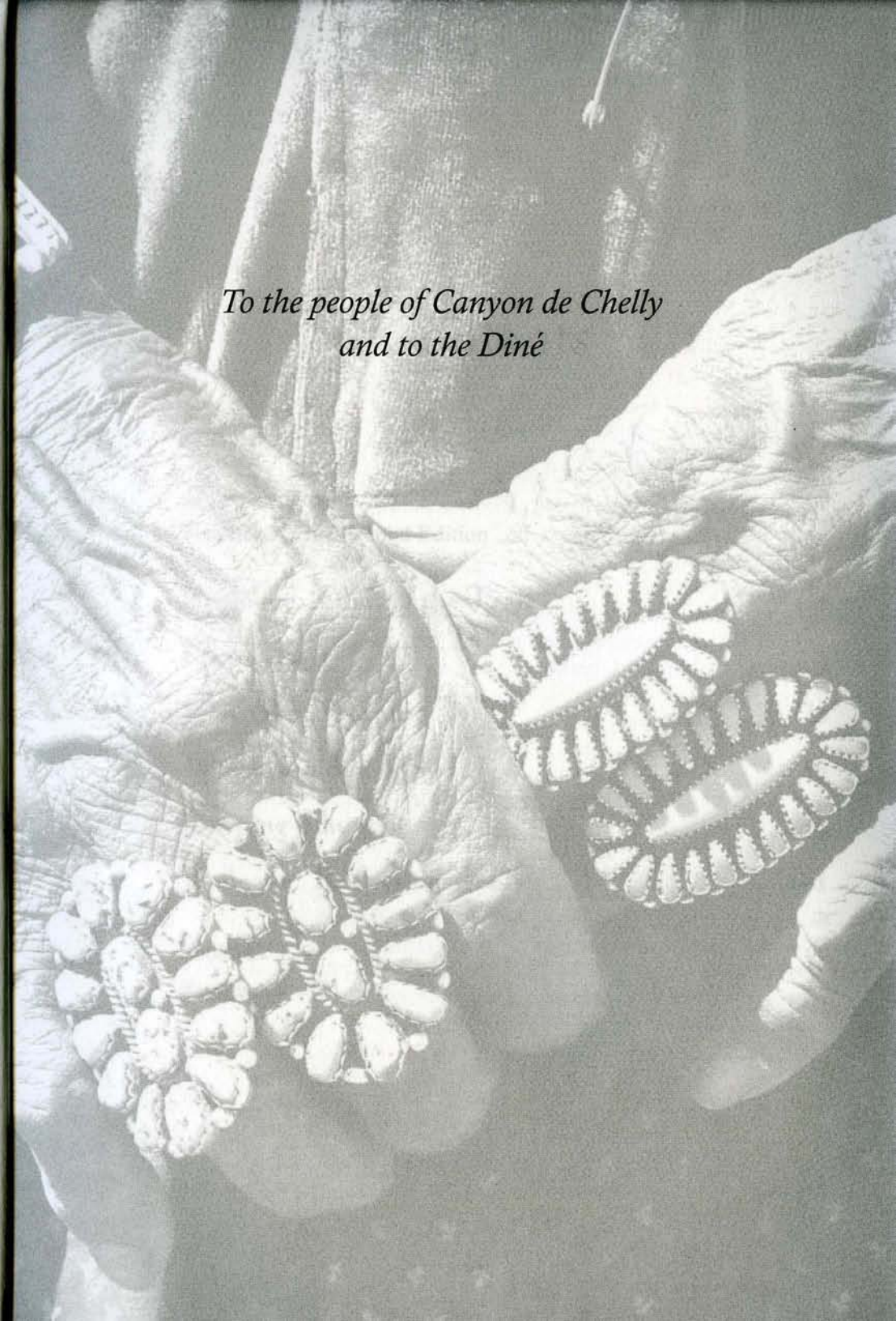
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*To the people of Canyon de Chelly
and to the Diné*

sitive and skilled editor of the first edition text; and Deborah Flynn Post showed insight and care in designing the book. Other commentaries were provided by Lupita Litson, Patricia Honan-Wohlford, Stephen Trimble, and three anonymous reviewers.

