

AUBURN

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Chapter 20 - Crazy Coyote Restaurant

The Judge interrupted. "Mr. Nati. Did you tell me leaving that building as it is will destroy your business?"

"Yes sir, your honor."

"You stand by that? Are you saying that is absolutely true?"

"Yes, your honor."

"And your mechanics would have trouble finding other work?"

"Yes, your honor. There is no other work."

He announced his decision would be a written order that the building could not be left as it existed at that time. If that required digging up all that dirt, baking it, and replacing that building, then that would be beyond his power to say otherwise. He did say no appeal bond, and he was preparing the record for an appeal to the Arizona Court of Appeals if they wanted to. But there was one little catch. If they appealed, he would hold a hearing on daily damages.

They appealed. They paid us after another fight in which Wheelchair Bob was perfect as the star witness. While we were closed, us guys all took courses on auto and truck repair at the Navajo community college. Even me in my denim shirt dresses got my finger nails dirty. Instead of an old engine to rebuild, the instructor told me he thought I would be up to something more difficult. I tore apart and rebuilt a heavy truck transmission.

Those lawyers attacked me in their appeal for wearing dresses and diapers.

I thought *how did they find out about my diapers?* In my response I admitted those details, and repeated my speech about this being a free country, and my business had been successful anyway.

The Appeals Court stated the ruling differently, and said the building could not be left in a condition where it could not be occupied.

They appealed to the Arizona Supreme Court.

The day came when we had to drive several hours to the State Capital in Phoenix.

By now I had been getting used to the idea of wearing a white shirt with that pleated skirt and matching jacket. I had also been to a Navajo wedding where some men wore traditional decorations hanging from their head. Some of those had turquoise decorations. I wore that suit dress outfit and my turquoise earrings which I liked more and more. I secretly wanted a fancy woman's white blouse and maybe even a bust to make it look right.

The Acolytes thought that was funny. They did buy it for me, and let me try the bra and prosthetic breasts in private. But not to the Supreme Court. They bought me a pair of women's flats for shoes in a masculine dark brown. They didn't think sandals would cut it for the Supreme Court. They did take me to the beauty salon for my hair, and they did a little makeup on me that morning. In the process they darkened my face a little, which also made my appearance Indian enough that maybe the earrings would be acceptable.

Into that imposing Courtroom I went, earrings flashing, and accompanied by all the employees and the Acolytes.

Those corporate lawyers scowled at me.

I put on a gentle smile. I hoped it spooked them.

The Justices interrupted whenever they felt like it. They asked tough questions of those corporate lawyers, the tribal lawyer, and Mr. Sheldon. They were sweating, and I think I saw their hands shaking. This became a major case of protecting the tribe.

The woman Chief Justice called on me.

I went to the podium with what I had learned from everyone. "Yes, your honor." I felt as terrified as the tribal lawyer seemed to be.

She said. "I see several people in the Court. Are these the people referred to as losing their jobs?"

I said. "Some are, your honor? The men."

She asked. "Is one of these the man referred to as Wheelchair Bob?"

I said. "Yes, your honor." I had become good at that phrase with a full voice.

She said. "Is he the disabled American veteran from the Iraq War on a full disability?"

I said. "Yes, your honor."

She said. "So he has full pay?"

I said. "Yes, your honor." Then a thought bolted through my fright. "But not self-esteem your honor. He can't find work anywhere else, either." I snapped my mouth shut before I said too much.

She said. "And there isn't another regular gas station in this little town?"

I said. "No, your honor."

She said. "And no regular truck repair, either."

I become bored being a broken record.

She said. "And the entire town is on the reservation."

I said. "Uh, no your honor, but completely surrounded by the reservation as if it is."

She asked. "Are you claiming a disability?"

I said. "No, your honor. I just want to wear a dress. I thought this is a free country, or did someone ring a bell and change that without telling me?"

That put a smile on all five of those prestigious justices.

She said. "Are you a transsexual? Trying to be a woman?"

I said. "No, your honor. I think the reason was written into one of those papers, and I answered with the truth. If it please the court, your honor."

