



From Chiltepin to Chivas, It's Been a Wild Ride!

Dear Friends and Colleagues:

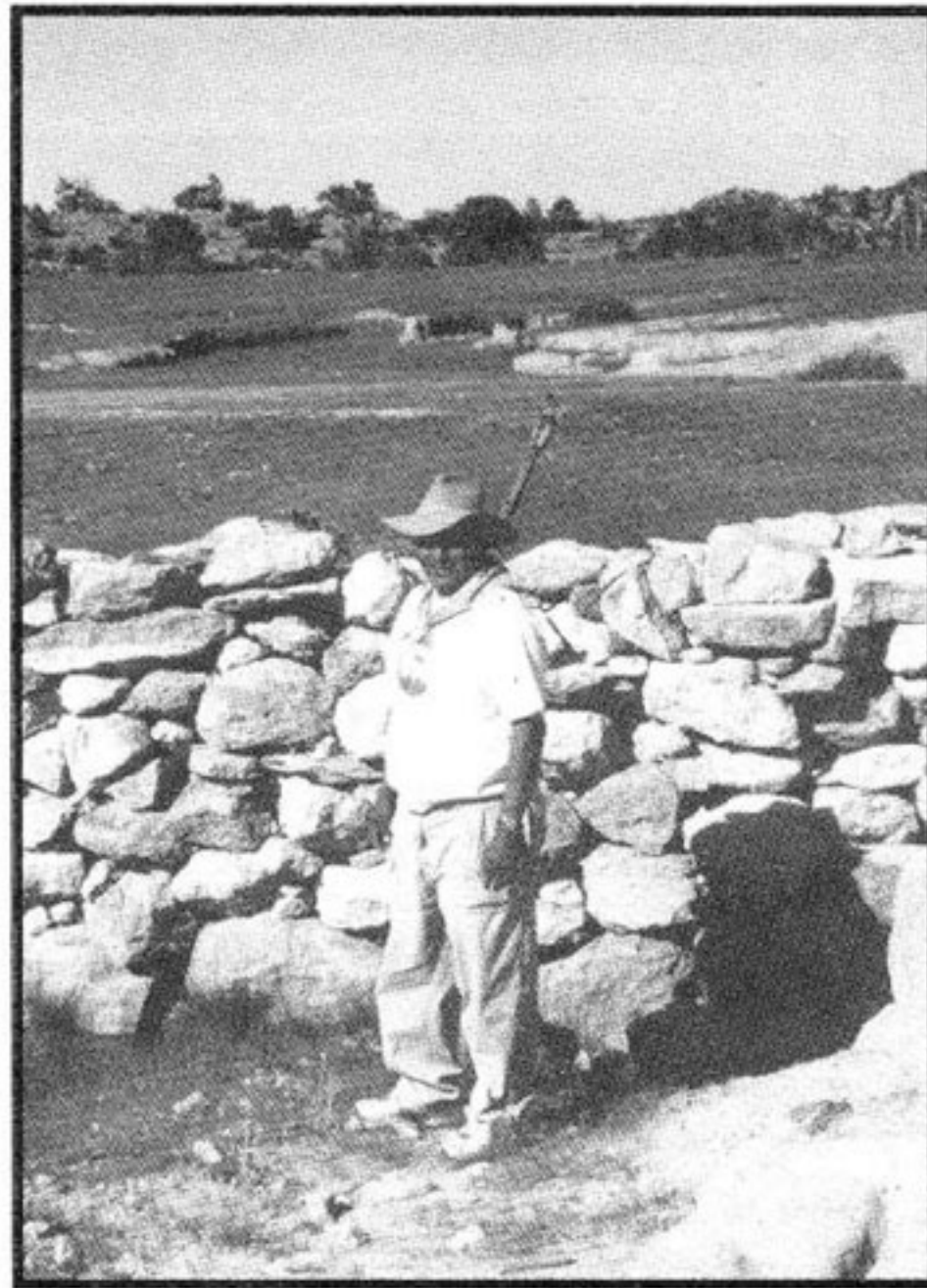
I would like to acknowledge and thank staff, board, members and donors for making the last ten years of my life so rewarding. I stepped down as Executive Director of Native Seeds/SEARCH on October 31. I have had one of the greatest privileges this world can offer in serving as Executive Director for almost six years. It has been a wonderful and challenging journey that almost didn't happen!

I was elected to the Board of Directors in 1990. I was later asked if I would consider taking over the position of NS/S Executive Director whenever Mahina Drees stepped down. I initially said, "no!"

After further discussion, I told them that I would consider the Executive Director position when the time came. In November, 1992, I was asked to become Native American Outreach Coordinator at "8 hours per week for just two months." Just before the two-month period was up, I also became Diabetes Project Director for "an additional 20 hours per week for only three months." Exactly two years later, on January 1, 1995, I became Executive Director of NS/S. My original commitment was for three years. However, at the end of that period, I felt that the organization had not achieved the level of operation I had hoped. From then on, I made a commitment to serve on a year-to-year basis.

The resultant journey has been fascinating. I'll never forget jaunts through the recently-designated Wild Chile Botanical Preserve searching for chiltepin plants in their northernmost native habitat while successfully avoiding "up close and personal" meetings with rattlesnakes. Hiking breathlessly through the Sierra Madre, avoiding being gored by chivas (goats) to see the results of our efforts to assist communities was another memorable experience.