At Waveland Press, Tom Curtin's support for this updated second edition was critical. The ability to keep this book in print allows us to keep faith with our promise to all those canyon residents and their families who opened their lives to us. This edition also includes photos by anthropologist Donatella Davanzo, who stayed with Margarita's family in 2007. These capture the ways we have all changed since the initial period depicted in these pages. As can be seen, change has happened faster for the children, and this work is for them.

The completion of a creative work is not always a smooth process. Consequently, a debt of gratitude is owed to our families. Charlie's wife, Martha Leigh, was an avid supporter throughout this project and a willing participant during a month of camping without showers at Canyon de Chelly. Charlie's daughter, Natasha, was, as always, enthusiastic about the photographic imagery. My daughter, Elanor, gave me food for thought during my first summer at the canyon. My daughter, Rachel, grew from child to woman during this work, and her support at home made it possible for me to travel and write. Though Rachel never revisited the canyon after the summer of 1990, she remained an important intersection in the unfolding story, since "Margarita" and I were both mothers of teenage girls and faced similar dilemmas.

Finally, I still thank my beloved dog and companion, Josafin, who took me on daily walks during the original writing of this book, providing an opportunity to think and work out the details. I know she would have typed the manuscript if she had been able to. As with so many of those who started this journey in 1990, she has passed over into another world. This edition especially commemorates each of their lives.

Foreword to the Second Edition

Dictated by Grandma Karen to her daughter, Margarita,
July 25, 2007

I've learned to open the pages to *Crossing Between Worlds* book without help now. When I look at the pictures, it brings me *ho zho'*—beauty. It helps me make my past clear; the book is one of the best things that ever happened. Especially for today, it seems like all our children only understand the books. When we talk Diné it's hard for them to understand. But, I enjoy it when they teach me about the story books; I especially like my book, *Crossing Between Worlds*.

The *yei' bi' cheii'* farmland in the canyon is better to see now. I feel my grandmothers and their grandmothers are happy; it brings joy to my heart. I am very thankful for my daughter Pete and my son [in-law] Jon who work and improve the *yei' bi' cheii'* canyon farm. Our clan *kinya' aah nii* has more land at Junction area, but I don't know why my sister's children and my children don't work with the land anymore. They probably don't have time for it anymore. Me, I can't haul water anymore and I can't chop wood anymore. My eyes have been playing tricks on me.

I wish I still had my young eyes. Modern world Doctor said they can put an animal eye or someone that died in my eye so I can see better, but I totally disagree. I'm going to have nightmares every night and I'm not going to sleep and then my eyes will always be closed and that is what I don't want. Modern Doctors are sometimes goofy. But we love our friend Dr. Tori from Portland; she is a naturopathic Doctor. She loves to learn more about the plants and how we cure ourselves with our plants. My life

tle more open, and the carpets were new. The entrance to the house was in a slightly different location. Tim was philosophical. "Took them a year to move the door," he noted.

