



Environmental author takes Hopi teen under her wing

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By Stan Bindell
For the Independent

POLACCA, Ariz. — Every youth should find a good mentor. Daryn Melvin, a Hopi High School graduate, found one of the best mentors in acclaimed environmental author Terry Tempest Williams.

For a youth interested in literature, writing and the environment it was a dream come true for Melvin when he joined Williams on part of her recent book tour promoting her book "Finding Beauty in a Broken World."

One of the reasons Williams invited Melvin was because he helped her with one part of the book. The book is broken into three parts. The first part is about time Williams spent in Rwanda and how she adopted her son Louis from there. The second part is about prairie dogs in Indian country. The last part of the book is about Williams' beloved home state of Utah.

Melvin, who is Hopi and Navajo, helped her with input about what prairie dogs mean to Navajos and Hopis.

Melvin said to Navajos the sighting of prairie dogs mean that rain is coming. He said some scientists want to kill prairie dogs, but Native Americans believe that isn't wise because prairie dogs aerate the soil.

"The book is about a different way of knowing," he said.

"It's not just about western science. It's about a larger picture and different patterns."

Melvin said the book is about different cultures and places and how they make the world beautiful.

Melvin joined Williams at book tour stops at University of Montana, University of Utah, Vermont Law School and Dartmouth College. Williams would address crowds and afterward take questions with Melvin joining in the question and answer period.

Melvin earned a bachelor's degree in environmental studies with a minor in Native American studies from Dartmouth. Melvin initially met Williams when he was in high school and working for the Black Mesa Trust against Peabody coal mines. But Williams became more of a mentor when they

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were both at Dartmouth.

While Melvin was a student there, Williams was based there as a Montgomery Fellow to see how more young people could become involved in environmental projects.

Melvin and Williams also worked together at the Murie Center in Yellowstone National Park and then became involved with the Great West Institute. This institute has a Next Generation Project to expand grassroots efforts to preserve the best qualities about western communities.

The goal, according to institute literature, is to create a think-tank style program to use the fresh ideas of young leaders. Melvin is one of 12 young leaders interested in expanding environmentalism.

Williams and Melvin co-taught an ecology class the past four summers at the University of Utah. This coming summer they will co-teach the ecology class at the Grand Canyon.

Melvin wants to continue to teach, write and share ideas. He also wants to be more environmentally active on the Hopi Reservation where he is concerned that some tribal council members want to open up 19,000 acres for coal mining. He spent the better part of his youth opposing coal mining on the Hopi Reservation.

"I understand it's a tough decision because of the economy. The council members feel they are between a rock and a hard place, but I think there are other options to improve the economy," he said.

Williams writes about the environment, but she has also taken on issues such feminism, cancer and the Mormon culture. She studied environmental education at the University of Utah and then worked at the Utah Museum of Natural History as curator of education and naturalist in residence.

One of Williams best-known works is her book "Refuge: An Unnatural History of Family and Place." This book deals with her mother's battle with ovarian cancer during the concurrent flooding of the Bear River Migratory Bird Refuge — a special place to Williams since her childhood.

The book questions whether the high incidence of cancer in her family is due to being a down winder during nuclear testing in America.

Williams lives in Castle Valley, Utah, with her husband Brooke who is director of the Murie Center in Moose, Wyo.

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