I Am a Proud Father

By Victor Rodriguez
(Yaqui)

WHEN I WAS GROWING UP, I was on my own at a relatively young age. So I grew up without any real guidance. By 15, I had an apartment and worked any job I could find. I ended up in trouble with the law once or twice. The more negative things I saw, the more I knew what I didn't want. I can remember thinking if I ever had any children, they wouldn't grow up like I did.

When we found out my wife, Deonnah, was with child, I became committed to the health of our future children. I wanted them to have healthy parents, to have healthy lives. I wanted to be a parent who helped his children achieve cultural, physical, and emotional balance in the two worlds we live in.

Deonnah is from the Pacific Northwest Puyallup Tribe, and I am Yaqui. We often look at both tribes' traditions when schooling our children. We offer our children two voices, two ways of knowing.

Today when someone asks me, "How are you?" I answer, "I am a proud father." And I mean it.

Deonnah is a wonderful woman. It is reflected in the eyes of our beautiful daughters, Machiwa, who is two years old, and Séwa, who is three months old.

To be a responsible Native American father, my first concern is Deonnah's spiritual, mental, and emotional wellness. The mother is the heartbeat of the family. For her to have the energy to mother well, I make sure she has time for herself. I support her and her commitments to ceremony, craftwork, and personal time to see a movie, visit friends, or go to a workshop or conference.

It is my honor to support my wife in any way to take care of our children. There is no such thing as me being a "babysitter" to my children—I am their parent.

As our daughters grow older, we would like them to understand healthy boundaries. We want them to learn from us and the many cultural teachers in our lives. Knowing their culture will help them gain their own perspectives.

Our children will always know we care for them. They will have the opportunity to be children and express themselves as children, so they can grow emotionally and spiritually as children should.

Machiwa is only two. She is very charismatic and loves to express herself, often by giving hugs. People see her and tell us what a happy child they see in her. It's times like this Deonnah and I know we are on the right track.

Victor Rodriguez with his wife, Deonnah McCloud, and their daughters, Machiwa, age two, and Séwa, age three months.

Produced by IHS
Division of Diabetes Treatment and Prevention, 6/2013