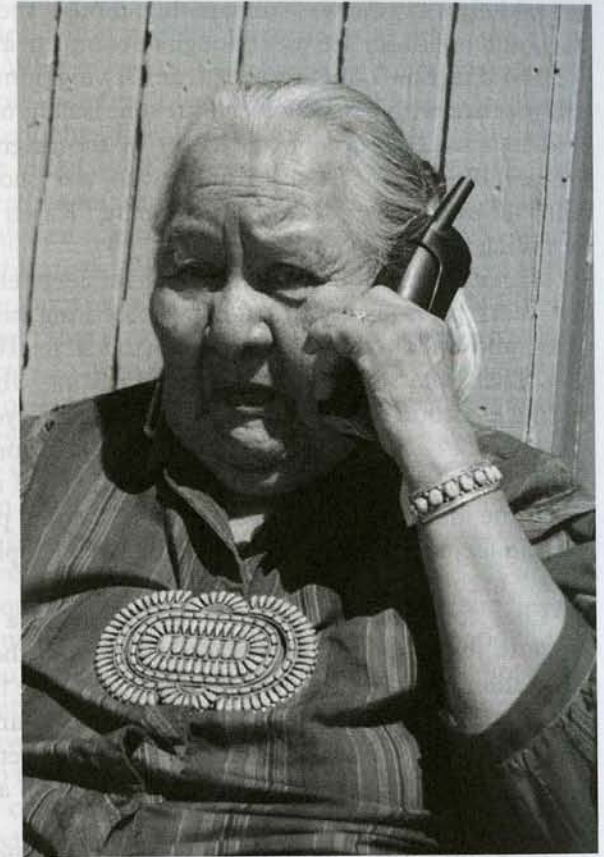
In 2005, Charlie made exhibition-sized prints of some of the *Crossing Between Worlds* images. The exhibit opened in Oneonta, then moved to the Guilford Native American Center in Greensboro, North Carolina, and finally to the Museum of Anthropology at Wake Forest University. Margarita and Tim flew to North Carolina, as did Charlie, and we held a series of cultural events on the Wake Forest campus. In the tiny kitchen attached to the anthropology department, we cooked fry bread and made Navajo tacos. Margarita explained Diné religious philosophy. My students tried once again to explain the mixed pagan-Christian symbolism of Easter.

By the time of this visit, yet another turn in time's cycle had occurred. Margarita and I found ourselves musing about the amount of grey dancing though our hair. She wondered why it was that the new generation of Navajo elders was so much greyer than her mom's cohort. "Maybe it's because we use so many chemical shampoos on our hair. Nobody uses yucca root any more," she said. "Maybe it's because people aren't out in the sun as much, and perhaps hair responds the way skin does," I added. Margarita laughed. "I think it's stress," she said, half in jest and half in contemplation.

We were quiet for a few moments, thinking of our families. The four young teens who frolicked in the rain at my Oneonta farm were now young women. Each of them faced the prospect of trying to find a balance in the world of peers and change and risk that surrounds young people in the twenty-first century. Carla and Dezbah, in addition, were also enveloped in the difficult cultural milieu of the reservation. The lives of all four reminded me of a traffic light: sometimes green, sometimes glaring red; at others, a caution-filled yellow. They grew, left home, came home, got lost. Some got found. Some are still wandering.

Margarita and I both moved into the venerable Navajo realm of grandma. During the North Carolina trip, we traveled to the coast and visited my two-year-old granddaughter, the child of Elanor, my oldest. For Margarita, the grandma role was a by-product of the Navajo kinship system, where the child of your sister is also your daughter, and her children become your grandchildren. As part of the same extended family, we considered all of the grandkids to be ours. Her family was wide and welcoming, and it was good to be a part of it. My daughter enjoyed opening her coastal home to our Diné branch.

As I drove my Subaru wagon onto the Fort Fisher-Southport car ferry on the North Carolina coast, Margarita was dubious. She smiled broadly. "My Mom, Karen, is not going to believe this," she said. Even as Margarita became an emerging elder, Karen remained the family matriarch. In



Karen on cell phone, 2007.

Karen and Leonard, 2007.



found the canyon to be hard, but it also gave us serenity and support in so many ways. We started a hiking and overnight camping tour company and that opportunity let us meet wonderful people. Most of them became good friends, we all learned many different cultures from each other.

