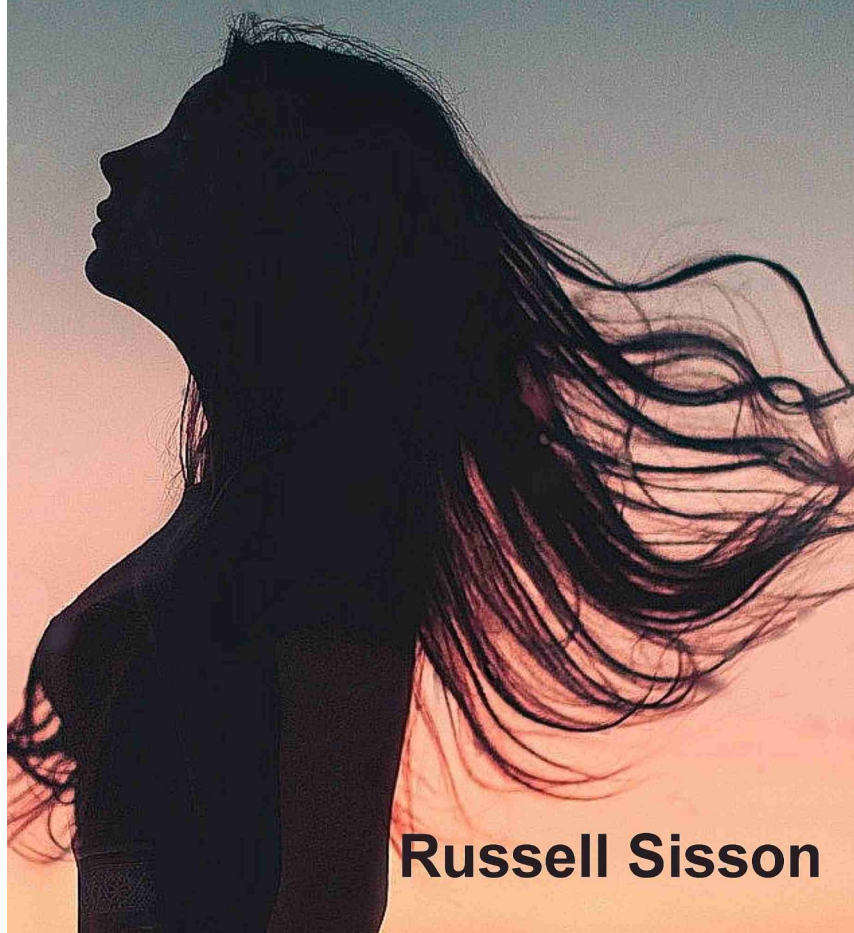


The
Ellie Mae



Russell Sisson

THE ELLIE MAE

Russell Sisson

Xerellian Press

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PROLOGUE

My name is Allys. I'm riding in one of those tour buses that I swore I would never take on a trip. As predicted, I'm forced to listen to those around me exclaim about the wild vacation they are on. They say they are going to see where the Indians lived a long time ago. Makes me just want to shake some sense into them.

Me? I'm traveling to what most people would describe as the Grand Canyon. You know, that big, gorgeous canyon in Arizona. Except, that's not really where I am going. The place I am heading to is in the northeastern corner of Arizona, close to the border with New Mexico. It's a very similar environment to the Grand Canyon, with deep gorges and high cliffs that have that familiar red dirt look and feel. The Navajo refer to it as *tseg*, which means "rock canyon" or "in a canyon". Once a year I make my annual trek to what we, these days, call Canyon de Chelly (pronounced 'd Shay'). I go there to speak to my family of Puebloan, aka Anasazi, ancestors. That's not what they call themselves, but more about that later.

Before I get too far along though, I would like to take a moment to talk about my name. I don't know how many times I read books and waste time trying to figure out how to pronounce some character's name. Only to find out

later, whilst talking to friends reading the same book, that they pronounce that same character's name completely different. Then the doubt sets in. Am I right or are they right? We end up spending more time than is necessary, contemplating which pronunciation makes better sense.

Does it really matter? Probably not. As long as you are consistent. But, in the end, if you finish reading a book thinking that the main character wasn't really who you imagined them to be, it can really diminish the story's value. Possibly, even make you regret reading the whole book. I am sure the author would prefer that you pronounce the names the way they do. So, to make things just easier, let me spend a paragraph or so, describing how to pronounce my name.

As I said, my name is Ally, pronounced as if you are saying the name Alice. I have to thank my parents for that one. The story that I was told was that after finding out they were expecting, they were quite sure I was going to be a girl. They thought long and hard about it and came up with the name Sally. They loved the name Sally. I don't know what they were drinking or smoking at the time, but they decided to be cutesy. So, they decided to kind of rearrange the letters and spell it Ally. Thus, my name was conceived.

When the moment came of my actual birth and they needed to sign the birth certificate, they both looked at each other as if they hadn't even thought about it before. Suddenly, they both blurted out the name Alice at the same time. Don't ask me what happened to the name Sally. I think it got lost in the moment somehow. For that matter, I

don't know what they would have done if I had turned out to be a boy. So, if you don't mind too much, just call me Alice.

Earlier, I made reference of my annual visit, the one I am currently on. I have been making this trek for I don't know how many years now. I usually drive my own car, but this year is a bit different. Whether I know it or not, the car just isn't my thing anymore. To tell the truth, I just can't drive myself that far. That's why I'm forced to take this godawful bus.

When this time rolls around each year, I feel like it's my birthday, or Christmas or something. There is this throbbing inside of me that says it's time to take another trip. It's kind of like a distant memory that comes out of nowhere telling me I am requested, pushing me out the door and onto the road. Next thing I know, I'm on this long journey to *tseg*.

My neighbors used to ask me where I was going every year and when I told them that I was invited to a small venue near the Grand Canyon to speak to the elders, they kind of wrote it off to my befuddled nature. Meaning that they probably thought I was a little bit off kilter. Especially, since they knew I had no speaking engagements of any kind to speak of. Whatever they thought, I knew better than to throw in the literal details of my visit. That would have only made matters worse.

As I get up in my years, the visit has become more challenging. I can easily see reaching the point where I won't be able to do it anymore. You see, it isn't just the drive to Canyon de Chelly that takes its toll on me. It also

requires that I make a difficult hike down inside the canyon to a place off limits to most people. A place only I and a limited few others know about. The more I think about it, most of them have died off.

At the bottom of the canyon, there are special ravines, known as slots, that branch off of the main canyon. These are the fairly narrow canyons that have been formed via the water that has rushed over the rocks throughout the millennia. These are the same forces that carved out Canyon de Chelly itself. The place I am heading to is known to the Navajo by the river that runs through it. She has run forever, it seems. Through the canyon where they found her so long ago. Although, it doesn't run so much anymore.

THAT FIRST SUMMER

CHAPTER ONE

After spending a rather restless night in a cheap motel, I'm ready to find some hot coffee and something simple to eat. Like donuts or something. According to my calculations from last night, I'm somewhere between Flagstaff and Winona, Arizona. Right alongside of Highway 40. I figure I am about three quarters of the way to my destination. I started out driving yesterday from Los Angeles and ended up pushing myself about seven hours before finally calling it a day late in the afternoon. This motel was about the only thing out here, so I didn't have a lot of choice in the matter.

I figure if I don't spend too much time dawdling around and my car holds up, I should arrive in Canyon de Chelly in another three or four hours. It will probably be on the high side, since I'm not really sure where I'm going once I get there. It's not like I'm stopping at a motel or something. I have to find a very special place in the canyon, where I will spend the next few weeks digging in the dirt, so to speak.

It all started a few years ago, while attending my first year of college. Having no idea what kind of coursework I wanted to pursue, I experimented around by taking various courses that sounded interesting. That first semester, I decided to take a couple of courses in Anthropology that

proved pivotal in what I was, eventually, going to end up doing in Canyon de Chelly.

One course I had was in Cultural Anthropology and the other was in Archaeology. Both of them seemed to be linked by a common theme, which was the indigenous populations of the American Southwest. It didn't hurt that both of the courses were taught by the same professor. Marilyn Greenfield was her name. She had spent a lot of time researching and studying in an area of the Southwest believed by archaeologists to be one of the longest continuously inhabited places anywhere in North America. It was her enthusiasm and passion for her life's work that, I too, became devoted to the life and culture of the Ancestral Puebloans. They lived approximately two thousand years ago in the slots of Canyon de Chelly.

Marilyn was the kind of professor that didn't like to take advantage of her status as a PhD. Of course she enjoyed being referred to as Dr. Greenfield, but she felt that was just a title that was used, mainly, by those who did not know her very well. Those of us who did get to know her well, had the pleasure of calling her Marilyn.

She was the complete opposite of some of my other professors who thought the world had ended if you called them by their first name. I'm not trying to demean or devalue the paper degree they had worked so hard to obtain. It just seemed that, once you got to know them, they could lighten up a little and let you in to their inner personality.

Later, in my graduate student years, I remember a little game that I and some other graduate students would play with one of our professors who thought it was such an insult to be referred to by something other than Dr. so and so. He made our lives a little miserable, so we decided to return the favor. Every time we passed him by, we would make the point of greeting him by referring to him by his first name. He would become very agitated and flustered, but by the time he could regain his composure to fire off a retort, we were long gone. It was very unfortunate that he never seemed to adjust to being the likable person who, I'm sure, he really was.

As I said, Marilyn was not like that. It was because of her ability to push aside any self-centered expectations of her title and position, that her students were able to identify with her love of her subject. She knew the culture and archaeology of the Ancestral Puebloans inside and out. At least as much as someone who was not Navajo can know about Navajo cultural ancestors of long ago. There was just something about Marilyn that seemed to reflect that same deep understanding and personal identity.

Marilyn began studying the Ancestral Puebloans long before her PhD dissertation on the same subject. Her PhD capped off eight years of living in the area of Canyon de Chelly doing field work in order to better understand the cultural and archaeological evidence left behind by the ancestral populations. The melding of a cultural and archaeological approach to the data provided Marilyn with an advantage over others in understanding who these

people really were, where they lived and how their beliefs shaped their view of the world.

That was a very brief review of my instructor and my mentor. It doesn't really do justice as to how significant a role she played in introducing me to what was really important, which were the Ancestral Puebloans themselves. I have used the reference to Ancestral Puebloans a few times now. Just who were these people? When did they first emerge in the archaeological record?

Unfortunately, when they emerged is still a matter of archaeological debate. This is due to the fact that they overlap two different archaeological periods in the canyon. As far as who they were, that is also a result of this crisscrossing of cultures. There was this overlapping of a people referred to as Basketmakers followed by those who were the forerunners to the present day Pueblos. This is where the term Ancestral Puebloans comes from.

Canyon de Chelly preserves the chronology of humans over a long period of time, starting with the Archaic people close to five thousand years ago. Then came the dramatic overlapping of Basketmakers, the Pueblo, the Hopi and the Navajo of today.

The Ancestral Puebloan culture covered a wide geographical area of the United States, intersecting the current states of Arizona, New Mexico, Colorado and Utah. Canyon de Chelly is just one small example residing within those boundaries, actually located in the U.S. state of Arizona and within the Navajo Nation.

The name Canyon de Chelly doesn't really sound Ancestral Puebloan. It sounds as if it is French or something. One would expect it to reflect more of a Spanish flavor, if anything. Which, in fact, it really does. The name "de Chelly" (again, pronounced 'd Shay') is actually a Spanish interpretation of the Navajo word "tseg", which means "rock canyon" or "in a canyon", first used back in the early 1800s.

Hopefully, this gives you a bit of an introduction to the culture and peoples with whom I fell in love. These are all just dry facts at this point. Marilyn made sense of those facts for me and gave them life. This is where Marilyn found her life's work. This is where I did the same. This is just the tip of the ice berg. It's like telling someone your age. They may know how old you are numerically, but they certainly do not know who you really are.

Being as this is where Marilyn did all of her field work, this is also where Marilyn directed me to do my research. It wasn't much of a stretch. The canyons of Canyon de Chelly were to become my home and my identity. That would be the case for the rest of my life.

This is the reason I have ended up where I am. In a motel, somewhere in between Flagstaff and Winona, Arizona. A long way from my home town of Los Angeles. The drive from Los Angeles was a little over seven, boring hours. Away from a bustling and crowded city, over lots of desert miles and finally up into the mountainous areas of Flagstaff. As I headed back down into the valley from Flagstaff, on the way to Winona, I decided to stop for the night.

I probably should have stopped while I was still in Flagstaff. There didn't seem to be a whole lot to select from out here. But finally, there it was. A small, cheap, but adorable motel that was just calling out to me. As if I had a choice! I was only a few short hours away from my new home in Canyon de Chelly. A few short hours from my first archaeological dig, arranged and paid for by my sponsor Marilyn Greenfield. Well, at least paid for by the grant she had received.

I spent the night a bit restless. I kept asking myself over and over again, what the hell was I doing? I was out here in the middle of nowhere. I was heading somewhere to do something totally out of character for me. This was not like me to just up and leave for possibly a month. To spend my days digging in the hot Sun and my nights sleeping on the hard ground. The lumpy bed I was in suddenly felt a lot better.

I must have finally dozed off as the next thing I knew it was morning. I slowly made my way out of bed and hopped into a hot shower. I reflected on how it might be the last good shower I would take for a while. After a bit of primping and preening, I felt refreshed and ready to go. I loaded up my car and headed up to the front desk.

Standing in the front lobby of the motel, ready to pay my bill, I noticed that behind the person at the front desk, there was a pot of coffee. I speculated that this was the same kind of coffee the motel provided in your room. Which isn't usually the best kind of coffee in the world. Needless to say, I had finished mine late last night and wasn't

particularly thrilled with the fact that there wasn't any more. It didn't taste very good, but it was all I had.

I was in a hurry so I asked the person at the desk if it would be possible to grab a refill for my mug? She replied that she would be more than happy to pour me a cup. She said this was my lucky day, for she had just made a fresh pot of French blend she brought in to work from home.

Not that I was nosy or anything, but I also noticed that she had some tasty-looking pastry carefully placed on a napkin next to her computer terminal. Thing is, she also noticed that I noticed. Before I could say anything, she said she didn't have any she could give me, but she did recommend a small makeshift kind of bakery down the road to Winona. She said it wasn't a real bakery, just someone selling their baked goods alongside the road. I thought to myself, is that legal? She did say, though, that they had more coffee and that the pastries were very tasty. That was good enough for me.

Not wanting to waste any more time, I paid my bill, thanked her gratefully for her hospitality and darted away in my car. I was hoping to make it to the bakery stand before they ran out of what I needed for my morning sugar fix. I found the roadside stand about fifteen minutes away and, fortunately for me, there were still plenty of sugary items to go around.

Now the dilemma. Getting back into my car I thought, do I sit and take a few minutes to enjoy the coffee and pastry? Yes, I included in my purchase some more coffee. I love my coffee. Or, do I prepare myself for driving while

munching on the pastry and carefully drinking the hot coffee? Well, I had two of each, so I decided to do both and proceeded on my way.

The directions given to me by the lady at the pastry roadside stand, had me head out of Winona towards the 419. She said to just follow the signs. This was just to get me out of Winona. Between a bite of pastry and a drink of coffee, there it was, Highway 419. I turned onto Highway 419 and proceeded for quite a ways before it turned into Highway 15. By now, my first coffee was gone and I was working on the second pastry. I proceeded for another long way, so long that I was completely done with all my morning fixes, until I got to a town called Indian Wells.

The drive along Highway 15 was mainly flat, but did have some ups and downs, so to speak. It wasn't until Indian Wells that the scenery really started to change. At Indian Wells, I got a little confused. Highway 15 merged with Highway 77. So, I crossed my fingers and drove on for awhile until, luckily, Highway 15 split off from Highway 77. I drove on, dumbfounded that I was still on Highway 15. The scenery by now had really changed, with a lot more rolling hills and canyons. Then, the terrain changed all again to a mixture of flat land and more rolling hills.

The day was wearing on and I was getting kind of tired of all the driving, until I reached a town called Burnside. It was in Burnside, where Highway 15 finally ended as it turned into Highway 191. The terrain became quite dramatic off in the distance.

I was looking for a town called Chinle further along this road. Finally, I saw the sign for Chinle. I just needed to turn off on Route 7. It was on Route 7 that I realized why I had come here. The terrain had changed even more dramatically, with gorgeous canyons and deep gorges marking the landscape. After about three miles, I arrived at the Visitor's Center for Canyon de Chelly.

I guess I didn't really need to bore you with all of the boring details surrounding the drive, but I just thought it necessary to let you know how remote this place was. Plus, I was quite proud (and tired) that I was even able to navigate myself here!

Once I arrived at the Visitor Center, I was welcomed by Marilyn. She pointed out that where I had stopped was where the tourists arrived to start their visit into Canyon de Chelly. Most of the tourists viewed the canyons and tributaries from above, either via the approved roadways or trails. Others, who were a little more adventurous, preferred to take prearranged walking and jeep tours down in the canyon. Marilyn said that this was when a Navajo guide was required. She said a Navajo guide was mandatory if you were going to go down into the canyon.

We were going to follow a different route that gave Marilyn and the other archaeology staff access to the sites down below. We would be using horses to wind our way down into the wash basin of Chinle Creek (or river as it was sometimes called), eventually making our way to the archaeological site being run by Marilyn.

My marching orders were to pack up what I needed and follow Marilyn to where the pack horses were staged for us. I asked about my car and all she said was “To park it over there”, pointing to a place where other vehicles were and had been parked for a considerable period of time, considering how dirty they looked.

Next thing I knew, we were on our way. Sitting atop our horses and followed by the rest of the pack horses bringing down our supplies and equipment. We were accompanied by three Navajo guides, Dan and Irene (husband and wife) and Lee. All three lived on the floor of the canyon with their families, on land occupied by their ancestors for generations. They were part of around fifty Navajo families that currently called the canyon floor their home and made their living farming or supporting tourism.

Our Navajo guides were quick to point out certain facts about Canyon de Chelly, as the ride down was quite slow and arduous. They said, starting at the Visitor Center, the elevation was around 5,500 feet, but at the highest point up in the mountains, it was more around 7,000 feet. We were making our way down about 500 feet to the floor. We were told that Canyon de Chelly National Monument was actually comprised of three or four different main canyons: Canyon de Chelly (joined at the top by Monument Canyon), Canyon del Muerto and Black Rock Canyon, which shot off from Canyon del Muerto.

At the bottom, the actual mouth of Canyon de Chelly, the guides said the rock walls were not very tall or that impressive. Maybe thirty feet high at best. But the further you went up into the canyon, the sandstone cliffs and sheer

walls became very steep. Rising to more than one thousand feet above the canyon floor.

What was even more interesting to me, as an anthropologist, was the history of the area. As beautiful as the scenery was, the cultural history of Canyon de Chelly was what I wanted to learn about. According to our guides, people had been living in Canyon de Chelly for thousands of years. The earliest people were referred to as the Archaic people. They didn't actually make their homes in the canyon but, instead, used the canyon for temporary shelters while hunting and gathering.

One controversial fact was the name given to the people who came after the Archaic people. In 1927, archaeologists, in collaboration with the present day Navajo, came up with the term "Anasazi", the Navajo word for "the ancient ones" or "the ancient enemy". In the first case, the meaning seemed quite appropriate. In the second case, it made you wonder what they meant by enemy? The dissension over the meaning "the ancient enemy" was that the people being referred to as the Puebloans, chronologically came before the Navajo. Obviously, the current day Puebloans took offense to such a name that referred to their ancestors as the enemy. So, to settle the debate, it was decided to refer to the ancient ones as Ancestral Puebloans, not Anasazi.

Changing the name resolved the offensive nature of the issue for the Pueblo, but it didn't adequately explain the use of "the enemy" by the Navajo. What you had to understand was that one should not look at the word "enemy" in the Western sense. Which was usually

interpreted as someone who opposed you. The Navajo were using the word “enemy” in their sense, which meant that the Ancestral Puebloans were dead and from the past. Navajo belief was that these kinds of people should be avoided because they were spiritually dangerous and could still harm you in the present. Thus, they were in a sense, the enemy.

Our guides told us that, once we reached the bottom, we would be riding past evidence of the Ancestral Puebloans: home sites on the canyon walls, pictographs (drawings or paintings on rock), petroglyphs (rock carvings) and pottery remnants. I’m sure the tidbits of information told to us by the Navajo guides were designed to keep us occupied on our long way down into the canyon. I must admit, it did pass the time, the scenery was just spectacular and the history was downright fascinating.

RIDING THE CANYON

CHAPTER TWO

As we rested our horses for a bit at the bottom of the canyon, I finally had time to pay proper respects to my ride. In other words, make friends with my horse. This wasn't the first time I had been on a horse. I used to ride horses quite a bit as a kid in the Los Angeles hills. I thought I was a pretty good judge of horses and I felt very confident and good about the one I was on. Maybe I was just lucky, as I wasn't given much choice when I was told to get on my assigned horse at the top of the canyon.

My horse's name was Cinnamon, obviously named after the color of his coat. A beautiful shiny and cinnamon coat to go along with his long golden mane, a high tail and a surprisingly pleasing disposition. He was very easy to handle and easy to talk to. I felt very fortunate to have met Cinnamon and this was as good as any time to let him know that.

Before I knew it, we were encouraged to be on our way. I hadn't come to Canyon de Chelly unprepared. I had spent many hours in and out of class studying up on the area and what I was here to do. So, understandably, I thought I knew which way we would be going when we took off. My understanding was that we were heading into Canyon de Chelly, but when we left we headed in the other

direction. In the direction of Canyon del Muerto. I was totally confused.

Just to help with the visualization, Canyon de Chelly is officially named Canyon de Chelly National Monument. It is located entirely on Navajo tribal lands and is owned by the Navajo Nation. Because of the huge amount of tourism and concerns about land use and management, it is run in cooperative partnership with the National Park System.

The Monument itself is actually made up of a number of canyon tributaries, the three largest of which are Canyon del Muerto, Black Rock Canyon and Canyon de Chelly. They form somewhat of a “V” shape, such that Canyon del Muerto is on the left, Black Rock Canyon forks off from Canyon del Muerto and Canyon de Chelly goes up the right side of the “V”.

Running down and through the canyons are a number of tributary streams, just to the east of the Monument, that find their origin high up in the Chuska Mountain Range of Arizona and New Mexico. Flowing down through Canyon del Muerto is Tsaile Creek. Rushing down through Canyon de Chelly are three sources: Wheatfields Creek, Whiskey Creek and Crystal Creek. I was never able to find out if there was any stream or creek that makes its way down Black Rock Canyon, but I am sure there is one.

Where we started our trip was at the bottom of the “V”, in what is normally referred to as Chinle Wash. This is a wash or arroyo that begins the trek up either side of the “V”. There are many more smaller canyons and watershed tributaries, but that’s the gist of it.

As I looked out over the canyon floor, I was struck by the number of sandstone passages and sheer walls that I saw. The wash itself is mainly fine sand, but there are plenty of places you have to cross over shallow water in order to get to one side or the other of the canyon.

After riding a short ways, I voiced my concern as to which way we were going. I guess showing my naivety or nerve, if you will. I didn't get any response. Marilyn soon dropped back and rode up along side of me. She explained that we, were in fact, heading up to the far end of Canyon del Muerto to do our work. She said she would explain more along the way, but for now that was all I really needed to know. We needed to step it up. I took that as a sign that I should just be quiet and continue riding.

It didn't take long to get into the rhythm of the ride. Cinnamon made it easy by locking me into his footsteps as his hoofs created a beat of their own. It was like my heartbeat was in lockstep with the rhythm of the ride. As we progressed further into the canyon along the wash, I could feel myself sensing the importance and significance of where I was. It was like I could feel the presence of the ancestors or something.

Riding over the white sandy wash, each horse kicked up a slight bit of dust as we nudged them along. We didn't have to do too much. It seemed like they knew exactly where they were going. I was the only one who seemed a little out of touch. We sort of zigzagged our way across the sand, crossing over a small stream that every so often met our path. Cinnamon just kind of splashed his way through making his way back up the other side. Turns out, this small

stream wasn't so small a long time ago. According to our guides, there used to be springs that attracted humans to the canyon floor for farming and agriculture.

The canyon floor was filled with willow and cottonwood trees, providing some very pretty greenery amongst the contrasting white of the sand and red of the sheer sandstone cliffs. Now and then, I could see patches of desert scrub and even grasslands. Some of the Navajo families that lived in the canyon had settled here. I could start to see what was called "desert varnish" on the canyon walls. These are the dark streaks left by rain storms interacting with chemical deposits in the rocks over thousands of years.

The other thing I noticed was the quiet. An almost absolute quiet, punctuated by the occasional sound of cawing ravens and screeching hawks. Silence, marked by the sound of the birds, the hoof steps of the horses and the guides informing us of something they thought we should be aware of. It reminded me of the time I had spent backpacking inside of an extinct volcano in Hawaii. On the floor, it was totally quiet. Eerily quiet. But every now and then the sound of silence would be interrupted by the buzz of a fly winging by. And then, it was gone.

The guides were correct, of course, in their description of the cliffs. The further we made our way up the canyon, the higher the cliffs became. The more the natural vegetation transitioned from one type of plant to another. I could see more sagebrush appearing. Yucca and cactus popped up. Yucca was an important fiber utilized by those who lived here so long ago. The trees started to change

over. Different types of trees, such as Pinyon Pine and Juniper appeared. The guides told us that there were even more types of trees higher up on the rim and in the Chuska Mountains. Trees such as Ponderosa pines, Douglas-fir, quaking Aspen and Oak.

After a few hours of riding up the canyon, we reached the point where Black Rock Canyon forked off from Canyon del Muerto. It was at this place where Dan, Irene and their family made their home. They had made prior arrangements for us to stop here for the night and settle into the grassland area around their ranch until the next morning.

First things first, we had to set up camp and make sure the horses were taken care of. After unloading all of our gear, we walked the horses into the corral that Dan and Irene used for their own horses, making them feel quite at home. We then went about setting up our campsite, which meant negotiating where everyone was going to sleep. Marilyn and I were going to be sharing sleeping quarters, so we began assembling our tent and moving some of our belongings inside.

As evening started to settle in, we prepared ourselves for the evening meal. Dan and Irene had put together quite a spread. It was a traditional Navajo meal, something they ate, pretty much, on a regular basis. Best of all, everything they made came straight from their farm. Out of their fields came corn, squash and beans. Corn was a big staple of their diet and had been a consistent staple for generations and generations. It was eaten fresh off the cob, dried or ground up into a fine corn meal.

This night, we were going to have grilled corn on the cob. Additionally, we were being treated to another Navajo favorite, fry bread. Not a corn product, fry bread is made out of wheat flour and is served as a flat doughy bread that is fried or deep fried in oil. Generally, it is eaten topped with various items such as honey, jam, powdered sugar, venison or beef. In our case, it was to be deer venison that had been hunted right here in the canyon.

We were told of another favorite Navajo food item called kneeldown bread. We were not going to be having this, but they thought it of interest to tell us. It is a very long and drawn out process, so I can understand why it had not been prepared for this night. Essentially, it is like a Mexican tamale made from scraping off the kernels of fresh corn cobs and grinding them up into a mushy consistency on a metate (grinding stone). Then, you wrap up this material in corn husks, bury them in hot ashes and cover it all with more corn husks to steam the bread. Finally, everything is covered with moist dirt and a layer of hot coals. After about an hour, you have hot, kneeldown bread. All in all, it is supposed to be a healthier alternative to fry bread.

