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Navaho Trading Days

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5. *THE HOPI MESAS*

THE HOPI MESAS watch over the fifty miles of undulating desert to the basin of the Little Colorado from where they lie as the southern outcropping of Black Mesa, like giant rocky fingers spread a few miles apart. These three promontories of cream colored sandstone are known as First, Second and Third Mesas. They were named in that order because the eastern one was closest to Keams Canyon Hopi Agency and came therefore to be known as First Mesa.

First Mesa interested me the least of all because it always had been the most accessible to the Agency and the best known to outsiders, particularly at Snake Dance time. But there were specific attractions there, among them Nampeyo, the unsurpassed pottery maker of those years, with her eye for gracious form and her use of very old Hopi designs. There was Tom Pavatea's trading post in Polacca at the foot of the Mesa, where really good Hopi pottery and baskets were handled for the white trade, both wholesale and retail. At a little distance was a squarish house amid bare grounds, the home of one of the unsung authorities on the Hopi country, Mr. A. H. Womack. This man from 1905 on had worked patiently with the Hopi men to find new sources of water around their arid mesas and to develop better what they already were using. His great practical knowledge of topography and stratification was known and respected, and when I first knew him in the 1920's he was a fixture in the country, known locally as the water witch.

Second Mesa was the one I knew best, although this was relatively the most inaccessible. Many of the Hopis from Second Mesa worked, or had worked, for the Fred Harvey Company at Grand Canyon in that little community on the South Rim where I lived for several years. There was Joe Secakuku, and his sisters from Sipaulovi. Jane, the wife of Paul Nichols of Mishongnovi, was a special friend and we had good times together. From Shungopovi there was Hopi Sam, and Jason, and we were as welcome in their homes on the Mesa as they were in our little Park Service quarters at Grand Canyon. The Hopis of Second Mesa knew it whenever I came into their country, because from their villages on high they had an eagle's view of the great open flat below where the twisting

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ribbon of the approach-road lay. My red car was unique and they could recognize it crawling along the dusty tracks, down into the cross-washes, and up again with a larger dust cloud. By the time I had parked at Toreva and laboriously climbed the foot-trail, some of them would be waiting to greet me.

The few tourists of those years usually bypassed Second Mesa as they struggled westward from Walpi across the Polacca, Wepo, and Oraibi Washes respectively, to New Oraibi and thence down to Winslow and civilization. The three villages perched on top were the place to see the unspoiled Hopi life of that era. Their Snake Dance ceremony always fell on a later date than Walpi's, so that it could be enjoyed in peace and quiet with perhaps Lorenzo Hubbell, Jr. and the Indian Agent from Keams Canyon as the only non-Hopi spectators. Even they might not climb up that long, rocky trail to Shongopovi for their Snake Dance, because in those years only a wagon could traverse the route across the mesa from the north to this very old village. Shongopovi was ancient and a very large pueblo when the Spaniards first came into the country, establishing a mission there as well as at Awatovi but making Sipaulovi and Mishongnovi only *visitas*. It was the brave Franciscan Friar at Shongopovi who willingly gave his life in the great Pueblo Rebellion of 1680.

I knew very little about Hotevilla, although the road from Blue Canyon to Oraibi passed close by it. It was a new village created in the fall of 1906 when a defeated faction split off from Old Oraibi. The Hotevillans wished to be let alone and were the followers of an old fanatic, Youkeeoma. In those days they were called the Hostiles, but now that they have become reconciled to modern ways they are called Conservatives.

The road was a rocky track that dropped off the mesa to the north of the Hotevilla cornfields and peach trees under the rim, and then angled west for the big Dinnehbito Wash crossing. After this, the road went north over the mesa until descending into Blue Canyon, which was itself a very long gash of brilliantly colored rock strata in the heart of Black Mesa. A wash, and incidentally the road, wandered between walls of white rock in what seemed an aimless way, but it was the only direct north-south route in this whole central part of the Western Navaho Reservation. It was much used by Navahos, traders, and Indian Bureau employees up through the 1930's.

One spur of Blue Canyon can be seen today on a short detour from the Howell Mesa road: Coal Canyon, not far from Moencopie, where layers of black coal appear among the red and white sandstone forma-

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tions. This coal was of good quality and the Hopis hauled it under contract for years to Tuba for the operation of the steam plant in the Agency.

