

## STOCKTONSpeaks!

### **FRANCISCO CARDENAS**

Sometimes Francisco Cardenas felt tense growing up, but he always found peace at a Mother Lode retreat, the tribal round house in Volcano. He remembers people all around him, dancing and talking, but they also gave him space to just stop and think. "It was a calm, soothing place," he recalls. He could leave behind school and work. Outside this sanctuary, however, being an adolescent was a challenge. Francisco craves independence, but he also wants recognition from his family and community.

Francisco was born in Stockton and raised there with his three sisters. As the youngest, he often felt immature. His parents gave him their full attention, but the result of their concern was a life with little room to make his own way. He sensed that, despite their respect for him, his father did not think him responsible nor would his mother treat him as anything but a child as long as he lived in the family home. His parents were so protective that they did not want him to ask questions in school—they wanted him simply to cooperate with the teachers. He knew their directives were well intentioned, but for him, they still went against the grain.

A particular point of sensitivity with his parents was Francisco's religious preference. While he acknowledged the influence of the Catholic Church in his life, he finds many of the Church's teachings intolerant, tending to support the powerful against the weak. He is more attracted to Miwok religion where the individual can right any wrongs he commits by taking action on his own. By comparison, repentance in Catholicism seems passive and directed by an outer source. "I feel I am truly a Native American," Francisco explains, "because of their spirituality."

It took a long time for Francisco's father to understand his son's religious feelings; at first he was frustrated, exhorting Francisco to accept Catholic

teachings on faith. Francisco found himself reacting in anger; he felt his father was denying him a faith that he could embrace passionately.

Whenever given the opportunity outside the home, Francisco excelled. He matured rapidly during high school. He applies various things he learned in the classroom to everyday life—sometimes creatively in typical teenage ways. Learning from geometry lessons at school, Francisco improved his success playing pool by choosing the ideal angle for every shot.

Francisco is also passionate about languages; he already speaks English and Spanish, but plans to learn Miwok, Southern Sierra Miwok, Portuguese, and French. He is always eager to keep busy, applying himself diligently because he knows the pride that results from accomplishments.

Working with his father in construction, Francisco found he could apply great energy to each task because the work was so immediately gratifying. Soon his father resigned the senior role as teacher and, instead, came to depend on Francisco, because the son had become such a fast worker. Working together side by side, Francisco earned his father's respect. At the same time, Francisco gained recognition from his mother and sisters when he became the first of the siblings to get a driver's license. This achievement gave him a sense of freedom and independence. His mother recognized his new maturity by allowing Francisco to drive her car.

The car helps him find entertainment outside of the home, but he finds pleasures at home, too. Francisco is passionate about cooking and enjoys preparing food in his own special style. He puts his mark on every dish by using a unique blend of spices, eager to try new foods and create new tastes in his own dishes.

Francisco has learned the etiquette and customs associated with his Miwok background from parents and friends. He is one of forty people who attend the meetings of the Miwok regularly, while hundreds of others show up rarely and contribute little to the band. "I don't think it's right that people come just once a year to eat and receive money." Francisco explains, "That attitude

doesn't show respect towards the elders at all." Francisco is proud of his identity as a Miwok and honors his tribe. While his peers depend on their parents for money, and some are even addicted to drugs, Francisco stays independent and tries to make his parents proud.

Still, Francisco knows that he has some growing up to do. He recognizes that manhood is not attainable through a single event or action; it is achieved through hard work, through building a family and through accepting the responsibilities that come along with family life. Even so, Francisco still strives first and foremost to gain the praise of his parents.

"I want to graduate and move out of the house." Francisco says, "I want to show my parents what I can achieve on my own."

Author: George Kim  
Interviewer: Tanya Moreno  
Ethnic Group: Native American  
Generation: Youth