Box 144
Thoreau, N.M. 87323

Dear Laura Gilpin:

I met you once, but you probably won't remember.

I had taken my Navajo mother and father, the John Martins, to the Navajo Museum in Santa Fe, and you came with some of your wonderful photographs to ask if they could identify some of the Crownpoint people.

Incidentally, he asked about you just the other day. He hasn't seen your book, apparently. I am now hoping to give him one for Christmas.

The specific reason I am writing is to ask if you might be able to come to Thoreau and photograph some Navajo string designs. If you've never seen any of these, they are quite complicated and beautiful designs Navajo children are taught to make. Our "cat's cradle" is put to shame by all of these. And there is a legend for each design.(I don't like the word design, but I've never been told the Navajo word.)

It seems that few children any more are taught these. But one of our Navajo teachers, Mary Chavez, who is from Lukachukai, knows many of them, perhaps all. (I am also a teacher.) I have talked to Mary about this, and she is willing to teach a small girl, and a small boy, to do these. It should be easy to find a traditional home near here, with a resident grandmother, and maybe grandfather too, for background. If not, I'm sure the John Martins would be willing to let us use their home.

Mary Chavez doesn't remember the legends, but her grandfather, who told them to her when she was a small girl, is still living, and she is sure xx he will tell them again.

I have written several children's stories about Navajo children, and have a publisher--Houghton Mifflin in Boston. This might be helpful in arranging publication. Incidentally, they--Houghton-Mifflin--have had, for over a year, my precious copy of your The Enduring Navajo. Leonard Weisgard, my illustrator, who, as you may know, is a distinguished and talented professional illustrator of children's books, obviously didn't know what Navajo people looked like, and I was a little distressed when I saw his illustrations for my first little story.

So as soon as Ix they accepted my second story I sent your pictures to my editor, with instructions that I wanted the book back.

This letter is awfully long, but there is one other thing that may be relevant. The other day I mentioned my thoughts about this project to a friend, who told me that Dr. David McAllester had once mentioned these string designs, and their legends, to him, as a possibly effective way (one way) to encourage an appreciation by Navajo children, and others, of Navajo culture.

You may know him, or of him. He is an Ethnomusicologist (sp?) who has spent a great deal of time studying Navajo culture.

He might be very helpful. Probably he could interpret the language of the legends even better than Mary Chavez herself. And his support of such a project might be helpful in arranging publication.

I don't know him personally, but we have several mutual friends, and I have corresponded with him about a recording of John Martin's Big Star Way. And he has very generously taken time to interpret for me some recordings that have been given me, by friends such as John Martin, of sacred Navajo chants.

And of course your well deserved recognition as a distinguished photographer will also be a factor.

I so much admire your sensitive photographs, and your obvious appreciation of Navajo people. I don't know of anyone else who could do this as well.

Incidentally, I would want this to be your book, and Mary's. My interest is in the possibility of sharing with other children, and people too, some of the beauty that is inherant in the life of a Navajo child. And I feel sad often because I know that many Navajo children are being deprived of a knowledge of their own culture.

Of course it will take some time for Mary Chavez to prepare the children. She won't be able to start until after the first frost. But perhaps by ~~that~~ Chriatmas, or early January, we will be ready for you.

I will be looking forward to your answer.

Sincerely,

Mary Perrine

(Mrs.) Mary Perrine