Over the years, I have visited almost every sovereign nation in Arizona and New Mexico to speak about NS/S and our programs. Fond memories include working as a liaison between NS/S and the Traditional Native American Farm-



Angelo inspects a trinchera on a 1998 trip to the Sierra Madre.

ers Association (TNAFA), which formed after a NS/S-sponsored conference in Gallup, NM, in 1992. About sixty-five farmers, mostly elders, expressed concern that when they passed on, their seeds might also die. They felt that younger tribal members may not recognize or understand the roles that farming and traditional crops play in their cultures. Today, TNAFA is thriving and playing a vital role in disseminating information to and supporting Native American communities. Another reward of my job was the opportunity to work with so many tribal people and learn of the similarities and differences between our cultures.

Exchanging information with other tribes made me appreciate my own Tohono O'odham culture to a much greater degree. I will always remember the hospitality of Pueblo people who invited me into their homes at feasts, especially out of the snow during the Buffalo Dance at Tesuque Pueblo. I thank them for their patience and understanding in answering my questions as well as for sharing their laughter.

In November 1998, I found myself in Rarámuri (Tarahumara) country in the Sierra Madre visiting villages where our projects are in place. In Rowerachi, I spoke to a gathering of community members participating in our trinchera project—a project to reclaim soil and prevent further erosion by constructing trincheras (rock walls). As I began to address the group of men in the O'odham language, I noticed a commotion as the headman made a comment and the men removed their hats. I continued speaking and then repeated my remarks in English. My remarks were first translated into Spanish by Suzanne (who oversees the project) and then into Rarámuri by Juan Daniel Villalobos, our local project coordinator. As community members made remarks the translation process was reversed. What a wonderful opportunity to hear four languages at work! It was only later that I became aware of the significance and honor bestowed upon me by the removal of their hats—an act reserved only for visiting dignitaries. I was speechless for one of the few times in my life.

The challenges faced by Native Seeds/SEARCH are varied to say the least. In 1997, the U. S. Department of Agriculture (USDA) attempted to confiscate our wheat collections due to the Karnal Bunt crisis. A collection we were growing out for the first time had tested positive for the fungus that adds a fishy taste to the crop. We held firm in our conviction that, as stewards of the seeds, we would be violating our promise to those who entrusted them to us for safekeeping if we allowed them to be taken off-site. A compromise was made allowing us to bag the wheat collections—wrapped in evidence tape—and store them in our seedbank

A Farewell from Executive Director, Angelo J. Joaquin, Jr.

with the stipulation that we not open the bags without a USDA presence. A year later, the state-wide ban was lifted.

Other milestones include moving our "museum" from the Tucson Botanical Gardens to a storefront on Fourth Avenue and the purchase of the Conservation Farm in Patagonia, both of which occurred in 1997. These two events, monumental and beneficial to NS/S, catalyzed the need to develop a plan for the future. While striving to remain a grassroots organization, our recent growth and the need to financially support that growth has required us to review our programs, priorities and goals. A \$255,000 increase in annual operating costs over a 5-year period epitomized the challenges facing the organization. Needless to say, it's been a long and at times difficult process. As a result of much hard work, we've recently completed a three-year Strategic Plan, ratified by the board on September 12, 2000.

For me personally, the crowning accomplishment occurred a few years ago. A group of elders from the Gila River Indian Community (Akimel O'odham, or River People) visited our offices at TBG. As the group toured the room with shelves filled with jars of seeds, an elder asked if we had a "spotted" lima bean from her tribe. She told us that her grandfather and others had grown them but that she had not seen them for about 25 years. A staff member pulled a

jar marked "Gila River Mottled Lima Beans" from a shelf. The elder was visibly taken aback, and even more so, when she was told she could have some for her own garden at no charge. The seeds represented a tangible connection to her youth, her grandfather and her ancestors. This event illustrates the value of the organization's mission and is why I will always remain a member.

In conclusion, I remain committed to the mission of Native Seeds/SEARCH—to ensure these seeds are available to future generations through our responsible stewardship. I have worked with many exceptional people in this organization over the years and am proud to have had a hand in building the team—staff, board, members and donors—that will successfully achieve the goals we have set. As an organization, NS/S seems to be guided by a "power" that attracts compassionate and qualified folks committed to its mission. I believe NS/S is blessed with such good fortune because it operates in a manner that honors and respects the seeds and the people who entrusted the seeds to our care. I wish all of you and the organization continued good fortune. Lastly, I deeply appreciate the support and friendship you have given me throughout my tenure as Executive Director.

Respectfully,
Angelo J. Joaquin, Jr.
Executive Director

From Mahina Drees, Board Chairman

Angelo J. Joaquin, Jr. guided Native Seeds/SEARCH through six years of incredible change and growth. A man of enormous calm and stability, he turned stressful times into positive challenges.

Angelo has been an articulate and compelling speaker for NS/S, helping us gain acceptance and support within Native American and other communities. He has shared a genuine passion for the mission with a wide diversity of audiences including young people, tribal elders, farmers, members, and funders. Angelo's loyalty to the seeds and his understanding of our mission to protect them has kept us on track.

A resolution of the Board of Directors unanimously passed on November 4, 2000

To Angelo:

The Board of Directors wishes to acknowledge your many contributions to Native Seeds/SEARCH. During your tenure as Executive Director, Native Seeds/SEARCH grew to become the pre-eminent organization preserving the crop genetic and cultural diversity of the southwest region. We thank you for your hard work, dedication, and accomplishments, which leave Native Seeds/SEARCH a strong and dynamic organization. We wish you the best in your future pursuits, and look forward to your ongoing partnership.