Oraibi, the Third Mesa, to me meant Lorenzo Hubbell, Jr., because his home and trading post in New Oraibi under the hill was always a first stopping place. In warm weather we camped in the deserted day school yard where there was a water hydrant, but ate breakfast with Lorenzo at the big round table in his kitchen. Giant cups of coffee, with fried eggs and green chili comprised the usual breakfast. And if the heap of green chili was not large enough to completely submerge the fried eggs, I heard about it promptly and explicity from Lorenzo. Bread and bacon were afterthoughts, and glasses of water were never put on the table. Water took up space the stomach needed for coffee.

Lorenzo was a large man with dark brown hair and a rather fleshy face. His voice was very soft and husky; his slow way of speaking was well suited to the Hopi and Navaho trade. He was punctilious in greeting his callers in their own language, whether it was Hopi, Navaho, Spanish, or English, as he was fluent in all four. Sometimes I spent the whole day in his dim, inner office where he sat behind his desk, just watching him handle the various personalities and races who had business with him. His Navaho name was Nahkai-tso, Large Mexican, and Lorenzo was justly proud of his Mexican ancestry because his grandfather Hubbell's wife came of a wealthy and prominent family of Chihuahua, Mexico. And Don Lorenzo, Sr., in his turn, married a girl of Spanish blood from New Mexico who, until her dying day, refused to use other than the Spanish language. At least that is what a couple of her children told me. So the rippling Spanish of Nahkai-tso was his first love and his birthright, but one might say that his second love was the Navaho language which he had also learned as a child.

On about the third visit that Mike and I made to Lorenzo, Jr. at Oraibi, he kept leading the talk around to racial backgrounds and languages. Finally I sensed what he was driving at—Mike's slender build with his regular features and black hair gave a very definite impression of his belonging to the Spanish-speaking group in the Southwest. But Mike continued to speak in generalities and avoided any direct personal reference, as these were the years when the Ku Klux Klan was flourishing and those of certain groups had learned to be reticent. At last Lorenzo, Jr. could stand it no longer and asked directly if he were not of Spanish background. Mike knew the time had come to be equally honest and he said quietly, looking him in the eyes, that he did not have one whit of Spanish about him as he was just plain Jewish; his parents

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had emigrated from Poland when it was under Russia and pogroms were annual events. Poor Lorenzo, Jr., felt terrible as we could see and apologized, saying he had never dreamed that Mike was other than Spanish-speaking but afraid to say so and therefore he had wanted to help him out. Then with his usual tact he added that he and Mike had a great deal in common as they both could understand the feelings of the minority groups in the Southwest.

Lorenzo Hubbell, Jr., was a trader of traders. He would greet a Navvy who came from a distance with a long hand-clasp, like a lost brother. If he had brought in wool with him, Lorenzo would then give him a bit of an edge over the top price it was bringing elsewhere. Naturally the Navvy would be delighted and the sum would be jotted on a trade slip—the ubiquitous brown paper bag in most trading posts. No, Nahkai-tso never forgot his old friends. Then ever so gently he would remind the Navvy of a debt owed these many years, perhaps because of forgetfulness? What customer could resist such diplomacy. And after this old debt had been duly subtracted from the trade slip, then the remaining sum could be traded out with the clerks in the trading post.

This was an enjoyable matter of hours while each purchase—ten cents or ten dollars—was marked off the slip. The sacks of flour and sugar, the canned goods, new pails or coffee pots, topped with yard goods in bright colored folds, would be stacked and ready to be carried out to the wagon. Some of the women would be wearing brilliant-hued Pendleton robes selected from the piles on the trading post shelf. These blankets have been manufactured for years in Pendleton, Oregon, of pure virgin wool from the flocks of fine sheep in that part of the country. Primarily they were made for the Navaho trade, and every trading post in or near the Reservation had to stock them. Navvies preferred Pendleton blankets above any other. Those with wool fringes were called shawls, and those without, robes. A straight-line pattern of Pendleton shawls and blankets was designated "Beaver State," and these were one dollar more retail. We Belecanas living in the Southwest used them on our beds and couches, and over the seats of cars in winter.

When a Navaho family was finally loaded up for the two- or three-day journey home, Lorenzo would appear to add a small gift for some absent member of the family whom he remembered. Each year some Navahos would drive their wagonloads of wool around nearby traders and across miles of rough country, right to the door of Nahkai-tso at New Oraibi. Rival traders used to say that "old debts" were frequently a figment of Lorenzo's imagination, simply because he overpaid them for their wool. Be that as it may, the Navvies were satisfied. It was well

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known that he would hold their pawn for years and pay good prices for their rugs if he knew a family well. He told me that he believed in the eventual worth of these Navaho rugs, even though in Depression Years the traders were overloaded with them. Time has proved him right.

