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OUR UNKNOWN FRIENDS, THE PUEBLO INDIANS

Elizabeth Willis DeHuff

EXCEPTING themselves, or perhaps, their anthropological cousins the Chinese, who really knows the village-dwelling Indians of New Mexico and Arizona? They live today in many of the pueblos as their ancestors were living when those first temerarious Spanish conquerors marched upon them in search of gold and silver and called them the "Pueblo Indians," since *pueblo* means "village" in Spanish. The Pueblos live today on the same lands and in much the same manner as they did before the white man came. Some of us live near them. We grow fond of them. More and more we feel that we are beginning to understand them, when suddenly a veil falls and we know that always we will be aliens in the sphere of the Pueblo Indians. We may be talking genially to an old Indian friend, that is, one whom we had thought we could call "friend" and then, forgetting, we formulate a remark into a probing question about himself or his people. Immediately the kindly expression fades and his face hardens into a noncommittal, cold, bronze statue. No need to apologize, or to tarry longer, for the friendly communion has been broken.

Although the Pueblo Indians possess the basic human characteristics—love, hate, jealousy, and so forth—they have developed different mores for expressing them, and cannot be judged by white standards.

Because the Indians lack the scientific knowledge now governing the life of the white man, superstitions, fear of mysterious forces, which to them are witches or the machinations of witches, and the mystic, play a much more important role in their lives.

Upon natural phenomena, inexplicable and awing—waterfalls, canyons, rainbows, deep mountain pools, the sudden appearance of a river or a spring, the reflection of the alpenglow against a mountainside, and particularly the manifest rhythms of nature—they have based their worship of a great creative spirit behind all things. It is a religion

highly symbolized, such as the use of feathers to represent the "little wind of life" that blows in and out of bodies to keep them living, and magnificent in ritual and pageantry, which we call Indian dances.

They share with whites such universal knowledge as that it pays to be truthful and honest; that one must give if one is to receive; that certain problems are the responsibility of the entire community; that spiritual development needs meditation; and that the absence of good is bad. What they, perhaps, have not learned is what boomerangs jealousy and resentment are at all times. These split the community spirit of the pueblo and prophesy its final disintegration.

These Indians have also learned the power of mind over matter, though they could not express it in such terms. They display this knowledge in a most primitive fashion in treating the sick, where the medicine men by legerdemain show the patient the concrete causes of his pain, remove these causes, and convince the sick person that he will soon be well. His faith will then cure him. Though the expression is crude, this knowledge of the power of mind is there.

What few outsiders realize is that the Indian has a keen sense of humor and much of the "milk of human kindness."

One day a Hopi lad of seventeen sat in my living room painting Indian dance pictures from memory. He was one of a group of boys, today well known in the art world, but just then beginning a new expression in the then untried medium of water colors. The other boys were absent that day and Fred was working alone, painstakingly applying his colors.

"Fred," I began, "why is it that most of us so-called white people like the Hopi better than we do other Indians? Why is it, do you think?"

For some moments he continued his work, without speaking; then he replied slowly and thoughtfully, "Maybe it's because Hopi they always happy! In the mornings when the dawns comes, those Hopi peoples they always gets up and goes to the edge of the mesa and blows sacred corn meals to the sun when it come up. They looks out across those painted desert and sees all those beautiful countrys and that it makes them happy all day. Maybe that is why you like Hopis."

After a long pause he continued, "These other pueblos, when they gets up in the mornings, they looks out their doors and all they sees is dusty plaza and hungry dogs all around. That don't makes them happy and that don't makes you like them. White peoples they are not happy

either. They don't see nothing but red brick walls, sometimes pretty old and dirty!" The inference from this he allowed me to draw.

