**FUNDRAISING SPEECH**

**FOR**

**TOLLESON NAIL**

Hello everyone!!! Thank you for allowing us a few minutes to tell you about Sacred Road Ministries and why we're here. In life, if we are lucky, we realize the blessings that are all around us, we give thanks every day, and search for the ways and means to share those blessings. Let's face it, all the advantages and opportunities in the world mean nothing if they are not used for good. Every day my wife Tollie and I count our blessings. We have our wonderful son, Zeke, we have our health, and most importantly we have our faith. We also have a deep and abiding love and appreciation of humanity, and when we heard about Sacred Road Ministries, we knew we had found our calling. Sacred Road serves the Yakama Nation (**Do you say nation or tribe? Please adjust as needed**) in Washington state.

The Yakama are our "first neighbors." They are the essence and spirit of American heritage, and as a culture and a community, they have fallen through the cracks of life. Because of circumstances and situations, the culture is broken. Despair has won and it has taken a serious toll on the quality of life for these people. Conditions are dire and Tollie and I know that we cannot live a fulfilling life in service to God if we cannot serve these people, especially their children.

Everything we do in our lives brings back pictures and recollections from times gone by. When I think back to when I was a kid, seeing a school bus brought so many thoughts and memories. Getting on that bus, going to school with my friends, traveling to.... who knows where.... but always knowing the last trip of the day would take me **home**. Being an adult and having an opportunity to get on a school bus on the reservation brought a whole new experience. Tuesday night is Youth Group for the Yakama kids. The ministry picks up the kids by bus. Dinner is served, activities are enjoyed, and at the end of the evening, it's back to the bus to go home. ...Sounds like fun... right? I will never, ever forget the first time I had the blessing to be on the bus as the evening began. As each young boy and girl entered, we checked to make sure we knew where their homes were and where they would be going after Youth Group. Without exception, each one said, "Oh, we'll find out at church." The stream of kids was seemingly endless. I stopped counting at thirty-nine. It became overwhelming. There were about sixty children that night... young children... right here in **OUR** country, who, for all intents and purposes, were functionally homeless. Their lives were in their backpacks and although smiles were on their faces, their young, insurmountable burdens were on their backs. Youth Group is just one night a week. There are six other days. Because of conditions and crises that plague the Yakama Nation, these kids have been the lost boys and girls. Where do they sleep? Where do they play, and most importantly, where do they **DREAM**?

Tollie and I knew instantly when we found Sacred Roads that this was and is our destiny. There are no "accidents" in life. Every chance encounter has a purpose, and God truly spoke to us with this one. We have been traveling to Washington to serve the Yakama youth and community for the past several years doing whatever we can, either on site or remotely, but we know the time has come to fully heed our calling. We plan to move to the reservation within the next few months. We are needed there, and we need to serve these children.

It's been said that a person can be measured.... not where he or she stands in comfort or convenience, but **HOW** he or she takes a stance in times of challenge. The children of the Yakama Nation are the future of their community and this country. We have been called to serve them but we cannot do it alone. Those kids have a light and a hope in their eyes and it's up to us to fan that light with faith, love, and a path to a meaningful future. No child in this country should have to "couch surf" because they don't have a home to call their own. Sacred Roads provides nourishment for their bodies, minds, and souls. We are here to tell you our intentions, and to ask for your support.

A movie was made several years ago that contained the tag line, "If you build it, they will come." When we first visited Sacred Road Ministries, we saw the build in process, and the numbers of youth waiting for us keep growing. The anticipation is palpable. We saw that although dozens of kids .... actually there can be as many as one hundred and twenty in attendance on a Tuesday night... anywhere in age from three to twenty-two years old, need to have positive adult roll models to allow them to feel safe and to guide them to understanding that it is possible to have a better life. And they need this **EVERY DAY.**.... not just on Tuesday nights. The conditions on the reservation in the past have been astonishing. (**You can give statistics here about child abuse, drug and alcohol use, etc**). \_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_. These children must be shown that a better life is possible.

Tolleson and I are ready to do God's work and willing to serve.... we are here to ask for your support in being **able** to serve. Your generosity ..... whatever you can afford to share, will endow a future for these kids. It is our purpose and intention to build a **healthy** context of family, a feeling of trust, a sustainable, faith based community, and deep and lasting personal dignity for each child in the Yakama Nation..... no exceptions.

Thank you and God bless you all.