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Chad Angasan



The small town of Dillingham, Alaska, has deep roots in commercial fishing, hunting and other forms of gathering food in the wild. Although I have many great memories there, I have painful ones too. Your average Native Alaskan young person has experienced physical, emotional, verbal and/or sexual abuse, and I am no exception. This is why my mother took me out of Dillingham and moved to Keene, Texas. A generous sponsor made it possible for my sister and I to attend Chisholm Trail Academy for a year, and this changed our lives forever. This where God started reshaping who I was.

For so long, I was ashamed of who I was. I continually compared myself to everyone else. I was angry at God, and had many questions about why hurtful, harmful things had happened to me as a child. I had a lingering reminder inside me that I would never be good enough, no matter how hard I tried.

One day during my sophomore year in academy, my teacher asked who would like to preach. For some reason, as I laid my head on the table, barely paying attention, my arm shot up! I raised my head, trying to comprehend what had just happened. I preached my heart out, and when it was over, I started to focus on that unusual feeling I had experienced but couldn't explain: The Holy Spirit pouring through me.

Following high school, I began studying with plans of being a structural engineer. By the time my first college midterms came around I had come to the realization that I may not want to sit

behind a desk for the rest of my life making sure blueprints were up to code. So, I prayed, and God asked me a question in my heart: “Do you want to build structures that will eventually burn up, or do you want to build my kingdom that will last forever?”

I switched my major from engineering to theology and after graduation ended up back home in Dillingham. Then the call came for my wife, Liz, and I to pastor in Togiak, Alaska.

As we landed and I looked down at the village of 800 people, the feelings of shame in who I was came rushing back. I asked God if he was punishing me. Anger, frustration and insecurity surfaced as I vented to God, “Why am I here?”

But God wasn’t finished with me. After visiting many families, I started to slowly remember why I should be proud of being a Native Alaskan. Long ago, before the white people appeared in our villages with their own ideas of civility, my people were survivors and lived in the harshest living environments, and smiled while doing so. My heart was warming up to who God created me to be: An Alaskan Native.

Then it happened. I was sitting among my people during a ceremony. Looking straight ahead, we all waited for the stick to hit the drum. As my people told stories of hunting and fishing through native dance, tears fell from my cheeks. It was the most beautiful display of gratitude. I watched each motion. One of my favorite dances was called “Praising.” A dance thanking God for providing us with clothes and food in a harsh climate. This was the beginning of healing for me.

I realized that God had brought me back to Alaska to reconcile all the bad that had happened there in my childhood. It was there that God reminded me that he had never left my side; he was actually preparing me every step of the way.

My grandmother spent much time in Togiak and connected with so many families that she considered her own. Those young people she loved and adored are now the elders of that village. When Liz and I first arrived in Togiak, we were outsiders. When they found out that I was Malania’s grandson, we were family.

I spent two and a half years ministering in that village. Now, I am a second-year seminarian and God has reminded me that I can be proud of who I am, for I am his child—an Alaskan Native child of God! May we show others the native dance of the Bible—salvation—by living God’s word through our actions and words. Amen!