After dinner we were quite literally stuffed up to our ears. We all took a role in helping to clean up the camp, with the exception of Dan, Irene and their helpers. They had done more than enough already. After we were through tidying everything up and putting things back in order, we sat around the campfire to tell stories and relax before ending the evening.

Me? I was overwhelmed by what was overhead. Stretching my neck out, I looked up at the night sky. I guess

I was following the embers and sparks as they made their flight up towards the sky. There were thousands, literally, hundreds of thousands of shiny, bright stars looking back down at me. It was not just overwhelming. It was very humbling to think that I was just a small, insignificant speck in a Universe so vast. I think the others picked up on my musings. They all started to look up and everything, all of a sudden, became quiet and still for a few brief minutes.

As the camp fire started to burn down and the conversation waned, the yawns came out. We were all feeling pretty darned tired after a long day's ride. In my case, it involved a long, hot car ride as well. We all said our proper good nights and staggered our way over to where we had set up the tents. Only for Marilyn and I, we still had lots to talk about.

It had been a long time since I had slept in a tent. Before my college days, I had done quite a bit of backpacking in the high Sierras, so I was kind of used to sleeping in the cramped confines of a two person tent. You don't have a whole lot of room to arrange things. There's really only one way to lay two sleeping bags and that was side by side.

We had our flashlights to provide a little light as we undressed and slipped into our cold sleeping bags. We knew it wouldn't be too long before we were nice and warm and toasty. As we situated ourselves in our bags, we turned out the lights and said good night. I rolled over onto my side and closed my eyes.

It was only a matter of seconds later that Marilyn decided to start up a conversation. My eyes popped open. My first reaction was to just ignore her, but she pressed on. She asked if this was a good time to fill me in on a few details of the trip? I rolled back over to face her, knowing that this must be important. Marilyn said that I had been correct in assuming that we would be heading in the direction of Canyon de Chelly earlier in the day. That was what we had discussed back at college. That was what the plan was supposed to be.

She apologized for that but said that once she got to Canyon de Chelly, she experienced a change of heart. She couldn't really explain the feeling, but something told her that the time was right to do what she had wanted to do for quite a long time. That, not only was the time right, but she had finally met the person to do it with. By this time, I was fully engaged. I turned on my flashlight between us. The eerie glow reminded me of when we would tell ghost stories as a kid. The kind that scared the holy daylights out of me. That's the way I felt right now. Like there was something coming that was going to knock my socks off. My heart started beating a mile a minute.

Marilyn noticed that my eyes were about ready to pop out of my head. The glow of the flashlight didn't help any. She encouraged me to just listen to what she had to say. After hearing the full narrative, I could opt out if I wanted to. There would be no hard feelings. No repercussions. Somehow I knew that, if I did opt out, it would be a missed opportunity I would regret the rest of my life.

So Marilyn started her explanation. Her plan was to divide the trip up into two main expeditions. She chose Canyon del Muerto as the first excursion because this was the canyon that offered the greatest opportunity to train me in the most pertinent aspects of field archaeology in the least amount of time. We would be heading up to the top of Canyon del Muerto to a couple of different sites. One, Mummy Cave, was very well researched and very well known as a site highly significant to understanding the Ancestral Puebloans. This would provide me with the training and understanding that I needed in order to do part two of the expedition.

Part two's excursion was to go up a tributary slot of Canyon del Muerto called Twin Trails Canyon. This was to be the more demanding of the trips and would be a good test of my training and ability to practice what I had learned at Mummy Cave. I thought to myself, so far so good. That all sounds pretty reasonable. Well thought out and the kind of structure I like. I felt my apprehension let up a little. My breathing slowed, my toes uncurled and my teeth began to unclench. Maybe just a bit too soon. Marilyn continued with her confession.

She hesitated a little, to gather her thoughts I suppose, but went on to say that there was a third part to her plan that included me. I thought to myself, here it comes. There just had to be more waiting in the wings. She said that this was the part that she had been thinking about for years, but hadn't really figured out how to implement or who to implement it with.

She said that when she encountered me for the first time, she felt she had finally met that person. She didn't have a lot to go on, except a feeling deep inside of her that said the timing was right and that I was the correct person. She called it a gut level feeling. At that point she started mentoring me and the process started. The schooling continued. The friendship grew. Here we were. She could tell by the look on my face that I was wondering why me? She said now was not the time to go into more details. I thought it was because she had no more details.

The third piece of the puzzle involved a canyon off of Canyon del Muerto called Twin Trails Canyon. This was the canyon not far from Mummy Cave where I was to hone my archaeological skills, so to speak. Marilyn confessed that she had not spent a whole lot of time up in Twin Trails Canyon. In fact, there had only been a few, limited archaeological sites found there by earlier archaeologists. But there were rock shelters high up on the sandstone cliffs that were good indicators of early human habitation. When she did go there, there was something about the canyon that talked to her. Something that told her that there was something more there to be found. That something, was now telling her that I was to play a key role in finding out what that was.

Suddenly, I had so many questions. So many emotions churning through my mind. Was I up for something like this? Who was talking to her and how did they know of me? This was all sounding very mysterious, as if a red flag was flying directly in my face. But, curiously

enough, it also sounded very interesting. It became more tempting the more I thought about it. I wanted to hear more.

I started to calm down once again. My heart rate slowed. I thought this was the opportunity of a lifetime. Marilyn could tell by my breathing and the changing look on my face that I was giving in to the temptation. That I was acquiescing to the invitation. Both from her and the canyon. Somehow she knew that it was to be. Somehow we both knew, that we were going to do this.

Marilyn explained that we would be spending about two weeks at the Mummy Cave field site. There I would learn the basics of the canyon's history and practice the technical aspects of being an archaeologist. The three Navajo guides had already been alerted that the plans had changed. Dan, Irene and Lee would be leading us on our journey to Mummy Cave.

The second part of the expedition to Twin Trails Canyon? Only Lee would be guiding us on that one. Marilyn wasn't sure about how many days that would take. She began telling me about her and Lee's relationship. Lee and Marilyn had worked together for about three years. Lee was already well aware of the spiritual nature of Twin Trails Canyon. He felt the same way as Marilyn. That there was something there waiting to be found. Waiting to be heard. He heard the same voices that called out to Marilyn and that were now calling out to me.

RIDING THE CANYON DAY TWO

CHAPTER THREE

Everyone in the camp woke up the next morning bright and early. We were all feeling full of energy and ready to go. Everyone with the exception of me and Marilyn. We were totally exhausted, after having spent most of the night gabbing. Well, it wasn't really gabbing, but that's a different matter. Even after we had decided to end our conversation and call it a night, we couldn't sleep. There was just too much going on. Too many thoughts racing through our heads. I came into this process thinking I was going to be an intern. Working without pay to gain experience on the job. Now, I felt more like I was an apprentice on some magical mystery tour. Still working for no pay and learning from the best teacher around. But, with a warning that I may not be in control of my own destiny. That was the scary part.

We both tried to act as normal as we could when we exited our tent, but we knew it was going to be a struggle to get back on our horses and ride up the canyon. Fortunately, the beauty of the canyon took over as we saddled up after a hearty breakfast of scrambled eggs, crispy bacon and plenty of hot, steamy coffee.

There was so much to see and so much to process. It seemed like every day I gained a totally new appreciation of

all that was around me. Dan, Irene and Lee announced that we would be seeing a number of archaeological sites on our ride today. They would point them out and provide a little interpretation, but we wouldn't be able to stop and linger. We had a long ways to go.

We hadn't gone too far when Irene pointed out one of the first ruin sites we were to encounter that day. At the base of the canyon wall was Antelope House. There were many walls still standing, several kivas (circular round rooms used for mainly spiritual purposes) and many other rooms built by the Ancestral Puebloans. Irene pointed out that it was estimated that at one time there were upwards of 91 rooms that reached four stories in height. There were pictographs on the walls of antelope grazing which gave the ruin its name.

As we made our way onward and up through the canyon, a dark thunderstorm appeared out of nowhere. The wind came up to about thirty miles per hour, thunder roared overhead, lightening bolts crashed and the rain came down in buckets. Large hail came pounding down, as we fled to the side of the canyon wall hunkering down under an overhang waiting for the storm to blow through. Fortunately, the horses had been through all of this before and were not too spooked.

Our guides were quick to mention that you never really knew what the weather was going to do inside the canyon. It could be sunny and warm one moment and wet and cold the next. We were lucky to have found the cliff overhang. We were told that it wasn't unusual to have a thunderstorm everyday, so to be prepared. After the storm passed and

the Sun came back out, we moved out from underneath the cliff overhang and dried out as best we could.

Continuing our journey, we crisscrossed over the canyon's creek numerous times. The previous, barely moving creek had actually surged in size, due to the recent deluge of rain. Our horses took the change in water level in stride. When we started our adventure the day before the creek was referred to as Chinle Wash. But the guides said it could also be a river at times. I was pretty sure what we were riding over now was Tsaile Creek, the main water source snaking its way down from the Chuska Mountains through Canyon del Muerto.

It almost felt like I was on some kind of theme park adventure ride. There were things to look out for on the right. Things on the left. More things up ahead. Our next place of note was Standing Cow Ruin. This cave, also of Ancestral Puebloan origin, held the remains of eighty-five to ninety rooms and three kivas. At the base of a sheer canyon wall, there was a small dwelling or storage bin. The interesting aspect of Standing Cow Ruin was the pictograph of what appeared to be a large, almost modern looking cow. Thus, the name of the ruin.

Dan and Irene pointed out that the pictograph of the cow was actually painted there in historic times. Currently, the old dwelling was used as storehouse for corn by the local Navajo. There was another pictograph not far from the dwelling that depicted a Navajo painting of Spanish cavalrymen, indicative of the painful relationship that existed between the Navajo and the Spanish when their cultures collided.

We kept trudging along stopping for lunch amidst a large stand of cottonwood trees. It was nothing too elaborate like the meal we had the night before. Just enough beef jerky, crackers and cheese to go around. And, plenty of water.

Marilyn and I hadn't really talked much during the day's ride so far. We sat together at lunch, but I could tell she had a lot on her mind. I was sure she was thinking about last night and all of the things she needed to do once we made it to Mummy Cave. This was where we would meet up with the rest of the team. Marilyn would be directing all the activities that would be taking place from that point on.

I noticed other types of trees growing in the area and wondered what they were? I was told there were cottonwood, willow, tamarisk and russian olive trees. The tamarisk and russian olive trees were an invasive species that the National Park Service was trying to remove from the Monument. This was because they were causing great damage to the canyon floor and eroding the stability of the stream banks. As well, they were crowding out the native species of cottonwood and willow. We didn't spend too much time on our lunch break, as we still had a long way to go. So, we didn't waste time and were quick to get back on our horses and be on our way.

As we traveled, we were told to be on the lookout for petroglyphs on the canyon walls. One such obvious place we passed by was called Standing Rock or Petroglyph Rock. It was easy to see the etchings that had been carved into the sandstone wall depicting riders on horses and big

game animals such as antelope with antlers. It seemingly told the dramatic story of hunters out tracking big game.

We continued along, winding our way through the canyon. We soon came to a tributary canyon off of Canyon Del Muerto that Lee said was Twin Trails Canyon. Riding past this fork off the canyon, I paid special interest to the location and its geographical surroundings. I knew that I would be coming back here at some point. This was the place where Marilyn said we would be going after Mummy Cave.

I think Cinnamon picked up on some of my restlessness. I had to cinch up his reins a little just to control him. I must admit that I was a bit on edge too. Last night's conversation with Marilyn made Twin Trails Canyon sound a bit spooky. Even so, I got this sixth sense that there was something happening up there. I guess you could call it an intuition. Was it the canyon or just me making all of this up in my head? The further we rode past this place, the more at ease both Cinnamon and I became. Before long, we arrived at Big Cave Ruins.

Big Cave Ruins is a very large rock shelter or cave that was used intensively during the Ancestral Puebloan stage. According to Marilyn, this site had produced one of the largest concentrations of valuable archaeological material in Canyon de Chelly. Several burials had been found here, including a number of child burials, all occurring around the same time period and buried together. Marilyn said that it appeared as if some disease must have swept through the site killing off a number of the children.

Marilyn and Lee announced that we were well on our way to Mummy Cave as we left Big Cave Ruins. I felt a big sigh of relief knowing that we were almost there. Even though I had ridden horses a lot in my youth, it was now taking a huge toll on my bottom. I kept trying to readjust myself in Cinnamon's saddle to relieve the pressure. It helped a little, but the news that we were almost to our destination, helped considerably more.

Ahead, on our left, high up on the canyon wall and about 300 feet up the slope from the floor, there it was. Mummy Cave. Mummy Cave had always sounded so impressive to me when I was learning about it in college. The pictures simply did not do it justice as I sat still on Cinnamon and looked up in awe. This was Marilyn's moment to shine.

She noted that the site was actually made up of two distinct caves: the Eastern and the Western. The largest of the two, the Eastern cave, consisted of about fifty-five rooms and four kivas. The Western cave contained about twenty rooms and was, largely, inaccessible, due to erosion and cave-ins. There was a ledge that connected the two caves that contained about fifteen rooms and a "tower" house that was the best preserved of all the rooms at the site. All together, Mummy Cave represented the largest Ancestral Puebloan village in Canyon de Chelly. It was estimated that upwards of seventy people called Mummy Cave their home.

Mummy Cave was named as a result of archaeological work done in the mid-1800s. Two human burials were found in the slope of accumulated rock debris

in front of the cave. The bodies were desiccated and had weathered out of their burial chamber or cist as it is called. Marilyn said that I would be learning more about cists in the coming days.

In any event, we were here. Well, almost. As is my want to do, I was being a little naive in thinking that we would just get off of our horses here and stop. Even though that was what I wanted to do. We were actually going to go on a little further to a place where the team had set up their field site, not far from Mummy Cave. It really wasn't that far, but I have to admit that I was a bit deflated to know we had further to go. I know my bottom didn't like it.

The other thing that kind of frustrated me a little was that, as I looked up at Mummy Cave, I thought sure I saw an overlook. There were people actually standing there looking down at Mummy Cave. Marilyn explained that it was an overlook fed by a road that came up from Chinle. I thought to myself, why didn't we just drive up here and hike down to the canyon floor where the field site was?

I knew better than to use my outside voice. It wouldn't have been good to do so. The more I thought about it, the less I fumed. The more I decided that I was wrong. I was not just a tourist driving the North rim of the canyon looking for ruins. I was a participant in the process of trying to understand what happened here. And the only way to do so was to walk the canyon. Or, in my case, to ride the canyon. I had to remind myself that I was an archaeologist. I was here for a purpose, even if I didn't have a clear idea of what that purpose was yet. That would all come in time.

MUMMY CAVE FIELD SITE

CHAPTER FOUR

When we finally arrived at our stopping point, we had progressed a short ways past Mummy Cave. The field site was rimmed by another of the many rock shelter cave ruins that were occupied during the Basketmakers and Pueblo stages, known as the Ancestral Puebloans. We were met at the site by the other members of Marilyn's team that had arrived here three weeks earlier. In need of additional supplies and of course to pick me up, Marilyn and Lee had ridden back to Chinle to make arrangements. In route, they had stopped to pick up Dan and Irene as additional Navajo guides for the return trip back to the field site.

There were three new team members that I was introduced to: Fran, Charlie and Julie. They had also been students of Marilyn, post graduate students now, and were making the transition to archaeological fieldwork from the academic environment. They were all very happy to meet me and couldn't wait to get some additional help in cataloging and analyzing all of the archaeological data they had been collecting.

Everyone understood well enough that the Mummy Cave sites had already been extensively researched back in the early 1900s. There probably wasn't a lot more to learn about the sites or anywhere else in Canyon del

Muerto for that matter. But Marilyn made it very clear that, even though that may be the case, it was her opinion that all sites were never completely finished. Let alone, well understood. She felt there was always more to learn. Maybe it was new technology or, maybe just dumb luck, but there was always something else waiting to be found. The team believed in that. I became a firm believer in that, as well.

It was late in the day and the journey up from Chinle had been a long one. As I unpacked and set up my tent next to the others, I think I finally felt I had arrived. I was ready to start what I had come here to do. That was to really understand what it meant to be an anthropologist. More specifically, an archaeologist. I deeply wanted to immerse myself in the people and history of the American Southwest, as they lived and thrived in Canyon de Chelly.

As a team, including Dan, Irene and Lee, we sat together around the campfire that evening for our evening meal, talking and slowly getting acquainted. The meal in no way compared to the one so extravagantly prepared by Dan and Irene the day before. But I must say that it was just as satisfying. How can you complain about sitting out under thousands of twinkling stars, next to a warm, roaring campfire?

I got up and made a special visit to Cinnamon. I don't know if it was so much to comfort him or myself? Meeting new people hadn't ever been a strong point of mine so it was an easy decision to seek out Cinnamon. I had a feeling that we would be spending a whole lot of time together.

After a short visit, I returned to the campfire and re-joined the group. They were already starting to nod off and make apologies for wanting to head off to bed so early. We all needed a good night's rest before the actual work began tomorrow. This time it was just me in the tent, so I was expecting to get some good snooze time in.

ARCHAEOLOGY OF CANYON DE CHELLY

CHAPTER FIVE

The next morning was my first real day at the Mummy Cave field site. We all crawled out of our tents on our hands and knees to a beautiful, clear morning. Other than being a little saddle sore, I was looking forward to a full and eventful day. The Sun was just coming up over the high sandstone cliffs and we all followed its path as we tried to warm ourselves in the early morning cold.

I was told that mornings in the canyon start out on the cool side, but warm up nicely during the day. I found that the higher up in the canyon you went, the colder the mornings became. I learned to strip off layers of clothes as the day wore on, to accommodate for the warmth of the rising Sun. The occasional thunderstorm was a welcomed event, as it would act to cool things back down again.

We built a small campfire and huddled around it as we ate a small breakfast of hot oatmeal and drank a few cups of good, strong coffee. Our first order of business was to bring me up to speed on the archaeological data. The data of Canyon de Chelly, the Mummy Cave field site and the whole history behind everything we were looking at. The others had already been formally introduced to this information, but they sat along with me anyway. They pointed out that there was always something new to learn

and, quite frankly, they just enjoyed hearing Marilyn's perspective on things. The same held true for me. I had heard the story of Canyon de Chelly many times in Marilyn's formal classroom lectures back at school. But things were different now. I wasn't sitting in a classroom. I was sitting smack dab in the middle of where it all happened.

The thing that wasn't different this time was an annoying little habit I had of keeping a notepad and pencil in my back pocket. I got accustomed to always having them with me to record things of importance that I could easily refer back to later. They were always with me. It was just in my nature to document everything that was going on around me. I reached around, pulled out my notepad and got ready to record Marilyn's take on Canyon de Chelly.

Marilyn started from the very top, beginning with a better, more thorough and technical explanation of Canyon de Chelly itself. She pointed out that it wasn't just a canyon where some indigenous people lived a very long time ago. It was a record of human occupation that existed long before there were ever any written records. The canyon had preserved that record and it was up to us, as archaeologists, to read that record and document that human occupation for all current and future generations. It was very inspiring.

The first thing Marilyn talked about was more of a technical clarification. It had to do with the scientific notation that was going to be used to document the age and dates of any of the archaeological and cultural material coming out of the ground. Whether it be here in the canyon or

anywhere else. It wasn't enough to say that some things or people were hundreds or thousands of years old. It was extremely important to document as best one could, very specific dates. Even though all you could ever really do was provide ranges. She said the best dating techniques in the world could only provide estimates and required some interpretation based on various geographical conditions.

Marilyn went on to say that for her data, which of course included ours as well, we would be using an alternative to the more typical use of a date followed by BC (before Christ) and AD (anno Domini). So, instead of BC and AD, we would be using BCE (Before Common Era) and CE (Common Era). All four notations were used in reference to the Gregorian Calendar. In fact, both sets of date notation were equivalent. But, BCE and CE were more frequently referred to as being religious neutral and preferred by the academic and scientific community.

Marilyn started her historical evaluation of Canyon de Chelly by stating that it preserved the archaic history of its people over a very long period of time and through various stages or epochs. These stages had been defined through an examination of past archaeological data and historic sources. Marilyn stressed that these dates were only generic categories established to help organize the otherwise vast amounts of data.

Marilyn said that the first category comprised what was known as the Paleo-Indian period (9200-2500 BCE). This stage began what was thought to be the first evidence of human occupation in Canyon de Chelly. That period was then followed by The Archaic people (2500-200 BCE).

There wasn't a whole lot of evidence found for either of these two periods, but enough was found to document their existence.

Starting with the Basketmakers (200 BCE-750 CE), much more evidence became available, which required even more refined categorization. As such, the Basketmakers were sub-divided into Basketmaker II and III. Marilyn stopped right there and said she was well aware that she didn't list a Basketmaker I stage. She said that we should keep a mental note of that and she would discuss it later.

After the Basketmakers, there began an even longer period called the Pueblo stage. That too contained a lot of data, requiring more sub-division. In her desire to keep her account short, Marilyn said she would also be discussing these in further detail later. But, in summary, the Pueblo stages included the Pueblo (750-1300 CE) and the Hopi/Navajo occupations, where there was considerable overlap during the more recent historic period.

With that out of the way, Marilyn jumped head first into a greater description of the six general stages. She said the Paleo-Indian stage was the one we knew the least about. Even so, there was high confidence that humans visited the canyon occasionally during this time period. On rare occasions skeletal remains had been found of these people buried deep in caves. Projectile points had also been found that were probably used for hunting. It appeared that most of their record was destroyed due to site erosion and weathering. There just wasn't enough left behind to be able to say much about what humans were doing here.

Marilyn said that the Archaic stage we knew a little more about, based on the physical evidence left behind. It was felt that humans must have used the canyon for hunting and seasonal migration, but they never appeared to have lived in the canyon building permanent structures. They, presumably, made temporary campsites on the ridge tops, making short forays into the canyon for food. What we knew of them came from petroglyphs found etched onto rocks and canyon walls that had been dated to this time period.

It wasn't until the Basketmaker stage that we found evidence indicating a continued human presence in Canyon de Chelly. Named for the fine basketry associated with these people, they followed a semi-agricultural and sedentary way of life, instead of strictly hunting and gathering. As their farming skills improved, they built large communities, granaries and rudimentary public structures. They typically lived in caves or shallow houses called pit houses, out in the open and recessed into the ground.

The Basketmakers were followed by the Pueblo stage, where a big cultural shift occurred. This was the primary stage where larger cliff-dwelling settlements were made, abandoning the much smaller pit houses that were built and preferred by the Basketmakers. They built rectangular, apartment like buildings that contained small households and kivas. Again, at the base of cliffs or high up on the canyon walls.

The Hopi stage followed an abrupt end to the Pueblo era. A prolonged drought dried out the canyon as well as elsewhere, causing disease and conflict that prompted the

Puebloan people to disperse. They left the canyon and settled in villages along the rivers. The people of these villages were the Hopi and they used the canyon for seasonal farming, ritual pilgrimages, and occasional lengthy stays.

The final intercultural exchange occurred with the transition of Hopi to that of the Navajos. One that continues until the present day. The Navajo were pushed south and west into the Canyon de Chelly region. They brought with them domesticated animals acquired from the Spanish along with a culture that had been modified by years of migration and adaptation.

Before we took a break for lunch, Marilyn wanted to make one more point. She wanted to remind us again that these were just general stages or categories. More detailed analysis was required in order to understand the archaeological evidence found in the Basketmaker and Pueblo stages.

She said that much of what we saw translated to different layers within the stages. Each layer was marked by an increasing importance on one technology or another. Such that the Basketmaker stage was broken down into Basketmaker II and Basketmaker III stages. There was a hypothetical Basketmaker I stage, but after considerable analysis it was decided that there was nothing new in Basketmaker I that wasn't already included in Basketmaker II. So, rather than rearrange everything, Basketmaker I was simply removed.

The Pueblo stage, was actually broken down into five different stages to reflect the diversity that was going on at the time. Each stage was representative of more specific dates of localization within the general Pueblo phase. Marilyn said that as a result of this, there was a considerable overlap of Hopi and Navajo occupation inside of Canyon de Chelly during more recent times. It was thought that there must have been considerable trade between the Hopi and the Navajo, especially in ceramics, so it was very difficult to assign one type of technology to one or the other.

Wrapping things up just before lunch, Marilyn said that the bottom line was that it was the Basketmaker and early Puebloan cultures that had left the most archaeological evidence in Canyon de Chelly. Because of their overlapping time periods, it also showed a blending of the two cultures. This was true for archaeological sites found within Canyon del Muerto and most of the other archaeological sites, including Mummy Cave.

Much of what Marilyn talked about I had learned while attending her classes. But, here it was different. Sitting at an uncomfortable desk chair in an overcrowded classroom just did not compare to being totally immersed in the place where the history was created. Where so many lives were lived, each with their own personal story. I truly felt it was up to us to discover the evidence of those stories.

After lunch we all sat back down with Marilyn to further discuss the characteristics of Canyon de Chelly. These were the things that would help us, as archaeologists, find

the physical evidence of human occupation and the material that they left behind.

Marilyn said the most obvious thing about Canyon de Chelly was its geological appearance. The most striking of which were its features of deep canyons cut out long ago from the plateau high above. Otherwise known as the Colorado Plateau. As the plateau was uplifted over time, streams on its surface eroded their channels and created the deep canyons that were evident today.

It was the stream erosion in combination with the sandstone of the canyon walls that formed the rock shelters. The upper overhanging rock shelters tended to be warmer and dryer, whereas the lower rock shelters were more susceptible to groundwater seepage and dampness. That was important to archaeologists for two reasons. First, both types of rock shelters showed evidence of human habitation. Second, the upper rock shelters, being dryer, provided excellent conditions for the preservation of organic materials. In other words, there was more left to discover.

The climate of the canyon was another thing to pay attention to, she said. The canyon was surrounded by mountains which regulated the amount of rainfall. The wettest time of the year was summer, when thunderstorms frequented the area on almost a daily basis. Temperatures could be very cold in the winter and very hot in the summer, somewhat like a desert environment. But when looked at from a climate zone perspective, the canyon floor was quite comparable to what was described as an optimal agricultural or farming zone.

Vegetation found within the canyon supported the argument for human habitation. The number of cottonwood trees, willow trees and others, provided good lumber with which to build structures, construct tools and form other types of human artifacts. Plants such as chenopod, amaranth, prickly pear and cactus, were used as food sources for the canyon occupants.

Game animals were also abundant within the canyon, although not so much any more due to a prevalence of historic over-hunting. Animals such as antelope, mule deer, cottontail rabbit, jackrabbit and pronghorn sheep were widespread during the Ancestral Puebloan period. The primary source of meat coming from hunting antelope and deer.

Taken all together, Marilyn concluded that was why we saw so much evidence of human habitation in Canyon de Chelly. These were the reasons for the considerable number of archaeological sites found on the canyon walls, within the canyon floor and the intensity and diversity of their distribution.