In later years, during springtime at Shonto when some Navvy lugged his first Pendleton of wool—forty pounds perhaps, carried in a Pendleton robe folded lengthwise and sewed together with yucca strips so it would hang across the back of a horse—we would be told how much per pound Nahkai-tso was paying. That was as sure as the first robin, inasmuch as we were the closest post to the north of Hubbell's own Piñon Trading Post. "Closest" in this case meant an arduous fifty miles or more, even on horseback, over the steep north face of Black Mesa and then across Blue Canyon (Boko Dot-klish) and Dinnehbito Wash. Long Salt lived in this country between us and Hubbell, and in some years he brought to us at Shonto his three sacks of wool—the nine-foot long regulation wool sacks that hold from 300 to 350 pounds of light Navaho wool. We could only guess that he owed too much just then to Nahkai-tso, as his pawn with us was not heavy.

Harry and I did much wholesale business with Lorenzo, and our relations were always of the best. He knew that I felt a kindred spirit with the Navaho people, even as he, to a greater extent, had always been one of them. He knew we were at Shonto not only to make our living, but because we liked being among Navahos and a part of the Reservation life. The knowledge Nahkai-tso had of the Navahos was so deep and profound that it could not lightly be written down or told to outsiders. The superficial students of the Navaho have been the ones to write prolifically of Navaho customs and traits, and they are soon given the label of being "an authority on the Navahos" by the reading public. But with Lorenzo it was different, and with the possible exception of Sam Day, no one had a more fundamental inner grasp of Navaho thought, religion, and ritual of daily life. Much of this died with him.

Under the tip of Second Mesa below Mishongnovi is the landmark known as Corn Rock because it resembles two huge ears of corn standing on end. It is a good place to sit and breathe the thin air that comes across the desert from the San Francisco Peaks, blue on the horizon to the southwest. When one looks down at the valley just beneath, the cornfields are in irregular patches with the hills of green cornstalks as tiny polka-dots, and the occasional burro with his bulky load moving slowly like a tiny black beetle. Some of these burros have had their long ears cut off short, because they were caught stealing corn and must be punished for life. So the Hopis said.

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On the Mesas there are some spots very sacred to the Hopi people. Each village has its own location for burials, for certain shrines such as that of the solstice, and for the burying ground of the eagles used by certain clans in ceremonies. No paths lead to these spots, and they are quite unobtrusive. I respected these private and sacred symbols of the Hopi faith. A prayerstick or *baho,* decorated with a few inches of hand-woven white cotton cord holding a fluff of eagle breast feather, may be placed with a prayer in front of a shrine (perhaps Spider Woman) in the same spirit that one of us lights a candle in church. Whenever I saw high in the Mesa rim a crevice heaped full of stones with a broken pottery bowl or an old enameled pan on top, I felt the same reverence as for a marble tomb in the midst of sweeping green lawns. After their life under the open sky in the heart of this land of their ancestors, what a perfect place it was for the Hopis to rest eternally.

Sipaulovi, that gem of an old Hopi village, sat on its own rock pyramid just to the north of Mishongnovi. The rectangular plaza, surrounded by one- and two-story houses, filled the level space on top. Jane Nichols' single-story house faced south and nearby at the northwest corner of the plaza was a deep and narrow passageway between two houses. It was completely covered with cedar poles and brush, over which was a small terrace and storage with a tiny, high window. Through this passageway, there was only the tremendous sweep of sky to be seen and far below, the pastel tones of the distant desert. I much preferred this entrance of the plaza at Sipaulovi to the much-photographed Last House at Walpi, which it resembled. Carl Oscar Borg's watercolor of this Walpi house was given me as a present at Grand Canyon in 1925, and is now in the Museum of Northern Arizona in Flagstaff.

To the north and east of the village, opposite the main approach trails, were little paths leading down under ledges of rock. Each family was assigned a certain location which was used carefully, as these spots were the outdoor toilets of those days. There was not as yet a privy in the Mesa villages. I always went to the one assigned to Jane's house. Corn cobs, the first toilet paper, were much in evidence, and there was never any offensive odor as the sun and wind of that dry mesa land swept over the ledges, not to mention the energetic chickens. When it was green corn season, these chickens really had a picnic and scavenging buzzards did their bit also, to be followed by the heavy summer rains that washed the ledges bare. Thirty years later with more civilization has come a rash of privies that cover the rocky slopes in front of Sipaulovi and Mishongnovi. The doors are kept shut and padlocked, and I won-

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dered if the keys ever were lost. Anyway they are a mark of progress, presumably.