When I worked as a Park Ranger at Canyon de Chelly National Monument, I felt like a horse with hobbles; I couldn't do very much then. Now, our lives have changed just being tour guides. I could not have ever imagined that was possible. I actually learned to bake a cake from a cardboard box. I learned how to cook fish. I had my fresh salmon fish at Canyon de Chelly. I learned that you can live in a tent for two weeks. I learned that there were actually hiking boots. I learned chocolate is made from nuts and that some cars run by McDonald French fries. I learned that people can stop work and come out to Canyon de Chelly for relaxation. Wow! I thought the canyon was only for work and some play.

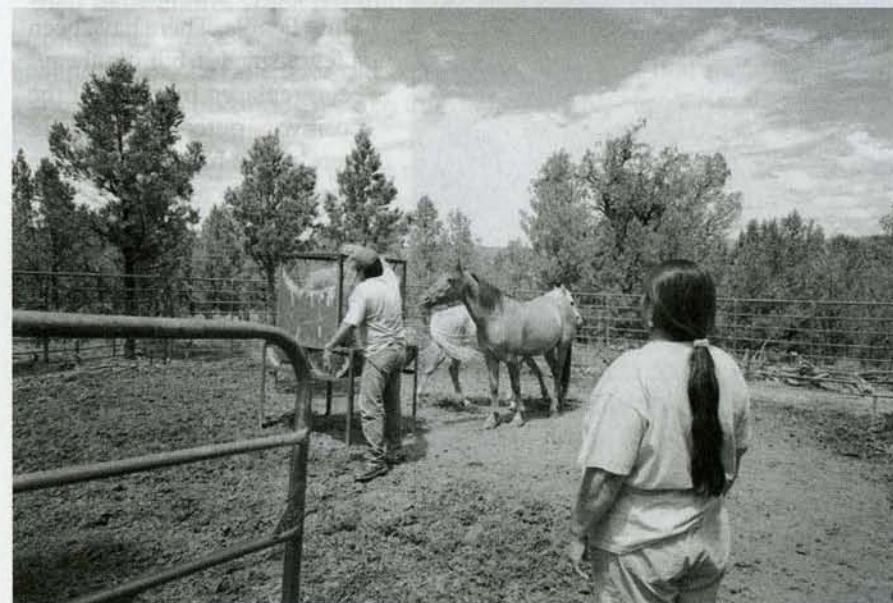
I am learning so much! It feels like I'm going to a private school, and of course with great teachers. They share their lives, where they work, and what type of foods they eat, how and when they sleep, why they don't care too much for the government. All these years I thought they were all working for the government! It was a big relief for me. I guess that is why I can communicate with biligáana better now.

One big difference is there are only about three or, at the most, four people in their family. My grandmother used to say, "Have lots of family. If you do, you will always be happy and strong."

Most of the time I am happy but I don't know about being strong. Physically, I am not strong but I guess I can't take no for an answer wisely. So, I guess we all live the way the Holy People want us to live. I know that most of the people that come to our home are very friendly and a great help. From 1984 to now, all the biligáanas I met have been just wonderful. Some of them became very close friends and some are like family. When our guests came to tour, some worked on fences, some dug out a pit for water so Marie's sheep could drink water. Some planted fruit trees and corn, some put mud on the hogan and most of them left our home with great love and respect for the Diné and the land, Canyon de Chelly.

One big change in our life is that we were given a chance to raise a grandson, Deon. He is our grandson by one of my dear nieces and she's the daughter of one of my sisters. Deon is now five years old, but we had Deon in our home at DezAh when he was six months. Deon and my daughter Carla keep us grounded. They are always in our prayers and heart. Carla is on her own these days. She sometimes stops by at Tsaille and babysits for us. She is still searching for her destiny gracefully. But when she doesn't call, that's when we worry.

Now, I am a parent all over again and Tim has been so patient and great with his grandson, who he treats like his own son. Tim and Deon



Top left: Margarita and Tim.

Top right: Grandson Deon.

Bottom: Tim and Margarita with their horses.

are like a pair of moccasins. They already have traveled to so many places together. They both love their five horses, DeChelly, Dawn, Star, Rainbow, and Shirley. The family does trail rides from Canyon de Chelly to Chuska Mountains or Tec Nos Pos every summer and Deon rides his favorite horse, DeChelly. They also sometimes ride their horses in a summer ceremony, the Enemy Way—Ni' daah.