Fred has gone back to Hopiland, where he now lives with a wife and children. A few years ago there arrived from him a carton of Hopi peaches. To appreciate the value of Fred's gift, one must visit the Hopi reservation and learn how precious to the Hopi and how economically valuable are his peaches. The original seeds for these little peach orchards were brought into this country by the early Spanish friars, and it has been with great difficulty, attended by long treks through heavy sands with jars of water for each gnarled tree, that they have been kept alive. Next day a letter of explanation arrived, stating in part: "... They say that thousands of people are starving all over the country, we don't think it possible. There are so much peaches, melons, etc., getting ripe that we simply need more time to eat. Our Navajo friends coming in with load of muttons, wood to trade for peaches, that we are all sitting pretty. The Hopis hardly sees money so it is all the same to them during this hard time" Fred feared that the depression in finances he had heard about was making life difficult for me, so he shared his peaches.

Many white people fail to understand Indian attitudes toward life; or else they feel that they themselves "belong to a superior race" and consequently are privileged characters when associating with Indians. A young white woman acquaintance of mine who came to the pueblo country to paint Indians, decided to go into one of the pueblos and live in an Indian house. When she asked my advice about such a move, I answered that although I was fond of the Indians, their mode of life did not meet with my views of hygiene and comfort and personally I would not care to live in their homes; but that if she liked that sort of thing she would be perfectly safe there! Renting a room in one of their homes, the young artist proceeded to "go Indian." She felt convinced that the Indian had been misjudged and misunderstood, and she was going to find out all about him; her idea being to receive without giving, to learn without teaching. After she had spent several months among them, the Indians began to rehearse for one of their religious pageants in their *kiva*. Like many of their dances, this ceremony was closely connected with fertility and propagation. The young artist, thinking of it as merely an Indian dance in which it would be great fun to take part, asked to be allowed to do so. Though the Indians were surprised at the request, they giggled and consented. The young artist

was painted, decorated with feathers, and dressed as the other women to take her part in the performance.

That evening after the ceremony was over, her young Indian partner escorted her home and made advances, which he considered quite proper under the circumstances and which he meant as the preliminary of matrimony; but the young woman was horrified. Rudely she thrust him out of her room, locked the door, packed her belongings, and by daylight she had engaged an Indian wagon to haul her—bag and baggage—back to Santa Fe. Directly she came to me. "You were right," she exclaimed with cheeks flushed. "The Indians are not to be lived with! They are horrid! They don't *understand* things!" Clearly she had forgotten my reason for not wanting to live in their homes, and did not realize that it was she who did not understand things.

Another acquaintance, who was a writer, decided to spend a winter in Hopiland, living up on one of the mesas in an Indian home, to get material. She was full of altruism and wanted to "really know the Hopi." They were such a "wonderful little people," they had the "true communal spirit of mutual helpfulness," etc., etc. She affected trailing skirts and handsome scarfs, picked up here and there in her travels abroad. Naturally we, who do not sentimentalize over the Indians, were much interested in watching the venture. After she had been a couple of months up on First Mesa, living in one room among the irregular piles of mud houses, she hinted to the Indians that she would like to be initiated into one of their clans. To these Indians a clan relationship is closer than any blood tie. After due consideration, the Indians decided to adopt her, and she went through the secret preliminary rites of one of the clan initiations. Soon thereafter, clan sisters began walking freely into her room, taking her cooking utensils to use, without asking permission, making free with all of the dainty little luxuries with which she provided herself through the mail; and finally, when a dance was in preparation, the women came in and rifled her wardrobe, taking each a scarf or a skirt that could be converted into a scarf. Though she remonstrated, they pretended not to understand her speech and paid no attention to her. She had more than she needed, and she was their clan sister. She, too, packed up and left. Her comments upon the Hopi are anything but complimentary to the Indians. She was willing to take

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all they had to offer of things spiritual and religious, but was willing to give nothing in return except smiling, verbal thanks.

From an Indian friend I learned that Indian hospitality is entirely based upon fear of witches. They receive graciously into their homes all who come from elsewhere, not daring to turn any stranger away, for fear he may be a witch and might cast an evil spell upon the household, or some member of it.

