



**DOROTHY SMITH & HELEN PHILLIPS
ON HISTORY, CULTURE AND TRADITION**

Dorothy Smith and Helen Phillips are patrons of the San Carlos Older Adult Center in south central Arizona. From the San Carlos Apache Reservation, Dorothy is 90 and Helen is 88. Both women lived much of their lives on the reservation, for a while took different paths, and now live only a few streets from one another. PWNA met them through Rosalita, a Program Partner, and learned of the lifetime and values they share.

The School Experience

Recalling her school years off-reservation, Dorothy shares, “I lived in Miami [Arizona] and went to the Phoenix Indian School from elementary until graduation. [Students] could return home during Christmas and summers, but they offered us work (cleaning, sewing and cooking) if we stayed for the summers and I did that.” Dorothy’s comments confirm the boarding school outings mentioned on the PWNA [website](#) under History and Culture.

Meanwhile, Helen explains, “I lived at Coolidge [Dam] and we moved here [San Carlos] when I was four. I stayed here for school, but only made it to 9th grade and then got married... Finally, finally I got married — they were chasing me!” Both women have large families, Helen with seven children and Dorothy with nine; between them, three children passed.

Living the Culture

Both women were raised with a strong presence of tribal culture and language in their homes. Our partner says “they are the only two women that wear their camp dresses every day.” Camp dresses are traditional dress of Apache women. On this day, their dresses are made of cotton and cover their arms and have a long full skirt. Helen’s is in turquoise, and Dorothy’s calico fabric is adorned with a thin pink ribbon. Dorothy informs PWNA staff, “I sew and it can take 6, 8 or even 10 yards of fabric (depending on the size) to make one. Mom taught me to sew and we learned in school. My favorite color is purple.” “Mine is blue,” adds Helen.



Helen shares about the ceremonies still present today. For example, “the Sunrise Ceremony is for girls entering womanhood. I went through it as did my daughters... The ceremony is four days... There is a food exchange, ceremonial dance, crown dancers and a gift exchange.” Dorothy was at school and did not have a Sunrise Ceremony. Asked whether she thought attending boarding school off-reservation had something to do with this, Dorothy said “yes.”

The Tribal Community

Dorothy shares with much clarity some positives and challenges of her community. “Nowadays our language is being chased out. It’s up to the adults — the parents to teach their children. Language is being taught in our schools but not always at home. It shouldn’t be that way. The English language is taking over. It’s up to the people and it can’t be done without them.” Grocery shopping for “better prices” takes the women into Globe, Ariz. and “it helps” to receive USDA commodities.



The tribe just opened a new hospital in Peridot, about 5 miles from San Carlos. “Wellness is here for people that need it,” Dorothy shares. “My health is good — I walk a lot. No vehicles, but still have two good legs! I still dig Peridot (green gemstone) too... it’s good exercise, and you can sell it.”

On June 18, the San Carlos Apache Tribe celebrates their Independence Day, with fireworks, dancing, a carnival for the children and all sorts of contests (frybread making, acorn soup, tortilla making, camp dress and traditional singing contests), bringing everyone together.