We (Deon, Tim and I) also rode airplanes to Portland, Oregon, to visit our friends Dr. Tori Hudson and Dee Packard, and to San Francisco to visit more special friends: Emery and Chris, Tim Fox, and David and Barbara Lazarony. At these places I learned to soak in a hot bubbly tub called a hot tub. I just love hot tubs. Tim has a hard time getting us out of that amazing experience. Deon also loves this tub.

Sometimes my mom asks me what I do when I travel. Oh boy, I have a hard time explaining about things, I told her that you sit in a hot tub half naked and the bubbles grab and massage your skin. She responded, and said, "Why go through all that trouble; just walk to the canyon rim after the rain and sit in a pot hole." Tim has a great sense of humor. He says, "You better get out of that hot tub or else it's going to turn into 'Mutton Stew.'" He only says that because I eat a lot of mutton stew and fry bread.

So far, my life has been incredibly blessed by the Holy People. There have been a few struggles, but it's always been replaced by more of the positive outcomes. There were a few hardships for the family, but my elders had done a good job explaining about birth and death to me at an early age.

When someone passes on into their spiritual world, you only cry for four days in your home; that is beginning to be very tough to do now. I try to continue to communicate with the air, water, fire and the soil after four days of our loss. Our elders taught us that all our relatives that pass on are the rain drops, flowers, mountains, rocks, trees, and ani-



Margarita (Summer, 2007)

mals so we must continue to talk to them with love and respect. Sometimes it is hard to make that connection when there are government policies tangled around nature. It is also hard to do that because a lot of our own people do not speak the Diné language and practice the culture anymore. Making positive connections with Mother Earth and Father Sky as our ancestors taught us are practices slowly fading away.

Well, with all this, I didn't so much grow up but I grew with many different kinds of experiences, some good and some not so good. Many of my elders that are in the book, *Crossing Between Worlds*, passed on and some were my young relatives. Some were close relatives to my dear friends in North Carolina, Portland, Palo Alto, and Phoenix. They traveled into their spiritual journeys. Before they left, they left a seed—a seed that will never end. That is why we are still here in the Fifth World.

The most painful and memorable was my Aunt Ellen passing, only because she took with her most of the Canyon de Chelly Diné cultural ways of life. My world stood empty that cold December. The government and the mission say she was born on December 26; she passed on December 23. Some Canyon de Chelly walls have fallen for her and some trees and animals left with her. The weather was harsh that year. Ellen was the oldest true traditional Diné woman. When she lived, everyone stopped their daily chores when she approached. Ellen's words were powerful and sometimes strict. Whenever and whatever words came out of her mouth were usually lessons. Her old ways of wisdom died that day, but her lessons are now becoming clearer. She has been my greatest teacher.

We were driving out of the muddy canyon and my mind drifted off to thinking about how many times we went out and in from the canyon. And they are all always different. I remember one summer dragging out a donkey with our truck; the donkey just couldn't stay away from our mares. There was another time we were speeding up the very deep sandy road trying to not get stuck when our family friend and in-law, Scott, tried to hang on to the truck but he fell out of the truck. It was a good thing he landed on the soft sand; he's okay. There was also a time when we got caught in a flash flood. My husband was driving and he was still in the truck when about ten feet of water just came gushing down the canyon. It took the truck and it almost turned over. That was very scary. We lost our truck, but kept my husband. The next spring we managed to get another truck, and guess where we drove it to? Yes, back to the canyon. Sometimes there is no other way of life but to keep going back to your canyon life.

There were also a lot of happy times; the canyon is where I first drove a tractor. I walked to work and school from Ye' bi cheii Trail. We ran with the ki'nal daa during Ki'nal daa ceremony to White Sands trail and back