The Indian is deeply superstitious. It is astounding how frequently coincidences will foster these superstitions. A young Indian woman, who helped care for my babies, always seemed pleased whenever I went away for a day or longer, leaving her more or less in full charge of the children. Indians are fond of children. They are exceptionally kind to all children and love their own devotedly, never chastising or punishing them themselves, all correction being delegated to two masked figures, the *Tsah-ve-yoh*, who come at Christmas time with long whips to visit each home to inquire about the behavior of all the children.

Although my maid enjoyed the responsible care of the children—and they adored her—one morning, as I was preparing to leave on a two days' trip, her face looked like a thunder-cloud. To make conversation, I asked if she had heard the little owls chattering on the housetop during the night. "Yes," she mumbled. "That mean trouble! You better not go 'way! Those owls they are witches. They talks right over your room. They means troubles to you. You stay home!" Consoling her as best I could, I went on my journey. When I reached the little mountain village where I was to stay, the young chauffeur, whose home it was, became so excited that he failed to put the brakes on properly when he got out of the car, and the automobile plunged over a twenty-foot embankment, completely crushing one wheel. The nearest garage was twenty-five miles away, and there was no telephone or telegraph communication from the village. My companion lost her wrist watch, a wedding present, and there were various other minor discomforts, one following close upon another. It was the owls! At least, the Indian maid will always believe so. Strange to record, several weeks later the little owls were again chattering upon the roof. Next morning I asked if it meant trouble for me. "No," replied the maid, "that for me! Those owls they talks over my window." That day in the pueblo her only sister died.

When Fred Kaboutie was painting the medicine men's ceremony to

illustrate *Taytay's Tales*, we were living at the Government Indian Boarding School. Two young Pueblo Indian girls chanced to come into the room where he was working. I knew from the horror upon their faces, when they saw the picture, that some superstition must be connected with reproducing the scene. "What is it?" I asked. "Shouldn't Fred paint the medicine men?"

"No . . . ol!" one of them whispered. "That mean somebody he goin' die, 'cause Fred paint that." Two hours later a young Indian boy, who was apparently in perfect health, was wrestling in the boys' playroom at the dormitory and dropped dead. To those two girls it was not heart failure, but Fred and I who had caused that death.

Their belief is not alone in witches and other superstitions. It is uncanny what results Indians get from an abiding faith in things of deeper import. A young Indian man was my gardener for several years. One morning he arrived with his jaw dreadfully swollen from an abscessed tooth, as I supposed, because he said that a tooth had hurt him all night. There was no mark of injury on the outside, but inside there was a large decayed spot on the hurting tooth. Although I tried to persuade him to let me take him to a dentist, he refused and insisted upon being allowed to return home to his pueblo. Two days later I drove to the pueblo to see how he was faring. There was no swelling in his jaw. He declared that his tooth was perfectly well again. "That tooth it very bad that other day," he confided. "Those medicine mens they takes out all kinds bad things from that tooth. I see all those things when they takes them out. They takes out one razor blade and one big piece barbed wire and lots things. Witches they puts those things there. That tooth it all well now!" He pulled from his pocket the razor blade and "lots things" to show me. He returned with me to work. For the next few months, while he remained with me, he never again complained of pain in that tooth nor was there any more swelling. All medicine men are clever at legerdemain.

It is when an Indian feels a sense of obligation for some genuine kindness to the listener that one can believe a tale that the Indian tells him, or any statement of so-called facts. At other times it is well to verify what one hears by asking other Indians for the same information. A prominent author, who claimed to be an authority upon the Indian, wanted to write a chapter on Indian religion in one of her books; so she spent some time near one of the pueblos in order to talk daily to a certain Indian about his religion. When published, the chapter was

patently the writer's own thoughts in regard to Indian beliefs. Later I saw the Indian who had been so thoroughly quizzed. "Juan," I asked, "why did you tell all that stuff to so-and-so about Indian religion? There isn't a bit of truth in it and you know it! Why did you do it?" His fat stomach shook with suppressed laughter before he answered me. At length he said: "That what he think 'bout Indians what they believes. That what he like I tell him, so I tell him that way!" A most agreeable people they are. They like to tell you what you want to hear, right or wrong though it may be!