Breaking for the day, I decided take a quick look around. I wanted to survey our surroundings and solidify what Marilyn had just said. Obviously for me, I also saw this as an opportunity to just stand in the majesty of the canyon and take it all in. As I did so, I looked up at the red, sandstone cliff walls and counted the number of rock shelters or caves that presented themselves to me. If I was an early Basketmaker, would I have chosen one of those as my home? Would I have chosen one of those caves to have my bones buried in?

I spent the rest of the day just walking around, becoming familiar with where I was. I tried to imagine myself as someone else living in a different time and in a different place. Trying to think like an Ancestral Puebloan. Like a Basketmaker.

TALUS SLOPE SURVEY

CHAPTER SIX

My second day at the Mummy Cave field site began just like the previous day. It was a little on the cool side, but I knew it would warm up later. Marilyn and Lee had left very early in the morning for the rest of the week to explore the canyon. I was pretty confident that what they were doing was scoping out Twin Trails Canyon. Dan and Irene broke camp and started out for Chinle, as they had to make arrangements for another guide trip within the Monument.

Fran, Charlie, Julie and I were left at the field site to begin my formal training. We were all huddled around the morning campfire when I decided to check in on Cinnamon. I was trailed by Julie, concerned that I might be feeling kind of homesick or something. She said she noticed that I went off by myself the previous day as well and wanted to make sure that I was alright.

I explained to her that I was truly fine and that I was just trying to imagine the walls of the canyon speaking to me. I thought that sounded kind of strange, but Julie said that she did that all the time. As far as she was concerned, it was a necessary part of being an archaeologist. She thought that if she knew what it was really like to be an Ancestral Puebloan, that would make it easier to find the traces that they had left behind. I interpreted that to mean

that she understood, like I did, that the ancient ones were really still here. The echoes off the canyon walls said so.

We walked back to the others, gathered up our supplies and started on our way. I wasn't sure where we were going, but I knew the rest of the team had been thinking about it a lot. This was their opportunity to mold me into becoming the kind of archaeologist that they thought themselves to be. The kind of archaeologist that Marilyn had trained them to be.

The team had my full confidence, but I was a little concerned when they said where we were going for a hike. They pointed up to a place high up on the canyon wall and said that was where we would be going. As I craned my neck to look, I could make out a couple of rock shelters that seemed to be where we were really heading. We didn't take a whole lot with us, just the basic necessities of some snacks and plenty of water.

We started out on the flat and level floor of the canyon, headed for a rugged looking trail that switch-backed its way up the side of the canyon. The rock shelters certainly didn't look very accessible from the canyon floor. As my questioning gaze up the side of the cliff caught Julie's attention, she pointed out that we were headed to the talus slope of one of the caves. She pointed to the pile of debris or rock flowing down from the opening of the cave. Over long periods of time, natural weathering had created more debris, which was then forced down slope from the mouth of the cave. I nodded my head in understanding, but I still wondered how we were going to get there?

The particular talus and rock shelter we were headed to was not actually part of Mummy Cave. It was a cavity off to the side, away from the main hubbub of where all the tourists gathered. The size of the rock shelter was not as big as Mummy Cave. The width of the opening was only about one hundred feet. Its depth, at its deepest, was around thirty-six feet.

The climb up the switchbacks became harder and slower as we gained height up the canyon cliff. The trail became very narrow with a steep drop off to one side. That was scary enough but as I looked ahead, I could see the sheer face of the canyon wall coming up. Access to the talus was solely by climbing up the forty-five degree angle of that face.

The trail itself became loose rock and just plain hard sandstone. We had to be very careful climbing up, as our footing became quite slippery on the windblown rocky surface. We used naturally carved out steps that had been chiseled by centuries of weathering to climb our way up. In other words, we grabbed on to whatever we could. Finally, we made it to the path running parallel to the rock shelter.

We faced one last obstacle. Navigating the very narrow pathway that had become heavily eroded and covered with debris over time. Single file, we carefully inched our way across the cliff edge to the hollowed opening. After doing so, we were at the rock shelter, standing under its overhang and on top of the talus. We gathered at the entrance where we ate our snacks, had some water and took a much needed rest.

The first thing out of Charlie's mouth was a question directed solely at me. He asked if I knew why we were here? Fumbling a bit, I answered that this must be a rock shelter that was once used by humans for shelter. Maybe even where they had lived? Fran thought that was a good answer, but inquired as to how I thought we might find that out? Admittedly, I was painfully silent for a long period. So was everyone else.

I knew that I wasn't going to get any help, so I searched my memory banks for anything of value that I might have learned in school. The only thing I could think of was to say that we needed to look inside the shelter. We needed to look for some kind of evidence that someone had been there a very long time ago. That brought some smiles to their faces, but they still seemed to be expecting more.

It was Julie's turn. She wanted to know if there was anything else we could look for, outside of going into the shelter, that might help us? She reasoned it could be dangerous to go inside. It might be highly unstable. There might be animals inside that would not appreciate our intrusion. We might need to set up lights in order to see what we were doing.

Julie asked me to remember what we had talked about earlier regarding the talus. How the talus slope contained debris forced out of the shelter, much of which came from natural weathering. Without waiting for my response, which was not easily forthcoming by the way, she answered that the debris could also contain signs of human occupation. Had anybody been living, even temporarily, inside the rock shelter, they too would have thrown things outside.

Anything not wanted would have gone down the slope. Thus, adding to the talus in the form of litter, if you will. So, she continued, that was why we were standing outside and not inside the shelter itself. I spent the next few seconds looking down at my feet and then, over the edge of the cliff where the talus formed. I finally understood that this was my first lesson. A lesson that had to do with, how do you know as an archaeologist where to look?

Obviously, Fran, Charlie and Julie had been here before. They had already performed an examination prior to myself ever arriving at the excavation site. They suggested that I be very careful and just walk around and over the talus slope. Bend down and take some time to examine the ground. Maybe, I should even sit down and just pick through some of the rubble.

I decided to do just that and as I did so my mind started to automatically arrange the things I looked at into categories. At first I created high level categories, such as rock and wood. Then, I started to ask myself questions about those categories. I noticed that the small rocks were similar to the rocks found encircling the mouth of the shelter. Had they weathered off and fallen down the slope? It looked like there might be some order to the arrangement of the rocks. Some appeared to be stacked, one on top of the other. Was this evidence of some kind of a rudimentary wall?

The wood I found I wasn't quite sure what to do with. There appeared to be no trees around the shelter, as we were high up on the canyon wall. So why would there be evidence of wood in the talus? Also, there were pieces of

wood that appeared to be carved and intentionally burned on the ends. Maybe they were some kind of support or small beam used in building a structure?

Something else that appeared out of normal was the fine sand that I found lodged between the rocks. It didn't really look like sand. It looked more like ash. Could this be evidence of a hearth that may have been located inside of the shelter and later was thrown outside? Had I found some kind of charcoal? If I had chosen to dig deeper, would I have found evidence of more cultural refuse?

As I formulated these questions in my mind, I verbalized them to my team partners. Once again they smiled and seemed pleased. All at once, they started clapping and congratulated me on passing my first quiz. I was in seventh heaven, but hurriedly brought out my notepad to document all that I had just learned.

We spent the next few minutes talking about the things that I didn't see or mention. Mainly, evidence of things like pottery sherds. The lack of pottery sherds was a significant sign of which cultural stage the shelter's inhabitants may have occupied. In other words, this rock shelter must have been occupied by people who did not know about or how to make pottery. That would place them in the Basketmaker era, specifically in the Basketmaker II period, where ceramic artifacts were completely absent.

Fran mentioned how something as seemingly insignificant as the pieces of wood fragments I found, could actually be significant. They, also, could be used to identify the cultural period. She said it was widely recognized that

Basketmaker II sites used wooden beams for holding up the walls inside of their rock shelters. These beams were typically burned or intentionally broken at the ends. If they were shown to have been axed-cut, that would indicate a Basketmaker III or Pueblo period, depending on the tool used to shape the beam. Another item of importance, was that the beams could be used in tree ring dating. This was more of an absolute way of determining the age of the logs used in holding up the walls and, thus, the age that the rock shelter may have had human occupants.

Lastly, Charlie mentioned something that I probably would have found if I had spent more time and actually dug into the talus slope a little. He said I most certainly would have found evidence of upright slabs of sandstone. He was so certain of this because they had already discovered these slabs in a nearby rock shelter. The significance of these sandstone slabs was that they formed enclosures and were indicators of cists. I had read about cists and already knew what he was going to say next. The cists were used for burials and were, again, typically found associated in the talus slope debris that contained human remains.

Their conclusion? By examining the talus slope, one was able to make determinations about the rock shelter without ever having to go inside the cave. Depending on what was found buried in the slope, further examination of the interior might be warranted. I had a feeling that's what we would be pursuing later.

It had taken approximately two hours to hike up to the rock shelter and we had spent another couple of hours in

assessing me and the site. We all felt it was time to start the hike back down. I felt a little disappointed. I felt like I had just begun to get familiar with things. There was so much more to examine. I wanted, desperately, to hear more about the cists and what had been found inside.

I think the others could sense that I was not really ready to go. They reassured me that we would be back. They said that we had only just begun and there was plenty of time left to continue examining the cave. As we filed out along the path, single file, I took the lead feeling confident that I could find my way back down to the campsite.

That night, as we sat around the campfire, I glanced up at the canyon wall occasionally, trying to locate the rock shelter that we had visited. I think I was looking for some kind of sign that this wasn't just a weird dream. I thought I spotted it, when Julie sat down next to me and confided that she knew how I felt. She felt the same way the very first time that she had entered the realm of some ancient's home. I confided in her that I felt like there was someone there. Watching. Listening. Hoping that we would have a little talk some day. Julie rested her head on my shoulder, as if admitting that she felt the very same way.

ARTIFACT SCATTER SITE

CHAPTER SEVEN

I woke up early the next day, hoping to prepare for the climb back up to the talus slope. I was told we were not going to be hiking back up to the shelter and my heart sank. I had been dreaming about it all night long. Instead, the plan was to stay here around the campsite and work on some of the more mundane aspects of doing archaeology. Of course, that was just my opinion.

There was a place not too far from here, still on the canyon floor, that had been chosen by the team for my next so-called lesson. I was told this was going to be a lesson based more on the mechanics of excavating a dig site. We all sauntered our way over in the direction of the planned activity, coffee cups in hand and my notepad and pencil at the ready.

Once we got there, the first thing I noticed was that a fairly large area of canyon floor had been roped off to delimit its boundaries. Things started as they did the day before, with a question directed at me. As we stood on this unassuming piece of ground, Fran prefaced the question with the information that we should assume that where we stood was a scatter site. More specifically, it was considered to be an artifact scatter site.

Once again, I was caught off guard, but I racked my brain trying to recall what an artifact scatter site was. Then it hit me. Archaeology 101. These were archaeological sites that consisted of pieces of ceramics, stone tools or the waste flakes involved in tool production. Typically, these artifacts were scattered over the surface or only partially buried in the ground. Once it looked like I had some semblance of comprehension on my face, Fran asked me what we should do now?

I was praying that the “A” I got in Marilyn’s Archaeology 101 class was going to finally pay off. This was not going to be an easy question to answer, but I launched into everything I knew about what we were going to do now. Or, at least, what I was going to do now. I assumed that what Fran was really asking was how did an archaeologist dig a site?

Fran had decided to help me out a little by telling me that this was an artifact scatter site, but that didn’t really matter too much. There was only one way to figure out how to dig and that was to do a formal survey. That was the answer I gave the team, with the understanding of course, that this was only the first step in a multi-step process. They concurred, but wanted me to explain further about what was involved in doing a formal survey.

I replied that it kind of depended on the tools you had at your disposal. If you had the money, you could use the latest technology to run scans of the site through remote sensing. Both from above and from below the surface. But out here? The only option was to walk the proposed site for evidence of anything worthwhile. That meant slowly walking

over every square inch of the site looking for anything that stood out.

We needed to perform a complete visual observation. There might be pieces of broken pottery or stone tool flakes visible on the surface, otherwise known as debitage. Or, maybe, there were some pieces of bone sticking out of the ground. Maybe, there was just a simple discoloration of the ground. All of these would be indicators of something not natural being present and would require further investigation.

They thought that was a pretty good explanation, by someone who had been sitting in a classroom, taking notes about how to do archaeology. I felt summarily dismissed and a little embarrassed. They were right. I was just regurgitating my notes. I decided to be a little more pugnacious and suggested that we get on with it. I started walking the site looking for what it was that I had been spouting about. They were all quick to join in, as the best way to survey a site was to do so as a team.

We all fanned out and took responsibility for our own little parcel of ground to cover. In more of an unsystematic way, we sort of wandered over the entire area not following any predetermined sampling strategy. As I walked along, I would stop every now and then when something caught my eye. Usually what caught my eye was a small fragment of ceramic or pottery. It was just laying there on the surface.

My first reaction was to drop down and pick it up, but I knew better than to disturb its location in the site. I called out to the others that I had spotted something. They marked

their location (so they didn't forget where they were) and assembled at my spot. Without extracting it from the ground, we carefully examined the sherd, trying to determine any features that might reveal what kind of pottery it was. Different styles of pottery were associated with Basketmaker as opposed to Pueblo, Hopi or Navajo. The sherd, its identification and its location was fully documented. According to the others, what I had found was called Lino Plain, which was associated to the Basketmaker III period.

We resumed our survey of the site and, all total, we found evidence of a few different occupation stages at this one location. Other than Basketmaker III, Charlie and Fran found sherds that were of black-on-white pottery style (known as Kana'a), indicative of the Pueblo I stage. Julie was able to locate what she called Little Colorado whiteware, providing evidence that this area at one time also had Pueblo III period occupation. Each find was documented exactly the same and, although, not very many sherds were found, it did show me that by just walking the surface of a site, one could make determinations as to what may also lie beneath the ground.

What we found actually made a lot of sense. I was told that, in fact, one should expect to find artifact evidence in a layered fashion. The fact that they all appeared on the surface of the ground at the same time, probably resulted from soil and water erosion that mixed up the contents of one time period with another. The overall implication was that over a long period of time, Canyon del Muerto was home to multiple stages of human occupation.

It was decided that to discover anything more significant would require further digging of the site. Only then, would we be able to discover a more definitive and layered history of that occupation. There was always the possibility that nothing else would be found. Maybe the scattering of sherds across the surface of the site was due to it being a trash area. Or, it was a place where the soil had been distributed after having been dug up elsewhere. That was where digging the site would pay off.

Unfortunately, that's all we were going to do here at this site. Normally, we would have taken a few test digs, just to see what they revealed. But, the team felt that we had accomplished all that we needed to here. It served its purpose, but the openness of the canyon floor had made it a fairly simple task to meet their expectations. They felt that the real test was going to be returning to the rock shelter. The shelter and the talus slope had their own sets of challenges in doing a site survey. I had to agree, even though I was, once again, a bit disappointed at not spending more time finishing what we had started.

The important thing was that we were going to return to the rock shelter we had visited the day before. I knew it was going to be a lot of work, but I also felt it would provide the experience I needed to be able to truly become an archaeologist. It almost felt as if what we had been doing here on the canyon floor was just playing around. What we had to do up there was the real thing.

ROCK SHELTER SURVEY

CHAPTER EIGHT

I opened my eyes and could hardly believe where I was. Yes, I was in my tent but I had that moment of clarity that one gets every now and then. I was in Canyon de Chelly. I felt so lucky to be here. My body had gotten pretty used to spending the night in a sleeping bag on the hard ground. I enjoyed sitting around the campfire at night and in the morning, beneath the wide open skies with billions of stars. It was more than I could have ever bargained for. The company I kept was the best and I had already learned a whole lot about myself, the canyon and the Ancestral Puebloans. I had thoroughly enjoyed my time up to this point. I felt like I was really getting into the rhythm that everybody else had already established a long time ago. The rhythm of scientifically approaching an area of early human occupation from the perspective of an archaeologist.

Wrapping up our usual morning routine of eating a warm bowl of hot oatmeal cereal, accompanied by strong cups of coffee, the four of us discussed our plans for the day around the campfire. The mornings were still pretty cool, but getting more so as the days wore on. We had been pretty lucky with the weather up to this point and had not experienced the usual drenching that the typical afternoon thundershowers brought. I guess that was good for us but not so good for the Navajo who lived in the

canyon and relied on the water for their farming and drinking needs.

We broke camp in our well-established, organized way and started out for the trail up the side of the canyon. The big difference this trip was that we had extra equipment to bring with us. We had to do a fairly intrusive survey of the cave, which I interpreted as meaning extracting archaeological artifacts. We needed to thoroughly document everything that we saw and did.

We wrapped up in a protective bundle a couple of laptop computers, cameras and GPS devices that were needed to properly document and locate any artifacts we found. We also took a transit with us to map out the shelter and lay out the grid that would be required to set the parameters for digging the interior and possibly the talus slope.

The rest of the equipment we fastened as cargo, consisting of the assorted hand tools that were the trademark of the archaeologist. These were things like a pickaxe, small hand shovels, trowels, spades, dental-type picking sticks, brushes, dust pans and some buckets. We thought about a shaker screen to filter out smaller artifacts, but that would have to wait for a later trip. We were already heavily laden down and it was going to be a hard and exhausting climb up as it was.

I felt like a pack horse as we started out. I am sure the others felt the same way, but everything we carried was essential for what we were going to do. Which was, a thorough and complete analysis of what went on in that

cave so long, long ago. As we made our way up the switchbacks, we stopped every now and then at the corners to take a much needed rest. At first I thought they were just doing that for me, but they made it very clear that they were just as tired as I was. We didn't dilly-dally too long. We had a lot to do and we didn't want to lose the rhythm of our breathing.

Things went pretty smoothly until we reached the part of the climb where the sandstone was getting very steep and slippery. We very carefully planted our feet in any footholds we could find and gripped the sandstone tightly with our hands when we could. The extra weight we were carrying didn't help any, but we slowly inched our way up.

Getting close to the top, we noticed that the weather had changed. Dark clouds had moved over us and we could hear thunder off in the distance. So much for the weather cooperating with us. We picked up our pace knowing that we didn't have much time before the rain would hit.

The last challenge was getting across the rock escarpment that led to the rock shelter. This was our last obstacle and we had to fight to maintain our balance as we marched like little ants, single file, one step at a time. Fortunately for us, the rain held off until we had all made it safely across the face to the shelter. As we watched from underneath the cave overhang, the rain started pouring down. We couldn't have timed it any better.

Charlie pointed out that the rock shelter's overhang was the big selling point for anyone long ago wanting to

establish a place to live or secure a resting spot just to hang out in. He said that the prize for archaeologists was that it made the rock shelter an ideal place to look for artifacts or burials. Keeping the water out made the inside stay very dry and its contents stable over a long period of time. I could see his point, but it was difficult accepting how dry things were inside when it was raining cats and dogs outside.

A more thorough examination of the talus slope would have to wait until the rain stopped. That probably wouldn't be more than fifteen or twenty minutes, but we decided to start inside the shelter just to manage our time better. I was a little concerned about the lighting, but the depth of the shelter was only about 36 feet at the most and there was plenty of light allowed in from the outside. Anyway, the team had hiked up a few lanterns, just to cover our bases.

Walking to the back of the shelter, we dropped all of our equipment and started another little discussion session as to what to do next. Or, in this case, what to do first. As I flipped through my notepad, I read how we started with a site survey before in the canyon and that we should probably do that again. At the very least, we needed to establish the area within which we were going to work. Fran and Julie agreed and the three of us got up to start walking the interior looking for signs of anything interesting.

Charlie went to work setting up the transit and unpacking the string and nails that he used to demarcate the site. Once that was done, he began establishing the grid by marking what is called a datum point. The datum point designated the beginning of the grid. Then, he staked off the grid using the nails and string. The whole point of

doing all this was that we needed to document the exact locations of what we were doing and what we found.

The first thing Fran, Julie and I noticed was that there was a slope to the floor of the shelter itself. The floor was actually tilting downward, towards the entrance and the talus slope. There was quite a bit of rock debris that had broken off from the ceiling and walls as they deteriorated over time. As we walked back towards the rear we noticed what looked like an old corral or holding pen. Julie mentioned that it looked like the kind of pen the Navajo used for their sheep. There were some charcoal drawings on the walls that Julie said, also, looked of Navajo origin.

We became more convinced when we examined what we were walking on. The floor of the cave had a hard crust that Fran identified as being sheep dung. I guess the final confirmation came when we found cultural material in the form of a milk pan and a metal pail, resting against the far back wall. Just from our initial survey, we could tell that during the historic period this cavern had been used by the Navajo for penning their sheep. According to Fran, this was a well known practice, continuing even today.

Charlie finished his job using the transit to identify all the location points in the grid. The grid, based on all of the cardinal points of the compass (north, south, east and west), was about twelve feet wide and thirty-two feet deep. It was subdivided into smaller excavation units that were three feet by three feet, each with their own set of precise coordinates.

The top layer, the layer we were currently walking on and established to be of historic Navajo origin, was what we labeled Stratum I. A stratum was simply described as just a single layer of the soil or ground. The deeper you dug, the more likely you were to encounter other distinct, identifiable layers. If there were any. Typically, you labeled each layer sequentially as you encountered them, using Roman numerals.

So, the top layer was documented as Stratum I. Any deeper layers would be called Stratum II, Stratum III, etc. until all the layers had been identified. Along with labeling each layer, there was a presumption that the deeper something was buried, the older it was. This, of course, was only generally true, as something could have been submerged into another layer (such as a burial). These intrusions could be easily identified though and were quite normal in most digs.

Unsure as to what we were going to find (at least for me anyway) we decided to dig a test pit. Otherwise, known as a shovel test pit. The results of digging the test pit would be used to justify whether we should continue digging the site. It would also help in determining how many stratigraphic layers there actually were.

The four of us chose one of the excavation units identified and laid out by Charlie for our sample shovel dig. There was nothing really scientific about it. We all just kind of pointed in its general direction at the same time. Charlie had defined the excavation unit as being a three feet square area. As the name implied, we used a hand shovel to carefully start digging a hole. A little bit at a time. Each

small shovel full we removed, we closely examined it for any noticeable artifacts. We scrutinized the sides of the hole to see if we could demarcate any stratigraphic layers.

We didn't see any recognizable artifacts after the first few shovels, but I noticed how the soil changed in colorization as we dug down. Julie mentioned how, over long periods of time and human occupation, the soil naturally changed in color and texture. Sure enough, we hadn't gone very far down and I saw the discoloration of two different layers. We were now going into what we labeled as Stratum II.

Digging a little further, we, again, did not find anything that resembled an artifact. We did encounter another identifiable layer though, which we labeled Stratum III. Then, low and behold, as we brushed away some soil, there was a sherd from a fired pottery vessel looking back at us. We extracted it so that we could document its style later and continued digging. Eventually, we shoveled our way through to Stratum IV before we finally hit bedrock.

Our analysis? No significant artifacts were found, but we did find a fired pottery sherd giving us evidence that there had been human occupation. Even without the sherd, the different stratigraphic layers provided sufficient cause for celebration. We understood now that there were four different stratum layers, each one, potentially, indicating a different stage of the shelter being occupied by humans in the past. We decided to go for it and do a full dig of the grid on the interior of the shelter.

As the day was waning, we made the hard decision to wait until the next day to start the full excavation of the interior of the shelter. We had done quite a bit already and we needed to get back down to the field site before it got too dark. We gathered up our tools and arranged them in the order that we would probably need them the next day. Looking around to make sure we had everything, we made our way out of the rock shelter and started down the path single file.

ROCK SHELTER EXCAVATION

CHAPTER NINE

We awoke to find a light rain falling and the pitter-patter of rain drops hitting the outside of the tents. I looked outside and could see that the clouds were starting to break up, so I was pretty sure we were going to be able to make it up to the rock shelter without any real difficulties. All we really had to do was grab our food and liquids and be on our way.

Arriving at the shelter entrance, I sensed that the level of intensity had changed. Now that we had decided to perform a full dig of the interior of the rock shelter, things became a lot more serious. I could tell by the looks on the faces of Fran, Charlie and Julie. The manner with which they all moved about had changed. It got kind of quiet as everyone, except me, just started doing things that they knew should be done. It was their second nature and experience taking over.

I realized that this wasn't going to be just another day the team would be providing me teaching moments and I would be jotting down notes. I knew I was going to be expected to be a member of the team responsible, like everyone else, for the professional documentation of this site's history. It was time for me to step up and know what

to do, as if it was my second nature. I felt we were all part of the same process of making sure we did this thing right.

Once again we huddled. The plan involved using a row-by-row method of excavating the grid units, starting with the row closest to the back of the cavern. Our overall grid was twelve feet wide by twenty-four feet deep. That meant eight rows, each row with four excavation units that were three by three. That meant a whole lot of work. We figured that was more time than we could afford, so we decided to do more of a random sampling of the grid instead. We broke up the first row at the back of the cavern into one excavation unit per person.

The big decision? We decided to take a lunch break. Which really meant, another discussion period. We committed to starting our first unit today and then that would be it for the day. Tomorrow we would all reassemble and resume our work.

We glanced over to where we had dropped our supply of tools, stood up and made a bee line over to gather up what we needed. Fran chose the first unit, Charlie the second, Julie the third and I got the fourth. The take away was, we needed to get to work. Lunch came and went.

As I sat next to Julie, she pointed out that probably the most often used tools for digging a small excavation unit were a trowel and dustpan. She said that was what we would be starting with as we worked our way down through the stratigraphic layers.

I had heard about this in class and hadn't really thought about it too much. Until now. I thought to myself, how would I dig a three feet by three feet area of ground, so many feet deep, with only a trowel and a dustpan?

I think Julie could see the look of consternation on my face. Knowing Julie as well as I did, I knew she had probably thought the same thing when she first started a real dig. Sure enough, she tried to comfort my concerns by relating her own experience. Oddly enough, it didn't help. She admitted as much and just shrugged her shoulders.

So I decided to follow Julie's example as best I could. She very carefully scraped the surface of the soil with the trowel and then collected the dirt with the dust pan so that it could be put into a bucket for a thorough examination later. There was a definite technique involved in scraping the surface. Julie scraped a little, gathered up the dirt and then closely scrutinized where she had scraped for any sign of an artifact. She was looking for anything that looked like it didn't naturally belong there. After a few minutes I turned to my own unit and started doing the same thing.

I was getting a little tired of scraping and collecting sheep dung into my dustpan and bucket when I exposed something that indicated I had made it down to Stratum II. The sheep dung was gone, but about seven inches down it had been replaced with a different type of animal dung. According to Julie, it was turkey dung. She knew from the archaeological history of the area that prior to corralling sheep, the local population used to keep turkeys penned up.

What had I discovered? As Julie and I talked, I recalled that the sheep dung from Stratum I was more than likely associated with a Navajo occupation. But the Navajo did not keep turkeys, so Julie said that was an indication of a different, earlier, occupation. It was probably of Pueblo I or Pueblo II origin.

Julie dug about twelve inches down and found a sherd of pottery protruding out of the ground. She hadn't taken it out yet, but it looked as if it was in the style of Kana'a black-on-white. Just the style that was used by Pueblo I or Pueblo II. Since Julie and I had set up shop right next to each other, I figured I would eventually find something similar. What Julie found meant that, prior to the Navajo being in this rock shelter, there had been Pueblo living here as well.

