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Corral Family: Robert Corral III (Youth)

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ROBERT CORRAL III

Robert Corral began his life in French Camp in 1979. He is of mixed ancestry—Caucasian, Mexican and Native American—but he identifies with his Native American heritage. Robert feels his interests, beliefs and personality are similar to those of other Native Americans. He is very proud to consider himself a part of the Northern Valley Yokut/Ohlone/Me-Wok tribe and of the California Indian culture.

Although Robert's family doesn't live on a reservation, his parents are still active in the Native American community. His mother and father are Native American Monitors. As Monitors, Robert's parents act as liaisons between the Indian community and the archeologists, contractors and public agencies that plan the development of and building on native lands. Watching the proactive roles his parents have chosen, Robert has internalized the importance of helping a community preserve its identity and heritage.

Before a person can successfully help others find and preserve their identity, however, one has to understand his own. While growing up, Robert's father didn't press his Catholic beliefs on Robert or his sister. Robert was encouraged to choose for himself. Robert maintains that religion can take many shapes and forms and is crucial to a person's identity. He believes that everyone, in one way or another, has spirituality, and is somehow guided by it. As Robert says, "Religion is where we find out what we are and what we believe in."

While in elementary school, Robert felt connected with his heritage. He participated in a school program in which the Native American students were given the opportunity to learn, in detail, about their tribe's history and culture. Robert continued in this special program throughout high school, and was also part of the Magnet Program.

Because Robert's father constantly supported and encouraged him to do well, Robert felt compelled to work and study hard to avoid becoming "anyone's donkey!" As Robert continued to mature in both age and knowledge, he became interested in the field of business. He took part in the Business Careers Program at Woodruff Regional Occupational Center. From this experience, he confirmed that he would pursue a career in business. After high school, Robert attended Heald Business College in Stockton. To this day, Robert feels he learned a great deal from his education and treasures the knowledge he has gained.

As he has grown older, Robert's tribe and family have become increasingly important to him. The Northern Valley Yokut/Ohlone/Me-Wok tribe's attempt to establish tribal rights before a federal court had great impact on Robert's family and friends. It was tragic for them when the legal strategy failed and their request was denied. This failure convinced them of need to stick together and aggressively fight to preserve their traditions. The Corral family feels that if they don't fight, their tribe may never be recognized as the only culture, native to the land upon which they live.

Although the continued battle for tribal recognition has taken a toll on Robert, he still remembers happier times with his tribe. At their meetings, Robert recalls how he would sit and listen to his grandfather's stories and memories about times and places so different from his own. His grandfather's tales taught Robert about life and about his heritage.

Through his grandfather stories, Robert has come to appreciate how lucky he has been to have grown up in a generation with increased freedom from racism. He senses that tolerance of ethnic diversity is much more widespread than in his parents' and grandparents' day. But with a shift toward acceptance of difference, Robert suspects that his own community has been tempted to adopt practices other than those handed down within the tribe. Still, he has no intention of letting go of his deeply ingrained culture.

In addition to maturing through the mastery of his ethnic heritage, Robert sees as an important step to adulthood the receipt of his driver's license. This new mobility, coupled with his early graduation from high school, has transformed the way Robert's family treats him. His family recognizes he is now capable of more responsibility. He is personally proud of his accomplishments and the way he has managed his time to accomplish goals he has set for himself.

While it is certain that Robert, at age 25, has much more to learn, he counts on his determination, enthusiasm, and love of family to see him through the remaining journey to adulthood.

Interviewer: Grant Ashley

Author: Jillian Altfest

Ethnic Group: Native American

Generation: Youth