



# The Scalpel and the Silver Bear

*Lori Arviso Alvord, Elizabeth Cohen Van Pelt*

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In a remarkable book that takes the reader on a spellbinding journey between two worlds, surgeon Lori Arviso Alvord describes her struggles to bring modern medicine to the Navajo reservation in Gallup, New Mexico—and to bring the values of her people to a medical care system in danger of losing its heart.

Finding the solutions to modern medicine's most daunting problems was far from the mind of a girl from a small, dusty town on a Navajo reservation. But Lori Arviso Alvord would leave the traditional hogans of her people to attend the prestigious Stanford University Medical School and become the first Navajo woman surgeon. Only after conquering the high-tech realm of the operating room would this extraordinarily talented doctor realize something was missing from contemporary medical care—an understanding of the whole person who has come seeking healing.

**The Scalpel and the Silver Bear** tells of Dr. Alvord's pioneering journey to become a woman surgeon, fighting the odds presented by her own culture and the unspoken rules that made surgery the territory of a privileged class of males. Then, having accomplished her dreams, the strong-willed young woman would find herself faced with a different challenge: learning another approach to medicine amid the Hataali, the medicine men of the Diné, the people we call Navajo.

Here in this moving, enlightening, and provocative volume, Dr. Alvord teaches us how she merged the latest breakthroughs of science and methodology with the ancient tribal paths to recovery and wellness. In dramatic encounters while practicing reservation medicine—a man whose intestine was pierced by a porcupine quill, which he insisted was placed there by an enemy's curse; a woman who had been struck by lightning and blamed her cancer on it; an all-night winter sing for a gravely ill young woman, attended by the whole community—Dr. Alvord witnessed the power of belief to influence health, for good or for ill. She discovered that patients undergoing chemotherapy did better after having a native healer at bedside, and that the feelings of both the patient and the surgeon could affect recovery time, postsurgical complications, and even whether the patient lived or died.

The secret, Lori Alvord discovered, lay in the Navajo philosophy of a balanced and harmonious life, called "Walking in Beauty." Her sharing of these ancient principles promises to have an immeasurable impact on today's doctors and patients by expanding the concept of mind-body healing to include the interconnectedness of all life. Personal, simply written, yet profoundly wise, **The Scalpel and the Silver Bear** joins those few rare works, such as **Healing and the Mind**, whose ideas have changed medical practices and our understanding of the world.

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