

# Picture book heroine



Alma E. Hernandez/Independent

Darlene Arviso fills water barrels at the home of Raymond Lamone near Baca during her water route Thursday as her coworker Cecil Joe, right, looks on.

## St. Bonaventure's 'Water Lady' immortalized in children's tale

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**T**HOREAU — When Darlene Arviso was hired to drive a water delivery truck for St. Bonaventure Indian Mission 14 years ago, she thought she knew the roads she would be traveling.

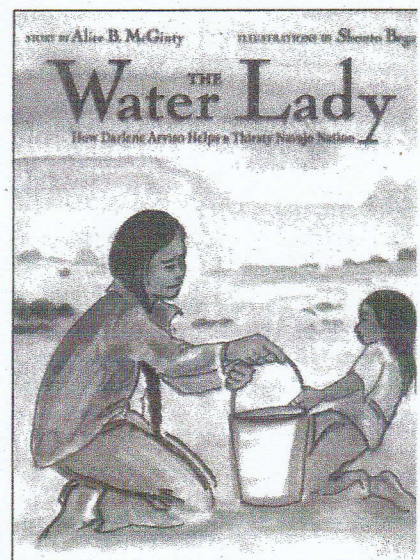
A native of the Baca/Prewitt Chapter, located on New Mexico's eastern portion of the Navajo Nation, Arviso was well acquainted

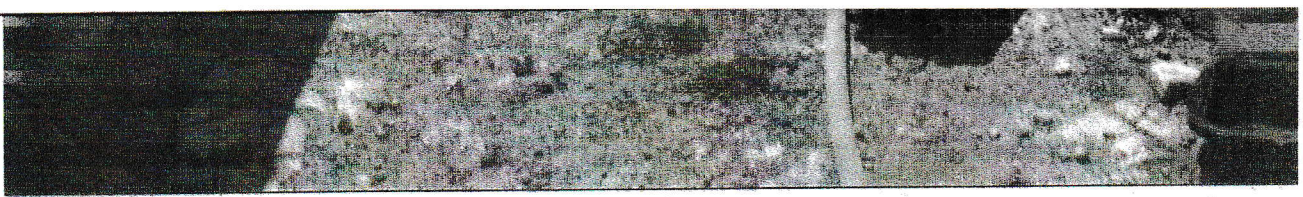
with the area's hard scabble dirt roads, filled with ruts, rocks, sand, and sometimes mud.

But Arviso couldn't have imagined the unpredictable roads of life the job would take her.

In the years since, Arviso and her big "yellow buffalo" water truck have been the subject of numerous national media stories — from CBS News and the New York Times to YouTube videos. Journalists reporting on Navajo homes without running water have come to Thoreau

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Darlene Arviso fills water barrels at the home of Raymond Lamone near Baca during

## Water Lady

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and told the story through St. Bonaventure's water projects and Arviso's dedicated service of delivering water to families living in isolated hogans, trailers, and houses.

This spring, the latest road in life brought Arviso to another unexpected destination: Arviso has now been immortalized as a real-life character in a children's picture book.

"The Water Lady: How Darlene Arviso Helps a Thirsty Navajo Nation," written by popular children's author Alice B. McGinty and illustrated by Diné artist Shonto Begay, was published in March by Schwartz & Wade Books, an imprint of Penguin Random House.

### Quiet, strong center

McGinty said she learned about Arviso and her water delivery work in 2015, after her literary agent emailed a link to a CBS News story, McGinty explained in a telephone interview Thursday. Her agent asked if it might make a good story idea.

"YES, I think this can be a picture book," McGinty enthusiastically replied.

After doing some initial research, McGinty contacted St. Bonaventure and talked with Arviso. In March 2018, McGinty traveled from her home in Illinois to spend a couple of days riding with Arviso. The two women spent time together driving in Arviso's water truck and the school bus Arviso drives before and after her water delivery route.

It didn't take McGinty long to understand the contribution Arviso is making as she diligently drives her routes — whether transporting water or students.

"That she's quietly and humbly influencing her entire community and helping them, not only by delivering water, but by being a quiet, strong center for the community," McGinty said. "I think that's a wonderful thing — that's why I wanted to write the book."

And so, the journey to write "The Water Lady" began.

In an interview Thursday, while on the road while delivering water and food boxes with fellow water truck driver Cecil Joe, Arviso said she no longer remembers who first called her "the water lady." But that's what many of the media stories have called her through the years, and that's what many of the area's young children call Arviso when she drives up, ready to pump water into their family's barrels, water tanks, and underground cisterns.

"I'm happy for the little kids," Arviso said of the children she encounters in the community. "When they're

happy, I'm happy," Arviso explained, adding she keeps toys and school bags in both the water truck and her personal vehicle to give away.

### Finding the right balance

The children along Arviso's routes inspired McGinty's composite character of Cody, a young boy in "The Water Lady," who expectantly waits for Arviso and her water truck to arrive in the story.

Arviso, the grandmother of five children, ages 4 to 13, said her grandchildren were also excited to receive mention in McGinty's book.

"They're happy about it," Arviso said of their reaction. "They say, 'This is me, this is me,'" she said of the children portrayed in Begay's illustrations.