I looked back at Julie to see what she was going to do next. She took out her brush and slowly cleaned the area around the sherd protruding out of the ground. Then she took her dental-like picking tool and proceeded to gently dig around the artifact, cleaning with the brush as she did so. After a few minutes, the pottery sherd was completely exposed and just lay there on the surface of Stratum II. Before she lifted it out, she snapped a picture of its position. Then, she grabbed one of the laptops and documented its identification, including its very precise coordinates within the grid.

I must admit, I was very impressed. Not just that she had painstakingly delivered the sherd to our eyes, but that there was even a sherd there to begin with. With renewed energy I turned back again to my unit and continued to

scrape and dust pan, hoping to reach a point where I could use my brush and picking tool.

I was curious as to what was going on with the excavations of Fran and Charlie. They seemed to be awfully quiet and, almost, secretive in what they were doing. They were very intensely working together instead of working on their own individual units. I turned and asked them how they were doing? I think Julie caught my drift. She got up, walked over and stood behind them to see what was going on. Well, that just gave me an opportunity to do the same, so I followed Julie over.

When I looked down at what they were staring at, I thought my eyes were playing tricks on me. It appeared as if there was the shape of a human skull breaking through the ground at the far corner of Fran's excavation unit. Fran and Charlie both stood up and wiped the dirt from their clothes. They looked at us in amazement and said that we needed to talk about what we were seeing. Charlie said that we needed to make sure we took pictures of what we had found.

I couldn't believe my eyes and I am sure Fran and Charlie found it just as unbelievable. Julie tried to assert a sense of self control and suggested that we all concentrate our efforts on helping Fran with the excavation of unit one. From all appearances, it looked as if what Fran had uncovered was a burial. A burial that was laying in Stratum II, about twenty-five inches down and had probably extended into Charlie's excavation unit. Maybe even into the first two units of the second row. Julie suggested that

we needed to all work together to methodically uncover and discover the burial's contents.

Fran and Charlie were both onboard. I was ecstatic. To be part of an excavation of a burial and its contents was what I had dreamed about. The plan we all agreed on was that Fran would continue exposing the skull in her excavation unit. Charlie would try to connect the puzzle from his end in excavation unit number two. Julie and I would start working on the first two excavation units in row two. The hope was that Charlie, Julie and I would be able to uncover the full burial pit that Fran was so busily exposing in excavation unit number one, row one.

The next few hours we worked diligently to uncover the human skeleton that lay beneath the ground. Julie and I had about twenty-five inches to uncover. Fran was able to expose the area completely around the skull of the individual. It appeared that we had a young child before us, judging by the size of the skull. The skull was undeformed and the child was laying on its right side.

Fran pointed out that in Canyon del Muerto, burials had been found where the skulls had been deformed but there were others found during the same time periods that were not deformed. Such skull deformities where there was a flattening of the back of the head were due to cradle boarding and not uncommon during Pueblo I.

As part of the excavation process we also uncovered other artifacts that had probably been buried with the child. There was evidence of rodent activity within the stratum that could have brought these artifacts from one stratum to

another, but that did not seem to be the case here. A Kana'a black-on-white bowl had been placed to the left of the skull. Another, gray plainware jar had been placed to the right of the skull. Both had a powdery residue inside that in all probability was some kind of food. We didn't feel that we needed to test it.

All in all, we worked until late in the afternoon to finish the excavation of the first two units of the first two rows. The overall finding was that the burial pit did extend into these four units. The depth was about twenty-five inches, still consistent with Stratum II since no other stratum had been found yet. Our conclusion, based on our preliminary investigation, was that this was a Pueblo I or Pueblo II burial and that the material found in and around the burial was consistent with that assessment.

Julie could tell that I was about to jump out of my clothes in excitement. I think we were all exuberant, but I was highly animated as well. I mean, just imagine. We had just uncovered something that had been hiding under the ground for a long, long time. To classify it as Pueblo I or Pueblo II didn't mean a whole lot. But if you thought about it in terms of years, this was evidence of a small child's death that could have happened close to one thousand years ago.

At this point we were ready to call it a day. We were all pretty tired and we knew we had a long hike back to the campsite. Plus, we knew that once we were back, we needed to discuss what we had found and what the plan was going forward. We cleaned ourselves up and the site as best we could, put a protective cover over the burial and walked out of the rock shelter feeling pretty good about life.

After a very hearty meal of corn, squash and beans, we sat around the campfire and contemplated the day. Fran, Charlie and Julie voted to conclude the excavation of the interior of the rock shelter. I thought that there was still plenty to do there, but for the purpose of training me, they thought we should move on to another type of dig. I wasn't thrilled, but they were the teachers and, like it or not, they knew what they were doing a lot better than I did. They agreed that the next item needing our attention was digging into the talus slope.

Of course being the type "A" person I was, I questioned what we were going to do with the child's burial and the area inside the shelter we had already excavated? I think they expected that I would ask that question. Which, once again, led to a further discussion on a topic that needed to be addressed.

I guess the reason I raised the question in the first place was because of discussions I had in the classroom regarding the ethics of archaeological excavation. Specifically, how ethical was it for archaeologists to be digging up things that were meant to stay buried forever?

All of a sudden the topic had a lot more relevance. Now that I was here in the field and not in some distant, far off classroom, it needed to be addressed. Fran, Charlie and Julie made it very clear that ethics in archaeology was a big concern of theirs. As it was to Marilyn, as well. They thought it would definitely be worth discussing, especially since we were here in a place where it really mattered.

They wanted to know what my thoughts were on what to do next with the excavation. They said that it was important that they be based on a good understanding of what the arguments were, both for and against archaeological excavation in general. It all had to do with becoming an ethical archaeologist.

We started the conversation off by talking about what it was that raised the subject of ethics in the first place. Specifically, as it related to archaeologists and native populations. The real issue had to do with burials and the religious and moral implications of digging up the dead. Tied into that were the cultural and religious artifacts that usually accompanied a burial. As we talked about it, what really mattered most though, were the burials themselves.

Serious objections had been raised to digging up the dead. Objections that stemmed mainly from religious beliefs. That was fine, but the result was increased hostility and anger, due to the perceived insensitivity and immorality of archaeologists disturbing a person's final resting place.

Fran, Charlie and Julie said that this had been a huge issue for them working within Canyon de Chelly. At least, originally. The local indigenous population was not happy at all to have this kind of insensitivity play out in the Navajo Nation. They felt archaeologists and other scientists had no right in disturbing the final resting place of their ancestral spirits. The phrase "laid to rest" implied that those remains should never be disturbed.

It was the goal of the National Park system to modify the view that the indigenous population had of

archaeologists. They wanted to work cooperatively with the local Navajo in the care and treatment of the Ancestral Puebloans. For that matter, the canyon itself. Charlie pointed out that the argument made by the Navajo was a very strong one indeed. They simply did not want their ancestors to be dug up for what they considered idol curiosity. A person laid to rest was meant to stay at rest for eternity. To be extricated from the ground would be highly insulting and considered dangerous to those currently living in the canyon. And, of course, to all living indigenous peoples.

The argument made by the National Park archaeologists was two-fold. First, that the handling of human remains was not something that archaeologists or any other scientists took lightly. They were deeply aware that this was once a living person and that what was buried with that person was of a highly personal nature. There was a high degree of respect for those remains.

Julie stressed that the archaeologists tried to represent themselves as being the voice of those who had died so long ago. A voice that needed to be heard. A voice that, otherwise, might be lost forever. Archaeologists felt that they could provide that voice, as to how lives were lived and how lives were lost.

The second argument had to do with what had happened to Canyon de Chelly. What was obvious to both the Navajo and the National Park archaeologists was that the canyon had experienced extreme stress, degradation and erosion. There were way too many people visiting the canyon. They trampled the environment as well as the

cultural sites. So much so, that the canyon was losing its identity. The indigenous history of the Navajo was disappearing and so too was the flora and fauna. Those who were buried there were suffering. Unfortunately, the damage done by out-of-control pot hunters and grave robbers was destroying the very thing they wanted to protect. The spirits of their ancestors.

With these two arguments, the National Park archaeologists convinced the local Navajo that they should work together to protect Canyon de Chelly and its ancestors. The key understanding was that it all had to do with respect. Respect for the local Navajo and respect for the Ancestral Puebloans who resided in the canyon so long, long ago.

With that, Fran, Charlie and Julie looked straight at me and asked again, what I thought we should do? It was a very intense moment for me, I must admit. The religious argument was a very significant point to be made. The more I thought about it though, I could see the other side of the argument better. Without doing what we did, the history of Canyon de Chelly and its Ancestral Puebloans would be lost forever.

I felt secure in the fact that what we were doing was helping to ensure that the Navajo would be able to recall their past forever. That was something important to all peoples. It helped define who they were. Who we were and maybe, even, why we were here. So my answer was, we should keep doing what we were doing. As long as we did it with the respect and dignity that Ancestral Puebloans would expect of us.

The team nodded their heads in agreement. They pointed out that the Navajo working in conjunction with the National Park thought the same thing. It was their mutual respect agreement. It was the argument behind why Navajo guides were required inside the canyon. It was the same guiding principle behind why we had Dan, Irene and Lee.

I asked the team if that was why they placed a protective cover over the child's burial up in the rock shelter? They replied that it was just part of what they believed they should do. They said there were still things to be discovered inside of Canyon de Chelly. Things that had been hidden by the march of time. But since so much of the canyon had already been archaeologically assessed, we needed to show our respect in whatever else we did. Furthermore, they said, when we all returned to the shelter tomorrow, we would be completely restoring everything that we had done, as best as possible. There would be no extracting of cultural material. There would be a re-burial of the little child. I nodded my head in approval.

ROCK SHELTER REINSTATEMENT

CHAPTER TEN

The next morning found us trekking up the cliff side, just as we had done the two previous days. Only this time, I spent my time hiking up to the slope thinking about the young child we had uncovered in the rock shelter. I was good with the plan to repatriate the child back to the earth, but I wondered what kind of life the child must have had. Why had someone died so young? What were the parents like and who did they live with? What kind of life did they all have? Would we have found any of this out if we had continued digging? I guessed that was the cultural anthropologist coming out in me.

I must have been a little out there in la-la land, when Julie called out to me to watch my step. She said I was getting awfully close to the edge of the trail and, obviously, not paying complete attention to what I was doing. It was a long way down the side and the tumble would have been really bad for my health. Let alone my life. It was a good thing she pulled me out of my daydream, as we were fast approaching the slippery slope up the side of the sandstone cliff. Complete concentration would be a must.

I regained my focus and we all were able to successfully make our way up the cliff side and across the very narrow path to the rock shelter entrance. Things

looked pretty much the same as we had left it before. I glanced down at the talus slope and it didn't seem as steep as I had remembered. The first time I had been exposed to it, I was quite hesitant to walk out over it. I imagined myself falling off. Now, I could see that it actually fanned out from the shelter at a fairly gradual angle, creating somewhat of a secondary shelf. I was sure that shelf was where we were going to be digging later in the day.

Our priority was to return the inside of the shelter to somewhat of its original condition before we started digging. The thought I formed in my head was the hiking mantra of "take only pictures, leave only footprints". More importantly, the goal was to pay our respects to the small child that we would be reinstating back to Mother Earth. As we gathered inside, Fran and Charlie removed the protective covering to the small child's pit. It was appropriate that they did so since they were the ones to have discovered the child in the first place.

Before doing anything else, we all went over our checklists, making sure that everything that we had done over the last couple of days had been properly documented and the coordinates accurately recorded. Fran mentioned that, even though we would be covering everything back up, it was still important to note what we had done. Particularly, what we may have discovered in the process. It would become the excavation history of the area that would go into the archaeological record.

I began to think to myself that maybe we were missing something. I asked the rest of the team if we shouldn't have a native Navajo here to preside over the child's remains?

Shouldn't we have considered having a Navajo shaman or medicine man present?

I was respectfully reminded that the Navajo would not want to be present. Maybe a Navajo shaman, but they would be taking a big risk. The Navajo knew that rock shelters were considered to be spiritually dangerous to their present lives. It was the Navajo belief that they should steer clear of places that may of housed Ancestral Puebloans. They referred to them as Anasazi ("the ancient enemy"). That was why their preference was to stay away from the rock shelters and caves where their spirits may reside.

I wasn't about to split hairs or anything, but I did wonder how some of these rock shelters had been and were currently being used by the Navajo for storage and holding pens for their sheep. The team's explanation fell along the lines of, if you didn't know that the rock shelter or cave was occupied in ancient times, then there was little risk in using the shelter for your own purposes. In other words, if the Navajo were not aware of what was buried directly beneath them, they would have found it perfectly acceptable to use the cave for storage or corralling their sheep. Then, of course, it may have also been that some Navajo, simply did not care and were not beholden by such spiritual beliefs.

We worked on covering everything over again, taking painstaking steps to make sure we replaced everything as it was. I couldn't help thinking of the child. Who was he or she? It kind of bothered me that we didn't even know whether it was a male or female. I stood over her grave and

stared down at her, mesmerized, as the dirt slowly covered her back over.

I suddenly realized that I had just referred to the child as female. How did I know this? I quickly turned around and asked if anyone else had determined this? They looked up from their work and, politely, replied that they had not. They had not actually gone that far in examining the child to determine what sex it was. They asked what the problem was? I said that, somehow, I thought it was a little girl. There was no way I was going to tell them that I heard her voice talking to me. That I felt there was a presence in the shelter that made her being known to me.

Even though we worked at a feverish pace, it took a lot longer than I had anticipated to complete our reconstruction of the rock shelter floor. We were there until early afternoon cleaning everything up. As we finished our final steps, the question was posed as to whether we should just call the day early. Considering we still had a couple of hours of hiking back down, we agreed that we should not risk getting caught in the dark or a late afternoon thunderstorm.

I had other reasons for wanting to leave a little early. I had to admit that I was a little spooked by everything that had just transpired. I could not adequately explain the feeling that I had inside the rock shelter as we poured soil over the child's body. I knew I heard her voice calling out to me. She was telling me who she was. Was it because I had asked the question in my mind? But then, there was that other thing. It wasn't so much a voice. It just felt like someone else was there. Watching. Watching over her? Watching over me?

As we filed out of the rock shelter and down the trail, I looked back occasionally. I think I expected to see something or someone following us. I could tell that Julie was well aware of my behavior. She was directly behind me and could see my every move. I would steal a glance at her on my look back sometimes, hoping to see if she had noticed how paranoid I was being. Whatever she was thinking, she hid it very well. She had to sense though that something was off with me.

We arrived at the campsite in the early to late afternoon. We took our time getting to the field site, as there didn't seem to be any rush. We laid our stuff down and tried to find a place to rest our tired bones, whether it be a chair or a rock next to the smoldering fire. Me? I sat down for a couple of minutes and then, abruptly, got up. I made some lame excuse about being really tired. I excused myself and headed for my tent. I said I would be back for dinner but, for now, I needed to lay down.

When I came back out of my tent, the rest of the team were busy getting things ready for dinner. They all glanced my way looking for some sign that I was all right. They were probably looking for an explanation to my sudden disappearance. I also assumed Julie must of said something about my behavior on the way down the trail.

I actually felt pretty good after resting for a bit. I jumped right in to helping with the preparation of the evening meal. We didn't have a whole lot of variety, so, once again, it seemed to involve the local Navajo diet of corn, squash and beans. That was fine with me. Although, I did miss a little meat in my diet. After all was ready, we

assumed our usual positions around the fire and chowed down on our platefuls of food.

I think we were all pretty tired as we didn't talk very much about our day, as we usually did. I could tell that Julie was anxious to engage me in a conversation. I was sure she was very concerned about my erratic behavior on the way back down the trail. As I got up and wandered over to Cinnamon to say goodnight, Julie tagged right along behind me.

She started off by asking if I was OK? She wanted to know if there was anything she could do to help? Julie was probably my closest and best friend here, but I wasn't quite ready to talk to her about all the strange goings-on yet. I didn't want to make it sound like I was a real nut case or something. So, instead of asking her for a shoulder to cry on, I just replied that I was tired from all the day's work and really needed to get to bed.

We made our way back to the fire and I politely excused myself, saying I was heading off to my tent for a good night's rest. Once inside, I tucked myself inside of my bag trying to get warm. It wasn't really that cold out, but I felt a slight chill and shiver. It wasn't long before the down bag worked its magic. I was nice and toasty as I fell off into dreamland.

TALUS SLOPE EXCAVATION

CHAPTER ELEVEN

The rising Sun woke me up bright and early. I felt bad about my ill-mannered behavior from the night before. I worked getting the fire going and started the coffee brewing. If there was one thing we all had in common, it was having that hot cup of coffee in our hands first thing in the morning. As the others straggled their way out of their tents, I made sure that I greeted them with a big smile, a hearty welcome to the day and a piping hot cup of coffee.

Julie was later to get up than normal, being the last one out of her tent. After handing off her coffee, I thanked her for her concern for my welfare last night. I told her that I really did want to talk with her about what was going on in my head and that, now, was probably as good as time as any. She got this warm, almost motherly look on her face and we strolled away from the others for a short while.

I started by telling her how I felt that the child had actually talked with me. That she told me who she was and expressed appreciation for us respecting her and re-committing her to the ground. I mentioned how I was startled by the presence of something or someone else in the shelter during that time. I said that was why I was looking back on the trail. I thought whatever it might have been was following me.

Julie took it all in. I have to admit if I had been told a story like that I would have thought it was just plain crazy. Julie didn't take it that way at all. I could tell in her eyes that she was completely sympathetic.

She told me something that kind of settled my stomach, if not my mind. Julie said that she and the rest of the team had been informed by Marilyn before I arrived on scene, that she was bringing me here for some reason. Marilyn didn't exactly make it clear what that reason was. Julie said she and the others thought that Marilyn herself didn't even know what that reason was. Marilyn hadn't quite figured it all out yet, but she knew that bringing me here was something that she was supposed to do. By doing so, whatever the reason was would reveal itself.

Julie said, that if anything, she was a little jealous of me. She wished it could have been her, whatever that "it" was. Julie said she felt a bond with me almost immediately upon our first meeting. She said she detected that there was a connection with me first off because of the way I looked at the canyon and the way I felt the canyon looked back.

Julie was right. I did feel as if the canyon was looking back at me. There seemed to be a relationship with the spirits of the canyon that noticed my presence. Julie made it clear to me that she believed everything I told her. She reassured me that I wasn't just imagining things. She was convinced now more than ever that what Marilyn had suspected was turning out to be true. She agreed with Marilyn that there was some special significance to me being here. I'm glad Julie and I talked. I felt that what I had

been experiencing was authentic after all. That what I was sensing and feeling was not just me going through some mental breakdown.

On the way back to Fran and Charlie, I felt ready to tackle what we were going to be doing this day. As we finished up our morning routine, I felt a lot better about why I was here and what I was going through. But I was still scared to death of what might yet happen.

Climbing up the trail to the talus slope gave me the focus I needed to keep looking ahead. As we made it across the final narrow ledge to the rock shelter, we were able to look back down at the campsite below. A couple of riders were making their way into camp. It had to be Marilyn and Lee. We glanced around at each other and acknowledged, almost in unison that, of course, Marilyn was her usual prompt self. Not to be detoured from our work, we decided to stay and work the slope as we had planned. Marilyn and Lee must be very tired anyway and in need of a good rest.

As I said earlier, the talus slope didn't seem as ominous as it had on my very first trip. This time I was more acclimated and sure of my footing. Charlie made mention that a talus slope could actually be flat in some places. This was known as a canyon bench. It was a terracing of the slope, where a number of artifacts were probably buried.

The first thing we did was to fan out and proceed with step one of the archaeologist's playbook. We were looking for anything that stood out. Not necessarily things that were of an artifact nature, although that would have been nice. I

think we were just looking for a suitable area to lay out our excavation grid. That seemed to be more of Charlie's expertise, so we let him lead the way.

Charlie decided that it would be best to excavate a portion of the slope by digging a trench along the face of the shelter. The small terrace that we were standing on, was as good a place as any to start. He measured out the overall trench line at about ninety feet long. The plan included marking off two or three excavation units that were aligned with this trench line, approximately three feet by six feet.

Charlie made the argument that we would probably need to go down to a depth of at least thirty or more inches, similar to what we had done inside the shelter's interior. In other words, we were attempting to reach Stratum II with the hope of finding evidence of Pueblo I or Pueblo II material. He felt we could even find evidence of the earlier Basketmaker II or III culture if we dug into Stratum III.

I must admit I was glad that Charlie had figured all of the technical stuff out. The others were in full agreement as well. I was ready to grab my shovel and start digging but, of course, we had to wait for Charlie to lay out the grid and mark the two excavation units within which we would be working.

I wasn't quite sure what we should be looking for as we begun digging. Julie was right there beside me and said the goal was to try and find another burial. A different kind of burial this time. What we were looking for was referred to as a cist. In other words, a burial chamber in which the

deceased were placed or interned. The child we found inside the shelter had been buried in the ground, so we were hoping to find the other way the dead were buried.

Julie said that you could spot cists fairly easily as they were usually large slabs of rock, arranged in some fashion to mark the burial spot. These cists usually had a slab of rock for the bottom or even a lid covering the top. She finally said the main point she wanted to make was that, if I hit a large slab of stone, I should stop and ask for help from somebody else as to what to do next. I got the message loud and clear.

My understanding was that the rest of the team had already figured out what they were expecting to find here. Based on what I had read, previous archaeological digs had shown that talus slopes held quite a few of these types of cist burials. It was just going to be a question of exactly where and how deep we would be digging before we found one.

I got to thinking more about cist burials on talus slopes. I had read that cist burial was just one way to bury your dead and that cists could be found both inside and outside of rock shelters. Sometimes, the dead were simply placed in crevices between blocks of stone. Kind of like a makeshift cist. More often than not though, a rough pit was simply dug in the floor of the shelter and the dead buried directly into the ground.

The question I had was, why would you pick the slope down from a rock shelter to bury your dead? Especially, since the talus slope was also the place where you threw out

all of your refuse. That opened the door to another team discussion. Fran, Charlie and Julie had their opinions.

The first thought was that it probably had something to do with what things looked like at the time. Fran said that if you compared the talus slope and the rock shelter of today with that of prehistoric times, there would have been quite a difference. Back then, the slope would have been less angled and, more than likely, completely terraced so that there was easier habitation of the rock shelter. It would have made perfect sense to use that area of the slope for burials when space for pits inside the shelter had run out.

As far as cists? The slabs of rock that had broken away from the sides and roof of the shelter, would have fallen down the slope. The rock slabs would have been conveniently available for constructing the cists. Cists that, by the way, were probably first used for storage and then re-used for burials.

The second thought was that there may have been cultural or spiritual reasons for burying the dead in cists on the side of the slope. Julie pointed out that these are the things we just don't know enough about and can only provide rough speculation. She said we would probably never really know for sure. It could have been that there was privilege in being buried inside or outside of the shelter. In other words, cists were reserved for individuals of importance. For example, maybe shamans or heads of family. Burial chambers might have been an entitlement for certain types of individuals.

The third thought was that maybe there was a fear of the dead, like in present day Hopi and Navajo behavior. They preferred to bury their dead on the talus slope. This was related to the belief that the dead were spiritually dangerous and should be avoided. Charlie reminded us though, that you have to be very careful when trying to use present day behavior to interpret the thoughts of the past.

This was another one of those learning moments that helped me understand that which I hadn't really thought about much. Especially, in a classroom setting. What Fran, Charlie and Julie said, helped to remind me that what archaeologists had to work with were just artifacts. Physical things buried in the ground for a very long period of time. What the thinking was at the time, of the people who were actually using those artifacts, could only be speculated. Anyway, those were the kind of thoughts racing through my head as we made ready to start the dig.

While we were having our little side discussion, Charlie had finished marking the grid and had laid out three excavation units, equally spaced out along the trench line oriented to the face of the cliff. Fran and Charlie claimed the first two and Julie and I were going to be responsible for digging the third.

Julie and I worked aggressively to remove a lot of the surface rubble that had accumulated on the slope. It consisted mainly of small rocks and other refuse material that had resulted from degradation of the rock shelter over time. This was not the time to be using a trowel and dustpan. We used our hands and shovels to remove as much of the rubble as we could. We had probably dug

down to a depth of more than thirty inches when Julie said we needed to stop and take a breath.

As she looked around at the others, I could tell that this was the moment she had been talking about. Directly below us was the outline of a large slab of horizontal rock that, obviously, had not made it there by sheer chance. Fran and Charlie got up from their knees and came over to see what we had found. From what Charlie could tell, he said we may have hit the top slab, or cover, of a cist.

As we all leaned over to get a better perspective, Fran decided that we should try to find a couple of things that might help identify what we had found. The first thing she wanted to know was if there was a difference in the ground we had dug through and the dirt the slab was laying on? She said that if, in fact, this was a cist then we should see soil, not rock, surrounding the top slab. Julie and I carefully cleared away more of the rubble down to the slab and the area surrounding it. Sure enough, an area of soil outlined the slab. Next, she suggested we look to see if there was any evidence of a segment of vertical slab that may be holding up the top slab. Digging around the side of the top rock slab, we were convinced that it was held up by another vertical slab that ran underneath the length of the top slab.

Feeling pretty confident now, the four of us continued to dig around the top slab, forcing us to expand our original excavation unit in both length and width. Eventually, we exposed the four corners of what was, obviously, a cist. The vertical slabs of rock holding up the top slab were not very deep. The cist seemed to be in the shape of a rectangle, with its longest side parallel to the cliff. The top slab had

been cracked into three different pieces, with mud and other material probably used to seal up the gaps. The question then became, what kind of cist was it?

My heart was heavily thumping within my chest. I think Julie noticed and suggested we all take a break. We needed to catch our breath and figure out what to do next. We all sat back away from the cist, wrapped our arms around our legs and took a moment to reflect. This was not a moment to be taken lightly. What we were about to do required extreme focus and restraint. I suggested that we take our lunch break, away from the slope and inside of the shelter. The others probably felt my apprehension and nodded their heads in agreement. We all stood up and walked back inside the shelter.

As we ate, Fran started talking more about the find. I was OK with that. It was better than just sitting there in silence. Fran said that there were two, and only two, explanations to what we had found. One was that we had discovered a storage cist, used for storing food, grains and such. The other was that we had uncovered a burial cist. At the sound of that, I could tell that all eyes fell upon me. I couldn't blame them. I'm pretty sure they thought that I was going to start hearing supernatural voices again if that's what it was.

Confidently, I stood up and said that there was only one way to find out. We would have to open up that thing and look inside. They looked at me a little surprised and we hurriedly finished our lunch with the understanding that what we would do next was to prepare for opening the cist.

Of course, I didn't really know how we were going to do that. I was sure I was going to find out though.

We sat down next to the excavated unit, took pictures and peered down at the cist. After we dug out the excavation unit to make it a little larger, Fran and Julie were able to slide down inside next to the cist. They weren't sure which was the head or the tail, if it was a burial. They started to pick away at the crack separating the slabs at what they thought was the top of the rectangle. With persistence, they chiseled out the mud between the cracks and placed their hands on the edges of the slab. We all stared at each other and knew the moment was upon us.

