

Weaving a Mother's Song into Life

Lorita Adakai, *Artist, 1931-2006*

by Sonja Horoshko; Translation by Darlene Adakai Smith

Lorita Adakai's daughters remember their mother singing to them while she weaved by the light of the kerosene lamp, sitting in front of her loom, tapping the past into the future, making a constant, smooth rhythm—as if time was passing through the wooden comb used to push the colored wool down into the design.

Today, Yanua Morgan sings to us in Navajo, translating the gospel lyrics of the waltz “Amazing Grace.” It feels like a lullaby. It is one of the songs her mother sang while making rugs and saddle blankets in the winter hogan where Yanua and her siblings were raised.

“Our mother was beautiful in everything she did, including the household chores. When she taught us how to use a broom, she said it does not matter if your hogan floor is dirt, you need to sweep with grace, and you must do it with beauty. Being an artist is a way of life, and every strand of your behavior weaves meaning into your existence.”

Nihimá t'áa ha'át'íí shíí íléléh shíí ayóo bee baa ákoniidzin nít'éé'. Hooghan bii' hasht'e hal'íigi bee nahalzhoohí da bee hojooshohgo hazhóó'ógo baa jisti'go dóo baa hoł hózhoqoqo ájiił'íih níigo nanihintin leh. Hwee'ó'ool'í' hólóqoqo éi bee iiná. Ts'ídá t'áálá'í adahaazt'i'go éi bee ájit'éego hwe'iina' bee anoolzhee'.

Because childbirth did not take place in hospitals on the reservation, elderly Navajos can have three or even four official birthdays. Just prior to her death in September 2006, Lorita said to her daughters, “This is my birthday now,” showing them a November date that they did not recognize and she didn't live to celebrate.

K'ad éi díi yizilígíí Níłch'its'ósí bii' ni' dizhchí dashijini.

“Our mother's weavings are like the days in her life. Really, we do not count each weaving separately,” Yanua tells us, “and we shouldn't separate the events or days, but look at how these things weave together, even the flaws, to make a whole, total life. They lead out into the next day, like the line in the weaving that looks like a flaw. It is, instead, an opening, a path leading out to the next weaving. There is no beginning or end to the work. The experience of her life is a weaving.”

Bich'é'é la' áni, Nihimá atł'óogo éi t'áa ákwííjí yee át'éé nít'éé'. Atł'óogi éi doo atł's'aa wólta' da. T'áa ákwííjí ádahooníilii doo al'aa siilyaa da. Biniinaago éi t'ááláhá góne' anoolzhee'go íniilzin. Áádóo náásgóo bíyoolkáál, nanoolzhee' ahineezt'i' nahalingo. Nidi t'áa aa'át'é, alkéé' hahaazt'i'go anoolzhee'. Naanish ál'íigi éi doo ninit'i' da. Díi yééhósinii be'iina' áyiilaa yéé éi atł'ó bíł anoolzhee'. Díi ajit'óogo éi ha'jít'óoh dóo niléi ni'jít'óohjí' nanoolzhee' t'áa háát'i' leh. Díi honaanish ál'íigi aldó' t'áa ákónánát'é, doo ninit'i' da. Áko nihimá atł'ó yíhool'á'aa éi binaanishgo bíniilká.

Lorita began making rugs when she was 14, after her own mother died. Until then, she only observed her mother working. It was her memory that taught her how to weave, sell the work and provide for the family.

“In those days, my mother would finish the rug and then go to Gouldings Trading Post in Monument Valley where the clerk would weigh it and give her credit by the pound to purchase what she needed from behind the counter.”

Íldáá' éi nihimá dah iist'ó' altso niit'óohgo naalyéhé bá hooghangóo yiltos. Áádóo naalyéhé yásidáhi dah iist'ó' néyoołtsosgo yinil'íi áádóo alní' gónaa aháá yiniilééh, yí'neel'aaah biniyé. Díi bik'ehgo éi dah iist'ó' báah adooleelígíí naalyéhé yee nayiilni.

Lorita married Tillman Adakai. They made a home for their family beside the panoramic rock formations in Monument Valley identified by names like The Rabbit and the Bear Having Tea, The Chief, The Stagecoach and The King on the Throne. It was in that inspirational environment that her daughters learned to weave on small handmade looms while listening to their mother's stories about life, beauty and survival.

“She was never finished with her work, teaching us that we shouldn't ever consider our work done. It was important for our survival. Only Gods can do that. It would be like finishing the work of nature if we did.”

Nihimá ánihiłni, díi dah'iist'ó' álnéehgi éi doo ninit'i' da. Háálá binahjí' éi iiná bee baa áhwizhdínóozijł biniyé.

Lorita lived generously, weaving us into her beauty, serenity and grace. She was kind, and her heart was pure.

When a good person passes on, it always rains softly.

Diné yá'át'éehgo naagháá nít'éé'go éi t'áa ha'át'íí shíí bee bééhózin doo dah náhodiidle'go, níłch'i dóo níłtsá ádaat'éi.

We are parked in front of the escarpment at Lorita's home facing a figurative outline in the rocks. It clearly resembles a woman wrapped in a blanket. A massive rock slide formed the shape during her mother's passing when rain began to fall in honor of her life.

“The same as the image in the rocks, artists are the only people who can live forever because their gifts are displayed on someone's wall, like a permanent footprint. They should be respected and thanked because the world always needs artists like our mother. They make a more beautiful place for us, even after they are gone.”

Díi tsé bikáa'gi tsé baah naalzhóodgo kóq yaa halne'. Háishíí ayóo na'ach'aaah nít'éé'go bibee ó'ool'í' yéé la' hooghangóo dah naaznil. Binahjí' éi baa ahééshnizin dooleel dóo hool'áágóo dah jooléel doo. Ákót'éego éi díi nihimá binahjí' bee níil'í. Háálá díi hózónigo éi nihá hahodiilaa, azhá shíi nihits'áá' dah náhodiidle' nidi.



Lorita John Adakai is survived by 21 grandchildren, 7 children. Her weaving is featured in private, public, corporate and museum collections worldwide as well as in many homes in Indian Country, U.S.A.

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Art Director's Note: The typeface used in this story is set in 10 pt. New Times Roman Navajo Regular. The typeface consistently used for all other editorial since the first issue of *Arts Perspective* magazine is Centaur MT Regular.