In October of 1927 Jane Nichols and I drove over from Grand Canyon to stay in her house at Sipaulovi, because she wanted to see the Lalakonti, Woman's Basket Dance, at Mishongnovi in which her husband's sisters would be taking part. In the morning we walked the mile by trail between the villages in the cool, dry air and arrived at the Mishongnovi plaza just as the group of women participants walked past to take up their positions in line. Each carried in her hands a Second Mesa coiled basketry plaque, differing in size, color and pattern. The women wore cotton housedresses under their fringed, brightly colored shawls of thin wool; although a few of the conservative ones did wear the ancient Hopi dress of two lengths of black handwoven wool with narrow red borders, worn with one shoulder bare, and belted around the middle with a red, handwoven sash. Over this was worn a ceremonial white cotton shawl with a wide band at top and bottom of an embroidery-type pattern woven into the woof with black and red or green wool. The Hopi men wove the white shawls on wide, upright looms in a tight weave of diagonal or diamond design. This was men's work, often done in the kivas, and women took no part in it. Their crafts were basketry and pottery. Most of the women wore buckskin moccasins and leggings of white doeskin wound round and round to the knees. I used to think that if a rattler ever made the mistake of striking at this arrangement he would end up as a sadder and wiser snake.

For the first part of the ceremony, the women formed an elongated circle open at one end, with a half dozen little girls there. Every woman held her plaque upright in front of her so that it showed to best advantage, while the songs were being chanted. A few plaques had the symbolic kachina design, but more had the corn or the butterfly pattern. One that caught my attention had the Paiute-Navaho wedding basket design, which is rarely done by the basket weavers of Second Mesa.

Two maidens were beautifully costumed in the white embroidered ceremonial shawls, and around their necks were thick strings of shell wampum, turquoise, and coral. They must have borrowed every single necklace owned by their family. But the distinguishing mark of the Lalakonti ceremony is the single, large curved horn of pure turquoise blue worn over the left ear. This is balanced by a pinwheel arrangement of feathers on the opposite side, and the whole headdress is topped by feathers, which looked to me like eagle tail feathers. It was not a solemn dance and all the women and girls seemed to enjoy themselves immensely. When the time came for the giving away of their plaques, a big

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crowd of men and young boys gathered in the plaza. Because these plaques would be thrown high in the air in all directions, to be caught by the nimble or lucky ones, this was the high spot of the whole ceremony for the small fry. The dance lasted for most of the day with time off for a meal, and judging by the Hopi men lining the rooftops they liked the unusual experience of being spectators while the women and girls performed the rites.

In Jane's house, like the others around the plaza in those years, there were no beds, tables, or chairs. A couple of low wooden stools and a stone banquette on one side of the room sufficed. The walls were white, and the floors were of clean, hard-packed adobe, with no clutter of possessions anywhere. Suspended from the ceiling near a wall was a long, cedar pole, upon which was hung the family shawls and blankets, and by the open hearth stood a few well-used cooking pots. The house had a separate storage room for corn, pumpkins, dried squash strips, seeds, and other foods always kept in reserve by the thrifty Hopi.

All the family slept on the floor on sheepskins of long, thick wool, which were not only warm but quite soft. Every morning these sheepskins were carried outside, shaken thoroughly, and hung in the sun for a couple of hours. Later they were rolled with skin side out and stacked in a corner of the room. Being tall, I needed the skin from a large buck sheep, otherwise I would be half on the hard mud floor, so Jane found a very large black one for me and I slept next to her on the floor of the main room. Others were stretched out around us for men, women, and children, and we were wise to have chosen a spot away from the front door traffic area or we would have been stepped over all night long. One night after settling on my sheepskin I saw a last flame from the fireplace reflected from the eyeballs of a freshly killed goat's head, reposing a couple of feet away. In the gloom I had not noticed it when I picked my sleeping site.

When I stayed with Jane for the Nimán Kachina Dance of 1927, the big thunderheads were beginning to pile high above the horizon with their promise of rain for the Hopi crops of corn, squash, and melons. The small children of Sipaulovi felt this electric excitement in the air, while the older women padded barefoot in and out of their houses with smiling faces, as they carried woven trays heaped with cornmeal or squash blossoms which are splendid in mutton stew. The smell of roasting or boiling meat was in the air, and doubtless the carcass of that buck whose head had rested close to me all night, was filling several pots and adding his bit to the general aroma.

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