Very carefully, Fran and Julie slowly applied enough pressure to the cracked slab to get it to move. Sliding the slab off to the side of the cist, we were able to dimly see the contents inside. What we saw made it perfectly clear that we were looking into a burial cist. There were, what looked like, bones inside. I'm sure the look of astonishment on my face didn't go unnoticed. Here we were, once again, looking at something that had not been seen in who knows how many hundreds or thousands of years.

Fran and Julie continued working and unsealed the rest of the top slab. They slid off the remaining two rock pieces and we were faced with a completely open burial chamber. We all just kind of sat there in silence, preserving the moment. Charlie broke our spell and reminded us that we needed to get on with it. There was still work that needed to be done. It was the work of documenting and photographing everything that we had done and were about to do. Work that required a steady hand and a keen eye.

I looked at Charlie in almost disbelief. He wanted us to drop everything we were doing at this very auspicious moment to do paperwork? At least, that was what I was thinking. Fran and Julie? They both clapped their hands together to shake away the dirt and climbed out of the pit to do exactly what Charlie had proposed. With that, I decided that I had better join them. Obviously, the burial cist wasn't going anywhere.

We spent the next hour or so catching up on the paperwork side of things. I knew deep down that Charlie was right. We had to do this by the book. By the time we were finished our window of opportunity had fast closed in on us. Charlie said we needed to finish things up here and start the journey back to the campsite.

My first thought was we were going to head back down? I looked around at Fran and Julie for some kind of sign. Julie said that Charlie was right. There simply wasn't enough time left to continue examining the burial cist. Julie said she knew I was disappointed but we would be back the next day to finish what we had started. I had to admit that if we stayed here much longer we risked having darkness descend upon us. I, for one, certainly didn't want to spend the night up here inside the rock shelter.

There was still one more thing that needed to be done before we headed back to the campsite. Fran and Julie got back down into the burial pit and proceeded to pull the rock slabs back over the cist. My eyes started to flutter. It was almost as if I could sense the light fading away from my eyes as the final rock slab slid over the cist. The darkness inside must have been unbearable.

We gathered up our things and made our way towards the trail down the cliff side. I was deep in thought again, as usual. If there was one thing that I was learning about being an archaeologist, it was that you have to be patient. There were the things that just take your breath away. Like, finding a pottery sherd that you knew must have been handled by an ancient ancestor. Or, uncovering the bones of a small child that had died for some reason. You just didn't know what that reason was. Then, there were those things that just needed to be done. Like, laying out grids, taking measurements and recording data. I resolved myself to the fact that revealing the contents of the burial cist would have to wait until tomorrow.

When we finally dragged ourselves back to the campsite, we were greeted by Marilyn and Lee. They had already started making dinner for everyone and, I'm sure, were anxiously waiting to hear the details of what we had been up to over the past week. I was equally determined to hear what they had been up to.

RETURN OF MARILYN AND LEE

CHAPTER TWELVE

There was something to be said to sitting down to a meal that somebody else had cooked. It could be the same food, as it was, but it always seemed to taste different. I was more than happy to exchange washing dishes and cleaning up for Marilyn and Lee to make the dinner. I think Fran, Charlie and Julie were happy to forego that task, as well.

We sat around the campfire to eat our meal. That seemed to have become our daily routine. Afterwards, I excused my self to go and start cleaning up. I hadn't been gone too long, when Marilyn approached and started up a conversation. She started off by saying that she knew I had been experiencing some very strange events recently. Events that she knew I was having trouble with explaining in any rational sense. She wanted to know how I was handling it all?

I was caught off guard by her question. I thought to myself, how did she know what had been going on? Had Julie told her? I guess I was a little uppity and asked her how she would be feeling if she heard voices coming from nowhere talking to her? Voices that seemed to be coming from dead people that had been buried a very long time ago? I had to give her credit. Marilyn didn't seem to be

flustered one iota by my response. It was almost as if she had anticipated my reaction. Still, I wanted to know how she knew all of that.

Marilyn said that in order for me to fully appreciate her answer, I needed to first understand who Lee really was. She said that he was more than just a Navajo guide who gave tours of Canyon de Chelly as a way of making money. She had known Lee for quite some time. She said that Lee was a Navajo shaman. As a Navajo shaman, he knew things about Canyon de Chelly not known by other people. She said that when she mentioned to Lee that she thought there was something mysterious going on in Twin Trails Canyon, he was quick to agree. He looked relieved that somebody else suspected. She said that Lee believed, as she did, that there was someone or something waiting to be found. They just didn't know who or where.

To answer my question, Marilyn said that Lee was the one to convince her that I would be able to help identify who that something or someone was. She said that while they had been gone, Lee had been well aware of everything that had been happening to me. He had talked with Marilyn every night about what I had experienced that day. In a sense, my thoughts were his thoughts. And, by extension, Marilyn's too.

Well that, of course, just totally freaked me out. I tried to hide my emotions as best as I could and continued putting the dishes away. Marilyn helped me, but I knew she wasn't fooled. For now though, she suggested we get back to the campfire and talk about what we had found up at the rock shelter.

After hearing all of that, I wasn't particularly thrilled about returning to the team to talk about something else altogether. I mean, someone had just told me that they could hear and understand my thoughts? I had to stop myself right there. I couldn't let this get to me. I told myself to focus on something else. Like, look on the brighter side of things. The other side of me that was totally fascinated with the whole idea of what it was that Marilyn was saying.

I told myself that this was something bigger than me and I needed somebody like Lee to guide me through the process. After all, he was a shaman. I thought that someone was trying to contact me and Marilyn and Lee could be the ones to help me figure out who that someone was. That was why I was here. I decided to calm down and just go with the program.

Returning to the campfire, the rest of the team was already talking to Lee about what they had been doing for the past week. They were at the point of having discovered the burial cist when Marilyn and I joined back in. Upon hearing that we had found a burial cist, Marilyn insisted that tomorrow morning she would be joining us on our jaunt up the cliff. She was very intrigued by what we had found and wanted to partake in discovering what was actually inside of the cist.

I turned to Lee and asked him if he would like to join us? Offer his expertise on anything we had uncovered? I was being a bit of a smarty pants, considering all that Marilyn and I had just talked about. Guess I wasn't completely over it yet. His reply was that he would not be joining us. I think the others already knew this, considering

the embarrassed looks on their faces. Lee said that as a Navajo and, particularly, as a Navajo shaman, it was his fervent belief that he should stay away from those things that were considered spiritually dangerous. He finished by telling us that he would leave that foolishness up to us. Guess I wasn't so smart to try and outsmart a Navajo shaman.

Well that kind of put a damper on things. Changing the subject, Marilyn suggested that we talk about what she and Lee had been doing up in Twin Trails Canyon. I was all ears. Marilyn started by explaining why she and Lee had gone to Twin Trails Canyon in the first place. She said that, for the most part, Twin Trails Canyon had not been extensively surveyed and that she felt it needed to be. That was the Professor/archaeologist in Marilyn speaking. I knew there was more to it than that, but that would have sent us all down a different path that I didn't think Marilyn was ready to go down yet. Marilyn said that her initial mapping of the canyon indicated that it had a number of slot canyons feeding into the main canyon. Those were the ones that she was interested in exploring further.

As she and Lee entered the mouth of Twin Trails Canyon, splitting off from Canyon del Muerto, they rode up the canyon looking for the first slot canyon they could find. They camped out at each one that looked like it had some potential. Julie asked what she meant by potential? Marilyn replied that the slot canyon needed to appear to have a number of rock shelters built high up on the cliff side. That would definitely give it potential to have had human occupation sometime in the past.

I decided to try and act as if I had been a good student and had really paid attention to the history lesson that Marilyn had given us earlier. I asked her if she was looking for a particular period or era of human occupation? Marilyn perked up and said that she was specifically interested in finding Basketmaker sites. She added, of course, she would not know for sure they were Basketmaker until after having surveyed and excavated each site more thoroughly. I did a quick calculation in my head to figure out the time line of her exploration, but before I could respond, Fran added that she must, then, be interested in finding evidence of human occupation one to two thousand years ago.

Not to forgo my opportunity to ask a question, I inquired as to the origin of the name Basketmakers. Charlie was quick to respond with what just seemed the all too obvious. He said that following many excavations, site analysis revealed a high number of baskets being associated with the cultural material being extracted. Further examination showed that the people making those baskets must have been highly skilled at doing so. Thus, the name Basketmaker stuck.

Marilyn went on to say that the Basketmaker period in Canyon del Muerto had been well documented. Basketmaker II and III sites were plentiful and well preserved. There was ample evidence of the transition of Basketmaker and beyond, to the Pueblo people. Marilyn said that what she was specifically interested in was the transition between Basketmaker II and III. Fran asked her why? She replied, that was because that was when

everything of importance started happening in Canyon de Chelly.

Marilyn said that the Basketmaker II people provided the first really good evidence of what life in the canyon was actually like. What life was really like about two thousand years ago. As excited as Marilyn was, she became even more animated, given this absolute golden opportunity to talk more about the Basketmaker people. We waited all ears for her to start as we circled ourselves closer around the blazing campfire.

Marilyn was fascinated with the fact that the Basketmakers in Canyon de Chelly represented that very special link between human beings and their subsistence strategy for controlling their environment. She said that it really all started about ten thousand years ago, probably in the Fertile Crescent of the Middle East. At that time, the Neolithic Revolution started, when humans first took up farming. Otherwise known as the Agricultural Revolution, this was the time when humans transitioned from a hunting and gathering form of subsistence to one of farming and growing food. They became a settled people. That was what led to larger, agricultural settlements and, eventually, early civilization.

We were able to get the connection, but just to make sure, Marilyn reinforced the fact that it was the Basketmakers who made a similar transition inside of Canyon de Chelly. Their prehistoric forebears were strictly hunters and gatherers, making their way into the canyon on temporary surveillance and hunting forays. They mainly camped up on the top of the cliffs of the canyon, but

probably spent some time down below in the rock shelters and caves as well. The Basketmakers were known to have hunted, but they mainly farmed the fertile land on the canyon floor, growing such things as maize (corn), squash, beans, and other small crops.

Marilyn wanted to emphasize that the Agricultural Revolution did not just occur in one place. It didn't just start in the Fertile Crescent and then, just spread everywhere else from there. It was widely known to have started independently in several places around the world.

As far as Canyon de Chelly and the Basketmakers were concerned, domesticated plants were introduced from Mexico. They were brought into the canyon and were both planted and harvested on the canyon floor. Even within the Basketmakers, particularly Basketmaker II, agriculture was not the norm. Some Basketmaker II sites exhibited no evidence of growing food. Basically, what Marilyn was saying was that this was a time of transition.

Marilyn said that there was just so much more to talk about, but she realized that we had just finished a long day excavating the rock shelter talus slope. We understood that to mean that she was tired too. We were, in fact, ready to hit the sleeping bags in our tents. We had planned an early start the next day and everyone, including Marilyn, needed their rest. With that, we concluded our little discussion, cleaned up the campsite and turned out the lights, so to speak.

I was fast asleep in my tent when I heard a rumbling outside the tent that made my eyes pop open. I found

myself in that moment when you frighteningly awaken and wait impatiently for the next sound that you hope never comes. Before I knew it, my tent flap opened and in popped Marilyn with her flashlight illuminating the tent. She had a big welcoming smile on her face and a sleeping bag tucked up under her arm. I had a sinking feeling that it was going to be another one of those long nights. I had wondered when we were going to have our next little chat about Twin Trails Canyon. I just didn't quite expect it to be so soon.

REVISITING THE BURIAL CIST

CHAPTER THIRTEEN

I woke up early to a vision of Marilyn sleeping contentedly only a foot or so away from my face. The memory of what had happened the night before returned to my thoughts. I wasn't really in the mood to continue thinking about it or even risk carrying on another conversation, so I decided to slip out of the tent as quickly and quietly as I could. As silently as possible, I extricated myself from my sleeping bag, crawled over to the tent flap and stealthily climbed out of the tent unnoticed. At least as far as Marilyn was concerned.

Upon rising from the ground I found myself looking over at the crackling morning fire that was already fully ablaze. Sitting next to the fire was Lee, who just so happened to catch a glimpse of me emerging from the tent. I went over to the fire and was immediately greeted with a hot and steamy cup of coffee. I thanked him for the much needed offering and sat down next to him. It was only the two of us.

Lee said that I must have had a long night, considering he saw Marilyn sneaking over to my tent before he settled in for the night. I admitted that it was true and figured now was as good as time as any to get to know Lee a little better. He hadn't shown to be much of a talker, but when he

did, it caught my attention. I said Marilyn and I had talked quite a bit about Twin Trails Canyon and what my role was going to be in its exploration. I was still a little offended that Lee had been able to hear and understand my thoughts, according to what I heard from Marilyn. So I just came right out and asked him if that was all true.

Lee's face looked a little perplexed and after a few seconds he let out a muffled chuckle. He said that I must have misconstrued what Marilyn had said or, at least, meant. I replied that what I had heard from Marilyn was that Lee was a Navajo shaman and that he was well aware of my hearing someone or something talking to me from inside of the rock shelter. Inside of the burial pit. I said that I just figured he had been able to hear my thoughts.

Once again, Lee offered up another chuckle. He said that he needed to explain a few things. First of all, he said that he was not able to hear my thoughts. He was a shaman true, but not a mind reader. To illustrate the difference he pointed out that he was not listening to me or hearing my thoughts. He was listening to the voices of the spirits who were talking to him about me. He said he was experiencing me through them.

I must have shown my embarrassment for having mistaken the slight nuance. Lee said that it was a mistake that happened a lot. But, just to be clear, he said his abilities allowed him to speak with the ancestors and, they in turn, to speak with him. He said he was Navajo but that did not prevent him from speaking with the Ancestral Pueblos. He said he just had to be careful.

I had one more question for Lee and told him that I did not mean it to be condescending. I asked him how he reconciled communicating with the ancestral spirits while at the same time he had this fear of being around them? He thought intently for a moment and then said that there was a slight difference between the two. He said the Navajo did have a real spiritual fear of being in close contact with the dead. They were not to be in close, physical contact with a spirit that had been laid to rest. That was the dangerous part of it all. He continued by saying that by being a shaman, he had a great deal of flexibility. A flexibility that allowed him to be a conduit by which the living could communicate with the spirit world.

Lee admitted that there was a slight danger, as a Navajo, in communicating with the Ancestral Puebloan spirits. The way that he reconciled it was to communicate with those same spirits by being an Ancestral Puebloan and not a Navajo. It was a slight trick that he learned to play as a shaman when he realized that the spirit world was not just made up of Navajo but, instead, was made up of all kinds of spirits.

I thought to myself how profound all of what I had just heard was. This was not just enlightening from an educational perspective. This went deeper than that. This was pure wisdom coming from the soul of a medicine man.

We finished our coffee and conversation in a sort of silence that signified our understanding and acceptance of one another. The others started to gradually crawl their way out of their tents and slowly made their appearance around the fire. Marilyn was actually the last one to arrive. She

gave both Lee and I a look of genuine approval, as if she had single-handedly orchestrated the whole thing.

The team merrily made its way up the trail towards the rock shelter. We took it a little slow this time being this was Marilyn's first trip up the slope. When it came time to climb the steps in the cliff and traverse the narrow path over to the rock shelter, we made sure we had one person in front of Marilyn and one person behind her at all times. Not that she really needed it, but we certainly didn't want something to happen to her. Could you imagine?

Anyway, it gave me more time to think about things. More like, agonize about how I was going to handle opening the burial cist back up again. I rationalized that I seemed to do alright the first time. I didn't hear any voices ricocheting inside my head. Still, I wondered what it was going to be like this time.

When we finally made it up to the talus slope, Marilyn was almost beside herself. We side-stepped our way over to where the burial cist was and stood around it momentarily, pondering what to do. Now that the teacher was here, I guess we we expected her to take the lead. Which, of course, she did. She jumped down into the pit and asked who was going to join her? Julie was right on top of things, after first getting a nod of approval from Fran.

The two of them slid open the cracked slabs for all to see and, once again, we just stood there in awe. Marilyn looked inside the burial cist as if it was the very first one she had ever seen. Even though she had examined plenty of them over the years in her digs at Canyon de Chelly. Each

time was like a new experience for her. Being the professor that she was, she began to itemize and describe the contents of the cist. Being the consummate archaeologist that I had been taught to be, I began to document in my notepad all that she described.

The first thing Marilyn declared was that it appeared we had unearthed a female burial. I was curious to know how she knew it was a female? She explained that there were certain indicators to look for when determining the sex. Looking at the skull, she could see that it had originally been covered with a basket, which was then covered by another basket. Both baskets were partially disintegrated. She said to look carefully at the chin. The chin was somewhat pointed, whereas in a male, it was usually more square. Also, there did not appear to be any large brow ridges. Another indication of it being a female.

The burial chamber was lined with bark and some kind of grass. Based on past experience, Marilyn said that it was probably juniper bark and yucca fibers. Examining the body further, Marilyn noted that the body had been wrapped tightly in some kind of blanket. Wrapping the body this way was common for both male and female. She said that sometimes turkey feathers were used to weave such a blanket. Marilyn spotted a shell bracelet on the left wrist. She said that bracelets on the left wrist were, again, fairly typical of both male and female burials.

Marilyn called out that the body was laying on its back with its head to the west. The right hand rested up by the chin and the left hand was down by the side of the body. Finally, the knees had been raised up in somewhat of a

fetal position. I was busily writing all of that down. Fran was taking pictures from above. Charlie was taking pictures from the sides.

Marilyn continued that there were sandals upon the feet and a second pair obviously added as an offering. Marilyn suspected that the sandals were probably made out of yucca fiber. Additional offerings appeared to have been made that included bracelets, hair ornaments, beads and pendants. Finally, there were more baskets that had disintegrated and contained, what looked like, remnants of maize and pinyon nuts.

Pushing herself back away from the cist, Marilyn summarized her conclusions. She said that it was very definitely a Basketmaker II burial. Of course, I had no clue how she was able to come up with that conclusion. I guess the look on my face encouraged Marilyn to go on. She described how there were specific things that differentiated a Basketmaker II from other Basketmaker or Puebloan burials. One important one was the inclusion of the sandals.

Sandals present in the burial deserved special attention, according to Marilyn. The construction techniques for making sandals was a learned behavior that must have been passed on from generation to generation. These were techniques that could be distinguished from one Basketmaker period to another in a developmental sequence. For example, if the sandals were found to be made of yucca fiber, then you knew you had a Basketmaker II sandal. If, instead, they were woven from yucca leaves, then you knew you had Basketmaker III or later.

Marilyn said the design of the sandal was also worth noting. The sandals of Basketmaker II were usually square toed and square heeled, with a bottom reinforcement that covered the whole sole. Later styles showed a more rounding or scalloping of the toe, although the heel could show both squared and round, especially well into the Pueblo III period.

Another sure sign of Basketmaker II was the inclusion of a second pair of sandals. Wrapping the feet with a new pair of sandals was prevalent in both Basketmaker II and III, but accompanying the body with a second or third pair of new sandals tended to only be seen in Basketmaker II burials.

Charlie asked if there was any reason for the inclusion of a second pair of sandals? Marilyn said there were theories about the significance of the second pair of sandals. She said that the main theory was that new sandals on the feet, accompanied by a second pair in the burial chamber, indicated that there must have been a belief in some form of afterlife. The sandals suggested that the dead were expected to travel. Baskets of food found associated with the burial, provided the sustenance for that travel. Marilyn said that what was interesting was that the sandals and food tended to be found in all burials of Basketmaker II, regardless of age or sex. That implied that they were all traveling to the same destination.

With that, Marilyn climbed her way out of the pit and said she thought we should take a break for a late lunch. Julie was right behind her as we climbed up the talus slope to the rock shelter. I said we, but I lingered behind for a bit.

That same old feeling of someone speaking to me had returned. I turned around, staring at the burial cist for the longest time before Marilyn called me out of my trance. Acknowledging her call, I joined the rest of the team in the shelter.

After we ate, Marilyn pulled me aside and asked me what was going on? I said that as we all got up to leave the burial cist I heard someone whispering to me. It was coming from the cist. Marilyn didn't seem alarmed. She asked if I knew what the voice was saying? All I could say was that I had this feeling it was saying that there was something else in the cist we had missed. That there was someone other than the female resting in the pit.

Marilyn quickly got up, grabbed my arm and marched me over to the edge of the shelter. We then made our way down the slope to where the cist was. The rest of the team followed, curious as to what we were doing. Julie knew something was up and tried to hush the others as they approached. Once Marilyn and I got to the pit, we climbed down, sat next to the cist and peered in. Marilyn turned to me and asked me what I thought we should do next? She was asking me to make the next move.

I bent over the side of the cist and my eyes were automatically drawn to the lower part of the female's body. I stared down toward her legs and feet. I slowly reached in, took my hands and gently lifted up the tibia and fibula bones just a slight bit. There was a small yucca woven blanket resting underneath. It was hard to see, as it was covered with the juniper bark. Almost hidden underneath the legs. There appeared to be something in it.

Marilyn turned her head and stared at me with a surprising look of disbelief. I had no idea what was in the wrapped blanket but, somehow, Marilyn knew. She asked me how I knew it was there? She said she had examined the cist herself and did not see it. I said that it was the voice I had heard earlier that told me. The voice had not told me what it was, only that it was there. Marilyn quickly responded that she believed inside the tightly wrapped blanket were human remains. Probably that of an infant.

I looked up at the rest of the team standing there incredulous. I didn't know if I was looking for absolution, some kind of natural explanation or what, but they had none. They looked dumbfounded, almost numb. I turned to Marilyn and asked her what we should do, expecting her to help me out? Very matter of factually she said that we were not going to do anything more. Even as an archaeologist, this was something out of her realm. She advised that we not open up the woven blanket to see what was really inside. She already knew. I didn't want to find out.

Thanks to Julie, we were all brought back to some aspect of reality. She said that she thought we should wrap up for the day and head back down to the campsite. We all nodded our heads in a sign of agreement. Once again, she and Fran got down into the pit and returned the rock slabs to their rightful places. Charlie said that we would return tomorrow to gather up our tools and things. We would spend the day returning the talus slope to the way it was before we started. Return the burial cist to the earth and all that it contained.

We left the rock shelter in single file along the narrow path parallel to the side of the cliff. We didn't talk much on the way down. We were all tired, but I think I may have had something to do with it. I think we were all relieved to be heading home. I know I was.

THE GIFT

CHAPTER FOURTEEN

When we arrived we were immediately greeted by Lee. Marilyn grabbed him by his arm and they headed off in the opposite direction. It wasn't just a casual stroll. Obviously, it was to discuss everything that had just happened up on the slope. The rest of us continued on, dropping ourselves down next to the campfire still smoldering from the morning's activity. Off in the distance we could see Marilyn and Lee talking. There was an occasional look in our direction, but other than that, we waited.

I could tell that the others were being unusually quiet. We were usually a pretty chatty group and as I looked around, all I could see were their heads bent down, staring at the ground. I decided that it was going to be up to me to break the silence, so I said that I needed to talk about what had just happened up on the talus slope. They all looked up at me, as if saying they did too.

I told them that after we decided to go back up inside the rock shelter for lunch, I started walking up the slope and was stopped by a voice that appeared to be coming from behind me. I turned around and I heard it again. The voice was coming from the burial cist. I just stood there in total disbelief, waiting for something further to happen. I said the

only one who seemed to notice was Marilyn, who's voice quickly brought me back to reality by breaking whatever it was that was capturing my attention.

Once inside the rock shelter, we sat down and I told Marilyn what I had heard and what the voice had said to me. I thought it was saying that something had been missed while examining the cist. That there was something in there that I needed to find. I said to Marilyn, there were only two people examining that cist and I wasn't one of them.

That was when Marilyn picked me up by the arm and led me back to the cist. When we got down on our knees and looked inside, I found what Marilyn described as an infant, wrapped in a blanket and hidden underneath the skeleton's legs. I admitted that I was just as startled as everyone else at what I had found.

As I looked around, I think Julie was the only one to not appear surprised. We had talked a few times about the walls of the canyon seeming to have talked to me as the voices of the ancestors. This was the first time Fran and Charlie had heard any of this and I could tell they were having a difficult time with it. But, with all that they had just witnessed, I think they realized it was hard to ignore.

I spoke up and apologized for making things so terribly confusing for everybody. All I had really wanted to do was to be an archaeologist. Unfortunately, something else happened along the way that interfered with that pursuit. Something that I had no control over. Yet, something that was meant to happen.

Fran confessed that she had originally questioned why I was put on the team in the first place. I had no special skills to speak of, other than being an archaeology student. Charlie said they spoke with Marilyn, expressed their concern and she was quite vague about her reasoning. She said that she simply had a gut feeling that I was a good fit for the job.

Julie said that, now, she had a better understanding of what those reasons were. Fran and Charlie said they thought they did too. Julie said she first started catching on when she and I talked about the canyon. How I said the canyon had spoken to me. Then, when I confided in her that the child in the rock shelter had called out to me, Julie said she figured out what Marilyn saw in me. I was capable of hearing the ancestors speak. I was meant to be their voice.

Fran and Charlie both agreed with Julie's assessment. They had a slightly more analytical interpretation of my purpose, but a purpose none the less. They said that being an archaeologist was all about digging up the physical evidence of the past. The artifacts of a people's existence. They said that the one thing they didn't find was what the people were thinking when they used those artifacts. They said that all they could do was make educated guesses.

The three of them looked at me and said that I was a link. I was someone who, for some reason, had been given the ability to be an interpreter. Fran and Charlie said that Julie was right. I was meant to be the voice through which the ancestors spoke. As we were talking, Marilyn and Lee strode up to the four of us. They had heard the last part of

our conversation. Marilyn seconded what Fran and Charlie had just said. I was floored. I thought I had ruined everything by being so goofy. Now, I felt as if I was someone truly special. What I had was a gift and not a burden as I had thought.

What I didn't understand though was the connection with Twin Trails Canyon. I turned to Marilyn and said that, even after the conversation in my tent the other night, I still didn't quite understand what was so important about Twin Trails Canyon. I admitted that I must have fallen asleep during the important parts of the conversation. Marilyn got a resolute look on her face and said that it was about time that she and Lee revealed what was on their minds.

Marilyn said that for the past five years or so, she had heard rumors that there was this unrevealed presence in Twin Trails Canyon. At first she thought that this was just another of the many myths circulating amongst the local Navajo regarding the Ancestral Puebloans. Then, about three years ago, she met Lee. She and Lee hit it off from the very start. At some point, Marilyn said that she got up the nerve to talk with Lee about the alleged presence up in Twin Trails Canyon. That was when Lee informed her that he was a Navajo shaman. He said that he was well aware of that story. That he firmly believed it was true.

Lee finally spoke up. He said that the story of an unidentified presence in Twin Trails Canyon was what the Navajo had told themselves by way of myth for generations. It was a story passed down from generation to generation even before the Navajo. Lee said that calling something a myth did not mean that it wasn't true. It was a story. And

stories had to start somewhere. Usually from something that was true.

It was Lee's belief that this story had its origins back at the time of the Basketmaker II people. He said as a shaman he thought this to be true. There was a presence in Twin Trails Canyon, probably a Basketmaker, just waiting to be discovered. Hoping to be found. Eager to finally be heard.