Although picture books are notably brief on text, McGinty and Arviso said the writing of the book took a couple of years and went through numerous revisions.

"Darlene and I went back and forth quite a few times with the manuscript," McGinty said, explaining Arviso helped make sure all the details in the book were accurate. "We just worked together to get it correct."

Arviso, who said she likes to teach visitors words from the Diné language, also helped to make sure the book's terminology was correct. In addition to a photograph and short biography of Arviso in the back of the book, "The Water Lady" features a glossary of Navajo

words used in the story.

McGinty credits her editor for helping find the right balance between telling Arviso's story and the story of the local community, as represented by the character of Cody. McGinty is also happy the publisher was able to hire Shonto Begay as the book's illustrator.

"I had always loved Shonto's work, so I suggested him," McGinty said. "I'd just seen his work before and seen his work online, and it's beautiful."

### COVID-19's impact

Ironically, McGinty and Arviso began collaborating on "The Water Lady" four years before the outbreak of the COVID-19 pandemic, which brought international media attention to the public health challenges facing the Navajo Nation, particularly the lack of running water in many Navajo homes.

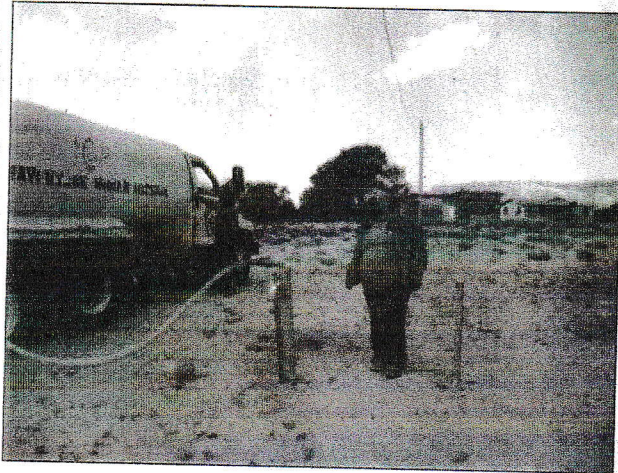
As water truck drivers for St. Bonaventure, Arviso and Joe have been frontline witnesses to the pandemic's impact on the reservation. On Thursday, while they made water deliveries to Roger K. Morgan's hogan outside of Thoreau and Raymond Lamone's hogan in the Baca/Prewitt Chapter, they also delivered food boxes.



Alice McGinty



Alma E. Hernandez/Independent  
ring her water route Thursday.



Alma E. Hernandez/Independent  
Darlene Arviso fills a cistern for a home near Thoreau during her water delivery route Thursday. The cistern was installed by the nonprofit Dig Deep in cooperation with St. Bonaventure Indian Mission and School. The large tank is buried underground to prevent the water from freezing. It provides running water to the home and replaces barrels previously used to store water.

While Joe visited with Lamone's family members, Arviso lamented about no longer being able to greet community members with handshakes and hugs.

Although delivering water is their central responsibility, Arviso and Joe now frequently distribute food, hygiene supplies, blankets, clothing, and children's school bags as they drive their routes. Taking time to visit helps Arviso and Joe learn the needs of local families.

"I like to help my people," Arviso said, explaining she offers her phone number to community members so they can call or text her when they need water or help with other essentials.

McGinty admits that after spending time with Arviso, her own awareness was raised about the challenges facing many Navajo families. After COVID-19's impact, she said, she feels an obligation to help.

According to McGinty, she is donating 20% of her profits from "The Water Lady" to St. Bonaventure's water projects and to the Navajo Nation's COVID-19 relief efforts. And when she promotes the book, McGinty added, she encourages others to donate to causes that benefit Navajo families.

"It's not just a book," McGinty said of the story. "It's real people and a real situation that's going on."

"The Water Lady: How Darlene Arviso Helps a Thirsty Navajo Nation" is available for purchase through bookstores and online retailers.

Deputy County Manager Brian Money inquired whether the college clinic would remain in operation. Smithburg confirmed that it would.

## Johnson arrested

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identifying Johnson as a person of interest in connection with the Shiprock incidents, the Shiprock Police Department received tips and information related to Johnson that led to his capture, according to the news release.

Another individual identified by police only as an "associate of Johnson" was also arrested with him.

"I am proud of how the community responded to assist us in apprehending Johnson. Crimes cannot be addressed if the citizens of the community are not part of the solutions," said NPD Chief of Police Phillip Francisco. "Reaffirming the partnership with our community enhances our societal bonds to ensure we take a stand against violence. Thank you for assisting the task force in finding Johnson and the others that have been apprehended in the course of the operation."

## Infrastructure package

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went bankrupt.

Half of available funds would be directly administered by the federal government on federal lands, and the other half would be distributed to states and tribes to be administered as state and tribal grants.

A General Accountability Office report issued in March 2020 stated that federal agencies spent, on average, about \$287 million annually identifying, cleaning up, and monitoring abandoned hardrock mines, for a total of about \$2.9 billion, from fiscal years 2008 through 2017.

Officials from the 13 western states GAO reviewed estimated spending an additional total of about \$117 million in nonfederal funds over the 10-year period, or an average of nearly \$12 million annually, to address abandoned hardrock mines within their states.

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