

Kuwanwisiwma, Leigh J.

2003 Interview of Leigh J. Kuwanwisiwma by T. J. Ferguson and Peter Whiteley at Hopi Cultural Preservation Office, Kykotsmovi, Arizona, July 11, 2003.

These notes supplement information documented by Peter Whiteley.

Leigh is speaking today as a Hopi individual to discuss the importance of water to Hopi. Water is a central theme for all everybody but even more intimate at Hopi. The Hopi people still remember struggling with drought and farming. They have villages where people collaborate on irrigation. Hopis have ways of insuring that water and moisture are still here.

There is a serious drought in 2003, and throughout the 53 years of his life, dry years have made farming an up and down proposition. This year, many farmers elected not to plant. If it were not for a modern lifestyle, the Hopis would be experiencing famine. The drought affects the staple corn crop.

Moisture is important for survival – to do what Hopi do, to farm. Livestock are also suffering from the drought.

Four out of the five springs at Paaqavi are dry. For the first year in many years, there is no planting in the terrace gardens.

Water, rain, and village life in the past were related to clan migration. You were resigned to the fact that sometimes it doesn't rain. Clan histories talk about environmental change in the past. Spiritual forces have to come in with the harsh reminder of the covenant to migrate and place footprints in response to natural disasters like drought.

Moisture was variable during the migration. Some clans stayed in the Rio Grande area because there was an abundance of water. Clan relatives here at Hopi are still waiting for their relatives from the Rio Grande to migrate to Hopi. The abundance of water in the Rio Grande had an effect on clan migration.

Hopi have always placed value on water for sustenance. Other than Munqapi and Homolovi, there was no irrigation. Dry farming was practiced in an arid land – have rain or shade from clouds, as the grandfathers said.

Ceremonies are actively about rain, corn, and plants. Almost every song, even social songs, katsina songs, ceremonial songs, are always about rain coming to bless the earth and to sustain and rejuvenate the land. Moisture, rain, and water are all in all songs. All the songs composed since 1990 are about rain.

The Home Dance is about rain. The spruce worn by the dancers symbolizes all of life. Brides at the Home Dance have robes representing clouds. Wedding robes made in winter are painted in white clay to represent snow. When worn at the Hopi Dance, snow turns to rain. Brides give moisture to Home Dancers and this symbolizes the importance of rain for females.

The philosophy of rain and moisture is not segregated by gender. Male and female have complementary roles in ceremonies that are the basis of spirituality. Songs, ceremonies, and dances are petitions for rain. In Hopi, ceremonies and prayers are for the whole earth. The Hopi have a universal view of all life.

Springs are always part of Hopi life. While Leigh personally feels concern about the lack of maintenance of some springs, the cultural change associated with government actions must be acknowledged. The Federal government provided running water, and affected other parts of Hopi life. Backyard gardens irrigated with garden hoses have led to a decline in spring irrigated gardens. Progress intrudes on tradition.

Hopis need to maintain and use springs but the discharge of springs is less today than in the past. Springs that are now dry are still respected by place names and placing prayerfeathers and hooma at them.

Major springs include Kiisiwu, Salako, Sihuva and many others [see Peter Whiteley notes for complete list of springs mentioned].

Moisture is represented by the San Francisco Peaks, the home of the clouds and katsina. These are associated with symbols of rain, clouds, and moisture. The Hopi Tribe opposes artificial snow on the peaks using waste water.

Tokonavi is associated with Snake, Fire, Sand, Bearstrap, Lizard, Bow, and Greasewood clans.

Mount Taylor is a katsina home. Tsiptiya – sung in Archaic words of songs, with offerings in villages to directional shrines.

Woodruff Butte had shrines destroyed. There was a pilgrimage there. A spring there is associated with Water clan migrations.

Mountain tops and springs in southern Arizona have cultural importance.

A shrine in the Roosevelt Dam area is visited regularly.

Sheep herding made the Hopi dependent on forage and water. Numerous springs up Oraibi Wash were used for watering sheep. There were oases and marshes in the valley, and it was important to herd sheep so they missed the swampy areas that were dangerous to sheep. Leigh discussed herding sheep when he was young, and how he hunted birds for feathers, and once got the herd stuck in a swamp and many sheep died. Springs were central to sheep herding.

When there was a traditional subsistence economy, families were never hungry. There was meat, vegetables, corn, and other foodstuffs – but these required hard work.

When the summer rains came, the ponds and reservoirs would fill with water. The swallows, ducks, and other birds are happy.

Today the deer visit windmill reservoirs, and once a herd of elk passed through the reservation. The return of game is a good sign, so the tribe needs to maintain springs in remote areas for wildlife.

Ladybugs come out when it rains and the ground is saturated with moisture. After a rain, the ants are busy searching for food. All nature knows and appreciates moisture and rain: flowers, eagles, rabbits, rodents. Rodents are food for eagles so they are important.

In moist years there is a risk that more worms will appear. The cycle of nature thus has the blessing of rain and the risks of moisture at the same time. This year, worms almost wiped out Leigh's white corn crop and he had to replant his field.

Farming is the key to Hopi culture. Hopi farmers anticipate the season. Farmers know their fields, and which areas retain water. These areas have more clay and less sand. In good years, these clayey areas will yield more crops. A farmer sizes up the moisture in the spring. If the year is dry, farmers will select different crops to grow. Certain beans are planted when conditions are dry because they will produce a crop. Sweet corn is drought resistant.

Leigh built a dike to spread water at the base of the floodplain where his main field is located up Oraibi Wash. A flash flood is always a risk but the runoff of these monsoon rains replenishes the topsoil. Leaves and pine cones from the woodland on top of the mesa accumulate in his field on the valley bottom. The water feeds into his farm area. Floods may result in the loss of part of his crop but they help with planting the following year. The wash runs through his field but it erodes so he digs it up and builds diversion dams so water can be diverted into his uncle's area. One year he hired a bulldozer to build a dam. When the floods came, they wiped out part of his crop of white corn.

Other farmers also make water diversions and check dams to channel water to their fields. These check dams manage water. You need to have a field at the base of a wash in order for this technique to work. Some farms are higher in the drainage.

Rivers have cultural importance, including the Little Colorado River, which is the terminus of the washes that cross Hopi land.

Historically, Homol'ovi thrived because of the Little Colorado River. Cotton was an important crop there, and there is archaeological evidence for this.

The LCR served as a major travel route because of its water and springs. The LCR was a route to Zuni. Rivers and waterways served as routes of travel, including the Verde River and Tonto Creek.

The use of small amounts of water are important in ritual activities. Taking a small amount of water for ritual use honors the river. This is more than symbolic. The practical use of this water is that it is used in ceremonies to create and bring rain. During the rain dances, water is used from all over. Some spring water is mixed with pigments for use in rituals.

Leigh lists a long list of springs that Peter Whiteley documents in his notes.

There are 18 places on the pilgrimage between the San Francisco Peaks and Hopi. There are 13 places on the trail from Hopi to Zuni. Many of these are springs.