Lee said the ancestors told the story something like this. At one time, around two thousand years ago, there was a valley that existed in a slot canyon off of Twin Trails Canyon. In that slot canyon, a people made their living in a semi-nomadic lifestyle. They did some hunting and gathering but, also, engaged in a limited amount of farming. Tending to the maize seeds that they had sown over the fertile canyon floor. The floor of the canyon was lush due to a river that ran through it. Lee said that, although, we did not know what they called that river, the most common name given to it was the Ellie Mae. As the story was told, Ellie Mae had run forever. Through the canyon where they found her.

Marilyn continued by saying that she had been looking for evidence of those people for a number of years now. She had been up and down Twin Trails Canyon. She and Lee had searched together numerous times looking for their presence. They just hadn't found anything. Marilyn said she knew they were once there. Lee surmised that they had lived and farmed there at one time. Marilyn said that today's environment though, had erased all physical traces of their existence.

Marilyn said that she had almost lost all hope of ever finding them. Until she met me. She knew from the start of our relationship that I had a special ability. She just didn't know what that special ability was. Until, she witnessed my abilities herself. She said that in the conversation she just had with Lee, he said that I was the conduit that would connect the three of them with the spirit that, he believed, still lived in some slot off of Twin Trails Canyon.

I was beside myself. How could this be happening to me? I could feel myself starting to shake and tremble. I think the others noticed it. I assured them that I was not having some kind of seizure that connected me to the sacred spirits. I felt relieved when they all chuckled in unison.

Marilyn said that the next part in the plan, probably the one that I had slept through, was that she, Lee and I would be leaving for Twin Trails Canyon in two days. Dan and Irene were at this moment traveling up Canyon del Muerto with additional pack horses and supplies, some of which would be dropped here to support the excavation. The rest of which, we would take with us on our trip to Twin Trails Canyon. Dan and Irene were scheduled to arrive sometime tomorrow, early afternoon. They would spend the night and return to Chinle the next day.

TALUS SLOPE REINSTATEMENT

CHAPTER FIFTEEN

Morning broke as some dark clouds started gathering overhead. The wind was picking up as it whirled its way down the canyon. As we poked our heads out of our tents, we could smell the rain coming. It wasn't here yet, but we knew it was on its way.

Charlie was the first person out, surveying the sky for a sign of what was to come. He was joined by Fran and Julie, who soon joined in Charlie's concern. I was last out of the four of us. We all just kind of turned around in circles, our heads pointed up to the sky. Looking for an answer as to how the day's weather was going to play out. Marilyn and Lee must have still been asleep, as they had not stirred even a little.

Charlie was worried that we had a lot to do today and we might not get it done. We needed to make sure that the excavation of the burial cist was returned to the way we had found it. Buried beneath a few feet of soil, rock and debris. What we were seeing overhead was not the canyon's typical afternoon thundershower that drops a lot of rain, but quickly passes. This was advanced notice of a true storm front coming in that could last for hours.

This morning there was no time for chatter. No time to lounge around drinking coffee and enjoying each other's company. We had to get moving. We gathered what we needed, pinned a note on Marilyn's tent stating that we had left for the rock shelter and hurried to the trail that wound its way up the side of the cliff.

We were pretty confident that we had enough time to do what we needed to do before the rain hit. We probably reached the rock shelter in record time. Everyone knew what they had to do. There was no time for explanation. For whatever reason, I was chosen to seal up the burial cist. Actually, I think the real reason was that I had this special connection with whoever was inside.

As I approached the burial pit I kept expecting to hear her voice in the back of my mind. I listened, but I heard nothing but my own heavy breathing. I inched my way down into the pit and slid in next to the cist. I realized that I was going to have to reach over the cist in order to grab onto the rock slabs that had served as its cover for a thousand years or more. That meant I would have to look back in. I said to myself that I could do this.

Draping myself over the cist, I was caught by the gaze of the female that lay beneath me. There was no voice, but it was as if she was telling me that she was OK. That everything was alright. She was saying to me that she and her child had been waiting for a long time for this moment to arrive. They had been placed in the ground long ago, expected to travel together to an afterlife that awaited them. They had almost worn out their sandals making the journey and consumed most of their food, but she knew that they

were almost there. Seeing me was confirmation of all that being true.

I felt bad in having to cover them back over again. First the rock slabs and then, Julie and I returning the soil, rocks and debris to the talus slope that was their resting place. I confided in Julie that I was worried that we had interrupted their journey to an afterlife. Maybe even had given them false hope by exposing their burial chamber. Julie comforted me by saying that the important thing was that they were on their way again. And that, along the way, they met someone like me.

We all convened outside the rock shelter, our work done. The sky looked even darker now. The wind was starting to howl more. We packed up our tools and gave one last check of the site to make sure everything we had needed to do had been done. Satisfied, we hastily made our way across the face of the cliff to the zigzag of a trail leading back down. As we finished the slippery section without any trouble, we felt pretty confident that we had successfully outrun the storm. We probably shouldn't have felt that. As soon as we had, it just started dumping large droplets of rain. The wind blew harder than anything that I had ever experienced.

We stomped through the mud until we reached camp like a bunch of drowned rats looking for some place to dry out. Marilyn and Lee met us to help with unloading the equipment. They supplied us with towels to dry ourselves off, afterwards which, we all climbed into our separate tents to shelter from the storm.

An hour or so later in the afternoon, the rain let up, the clouds blew away and we, once again, reconvened outside around the campfire pit. We could tell something was bothering Marilyn to no end. When we asked, she said she was worried about Dan and Irene. She said they should have been here by now, even with the rainstorm.

The next thing we knew, we heard the clippety-clop thud of horse hoofs through the mud, announcing the arrival of Dan and Irene to our campsite. We imagined ourselves looking drowned? They had ridden through the thick of it to get to us. We thought to ourselves how sweet that was. Until, we heard them say that there was just no damn place to stop and hide between here and there.

OFF TO TWIN TRAILS CANYON

CHAPTER SIXTEEN

Waking up the next morning, I found myself not wanting to get out of my sleeping bag. It was nice and warm inside, but that wasn't what was making me indecisive. I was flying high between two opposing emotions. On the one hand I was feeling extremely excited about leaving with Marilyn and Lee for Twin Trails Canyon. There was a lot to look forward to and new things to experience.

My emotions on the other side? I was not looking forward to saying goodbye to Fran, Charlie and Julie. Especially, Julie. Julie was the one I had really connected with. She was the one that I felt intimately understood what it was I was going through. I wasn't quite ready to let any of them go, but especially Julie. So, the easiest thing to do was to simply avoid getting out of my tent.

I think I finally realized that was unacceptable and, more so, would not have worked for long anyway. So I slowly slid out of my sleeping bag and poked my head out of the tent. I was quite surprised to see the Sun brightly shining in my eyes. The stormy weather had definitely cleared and the only thing left to do was crawl my way out of the tent and face the events of the day.

The others, including Dan and Irene, had already gathered around the morning campfire. I joined them just as they were passing around the coffee pot and I poured myself a welcome, full cup. They were all talking about the upcoming day's activities. I thought to myself that there was no avoiding the inevitable now.

Marilyn said that the plan was for she, Lee and me to leave just before noon. We would pack up all of our stuff, get the horses ready and load up the two pack horses that had arrived with Dan and Irene. There were enough supplies for a good six or seven days, so we should be all set for the week ahead. Irene said that they would need to be heading back to Chinle at about the same time, so she wondered if it would be a good idea if they rode part way back down the canyon with us? We all agreed and set things in motion.

Fran, Charlie and Julie had not said a word. I think they were equally upset with losing one of their team. Someone, me, who they had invested a lot of time and energy in. Along with a few generous surprises. It was to be an abrupt ending to a friendship that had just barely gotten started. As the others got up to start their preparations, I moved in closer to Fran, Charlie and Julie and asked would they do one more thing with me?

I thought we needed to engage in a last group activity. I asked them to walk with me through the canyon. Together, as a team. This was the moment I needed, I think we all needed, to listen to what the canyon had to say. To hear its sounds, see the sharpness of the canyon walls and feel the warmth of the Sun that made one just want to pause for

awhile. Alive with the spirits that had chosen Canyon del Muerto as their final resting place.

Just as Marilyn had planned, we saddled up our horses around the noon hour. Cinnamon sensed that we were up to something new. He turned his head in the direction of Twin Trails Canyon and followed the lead of Marilyn and Lee as they departed what had been my home for the last ten days.

With our pack horses behind us, progress was a little slow. That was OK. It gave us time to reflect on the beauty and grandeur of the canyon. The effects of the storm the day before were quite evident as we rode down through the canyon. The lazy and normally quiet Tsaile Creek that ran down the middle had swollen quite a bit, due to the amount of rain that had fallen over just a few hours. Dan and Irene said that was due to those same buckets of rain falling first in the Chuska Mountains. The mountains that fed Tsaile Creek. Crossing over the stream became a bit of a challenge, but nothing Cinnamon and the rest of us couldn't handle.

We finally reached the fork to Twin Trails Canyon. It wasn't hard to spot, but Cinnamon and I both picked up the scent, so to speak. We stopped for a short bit to bid goodbye to Dan and Irene. They still had a ways to go if they were going to make it back to Chinle in one day. At least the weather was working in their favor today.

For Marilyn and Lee, they had a pretty good idea of where they were heading up Twin Trails Canyon. I, on the other hand, was in uncharted territory. As we rode up the

canyon, the scenery was pretty much the same as Canyon del Muerto. The flat canyon floor, the cottonwoods, willows and the low growing scrub brush that lined the edges of the high, red sandstone cliffs. If you looked closely, you could make out some random rock shelters that pocketed the sides of the cliffs. The thing that appeared to be missing was the stream that ran down the middle of the canyon. I could see that, at one point, there used to be a stream there. Even the heavy rains of the previous day weren't enough to get it flowing again.

As was typical of Canyon del Muerto, I was told that there were some slot tributaries that broke off from the main canyon further up ahead. We kept riding for an hour or so before we reached the first one. As we approached, Marilyn and Lee announced that this was going to be our stopping point for the night. We found a good flat spot next to the canyon wall, corralled the horses and began setting up the campsite.

I mentioned to Marilyn that, obviously, someone had been here before. There was an old campfire pit that had been abandoned by somebody. Marilyn said that was because that was where she and Lee always stopped when exploring Twin Trails Canyon. This was going to be our base camp for awhile, until we found something worth exploring further up the canyon. Then we would move the base camp to that point and go from there. In all likelihood, our base camps would be set up at the intersection of the canyon with a slot canyon. That way we could check off each slot canyon as we went along. I thought to myself how

well Marilyn had really planned all of this out. Very methodical of her.

Late in the day, we got ourselves ready for another evening meal sitting around the campfire. Things were a little different this time. It was just the three of us. If I had to describe it, I would say that conditions were a little more primitive than usual. I felt good about that, but missed the company of those at the field site. In my mind I compared what we were doing with what I remembered of my old backpacking trips. Sometimes just me alone and, other times, maybe with one other person. I think if anybody was feeling more at ease with the experience, it was Lee. I got the impression he didn't like crowds much and preferred to be out here in the open.

Like I said, things were somewhat meager here, including our food options. I suppose you could probably describe them as rations. That all didn't matter. Everything tasted better when you were outside. When you considered your surroundings, the towering red sandstone cliffs, the sparkle of a night sky full of billions of stars and the almost complete absence of sound, I wouldn't have had it any other way.

With the day behind us, the campsite organized for the night and the horses well taken care of, we made our way off to our tents to settle in for the night. We would be talking more about how we were going to investigate the canyon tomorrow. That was a given. I was pretty much here just to follow Marilyn and Lee in their day-to-day routines. I thought.

TWIN TRAILS SLOT CANYONS

CHAPTER SEVENTEEN

We all must have had a pretty good night's sleep. I know I did. Dragging myself out of the tent, I was followed by Marilyn, stretching and yawning her way to the small campfire that Lee had built. Lee, of course, had been up early. That was just his nature. The bonus for Marilyn and I was that he had also made a pot of coffee and fixed up a light breakfast to start our day.

The plan that we devised was to get on our horses and start riding up Twin Trails Canyon as far as the next slot. Depending on the nature of what we found, we would explore that part of the canyon further. Eventually, making our way up the total length of Twin Trails Canyon. Marilyn said that the most suitable of the slot canyons would be found at the far end, according to what they had already scoped out.

I thought that was a pretty good plan, but, to be honest, I still didn't know what, exactly, we were looking for. I wanted to know what Marilyn and Lee expected to find that would, then, require further exploration? They both looked at me with a slight smirk on their face and said that it was all up to me. They had scoured this canyon for many days and had not come up with any extraordinary evidence of there being an ancient culture of people living here in the

past. That's what they were looking for. An ancient culture of people that, according to the assorted myths that Lee had woven together, lived here a long time ago. I finally had my bearings, although I was still unclear how I was going to help resolve that puzzle.

Later in the morning we started out from the campsite headed for the first slot canyon. We were able to travel a little faster now that we didn't have the pack horses trailing behind us. Coming to the first slot canyon, we just rode on past. At the next slot canyon, we did the same. At this point I felt I had to say something. I inquired as to what I thought the plan was, which was to stop at each slot canyon and investigate further?

Marilyn turned around and looked a little embarrassed. She said that there was one thing she had forgotten to mention. She and Lee had already gone up and down a number of these slots and found no credible evidence of human occupation. Thus, there was no reason to stop and do it again. Their plan was to just keep going up the canyon until they reached a slot canyon they had not surveyed yet. Who was I to second guess them? This was all new to me.

We rode by another three slots and at that point, Cinnamon just stopped. I don't know if it was something I did to make Cinnamon just halt like that, but I felt the urge to stop as well. I swung around in my saddle, looking up at the slot canyon. I kind of felt like a compass with my magnetic north pointing in its direction. Whatever it was, there was something drawing me to that slot. Cinnamon seemed to feel it too, judging by his reluctance to keep following the lead of Marilyn and Lee. We both turned and

faced the slot canyon head on, hesitated a bit, then slowly proceeded in its direction.

Marilyn and Lee were well up ahead before they stopped to look back and check on my progress. I'm sure they were wondering what the hell I was doing. They had already gone up that slot the week before. There was nothing there of interest as far as they were concerned. Deciding not to ask any questions, they turned right around and followed in my direction. I think they understood that I was on to something. Something they had missed. That was what they were hoping anyway.

The beginning of the slot canyon was just like all the others. A flat, canyon floor of fine windblown sand, with high sandstone cliffs on either side. Punctuating the desert wash were stands of cottonwood and willow giving some color and contrast to the picture. Marilyn and Lee seemed reluctant to go much further, but Cinnamon and I just kept plodding along.

At one point I stopped and got off of Cinnamon. Marilyn and Lee dismounted as well. I got down on my knees and started digging with my hands, letting the sand strain through my fingers. I turned to Marilyn and Lee and said that this all use to be a flowing stream bed. There was a stream that, long ago, ran through this canyon. On its way to, eventually, merge with the stream that ran down Twin Trails Canyon.

Lee agreed that there probably was a small stream that ran through this slot at some point. Over the centuries that stream had dried up, probably due to the climate

becoming drier. It was well documented that extreme droughts had affected Canyon de Chelly periodically since the earliest times of its formation. He said he wasn't trying to dismiss what I was saying, but he was simply wondering why it was of such significance now?

I said that something was telling me that it was important. I couldn't put my finger on it, but we needed to keep going. Follow what remained of the ancient stream bed up the canyon. I think at this point Marilyn and Lee decided that the rest of this day was mine. They were going to do whatever I suggested. They were going to place their trust in me. So, up the slot we went. Following the ancient stream bed or, at least, whatever was left of it. I was relying on my senses for some of it, but also trusting in Cinnamon's intuitions as well.

Towards early afternoon, we stopped for a bite to eat. We dropped down from our horses and just picked a spot to sit and eat for a bit. I started looking around, trying to follow the path of the imaginary stream we had been following. I was trying to locate its source. It seemed to be running down from a plateau about a quarter mile from where we were sitting. I turned and asked Marilyn and Lee if they could see that? They both looked in the direction of, what to them, looked to be just part of the sandstone cliff. They admitted they didn't see anything special in that direction at all. They asked what was I looking at?

I told them that the dried up stream bed we had been following appeared to be coming from that direction. It was coming down from the plateau up there. They both looked again and acknowledged, that, indeed, there seemed to be

something in what I was saying. They said that they had just never imagined it looking like that before.

I don't know what made me say it, but I said that there was another valley up there on that plateau. A valley that at one time had, not a stream, but a river that flowed through its bottom. Creating a fertile basin where vegetation thrived and plants were prolific. Marilyn looked over at Lee stunned. Lee had only one thing to say: "The Ellie Mae".

It soon became clear that we should reestablish our campsite here. Preferably, close to the base of that plateau. I said that something was telling me that on top was where we really wanted to be, but that was unrealistic to expect to be able get up there today. With that we made the decision to get back on our horses, turn around and head back down to break camp and pick up the pack horses.

As we rode back down, I couldn't stop thinking of what was up on the plateau. I knew that Marilyn and Lee were placing all their marbles in what I was seeing. The only way open was to follow what it was I had caught sight of. My moment had finally arrived.

GETTING TO THE BASKETMAKERS

CHAPTER EIGHTEEN

The next day we awoke underneath the shadow of the plateau high above us. We were camped next to a sandstone cliff that offered the only way up to the mesa. As such, we had to try and figure out a way to get ourselves and the pack horses up on top. If there really was a top that we could get up on. It made no sense to keep our campsite down here because, if there was a valley up there, that's where we wanted to settle.

Lee was adamant that whatever we decided, we should do so sooner than later. His senses told him that there was going to be an afternoon thundershower that would make it difficult to get up to the plateau. He could smell it. He said that getting up and over that cliff should be our first priority. Before it was no longer doable. Marilyn and I looked up at the sky and didn't see any clouds or any that were even forming. We knew better than to ignore Lee's caution though. This was the place of his birth. We were just guests and, as visitors, we needed to heed his warnings.

So, without much delay, we started packing things up again. By the time we gathered up our supplies and loaded all the horses, Marilyn and I looked up to see clouds forming off in the distance. Lee said that it was not going to

be a big storm, but we needed to be respectful of how quickly things could change.

We stood back from the cliff as far as we could and searched for a path that could take us up to the top. It seemed as if there was a shadow of a switchback along the side. There appeared to be an outline of a trail that led one way across the face of the cliff and then, the next. We thought it could be a series of rows made by animals. Or, an old footpath created long ago to reach, the presumed, upper valley. The main thing was, we were going to have to let the horses figure out the best way to go. I thought to myself that this wasn't going to be easy. Our only option though, was to place our trust in the horses to get us up there. I had to trust in Cinnamon's ability to find a way to the top without me falling off.

When all was said and done, it wasn't really that bad after all. I had to tell myself not to look down and let Cinnamon do the work. The horses found it fairly easy going as long as we allowed them to just take it slowly. We hung on as they slowly made their way back and forth across the face of the cliff. Each step was carefully followed by another and, after a couple of hours, we finally reached the top of the last switchback before cresting the top.

I was beside myself with anticipation as we crossed over the top. In my mind I had created this picture of a grand valley, full of lush green trees, sage brush and a meandering mountain stream running down the middle. This was going to be my shangri la. I had to admit to myself that I had probably watched too many Hollywood movies.

As we stopped at the top to check out the view, I was elated and dejected both at the same time. Elated that a valley really did exist. A long valley, wide open at spots with high sandstone cliffs on either side. At the far end of the valley, the sandstone cliff gradually disappeared and was replaced by a long run up to a range of mountains. Lee said those were the Chuska Mountains. He added a warning that the clouds were moving faster in our direction, coming from the Chuskas.

The lush valley that I had imagined? Not so much. The landscape was different up here to be sure. Not dramatically, but in more of a state of transition between the lower and higher elevations. In the wash area of the canyon below it was dryer. There were more cottonwoods, willows, pinyon and desert scrub. Up here, it was still dry, but there were more pine, fir, oak and aspen. Species that were prevalent in the higher elevations of the Chuska Mountains.

I turned to look at Marilyn and Lee. I wanted to see what their reaction was. I was surprised to see an expression of wonder on Marilyn's face. She said that, in general, she would have never imagined this place even being here. That meant, no one else would have either. Marilyn was ecstatic. This was a place that had probably been largely untouched for a very long period of time. Perhaps, a couple of thousand years. This was an archaeologist's dream.

Lee, on the other hand, showed no real signs of outward elation. I could see that he was still worried about the coming thunderstorm. He kept looking up at the sky, pulling on his hat as he did so. Then, I caught him gaze out

at the valley. For a long moment, he became completely silent. I mean, he never really spoke much anyway, but he didn't make a sound as he sat atop his horse and looked out. Staring off into the distance. He was in total reverence of what he was seeing. Like he was worshiping something or someone that lived up here. I knew exactly what he was feeling.

We slowly encouraged the horses up a ways, riding steadily along, until we spotted a place close to a sandstone cliff on the far side of the valley. We decided that was the place where we should make camp before the thunderstorm hit. It was inset in a small alcove, so we thought the location would help protect us from the rain and the wind. Arriving at our destination, we hurriedly built our campsite, enraptured by the valley that stretched out before us. Eventually, everything was all set up and the horses were properly secured.

Marilyn and I decided to make a quick reconnaissance of our surroundings. Before we got very far though, the rain started coming down. We said to each other that we probably should have just stayed put. We knew it wasn't going to last very long, still, we ran back to the campsite and decided to climb into our tents to wait it out.

As it turned out, the thunderstorm lasted a lot longer than we had thought it would. It was late afternoon before we climbed out of our tents. Marilyn and I thought it best if we postponed our little sight seeing trip until the next day. Remember a ways back I was talking about patience? I think we were both trying to practice as much of it as we could, given the circumstances.

That night, sitting around the fire, we watched as the sparks flickered away toward the night sky. I imagined them turning into bright, twinkly stars that lived high up in the darkness. We were sitting there, enjoying the night air, when Lee suddenly stood up. He bent over and grabbed a few items sitting next to him, then proceeded to quietly walk away from the open fire. He headed off into the openness of the valley, fading away into the darkness as the firelight fell away.

I turned to Marilyn with a questioning look on my face. She said that this was something he had been very much looking forward to. This was Lee's way of introducing himself to the spirits of the valley. Lee now understood this land to be the valley of the Ellie Mae. I asked Marilyn who it was he thought he was speaking to? Marilyn said it was to whoever it was that may be listening.

I guess Marilyn thought I didn't really understand what being a Navajo shaman really meant in this kind of situation. She said that Lee had been trying to communicate with the Basketmaker peoples for quite a long time. Unfortunately, his powers were very limited when it came to those that were so far away. Not so much by who he wanted to talk to but, instead, by those willing to talk back to him. Considering that the Navajo saw the Ancestral Pueblos as "the ancient enemy", they were not particularly interested in speaking with him.

I questioned Marilyn as to why, then, he was able to talk with them about me? They answered him then, I said. Marilyn replied that mine was a very rare occurrence for Lee. Lee said that the Ancestral Pueblos spoke with him

because I was the common thread that tied them all together. It was their trust in me that allowed for them to trust in Lee.

Off in the distance, I could hear a small flute playing. It was a sound that was unusually familiar, but I couldn't quite put my finger on it. Marilyn said that it was Lee. The flute was what he used to call the spirits and request their presence. She said he had other cultural items with him, such as turkey feathers and yucca fiber to help personalize his call.

Marilyn couldn't resist a bit of a history lesson. According to Marilyn, the significance of the flute had changed over time, but many believed it was noteworthy due to its cultural symbolism. It wasn't the quality of the flute's musical notes that was important. It was what the flute portrayed. In the rock art found on both cave and cliff walls, to the myths that were passed down from generation to generation through ceremony, there seemed to be a common belief in it as a symbol of fertility.

It wasn't long before Lee came back to his place beside the fire. He sat down and placed his personal items close by his side. He took special care in wrapping up the flute and folding his cotton-woven blanket. I felt like asking him how things went, but that would have been stupid. Even I knew better than to ask that dumb of a question. If there was something Lee wanted us to know, he would tell us.

As the fire burned itself out, one by one we got up, said goodnight and found our way to our tents for the night.

WHERE THE BASKETMAKERS LIVED

CHAPTER NINETEEN

Marilyn and I agreed that last night was not one of our better sleeping experiences. I had too many thoughts running through my head. I'm sure it was the same for Marilyn.

We rode our horses out to the center of the valley to get a better view of things. Standing beside our horses, next to the now dried up stream bed running down the center of the valley, I turned to Marilyn and asked her what she saw? This was my attempt to try and imagine what a professional archaeologist saw when they had an open canvas like this valley.

She said that she was trying to pick out the possible places that a Basketmaker would have chosen to make their home. Specifically, she was surveying the edges of the valley as they butted up against the sides of the sandstone cliffs. Basketmakers were known to prefer those places to establish their small settlements. That was where they would build their pit houses and, in all likelihood, live out their lives.

Marilyn turned around and put the same question to me. She asked me what I saw? I said that if there was one thing I had learned from Fran, Charlie and Julie, it was that I

should be looking for places of shelter if I wanted to find evidence of human occupation. Regardless of whether it was Navajo, Hopi, Pueblo, Basketmaker or even Archaic peoples, a rock shelter or cave was where the majority of the evidence was found. I said, for example, looking over at the far side of the canyon, it looked as if there were possible hollows or cavities that we should probably explore.

There wasn't much more to be said. We got back up on our horses and trotted off in the direction of the caverns I had pointed out. As we got closer to them, it became pretty obvious that, if, there was some place around here that an old Basketmaker would have called home, this would have been one of those places. There were two, clearly identifiable, hollowed-out caverns located at the base of cliff. They sat side-by-side to each other, almost the same as in the configuration at Mummy Cave. They were both about equal in size, being about 150 feet in width.

I got off of Cinnamon and took a step back or two. I was trying to get a larger view of the sandstone cliff wall. I pointed out to Marilyn that, further up and far to the left, there appeared to be a cave. A cave that, certainly, could have been used for something that would be of interest.

I think Marilyn was thoroughly convinced that this is where we should spend the coming days to do our research. I know I was. We didn't know what we were going to find, but if we found anything, it was going to be found here.

By noon, we had ridden our way back to the campsite where Lee was anxiously awaiting our return. He had already started to pack everything up. I'm sure he knew Marilyn well enough to know that she moved around a lot. I likened it to a chess match. Slowly, but surely, making one educated move after another, until you arrived at your final checkmate.

I think Lee was very pleased with our chosen camping spot. Marilyn and I were extremely excited about being able to explore the two caverns at the base of the cliff. Lee, of course, was more than happy to steer clear of those same places. As far as he was concerned, they, and the cave far above them, held spirits he was supposed to stay away from. I think deep down inside though, he was waiting for the right invitation to engage.

Early afternoon, Marilyn and I decided to make our first incursion into the leftmost cavern. We weren't going to take any special tools or equipment with us. This was going to be our initial site survey. Marilyn decided to have me describe what I saw as we entered the cavern. I think she wanted to know what I had learned to look for when surveying a site such as this.

As we stepped inside, I judged the interior to be around 100 feet in depth. I remembered what Fran and Julie had said about the floor. There was almost always some kind of crust on the ground, that helped identify who may have been there previously. That crust was usually in the form of animal dung of some kind.

I dropped down to my knees and examined the floor of the cavern. I said to Marilyn that there appeared to be no evidence of sheep dung, which, if found, would have been a clear indication of a more recent Navajo occupation of some kind. What there did appear to be was, what Julie had described as, turkey dung spread out over the surface.