Seldom do we on the outside understand the actions of the old men of a pueblo. We hear of their doings oftenest through young English-speaking Indians who misinform us either deliberately or because they themselves do not understand. Not long ago a young man from one of the pueblos came to the Indian agency to complain. According to his story, the old men of the village had destroyed a plow which he had bought, had whipped him, and had taken from his father the land allotted to him for his corn field. They had done this, he continued, because "they say I must not plow in the fields with an iron plow like how I was taught in the boarding school. They say I must use one hoe and sticks, all same like my ancestors they use long ago. They say those *Katchinas*, those spirits what teach Indians to plant corns in the long time 'go, they not like it that I plow with one iron plow. If I plow that way those *Katchinas* they not sends rains to the pueblo fields and nobodys they won't have no corns this year! So those old mens they breaks up my plow and they takes away the corn field from my father and they whips me!" In the pueblo, the agent was told by the group of old men that the young Indian was one of two who had stolen very old, sacred ceremonial objects from the *kiva* and had sold them to a collector. For that he had been punished. They had taken the plow away, though, for the reasons the boy stated. The land would be returned when a promise should be given that it would be cultivated in the old way. "But," rejoined the agent, "why can't the boy use an iron plow? Your pueblo has bought a reaper to cut your wheat and you use that!"

"That is different," they replied. "Wheat it belong to white man. Corn it belong to Indian. Reaper belong to white man, too. White man God teach white man to cut wheat that way. Indian no can use plow for corn. *Katchinas* teach Indians long time 'go to grow corn. Indian grow much corn. White peoples same land grow little corn. Indian way best for Indian things!" The boy and his father got back the land,

but they did not use an iron plow. The internal workings of their pueblo the Indians consider their own affair; they only tell outside what they want the outside to know.

Several years ago an Indian man was found dead outside of one of the pueblos. He had been shot. The government agent went to investigate. After several days of intensive inquiry, he had gained no information and gave up. At that time I had a maid from the same pueblo. She confided to me that all of the Indians knew who killed that man. The slain man, she explained, had been too friendly with another man's wife. The old men had called him in to a council meeting. They charged him to leave the second man's wife alone, warning him that if he did not do so, they would not be responsible for any trouble which might follow. Eventually the married man shot the offender in his own home and dragged his body to the edge of the village. It was no affair of the outside world.

There are always difficulties in adjusting to a new order, a strange culture. The old men in a certain pueblo were much incensed years ago over the compulsory school attendance ruling, passed by Congress, which kept their boys and girls away from home in boarding schools until they were sixteen or eighteen years of age. The boys were needed in the fields. The girls not only should be at home to be taught practical domestic arts, but it was time for them to marry and assume their natural obligations in the pueblo. During the summer, the governor of the village was told that he must have a certain group of young people of the required ages ready to be brought to school in September. The children were brought, but half a dozen of the older girls were found to be pregnant. This condition had been purposely brought about to keep the girls out of school. The old men had won. The girls went back to establish their own homes.

At the end of that same school year, a young woman from another pueblo completed the school course. She begged not to be sent home, but to be given employment as a household maid in Santa Fe. She was engaged by a neighbor, who took her in as one of her family. Message after message came to the girl from her village, demanding that she return. Finally she was told that the old men had refused to let her father have water from the irrigation ditch for his corn field until he brought his daughter home. Still she would not go, not even when told that if she did not go then, she could never go back again. She continued to work and to send money home for her father to buy corn and

beans. She has never gone back. She gave me her reason for not wanting to go back. During the summer, she said, the people of her village always have a ceremony for marriageable girls. At the end of the ceremony, which takes place high in the mountains beside a sacred lake, these girls race away to be chased and caught by men, who thereupon initiate them into certain marriage rites. She was determined not to take part in such a ceremony. The only way to escape was to stay away from the pueblo.