She said. "And you think you can run a major business?"

I said. "No, your honor, I don't think any such thing." I explained all those awful bosses across the country, and how we used an Indian Council method of governing.

Those corporate lawyers leapt to their feet objecting to my giving new testimony.

I have never seen a woman scowl quite the way that Chief Justice did at those three lawyers. "We want to know what we want to know. We have a very unusual young man in front of us. You are asking to close his business down. I want to know if this claim of his is real. He just convinced me it is. No, you did by trying to cut him off." She leafed through papers. "I see you go by the name of Nati. Did someone give you that as an Indian name?"

I said. "Yes, your honor. Someone gave that to me. It means I am a caring person in Navajo, or something like that. I am Anglo, and can't speak Navajo hardly at all, and definitely not correctly. I never claim otherwise."

She said. "Would everyone here stand up who works for or with Mr. Nati?"

Everyone in the courtroom stood up including Uncle Joe and the Acolytes. Two of the mechanics helped the struggling Wheelchair Bob stand up too.

She said. "The Appellant has ten days to brief the Court on the impact of the Americans With Disabilities Act on this case. That is fully brief the Court. The Respondent has a week after that to reply. Further, the Appellant is represented by a major law firm, but we have a Pro Se Respondent from a very small town many miles away. If you reference any case from outside of Arizona or any Federal case you will provide a full copy to all of the Respondents."

The tribal lawyer and Mr. Sheldon quickly saw the flaws to the opponents in the cases they provided. I took a copy of Mr. Sheldon's response, lined through his name and address, and wrote in my own and signed it. The Acolyte Ruth drove a full day to

Phoenix delivering our responses.

The Court ruled the Distributor and the big oil company could not leave a damaged and unusable building. They remanded the entire case to the local trial Court to work out the details.

They appealed to the United States Supreme Court, but they wouldn't accept the appeal.

By now I had taken several courses including Bob and I took one together on bookkeeping. The mechanics had taken every course available on location, and even became qualified vehicle safety and environmental inspectors.

The trial Court made them dig up everything until the soil inspections came up clean. The Judge discovered the newest regulations required a very different building.

Those lawyers were seething.

The judge said. "Go ahead, appeal."

But they didn't. I could tell things changed when they became a little less unfriendly. We told them to give us a figure for what gas station with a small snack bar would cost.

Instead, they built a spiffy Love's type place, plus a much larger sheet metal tin can repair building, and then the County threw another requirement at us. We couldn't even give away free coffee without a health permit.

With that as our equity, we were back to the bank for another SBA loan for a real restaurant, but needed a name. No proposed name quite worked for everyone. The whole discussion became too crazy. Finally with the contractor about to build the walls the women accepted my suggestion based on their calling this too crazy. We called the restaurant the 'Crazy Coyote', with a by-line of 'you'll howl at our food'.

I had to work at it with the staff to host every group we could find. Or made ourselves. The town leaders of business owners, school teachers, and the minister of the nearby Mormon church was one such group. We put up a teepee in the repair bay on Sunday morning for a Native American Church meeting. A teacher asked if he could have a Christian Service? Sure, go ahead. How do you want it? He said just a few rows of chairs would do just fine.

I sat in on a few Native American spiritual meetings, but didn't understand the words, and didn't quite fit in. The Acolytes went there, but also came with me to the Christian Service, too. They wanted to know it all. The teacher had a paper back book on saving Jesus from the organized church. The Acolytes loved it, and thought I might enjoy it. I loved it too.

When the truckers liked the restaurant so much they wanted to stay overnight we built showers for them and rented trailers we placed out back. We rented all sorts of stuff. We even rented a pair of mobile home trailers adding to the little village out back. Wheelchair Bob could stay in one, and our office needing space used the other. One of the waitresses wanted to live with him. We told the state police they could prepare their reports back there in the air conditioning. We became a favorite of theirs in the heat of that long desolate stretch of the Interstate.

The staff took courses at the community college on restaurant cooking and operations. Even though the staff was less than thrilled with it, the truckers and the tourists bragged up and down the Interstate about the restaurant's Mex-Tex food.