Marilyn asked what my takeaway of that was? I replied that it seemed as if this place had never been used by Navajo for penning their sheep. It seemed more than likely that it had been used by Basketmaker III peoples to possibly pen their turkeys. Or, that maybe it was an indication of Basketmaker II, where the turkeys had not been penned at all. Marilyn seemed quite satisfied with my observation. I could tell she she was pleased with the training I had received from Fran, Charlie and Julie.

Marilyn explained that turkeys were a big part of a Basketmaker's life, although they were of importance to Pueblo peoples too. Contrary to what one would think though, the turkeys were not used as a source of food for the Basketmakers. Instead, the turkeys were kept for their feathers. They used the feathers for clothing, woven blankets, adornment and ceremonial purposes. That said, the bones of the turkey were used as well. The earliest known flute, for example, was said to be made of turkey bone. Marilyn said that Lee's flute was made of a turkey leg bone.

Marilyn went on to describe what she looked for when examining what was inside or outside of a potential rock shelter. These were the things that could help narrow down a site to a particular stage or period. The thing to remember

though was that periods and artifacts overlap one another and that was when you had to actually excavate the site to be more specific in your analysis. She said that if we found anything obvious, then excavation would surely follow.

Marilyn said that the first thing she always looked for was evidence of cists. Cists were quite common in Basketmaker sites. The critical factor was determining how those cists may have been used and what they contained. She said, for example, Basketmaker II peoples originally used cists for mainly food storage. Basketmaker peoples, in general, were transitional between hunting and gathering and early farming. So, cists were built to store the foods they gathered and the grains they grew.

Marilyn said that abandoned cists were then used for burial chambers. So, what was actually in the cist could make a big difference in determining who the people were who used the cist. She said take food substances, for example. Basketmaker II peoples were known to grow maize and squash, but it wasn't till later periods that beans were grown and became a part of their diet.

Marilyn said that the same held true for other cultural material such as baskets, blankets and ceramics. Basketmaker II sites contained baskets interlaced with yucca fiber, whereas those of Basketmaker III origin, contained yucca leaf. Then too, instead of blankets woven with yucca fiber, you saw yucca replaced with cotton in later periods. Finally, baskets were replaced with pottery and other ceramics. The pottery itself seeing stylistic differentiation across periods.

Another thing that Marilyn said she looked for, was evidence of tools. What material the tool was made out of and how it was constructed could tell you a great deal about who might have used it. The classic example was the atlatl or throwing spear. The atlatl was found associated with Basketmaker II sites, made of long slender shafts of a single piece of wood. As you progressed to Basketmaker III and Pueblo periods, the atlatl was replaced by the use of the bow and arrow.

Lastly, Marilyn mentioned that she looked for structures. Some kind of place that the people built for housing themselves or storing food stuffs. Basketmaker II people either lived in caves or they built structures called pit houses. These were round or rectangular buildings, carefully sunken into a depression in the ground. They were supported by log corner posts and covered with a material of mud, sand, animal dung and straw. Eventually, pit houses were replaced by the larger cliff dwellings that Basketmaker III and Pueblo peoples preferred.

Marilyn said, bottom line was, you just couldn't look at the surface to make determinations about who may have lived there. You had to dig. You had to catalog and analyze what you found. You had to understand the history and prehistory of the area. In other words, you had to document to understand relationships over time.

My takeaway from all of this? We were going to have to go back to the campsite, collect our tools and return to dig another day. There just wasn't enough time left in this day.

Finishing our evening meal, we once again sat around the open campfire readying ourselves for a good night's sleep. Predictably, Lee got up, collected his things and walked away from the fire in pursuit of whoever it was that might be listening. Marilyn got up, said she was spent and retired to her tent. That left me alone with my thoughts. And, my thoughts told me to follow Lee.

I was curious as to what Lee was doing out there. I knew what Marilyn had told me but I needed to see what was going on first hand. I stood up and just decided to go for it. As I walked away from the glow of the fire, my eyes started to adjust to the darkness of the night. Off in the distance I could see the silhouette of a lone figure sitting on the ground. As I approached, the sound of Lee's flute began its call to those who may be listening nearby.

Coming up to Lee he stopped and beckoned me to sit down next to him. He had unfolded his blanket to include a spot just for me. I had planned on asking permission to sit with him, but I think he was actually expecting me. I asked Lee how he knew that I was going to be coming and joining him? He said, that it was only a matter of time. I would decide when the time was right.

In the dark light of a star-lit sky, there was a crescent moon starting to rise up to its place high in the sky. As dim as the light was, I could see that Lee had spread out the turkey feathers and yucca fibers in front of him on the ground. When I sat down next to him, Lee started to play the flute again.

Out of the corner of my eye, I caught a glimpse of a faint light up in the cave high above the rock shelter Marilyn and I had explored. I guess I tried to rationalize it as the result of the crescent moon, reflecting off of the cave. I looked up at the moon and then over to the cave, just to verify that it was, in fact, what it was. The light from the cave appeared to flicker. I said to myself that it was not a reflection I was looking at. The light was actually coming from inside the cave. It was a shimmering of light like that from a crackling campfire.

Lee continued to play, but I could tell that he had turned and was looking directly at me. Weirdly, I could sense that he had heard what I was seeing. That was when I heard the voice. A voice that was calling to me, that I can only assume was coming from the cave. The voice welcomed me to the valley and said they had been waiting for me for a long, long time. The voice said that it was in this canyon that a great river used to run. A river that, today, the Navajo called the Ellie Mae. According to the voice, the Ellie Mae had run forever. Through this valley, where they had found her.

It was then that the voice stopped and the light grew faint until it disappeared altogether. Lee stopped playing and whispered to me that the ancestors had just spoken to me. Spoken to him. He said that he was grateful to have been included as part of the conversation. Something that he had hoped would happen some day before he died.

Quietly, Lee gathered up his things and stood up. He gestured to me to do the same and, as I did so, he reached down and neatly folded up his woven Navajo blanket.

Together, we silently made our way through the darkness back to the campsite.

THE CAVE

CHAPTER TWENTY

As the Sun broke over the crest of the canyon, Marilyn was up and ready to start the day. For that matter, so was I. Her plan was to initiate a formal excavation of the rock shelter today. That would include all the formal aspects of surveying, establishing a grid, laying out the excavation units and scraping and brushing the surface. I assisted Marilyn in packing up all of the implements needed and helped her carry them over to the shelter.

Once we entered the cavern, I figured this would be as good as time as any to mention that I had a slightly different plan for myself this morning. I asked that, if it was OK with her, I would like to be able to explore the cave up above?

She didn't seem surprised that I asked. I had told her about sitting with Lee and seeing the light from the cave the night before. She encouraged me to figure out what it was that I was so anxious about. Obviously, she had spoken with Lee. Her only request was that I be very careful up there. She said the way up looked formidable. I said that I would be and thanked her for her understanding as I backtracked my way out of the shelter.

Looking up at the cave, my first priority was to try and figure out how the hell I was going to get up there?

Realistically, there had to be a way. I followed my line of eyesight from the cave over to the left and it looked as if there was some faint outline of a crossable ridge. Based on my experience of the field site caves, I imagined there being a path over to the cave from the ridge. It was probably a very narrow pathway, littered with cliff debris and stuff, but a pathway none the less.

Next question was, how do I get up to the ridge? I decided to hike my way over to the base of the cliff, directly below the ridge. It was going to be a climb, but I thought I could bushwhack my way to the top using the tried and true method of creating switchbacks. I walked back and forth at the base of the ridge and I thought I caught a glimpse of a starting point.

I saw a place at the bottom that had probably been someone else's starting point a very long time ago. I followed an imaginary line zigzagging across the face of the cliff and I could just barely make out a primitive trail. Another deer trail perhaps? Or maybe a foot trail last used by a Basketmaker of long ago?

I had a lot of intensive labor ahead of me so I set to work clearing the trail. I just kind of followed the line that appeared as I cleared away the loose rock and rubble. I worked my way up and across the face. I wanted to make sure Marilyn and Lee knew where I was, so I set up trail markers to light the way, so to speak. That also gave me an opportunity to take water breaks. After a few hours I found myself sitting on top of the ridge looking down at my handiwork. At this point I hated to backtrack, but I hadn't

brought anything with me to eat, so I made the decision to head back down for lunch.

Both Marilyn and I walked into the campsite at about the same time. Lee was waiting for us there with my favorite lunch: corn, squash and beans. He said that he was about to come get us but waited, knowing that we knew better than to skip a meal. No matter how excited we were. As we sat down, Lee brought out a surprise. Navajo fry bread. He had just pulled it off the griddle. We ate more than we should have, but it was a treat definitely worth having.

After lunch, Marilyn and I retreated to our previous activities. I found myself high on top of the ridge overlooking the valley. Walking across the ridge, I discovered the beginnings of a pathway leading over to the cave. My earlier assumption about a narrow passageway turned out to be true. But, it was littered with cliff debris. I guessed I had about 100 feet of trail to clear before I got to the cave. I could even start to make out the talus slope, that had drained from the cave over a couple of thousand years. Wasting no time, I started in opening the path up for travel.

Upon arriving at the cave, I was hit with the sudden realization that I was finished. Or, was it that I had just begun? I hadn't thought about what I was going to do next. I stood on the outside of the cave, reluctant to go in. I asked myself if I really wanted to do this?

What saved me was that I heard Lee's voice calling up to me from below. He said that the clouds were moving in and the wind was picking up. He thought it would be best if I came back down before the thunder and lightening started.

That decision made, I retraced my steps back across the narrow ledge, en route to the campsite via the switchbacks I had cut across the face of the cliff.

I thought about that decision that night as I lay in my sleeping bag, trying to fall asleep. I questioned whether or not I shouldn't have just stayed up there and entered the cave. The cave that had called out to me the night before. There was something or someone in that cave that was waiting for me. What allowed me to finally fall asleep was my full appreciation of the word patience. After all, whatever was in there had been more patient than I could have ever been for a very long time.

THE CAVE DAY TWO

CHAPTER TWENTY-ONE

I found myself standing in front of the cave entrance very early in the morning. The Sun was just coming up, bouncing off the walls. The feeling of hesitation I had yesterday returned as I contemplated entering the cave. I had this feeling of an impending event about to happen. I peered inside the cave and rationalized that it really wasn't the scary place that I had thought it was. It wasn't a dark, inhospitable hole in the side of the sandstone cliff. The sunlight had found its way inside as the morning awakened. It was, actually, an open and well lit shelter. Almost inviting. Taking a deep breath, I cautiously stepped inside, pushing aside any reluctance I had a moment earlier.

The first thing I did was to make a quick visual survey of the inside. The front of the cave to the back wall ran approximately twenty feet at its deepest point. The width of the cave opening was only about ninety feet. It wasn't a very large cave but, large enough to have provided shelter to one or two people. The floor I walked on seemed to have that same turkey dung crust that Marilyn and I saw in the rock shelter below. But not as much. The turkey dung was sporadically evident in some areas and not in others. Towards the back, I found evidence of ash and an old hearth. Small slabs of rock had been arranged in a circular pattern to contain whatever may have been burned there.

All things considered, my conclusion was that the place seemed to have been occupied by humans in the past. A rock shelter that, by all indications, had not been disturbed since that time. As I approached the back wall of the shelter, I found handprints high up on the cave wall. The hands must have been slathered with a white pigment and placed against the cave wall. They seemed to be saying that somebody had been there.

The inside left wall of the shelter was not the typical sandstone of the cliff. It was comprised instead, of slabs of stone. Some of which had been dislodged from the roof of the cave, creating a wall of debris. Somehow, it looked out of place, artificial. I stood in front of the wall and imagined that it was built to separate something. It was not a naturally made wall, but a divider that had been intentionally constructed to separate one portion of the cave from another. Maybe, even another cave.

Plenty of rock debris had accumulated over the centuries, but there seemed to be an outline of an old entry or doorway. I moved up closer and began to clear away some of the rocks and, sure enough, there appeared to be a way in. Into what, I didn't know. But there was enough of an opening to be able to lean in and at least take a look around.

There was a musty odor to the other side. An old stale and decayed smell. I was surprised that it was not that dark inside. I could see sunlight streaming its way into the other side through some cracks in the rocks that formed the outside wall. I asked myself if they had naturally formed through deterioration or were intentionally created to allow

in just enough light to fill the room? I thought to myself that I must have walked right by them as I made my way across the face of the cliff to the cave. Somehow, I had totally missed them.

Against the back wall were slabs of rock that had fallen to the ground from the sides and ceiling. Rays of sunlight acted like a flashlight highlighting where they lay. Two were lined up, parallel to each other on the ground, with about four feet of separation between them. Each end was capped off with another slab. Small rocks had been used to cover and fill in the space between the slabs. I realized that what I was looking at was a cist.

I abandoned my plan to remain outside of the room. My curiosity had gotten the best of me. I spent a few minutes clearing the remaining rocks from, what I thought was, the doorway. Then, I climbed my way in.

I looked around the small room, trying to size it up. It was about fifteen feet in depth by twenty feet wide. I thought to myself that Marilyn would jump out of her skin when I told her what I had found. I was looking up at the ceiling when I heard someone call my name. I immediately swung around and looked in the direction of the cist. I heard my name again. It was the same voice that spoke to me that night sitting out in the open with Lee. It was definitely coming from the cist.

I dropped to my knees and cautiously crawled over to the cist. I heard it beckoning again. The sound was coming from underneath the rock debris that covered the cist. At this point I think I lost it. The patience, expertise and

restraint I had learned training as an archaeologist went out the window. There was only one thing I was determined to do and that was to remove the rocks sealing the cist.

One by one, I removed the rocks. Gradually, I understood that the rocks had a purpose. I thought it was to disguise or hold down the single slab that lay underneath. Grasping the slab with my two hands and applying a little force, I lifted it up and out of the way. I could have been opening a Basketmaker storage cist, but what I saw sat me back on my heels. It was a full-on burial cist.

About twelve inches below the slab, lay the remains of a body. It filled out the length of the cist. I could see that this was not just some ordinary burial. The body itself was adorned differently. There was a lot more cultural material than usually associated with a common burial. The items that had been laid to rest with the individual seemed to indicate some kind of special status. I had to stop myself for a moment. I needed to really understand who this individual might have been.

Underneath and surrounding the body were clumps of grass and juniper bark. The body was wrapped in a yucca blanket, that had partially disintegrated, displaying the skeleton beneath. The individual was laying on its back with its head facing away from the back wall of the cave. The right hand rested up by the chin and the left hand was down by the groin. The legs and knees were raised up to the chest. There was a shell bracelet on the left wrist and another set higher up on the arm. The feet held unworn twined sandals made of yucca fiber. A newer, second pair lay off to the side. This was all very similar to the burial we

uncovered at the field site cist. I remembered Marilyn saying that this was fairly typical of a Basketmaker II burial.

There were some things that were not typical though. A yucca fiber woven basket had been placed over the head. Another one had been inverted over that. A lot of the basket had withered away, but you could still make out the yucca coiling. Draped around the neck were strands of wooden and seed beads that hung down over the chest. Resting on top of the chest was a bone flute. I assumed that it was turkey bone. There were two more flutes, one on either side of the body. Two atlatls had been placed down by the hands. A coiled basket lay beside the left arm, inside of which I spied a stone pipe and a couple of locks of hair. Finally, there were bone awls, assorted stone tools and a couple of other baskets that contained remnants of maize or some other such food item.

There was one item that I could not really identify. It was a tapered and well polished stone that had been hollowed out to look like the bowl of a pipe. But, I don't think it was. It looked more like a vial or container of some kind. I picked it up to examine it more closely and was surprised to see that something was still inside. It was more than just a residue. It was a compacted material. Once again, I had to just stop for a moment and reflect.

I sat back and tried to piece together what I had seen. I thought to myself, who was this individual? Suddenly, the flute popped into my mind. I thought of Lee. And, what was Lee? A medicine man or shaman. I looked back at the body and understood that I had unearthed a shaman. I remembered the things that Marilyn had said to look for in

determining the sex of the individual. Looking over at the skull, I decided it had to be a male. I was looking at a male shaman from the Basketmaker II era.

I still had the stone bottle in my hand as I contemplated the idea of having just exhumed an ancient shaman. I became intrigued by what significance the bottle may have had in the life of that person. It must have been a very important part of his life to have been included in his burial. Especially, his ceremonial life. There was only one explanation. The vial contained a substance that the shaman used to help facilitate communication with the afterlife. To mediate between this world and the next.

I don't know what made me think of it but the next thing I knew I was toying with the idea of ingesting some of the material in the bottle. Somehow, it just seemed like that was what I was supposed to do. I was convinced that's what the voice I heard coming from the cist was directing me to do. I decided to do it.

I took the bottle and thumped it with my finger a few times to break up the compacted substance. Then I held out my hand and sprinkled some of the concoction out onto my palm. I bent over and used my tongue to lick up the contents and placed it in my mouth. It was very bitter tasting and difficult to swallow. So, I decided to eat the snack I had brought with me for lunch, drink some of my water and wash it all down together. Sitting back on my haunches, I waited. About a half hour later, I realized that I had made a huge mistake in eating the snack.

I started to feel nauseous and could sense my face beginning to flush. I began to profusely sweat as my body temperature rose and my heart rate went way up. I felt like I needed to throw up. I rolled over onto my side and started to violently vomit, completely emptying the contents of my stomach before I was through puking. My stomach hurt and my head was spinning. There was nothing I could do except to lay there on my side and just try to wait it out.

After about another half hour of laying completely still, I finally felt good enough to roll over onto my back. I felt I could probably work myself back up into a seated position. I kept my eyes closed as I finally propped myself back up on my hindquarters. My head was spinning way too much. Once sitting up, my vertigo calmed down somewhat, so that I could at least slowly blink and open my eyes.

There, sitting directly across from me, was this person. Someone totally inconsistent with what I had ever known. Yet, someone who I seemed at peace with. He spoke not a word, but I heard him saying my name. Through the haze of my mental fog, I could hear him welcoming me to the canyon of the Ellie Mae. It was the same voice that I had heard coming from inside the cist. I would have recognized it anywhere. I thought, it had to be. It couldn't be anybody else. It was the shaman sitting right across from me, alive as could be.

THE ELLIE MAE

CHAPTER TWENTY-TWO

I wasn't quite ready to accept the fact that the shaman I had discovered in the cist was, now, sitting right in front of me. I kept staring at him, hoping to find some logical explanation. He was medium to stocky build with long black hair extending past his shoulders. His skin was brown in color and his eyes were deep black. The adornments he wore on his body were the same ones I saw on the remains in the burial cist. He had necklaces around his neck and bracelets on his wrists and arms.

He wore what appeared to be an animal hide of some kind draped over his upper body. He did not seem to be wearing leggings of any kind. On his feet were sandals made from what looked like yucca fiber, with a square toe. Just like the ones in the cist. Over his shoulders was thrown a cape or robe, probably made out of rabbit fur. He held turkey feathers and a flute in his hands.

I think he was getting tired of me scrutinizing his appearance. He just stared back at me, as if hoping I would move on. I had run out of ideas. The only conclusion I could draw was that he was who I thought he was.

He said to me that, maybe, I should try to touch him? That might help convince me of his genuineness. There

was a calmness in the way he spoke to me. But, that was the thing. He didn't speak to me through his mouth. Somehow, I just heard his voice coming through my ears, into my mind. I reached out to touch him and my hand met his extended hand. His skin was rough. His hand was warm. His chest moved as he breathed in and out. I spoke to him.

I said to him my name was Allys. He replied softly that he already knew that. He told me that others called him Running Rabbit. I thought to myself, what an idiot I was. Of course he knew my name. He had been calling me for days now.

He said that I should not think of myself as an idiot. I stared back at him in amazement. He had heard my thoughts. He continued that it must be very difficult for me to accept that we would be able to understand one another without actually speaking.

With that, he stood up. Reaching over, he helped me up to my feet. Holding my arm in his, he escorted me over to the small doorway and we walked through to the other side together. We made our way over to a small hearth that had a fire burning, throwing up occasional sparks to the roof of the cave. He motioned for me to sit down and warm myself by the flames. We sat down on a beautifully woven blanket that skirted the fire. I proceeded to warm my hands over the fire, hoping to recover from the shivering and chills I was experiencing.

After a few minutes of silence, Running Rabbit got back up and beckoned me over to the cave entrance, out

on the talus slope. He said he needed to show me something. As I stood up, I felt the blood flowing back into my arms and legs. I managed to stumble over to where he was standing. When I reached him, Running Rabbit waved his arms widely, exposing the stunning expanse of the valley below.

I was in complete disbelief. This was not the valley that I had rode Cinnamon through. Where was the dry wash, the cottonwoods and the willows? They had all been replaced with what I had imagined it looked like days earlier. The shangri la that I had painted in my mind. Below me was this lush valley, blanketed with green grass and studded with pine trees, fir trees and pinyons at the base of the canyon walls.

Most impressive of all, there was a river that ran down the middle of the valley, adding a streamer of blue to the landscape. Where we were, the river slowed and lazily wound its way along. Running Rabbit said that this was the valley where he lived. The river that I called the Ellie Mae, was the lifeblood of the people who lived down below. It was, as he said, their maternal water. When it flooded, it added nutrients to the soil. Which, in turn, helped the crops to give birth and grow.

I thought to myself, the people who lived down below? Somehow, I had overlooked any people down below. Looking again, I could see four pit houses sprinkled here and there. There were people surrounding the pit houses and others working in carefully laid out plots or fields. I turned to Running Rabbit and asked what they were doing? He said that they were tending to the seeds they had sown.

Seeds of maize, squash and beans, the three main food sources that made up the bulk of their diet.

I started to feel a little woozy again. This was just too much for me to absorb all at once. Running Rabbit turned and led me back inside to sit down next to the fire once again.

I asked him why I was brought here? He thought a moment and then said it was because I wanted to be here. That I was needed here. I was a link in the journey of his people. He said that all of his people, including himself, were on a journey. A journey that went forward as one grew. A journey that did not end when one died. It continued as long as it took to reach the afterlife.

He said that, because it was such a long journey, the travelers needed to stop and rest occasionally. Meet with old friends along the way. He said that I was such an old friend. That was why they called out to me. That was why he called my name. They wanted to meet with me, so that they could get to know me better. They wanted to know more about the one chosen to meet with them along their journey to the afterlife.

I looked down at myself and said to Running Rabbit that I probably would not make a very good impression dressed the way I was. He laughed and explained that I shouldn't worry. They couldn't see the physical me. Only he could see me. I guess I must have looked pretty confused, which, of course, I was. He said that they only knew of my presence. He said that whenever I decided to go down and join them, they would know I was there. They would hear

my words and talk to me as if I was part of their conversation.

I had so many questions, but I was so worn out. I just needed to find a place to stretch out and fall asleep. Running Rabbit pointed over to the corner. There was a pile of rabbit fur and blankets arranged especially for me. He said that was where I would be sleeping for the next few days.

I thought it odd that I didn't seem to be hungry, just very tired. Running Rabbit said that I would not require food for such a short visit. Food was something that my physical body needed and, since, I had no physical body, then I could go without it. But, sleep? I decided that was what I needed at the moment. I got up, walked over to the bed of rabbit fur and blankets and laid myself down for a short nap.

DOWN IN THE VALLEY

CHAPTER TWENTY-THREE

When I awoke, I realized that I must have slept the rest of the afternoon and night away. The sunlight was just coming into the cave, filling it with the light of a new morning.

I looked around for Running Rabbit, but he was nowhere to be found. I got up from my bed and walked over to the cave entrance. Looking down, I could see people just starting to leave their pit houses for the fields. The campfires were trailing smoke created from the cooking of their morning meal. I thought to myself that I wanted to go down in the valley and meet the people. The only question was, how was I supposed to get down there? That was when I heard Running Rabbit's voice in my ears. He suggested that I go down the same way I had come up. By way of the narrow ledge and down the switchbacks to the floor below. Of course. I should have known that.

When I reached the valley floor, I walked towards the first pit house on my way. There was an older man and woman sitting by the fire. They seemed to be enjoying the warmth of the fire and the coming of the rising Sun. As I came up to the fire, I heard the woman call out a greeting to me. She said I must be Allys, the one Running Rabbit said would be coming down here to observe us. The man looked

up and let out a muffled chuckle. I think he sensed I would be startled.

I have to admit that they caught me by surprise. The whole idea of me not being seen, but only heard, hadn't quite sunk in. On top of that, not having to speak but, still, be heard? I tried the best I could, but I just ended up staring at her for the longest period of time. I was hoping to somehow force my reply into her head. I think I was trying way too hard. She reminded me that no special effort was required to communicate with her. I should just think of it as concentrating on I wanted to say and let her do the rest.

I apologized and said I wasn't very good at this yet. They seemed to understand everything I said, or thought, just fine. I asked them if I could sit down and join their morning routine? The woman responded by motioning me to sit next to her. She said her name was Hasea. It meant "she rises". The man said his name was Gad, meaning "juniper tree". I felt like I should be telling them the story about my name, but thought better of it.

I spent the next few minutes trying to explain to my new friends that I was going to be acting a little differently from what they were used to. I said that I was the kind of person who learned things by observation and taking notes. Hasea said that was what Running Rabbit had told them. In that regard, I told them that I would be spending a lot of my time watching what they do. Looking at how they dress and act. Making a lot of physical and mental notes that may not make a whole lot of sense to them. I said I didn't want to offend anyone, but that's just how I did things. Hasea

looked at me and, in response, nonchalantly nodded her head.

The one thing I consistently carried with me was my notepad and pencil. I learned a long time ago to always keep them with me at all times. I frantically reached around to see if they were still there in my back pocket. Fortunately, they were still there. I felt I needed to document everything. That was what fieldwork was all about. It was plainly obvious. After all, wasn't that what I was supposed to do?

Hasea said that maybe they could help me out. She and Gad looked at each other, proudly stood up and turned around slowly. I laughed and quickly began jotting down their physical description. Hasea was about five feet tall, with light brown skin, brown or black hair, dark eyes and was of small to medium build. Hasea's hair was cropped short. Noticeably, short. Gad was a little taller, maybe another four or five inches. He also had light brown skin, black hair, dark eyes and a stocky build. Gad's hair was longer with, seemingly, a more manicured appearance.

I inquired as to why there was such an obvious difference in the length of their hair? Hasea said that it was because a woman's hair was cut so that it could be used to wrap things together. Sometimes, things were wrapped with human hair for ornamentation but, in other cases, things were wrapped with human hair for ceremony and burial.

In one way I could see this as being interpreted as a woman's hair was not as important as a man's. Hasea was quick to point out just the opposite. That a woman's hair

was chosen because women were more important in their society. There would be more about this later.

There did not appear to be much evidence of clothing. Hasea wore an apron over her lower extremities. The apron itself was made of what she said was deer hide and fringed with strings made of yucca fiber. Gad was dressed in a loincloth, but Hasea made it clear that their form of dress was, of course, seasonal. When the days grew short and the cold fell from the sky, they also wore leggings and robes made of rabbit fur to keep themselves warm. As well, they used robes made out of tanned deerskin. On their feet they both wore sandals. Hasea said they were made of yucca fiber and had a square toe.