Like one of the African tribes, mentioned by Emil Ludwig, along the Nile, the young girl chooses the man she would like to have pursue her with smiles and other flirtatious wiles. Several years ago, two young boys in their teens dressed themselves as girls. Going secretly up to the ceremonial at the lake, they camped near two susceptible old men. For two days they smiled coyly at the old gentlemen, watching with glee the results of their flattery. Then, just before the time of the races, convulsed with laughter over the old men, who were waiting expectantly nearby, the boys took off their dresses in the open, disclosing their identity. "Boys will be boys!" the world over.

Pueblo girls like to work in the city with modern equipment, after having been for years in a government boarding school, where they have used every modern electrical and steam appliance. Going back to an Indian village to them is like having any one of us return suddenly to the mediaeval conditions of candle light, cooking in a fireplace, chopping wood, etc. Yet, had we known nothing else, how happy we might be in that simple life. Fortunate is the Indian youth who has the disposition to go back to his or her village and take up life as the parents lead it.

Just as with other people, the Indian is often happy in simplicity when there is no sophisticated onlooker. One day as I went into a pueblo, I saw a former school girl walking barefooted up and down the rows of a recently planted corn field. She was of the type who can readjust and be happy. When I waved a greeting, Anna came running to meet me. "How delightful to go barefooted!" I exclaimed. At the mention of her feet, she drooped her head in a shamefaced manner, causing me to regret my remark. Then, with her chin still drawn in, she raised her eyes to look into mine and whispered: "The old mens they makes me walk barefoot in the corn field. They says it make the corns grow for girls what not married to walk barefoot like this in the ground."

If an outsider goes into a pueblo, no one pays any especial attention to him, excepting groups of children, who huddle together to ogle the stranger. (This excepts two pueblos that have become commercialized.) If the stranger speaks to the children, they usually turn and flee, or they gaze silently upon him without response, unless candy or some other delicacy is offered, when they advance timidly or in stampede, according to the disposition of their leader. Then they dash away, or, perhaps, follow for more. The grown-up Indians pass by, hither and yon, intent upon their own affairs, without even glancing at the outsider unless he stops them to ask a question; whereupon there are no pains to which an Indian will not go to direct a stranger, or to assist him in case of automobile trouble or in any difficulties in which the stranger may be involved. The Pueblo Indian wants most of all to be let alone by the outside world, to pursue his own affairs in his own way. He will leave you alone, unless you appeal for aid; in which event he is always graciously polite and helpful.

These are the Pueblo Indians as I have known them—not *known* them, but encountered them. For what white person can know the Indian? They live in a world apart, as Kipling has said of Orientals. They are of the earth. They understand the whimsical side of earth's various laws. They give her personal attributes. She must be propitiated and appealed to like a temperamental mistress. They dance to her, impressing her with music and stamping in her own rhythms—the rhythms of rain, of seasons, of the human pulse.

The basal things of life, of nature—sun, rain, wind, clouds, corn, birth, growth, death—are still to them of super-importance. They understand with the patience grown from ages of suffering because of earth's tempers and vagaries. They view with the tolerance born of such suffering and with the deep feeling of that instinctive sixth sense developed through the centuries and unblunted by any knowledge of science as science, by the abstractions of the printed page, or by the inhibitions caused by myriad surface conventions.

Their other five senses are alert, their feelings keen. One cannot deceive them for long. On the outside is a slight veneering of the "civilization" and religion of the white man, but underneath is a person apart, unfathomable to those of an Occidental culture.

They touch us in our own environ, for they learn to speak our language and to trade with us, but we have no contacts, no apperceptive basis, with which to reach them in their own world.