

Giving Thanks to All My Relations

An act of thanksgiving

By **Kat Avila, Contributing Writer** | Published on LatinoLA: November 24, 2012



"I give thanks to all my relations."

The line jarred loose from my brain last night as I gazed up and spotted the faint hourglass-shaped constellation of Orion the Hunter, which can be seen at this time of year until February. Seeing the constellation reminded me of my dad when he first pointed it out to me as a child: "The three stars make up the belt of Orion."

And thinking about my dad brought to mind the last family dog we owned, and a whole lot of other things, including a time when I had been a student of the Native American Medicine Wheel. Thus the common prayer closing - that reaffirms our connection to Mother Earth and everything in it - came to me easily.

It would not come as any surprise that this Thanksgiving Day I went hiking. This time I even remembered to bring a plastic grocery bag to pick up trash along the trail. I took it as a good sign when I saw a pair of turkey vultures circling in the cloudless blue sky over the distant hills.

However, as the contents of my trash bag jingled and jangled, I wondered about the futility of what I was doing. First, at one of my favorite off-trail spots, I saw a scattered group of clothing price tags and an empty can of Rockstar. Great, now I'm cleaning up after a shoplifter.

Then I met a couple walking their dog who either had not seen or chose to disregard the "No Dog" signs posted throughout the area. If wildlife smells dog or dog poop on the trails, they will stay away. Hmm, maybe they were responsible for the dog litter bags I had run across earlier, including a filled one waiting for me at the park's entrance.

All this brought to mind a familiar fable about a young boy who was throwing dying starfish from the dry sand back into the deep ocean. An observer asked the kid, "Isn't this a big waste of time? After all, they keep washing ashore."

"Maybe so. But it matters to this one," the boy said as he tossed yet another (lucky) starfish back.

I grudgingly admitted to myself that I was doing the right thing. At least I wouldn't have to look at the same trash on my next visit.

I paused to watch a vulture circling overhead. The sun was shining through its tail feathers in such a way that they looked an eye-catching red. Brother Vulture.

As I pondered on the native concept of referring to birds and animals as "brothers" or "sisters," a mule deer bounded across the trail just yards in front of me. It was followed by another...yet still another...wow. A buck and two does. Of course, I didn't get any pictures. Sometimes you just watch. I penciled in the time, 11:19, in my notebook.

Exiting the park, I met a trio of guys - grandpa, dad, and young son. Dad asked in reference to my plastic bag, "Is there a grocery store up there?"

"No, I was picking up trash, so now it's all beautiful for you!" I snatched up a doggy poop bag to deposit into my bag.

"Thank you, thank you!" they smiled and laughed.

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I give thanks to all my relations. Happy Thanksgiving weekend!

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