

The Native American religious ceremony I attended was my best friend's first menstrual period rite of passage which I now know is called a "Kinaalda". This took place near Window Rock Arizona on the Indian reservation. My friend lived in a very secluded part of the reservation. The people invited were all women which included her mother, grandmother, sisters, and cousins and only a few friends. It started off with a fast. Many people shared stories about her as a child and their hopes for her as a woman. As the day progressed I was told that the rituals of the morning were tradition to her family and her tribe and I could participate or watch. I was really unsure about what was going to take place but I was very intrigued.

After a long day of fasting and storytelling we all went to bed and were woken up at around four am. I was told that the ceremonies of today would begin. First my friend was washed by her mother and grandmother in a bath in the living room while they recited prayers and everyone looked on. This was a cleansing ritual. After the she was wrapped in a ceremonial blanket that was made by a great ancestor or family member and it had been in the family for many years. It was brown with a red and white bird stitched on the back. They wrapped her hair in a special bun that had a story that went with it and the hand wrap was her great grandmothers. She wore beautiful turquoise necklaces and other jewelry that was given to her, along with other jewelry that had been blessed by someone in their tribe.

My friend was then led outside. Barefoot and naked except for the blanket and jewelry she began to run while others ran behind her and some watched and prayed. The run was her entrance into womanhood and her showing her oneness with Mother Earth. She ran for a really long time and when she returned she came inside and was prayed to by her mother and other family members. The prayer lasted for about an hour. She then dressed in her traditional dress which was hand-made by her grandmother. It was very colorful. It consisted of a skirt and a simple pull-over top. After a short while religious men of the tribe and a medicine man showed up and prayed over her. As the day began to turn to night a big feast was prepared and everyone ate. This was the end of the ceremony. This event took place when I was around thirteen years old. I was really unsure of what was going to take place as I had never been to one of these ceremonies before. I felt much honored and privileged to be a part of her rite of passage and thought it was beautiful how her family upheld such long-standing traditions.