They were both adorned with various types of jewelry. They wore necklaces and pendants around their necks and bracelets on their wrists. The jewelry was made of shell, stone, bone and dried berries. I pointed to the shells and asked them where they came from, since I knew there was no ocean close by. Hasea said that the shells, called olivella, had been obtained through trade with other peoples long before they came to the valley.

As they sat back down, I thanked them for showing themselves off to me. Hasea asked if I would like something to eat? I knew this would have been a major faux pas if I refused, but I wasn't sure how to respond. I mean, they couldn't see me and I wasn't hungry. Hoping to placate them, I asked them to set out a portion for me and make an offering to Running Rabbit. They seemed pleased with that.

I could see that the others were starting to leave their fires and start the day. I asked Hasea and Gad what their plans were for the day? Hasea said that she would be heading out to the fields to tend to the maize, squash and beans. Gad said that he was planning on hiking up to the mountains to hunt for game animals, such as rabbits or deer. I asked Hasea if I could follow her out to the fields and document her routine? She said, of course, she would be honored to have me tag along. I didn't want to ignore Gad, but I knew I would be getting to him later.

As we left, Hasea grabbed her digging sticks, a few baskets and a stone axe that she said was used for clearing the field. The baskets she placed inside of each other and carried them by way of a tumpline around her forehead, made from wide yucca leaves. The tumpline was passed around the forehead to support the baskets that she carried on her back. She said that it was especially helpful when a heavy basket was filled with maize or squash. It allowed her to keep her hands free for doing other things.

On the way out to the fields, Hasea said that maize, squash and beans were the staples of their diet. She said that they also collected seeds, nuts, fruits and berries to supplement what they grew. I said to Hasea that I was curious as to how they became growers, instead of just being the collectors of food? She said that she didn't really know how it all started. It was so long ago, that now, all they had were their stories.

The storytellers said that the seeds for maize, squash and beans came from the ancients. The ancients lived in this valley long before Hasea and Gad did and they brought

along with them the knowledge of how to plant the seeds and tend to their growth and harvest. I nodded my head in agreement. I knew from my classwork that maize, squash and beans came as a result of contact and trade with peoples from the south. Probably from the regions of Mexico. Hasea interrupted me and wanted to know what a Mexico was? I explained as best I could, but I knew it probably did not make any sense to her.

When we reached our destination, Hasea immediately went to work clearing away the debris from around the maize. She used her wooden digging stick to carefully weed the area circling each maize plant. One digging stick had a point on the end and was used for digging and planting. The other had a blade and was primarily used for loosening the soil and weeding.

The maize itself did not look like the corn I was used to seeing. This was a small eared variety. As Hasea cultivated the plants, she harvested whatever she could. She would place the picked maize into the baskets she had brought with her. Once Hasea had finished culling the field of maize, we proceeded over to where the squash was planted and she did the same thing over again. By the time she was finished, she had accumulated her three baskets worth of maize and squash.

I wasn't quite sure how she was going to get the extra baskets of squash back to her pit house. I knew that I couldn't help her. Fortunately, there were children close by who offered to carry the extra baskets for her. I got the suspicion that this was not a surprise. I think this was just

the ordinary and expected thing to do. To help one another as they would help you.

When we returned to the house, Hasea was eager to show me what they did with the maize after they harvested it. I think she was beginning to thoroughly enjoy teaching the neophyte the ways of her family. We entered the pit house and Hasea walked the basket of corn over to a section of the house divided off for cooking. Resting on the ground was a mano and metate that she used for rolling and grinding the dried corn kernels. The metate had a trough at the end such that, when grinding with the mano, the ground material would spill off the end into a collecting basket. The meal would then be used to make various types of breads.

Hasea proceeded to show me how it was done. She placed a handful of the dried maize on the large flat stone known as a metate. She then placed both hands on the grinding stone, the mano, and rolled it back and forth producing the meal that fell out the end of the trough. As she did so, she began to sing. I'm not sure of the meaning, but I believe it had something to do with maize being so important and spiritual in their lives. Hasea said that some of the dried maize was saved for storage and some was set aside to be planted at the next growing cycle. She said the storage bins, what I knew of as cists, were located outside and in the cliffs themselves.

I learned from Hasea the importance of baskets in their lives. It wasn't just that they had baskets by the plenty. The uses of the baskets were very specialized. There were shallow trays, cooking receptacles, bowls, carrying baskets,

water containers and storage baskets. The water baskets were especially unique in that they were tightly woven and lined with a pitch made from pinyon gum to make them water tight.

I asked how they could cook using a basket without it burning up? Hasea said that was a silly question. She said you didn't put a basket over an open flame. Everybody knew that it would just catch fire. Instead, she said they heated rocks and dropped them into baskets of water to heat up whatever was inside. Guess I was told.

The day was growing short by this time. I said to Hasea that I need to make my way back up to Running Rabbit's cave. I thanked her profusely for showing me her ways and said I would return the next day. With that, I started over to the trail heading up the switchbacks and over the ridge to the cave.

When I arrived, Running Rabbit was waiting for me. He said that he was glad I made it back in time. I questioned him as to in time for what? He said that he had many things he needed to talk to me about. The first of which was to describe how they all came to be.

THE JOURNEY

CHAPTER TWENTY-FOUR

Running Rabbit and I sat down and talked about my day. He said Hasea, Dag and the others had questioned him as to who I was and what I was doing here? He told them that they should think of me as a kind of shaman on a quest. More so, a spirit. A spirit who wanted to sit amongst them and learn their ways, so as to be able to comfort them when they made their journey to the afterlife. He made sure to tell them that I wasn't a shaman like he was. He was a medicine man that had a special spiritual connection. I, on the other hand, was a true spirit from the spirit world.

I said to Running Rabbit that I felt very honored to hear that, but I still did not know why I was here. I felt like I just so happened to end up here. He replied that no one just happens to end up somewhere. There was always a reason. Usually, it was because they were put somewhere. There was a purpose for being.

He said, for example, that the reason he and those in the valley were here, was because the ancestral spirits put them there. They had stories that said so and that gave them a purpose for being. The stories had been passed on forever, from parent to child and from their children to their children. They told of what the ancestors had said about how they came into being and where they came from.

People like Hasea and Dag saw the reason for their life as a journey that began long ago when the ancestors made them visible. What they were doing now was just a stop along the way. They believed they were heading towards the continuity of an afterlife. Running Rabbit said that they trusted the journey was the reason why they were here.

I had to let that sink in for a moment. They didn't need to know why they existed in the philosophical sense. That was my hangup. They just needed to know how they got here and that gave them purpose. It became the reason for why they were here. And that reason was the journey they were all on to an afterlife.

Running Rabbit said that the journey they were all on was revealed in what the ancestor stories disclosed about their origins. The ones that were passed down from mouth to mouth. He said to be clear, origin stories told of the journey of where they came from, not of where they were heading to. That, he said, was what he was there for. To be an interpreter of where their journey was going to take them. What he revealed to them was that, after their bodies died, they simply continued on their very long and difficult journey. The one that was started when "the people" were first created. The journey to the afterlife.

Since the only ones who could accurately report on such events were the ones who had made such a journey, he could only provide them with so much. Running Rabbit said that in order to fully appreciate and understand the journey, a spirit was needed. A spirit who was familiar with the journey.

I finally realized that I was that spirit. I was to be the one to guide them on their journey to the afterlife and offer solace and consolation along the way. That was my purpose and the reason behind why I was here. Running Rabbit quietly nodded his head in agreement.

I said to Running Rabbit that the piece of the puzzle that was missing was that I did not know his people's story. I did not know their origin stories. I needed to hear the stories of how they got here, so that I could understand what had given truth to their lives. To hear the answers to the questions that were normally thought of as unanswerable. The stories that had been told orally from generation to generation in the hope of keeping that truth alive. Running Rabbit laughed as I brought out my notepad and pencil. I knew I would forever be remembered as being the one who kept her thoughts in her back pocket.

Becoming more serious, Running Rabbit said that when life's meaning was first questioned so long ago, the truth was not known. So, stories were told to make up for that. Then, "the people" saw themselves in those stories, making them appear real. That which was once unbelievable and unknown, became believable and known.

That was when it hit me. Running Rabbit was telling me that I was here to be a part of his people's story. I needed to be a part of the story, that got passed down from generation to generation, in order for my spirit to become real. In order for me to become believable and known.

Running Rabbit said that was what origin stories were all about. They placed us in the story of a creation. They

told us where we came from and how we got to be here. What made them special, was that they specifically applied to the people telling those stories. He said that the stories he told, were the same stories told around each and every campfire. By every family, in every single house. That was the way it had been for generations. Usually accompanied by a lot of singing, dancing and ceremony. The things that brought everyone together in the story of life.

Running Rabbit began his story by saying that the origin story of his people told of how we, as human beings, came to be. It chronicled the emergence of humans into this world through various levels of existence, starting with Mother Earth herself. He said we emerged far below Mother Earth and moved through set stages towards a world of light. The world we lived in today.

Running Rabbit said that if you looked inside of each of our houses you would see a small hole in the center of the floor. That hole was the opening to the lower world from which all of us emerged. It was our origin and it applied specifically to us. That was why we referred to ourselves as “the people” and where we lived, as the center of the world.

In the darkness of the lower world, there were two sister-spirits born. They were taught by a goddess figure called “Thinking Woman”. As the two sister-spirits grew, they acquired a language through the teachings of “Thinking Woman”. When she thought they were ready, she gave them baskets of seeds for all the plants and models of all the animals that would be found in the next world.

The sister-spirits took the seeds and planted them. One of the seeds sprouted into a pine tree which grew straight and tall, puncturing a hole through the top of the underworld. The hole let in just enough light to convince the sister-spirits that they should climb up the pine tree, bringing with them their baskets of seeds and model animals.

Emerging into the upper world, they found that the light was coming from the Sun that lived high up in the sky. The warmth of the Sun germinated the seeds, which then sprouted forth from Mother Earth. The two sister-spirits breathed life into the model animals. Out of the darkness people materialized and became visible humans. In the light of the new world, “the people” learned how to grow maize, squash and beans. Nourished by the warmth of the Sun and Mother Earth’s maternal waters.

Running Rabbit said that was the story of his people’s birth. The origin of himself and the people of the valley down below. The two sister-spirits gestated within Mother Earth and struggled to emerge from the darkness of the lower world. Finally, they surfaced into the light of this world as “the people”.

He said the story emphasized the importance of the female in their lives. Everything started with a female goddess and two female spirits, with “the people” emerging from the womb of Mother Earth. The womb of Mother Earth and the female goddess and spirits, showed the power of females in their society. That was the reason behind why relationships, what I called kinship, was traced only through the female line.

The origin story was truly captivating, especially as it was told by Running Rabbit. My notes were simply not able to do it justice. I was interested in what Running Rabbit had to say about kinship being traced through the female line. I said that, in my world, that was known as a matriarchal or matrilineal society.

I was trying to get him to talk more about that, but he deflected my attempt by saying that I would be better off talking with Hasea and Dag about that. He said that they were much more familiar with those kinds of things.

I decided that would be my plan for tomorrow. He and I had spent a lot of time this night talking about the origin of his people. My brain was oversaturated.

THE FLOOD

CHAPTER TWENTY-FIVE

I woke up from a restless sleep quite a few times during the night. There had been a powerful thunderstorm that had formed and the thunder and lightening lit up the cave like the turning off and on of a light switch. The rain had fallen in what seemed like buckets for most of the night.

By morning light, the storm had cleared leaving the beginnings of a crisp, cold day. The smell of fresh, clean air was everywhere. I could sense that Running Rabbit was nervous about something. He was pacing about, back and forth. He finally leaned over and picked up something. It was his flute. He stood up and started melodically playing it as he moved his body from side to side. His feet moved first right, then left and, then, back again. I thought it better that I leave him alone. So, I left the cave and headed for the houses below.

As I arrived at Hasea's house, Dag was on his way out to go hunting. He said that he was on his way to the mountains to hunt for rabbit and whatever else he might find. He said he knew that I had wanted to talk with him about the hunting side of things, so he would stick around for a while until I was finished.

Dag and I sat down outside next to the now smoldering fire. He brought out an animal hide and unwrapped it to reveal the things that he always took with him hunting. I asked Dag what kind of animals he hunted? He replied that they were mainly smaller animals, such as rabbits, badgers, prairie dogs and birds. He mostly used snares and nets made out of woven hair. The hair was cut from the head of Hasea, showing the power the female had in the hunting of animals. He said sometimes he would use what he called a throwing stick to hurl at rabbits and bring them down. He showed me a couple he was bringing with him. They were curved pieces of wood, about two feet long, with a special ribbed handle that improved the grip. Of course, he said, you had to have quick reactions and an aim that was true.

I was curious as to the purpose of the turkeys that I saw milling around the settlement. I asked Dag if they hunted them or used them for meat? He said that they did not hunt or eat the turkeys. He said that turkeys were very important, almost spiritual, animals in their lives. They raised them for their feathers but they also used their bones when they died.

Since he was going to the mountains, he said he would also be looking for larger animals, such as deer, sheep and mountain lions. For these larger animals, he said he would be using what he called an atlatl. He described an atlatl as another piece of flattened wood with a spur at the end. It was about two feet long and was used to provide more leverage when throwing a spear or a dart. He said you held the atlatl in one hand, placed the dart in the cup or

spur of the atlatl and used your arm and wrist to rear back and heave the dart at the animal. The leverage came from the atlatl acting as an extension of your arm as you threw the spear. It gave the hunter better power and the ability to throw longer distances.

He showed me the accompanying spears and darts that were attached to the atlatl. They were split in half and assembled prior to throwing. At first I thought they were broken, but Dag said that the reason for splitting them was so that you would not lose the whole dart or spear when it went too far into the animal's body and got lodged. Rather than losing the whole spear, you would just lose a portion of it.

I was very curious as to what he had in his leather pouch. I asked him to explain what was inside. He brought out a couple of stone blade knives. He said he used them primarily for skinning and butchering animals. The other items in the pouch consisted of projectile points, some of which were made of stone and others that were made out of wood. Dag pointed out that each one was special and unique to him. He had made them exclusively for himself to serve very specific hunting purposes. Lastly, there were a couple of awls. These were bone awls, made from the leg of a turkey. Dag said they were used in puncturing small holes in animal hides to tie them together.

I didn't want to keep Dag any longer. I knew he had a long way to go and would be gone most of the day. I thanked him for showing me his tools for hunting, said goodbye and went inside the house to talk with Hasea.

Hasea greeted me inside and invited me to sit with her as she used her metate and mano to grind some more corn meal. I was curious as to how the house was constructed. Although Hasea's house was rectangular, she said they could be rounded as well. The dirt floor had been excavated down a few inches and earthen walls were built between the four wooden posts that anchored each corner. The roof was flat, made of brush and thatch. There was a small hearth for cooking and a hole in the roof to allow the smoke to escape. Over in the corner was the spiritual hole that Running Rabbit had described as representing emergence from the lower world.

Hasea said to me that she knew I wasn't here to talk about the pit house. She heard from Running Rabbit that I wanted to talk to her about her status as a woman. The role that she played in her community. Hasea said that the power of the female came from the role the female played in their origin stories. The goddesses and female spirits that created everyone. The emergence of her people from the womb of Mother Earth.

She said that what that translated to, was that she enjoyed certain rights that a male did not have. Things such as ownership of land, property and personal possessions. She said one of the most significant privileges had to do with the passing on of those rights to future generations. In her case, inheritance traced descent along the female line. Any children born into her family, male or female, were part of her family clan. All of her possessions were passed down through her daughters when she died. And, from them, to their daughters. Hasea said that was the way it had been

since the beginning of time and that was the way it would continue to be.

I said to Hasea that what she had described was, what I called, a matrilineal or matriarchal society. Where kinship followed through the female line. I thought about going into more detail, but I'm sure she didn't really care what it was technically called. She just nodded her head in agreement anyway.

She said that when she and Dag were united, Dag came to live with her. He joined her community. She said that if her son had lived and married, he would have left to join his wife's community. He would have lived in his wife's house. She likened it to a movement of men into and out of the community. Married men came in and married sons went out. She said that the three other houses near her, belonged to her sisters. They shared their lives with their husbands and their children. That was their community and it's survival depended on how they, as sisters, managed their affairs.

I said to Hasea that it sounded as if she once had a son? She got somewhat of a pained look on her face, stood up and walked over to the doorway. She motioned me to follow her and we went outside. Hasea stood there and pointed in the direction of the sandstone cliff. She said that if we were to go over there, we would find an abandoned storage cist that contained the body of her child. She said he died very young as a result of falling from the cliff to where he was buried now. I tried as well as I could to express my condolences, but I could tell that this was probably one of those painful things better left alone.

We both suddenly heard footsteps running in our direction. We looked up to see Dag abruptly returning from his hunting trip. He was out of breath but managed to say just enough to alert us that we were in danger. The whole community was in danger.

After calming him down a bit, he said that he had gone hunting up in the mountains. By the large lake that fed the river and flowed down through their valley. I said to myself that he was referring to the Ellie Mae. He nodded his head and continued that the thunderstorm from the night before had caused a tremendous amount of water to come rushing out of the mountains and into the lake. The lake itself was close to overflowing its banks. He said that if it did, it would breach the earthen dam that was holding back the water. Hasea and Dag looked frantically at each other and said that if that happened, then the Ellie Mae would surge and the whole valley would flood more than the valley could handle.

At first, I didn't think that this was as serious as they were making it out to be. I thought that seasonal floods were supposed to happen. That was what made the valley so fertile. That was something that should be expected. The look on their faces told me that this was different. They said that this was going to be a major flood that could wipe out their whole community. It was obvious that they needed to move themselves out of harm's way. I knew, now, why Running Rabbit had appeared so nervous. He had sensed that this was coming.

Hasea's stare told me that she was not ready to make that kind of a move. She said that this was where they had

always lived. This was the valley of she and her sisters. This was where they grew their maize, squash and beans. They needed to say put and be close to their fields. She said that it was because of this that they were able to grow their own food but, also, hunt and gather if they wanted to.

I could tell that what she was thinking meant more than just moving a campsite. Hasea knew that this meant making a final commitment to a more settled life style. Living in more permanent structures and villages. Giving up some of their old ways and the freedom to move when they wanted to. Hasea also knew that this was not just her decision to make. She sent Dag to gather all the sisters for an emergency meeting to discuss their options.

As they were meeting, Running Rabbit appeared and sat with me to also discuss options. We both knew that the only way to escape the flood would be for everyone to move to a new location, up on higher ground. Running Rabbit's cave was well above the canyon floor but, way too small for the four families that were being displaced. My mind erratically returned to a memory of Marilyn and I discovering the two, large, caverns located just below Running Rabbit's cave. I hadn't noticed them so far. I didn't even know if they existed yet.

Running Rabbit had understood where I was going with this and replied that, in fact, they were there. He said that there was a lot of debris and brush that would be needed to be cleared away but, they could easily provide shelter for the four families. He said that the trick was going to be convincing Hasea and her sisters that moving to a more permanent settlement was the right thing to do.

We were about ready to walk over to the meeting, when the meeting came to us. They said that they had been guided by our thoughts and had already decided that the move to the caverns was best for everyone. Not just best for the current emergency but, for the long term health of the community. Hasea said that they would still be able to grow their own food. They would still be able to hunt and gather. Instead of their pit houses, they would build homes within the caverns. The pit houses, at least those left standing, could be used for storing their food and grains.

Hasea and her sisters saw that the Ellie Mae was already rising significantly. Everyone was ready to scatter as they heard the roar of her sound. There was no time to waste. The decision was quickly made to pack up everything they could and move it in the direction of the caverns. Once there, they would wait for the valley to flood. They would watch as the land would be fertilized. They would start a new life living at the base of the sandstone cliff. In the caverns that had been created for them by the wisdom of the spirits high above them.

GOODBYES

CHAPTER TWENTY-SIX

That night, as everyone was high above the river's rise and fall, "the people" felt secure within their new home in the caverns. Running Rabbit and I sat up even higher in the cave above the caverns, watching the Ellie Mae rise from the safety of our talus slope. The quarter moon was just rising above the horizon. It felt good to be here with Running Rabbit, knowing that no harm had come to Hasea, Dag and the rest of their extended, matrilineal, community.

I could tell that there was something bothering Running Rabbit again. He seemed very distant. His mind seemed to be traveling to some other place. I suddenly got this horrible feeling in the pit of my stomach. Like somebody had just gut-kicked me. I asked Running Rabbit what was going on? He said the time, my time, had come. I wasn't quite sure what he meant by that, but, then, it hit me. He was telling me that it was my time to say goodbye.

I looked deeply into his eyes for an answer and the answer came. He nodded his head and spread out his arms to the valley below. Looking down, I could see the glow coming out of the caverns below. The glow from all the campfires that seemed to just suddenly ignite with a purpose. Outside of the caverns stood "the people" of the valley. They were looking up at us. Looking up at me. I

could hear the sounds of their voices rising up to meet us. High above them, I could hear their song of goodbye.

Somberly, I stood up and reluctantly walked back into the cave. Running Rabbit followed me inside, behind me. I asked if I could do one last thing before leaving? I said that I would like to leave my handprints high up on the wall of the cave. He knew what I wanted to do before I had even asked. He had already prepared a basket tray of tightly woven yucca fiber with the white pigment for my hands. I leaned over and placed my hands in the pigment, covering both hands like a pair of white gloves. I stood back up, turned around and went to the back of the cave.

Reaching up, I stretched to touch the sky that opened up inside of the cave. As high as I could go on the very tips of my toes, I placed my hands firmly against the side of the cave and left my mark. I thought to myself that maybe someday, I would feel those handprints again. High up on the canyon's wall. At the back of a cave, towering above, what I had known as, the Ellie Mae.

I rubbed my hands in the dirt of the cave, removing as much of the white pigment as I could. Running Rabbit escorted me from the back of the cave, through the darkened doorway and into the side room where it had all began. He sat me down in an upright position, facing him, as the moonlight fought its way through the cracks in the cave wall and fell upon my face.

There was only time left to give Running Rabbit a huge hug and thank him for keeping me safe. For providing me with the answers to all of my questions. I asked him to

tell the others that they would not be forgotten. I told Running Rabbit that I would return each year to speak with them, if he was willing to have me. I would always be with them along their journey. I pledged to Running Rabbit, that what I was speaking was the truth. I could feel my eyes starting to close and the fuzziness returning to my mind as I faded away into the darkness.

HOME COMING

CHAPTER TWENTY-SEVEN

Slowly, my eyes started to blink open. There was this sudden feeling of warmth, as rays of sunlight came streaming in and fell upon my face. I could make out a couple of shadowy figures sitting directly opposite me. They were staring at me, waiting for me to awaken I guessed.

It was Marilyn and Lee. I could tell they wanted a sign from me that everything was alright. That I was alive. I said that my mouth was really dry and that I could sure use some water. The look on their faces changed from intense concern to that of extreme relief. They reached around for a bottle of water and passed it to me. Marilyn said, welcome back to our world.

I couldn't believe my ears. I actually heard her voice and saw her mouth moving at the same time. The sound of a voice that it seemed I hadn't heard in quite a long time. I heard myself ask them what they were doing here? Probably not the smartest thing to have said.

They answered that they had been sitting there watching over me. Marilyn said that yesterday, late morning, Lee heard the distant voice of another shaman telling him that I was on a quest. The shaman said that I was OK, but that I needed watching over until I returned.

Lee was pretty sure of where I was, but that was confirmed by Marilyn when she told him that I had gone up to the cave above the caverns to check things out.

Marilyn said that was why they were there now. They had been watching over me, like the shaman had requested. Marilyn said she had noticed the cist as soon as she arrived. She had examined the contents and seen the body that lay inside. Including a very suspicious looking vial that was sitting outside of the cist. She assumed that I had ingested some of the substance in the stone vessel and had dropped it as soon as it started to take effect.

Marilyn and Lee both figured it was some form of peyote. Possibly, left there by some Navajo shaman who had found the burial years earlier. They were both quite sure that I had been in a drug induced, peyote laced, trip. That, finally, its effects had worn off, returning me back to present day reality. They confided that I was lucky to be alive.

I had to confess that what Marilyn had said sounded pretty plausible. I vaguely remembered something similar to that series of events. I was pretty confused myself as to what had happened to me. I admitted to Marilyn that I remembered taking the powdery substance and feeling extremely ill afterwards.

The more I thought about though, I remembered that taking the powder was not just my idea. I had done so at the request of the shaman. I said to Marilyn and Lee that it was the shaman, the one who was lying in the burial cist, who placed the thought in my head to ingest the powder.

He was ushering me along. That had all happened before I made the decision to ingest the powder. I probably should have known better than to blame somebody else, even though that was what had actually happened. At least that was my story.

I could tell that Marilyn and Lee were not convinced, although I think Lee was a bit more accepting of the explanation. I had to come up with something quick that would show them that what had happened to me was more than just some drug induced trip. I started to explain, but they both just looked at me as if I was still tripping or something. Then it hit me. I had evidence. Evidence that my journey was real. In fact, I had two pieces of evidence that would prove my case.

I asked them for assistance in standing up, as my legs were still a little wobbly. I led us out to the adjoining room and into the main part of the cave. I told them that at the back of the cave they would find my handprints placed high above on the wall. Handprints that I had placed there a couple of thousand years ago while on my visit with the shaman. The shaman in the cist, who lived in this cave at that time. He lived in a valley with a river running through it that Lee knew as, the Ellie Mae.

Marilyn and Lee skeptically walked to the back of the cave and looked up at the wall close to the ceiling. There were two handprints. Of course, that only suggested that they could be mine. That wasn't the evidence I needed. I went up to the wall, stretched up onto the very tips of my toes and placed my hands exactly within the outline of the

handprints. The tracing was perfect. The shoe, so to speak, fit.

I could see that my argument was making some points with Marilyn and Lee. Although, there was still some concern as to its authenticity. So I decided to bring out the big guns. I said to Marilyn that, if she remembered, I always had a notepad and pencil with me that I diligently took notes on. I said that I was taking detailed notes of my journey the whole time I had been gone. That would prove what I had been saying was true. I reached around to my back pocket, but the pocket was empty. The notepad and pencil were gone.

I was completely devastated. That was my ace in the hole. I looked at Marilyn and Lee in horrible disbelief. Embarrassed. Lee was somewhere else entirely. He was staring back at the adjoining room of the cave. He was listening intently to someone. That someone, was the shaman. I could hear him too. He was telling us to come back to the room and look inside the cist. Of course Marilyn could not hear a thing. Before she knew it though, we yanked her back in the direction of the burial cist.

The three of us sat down beside the cist and peered down inside. There, laying next to the shaman's body, next to the two atlatls that were resting by his side, were the notepad and pencil.

We all sat back on our haunches. Marilyn was almost breathless, but managed to say something that proved my case. She said that she had thoroughly examined that cist before, when she and Lee first came up here. She had

been looking for clues as to what had happened to me. She looked directly at me and exclaimed that those items were not there before. She said she had no plausible explanation. Lee and I looked at each other and said that we did.

FINDING OUT WHY

CHAPTER TWENTY-EIGHT

As we walked out of the cave, the morning cool was starting to transition into the warmth of the afternoon. The light from the Sun was at a different angle, more intense and brilliant. My eyes were not used to the sudden brightness of the light of day. I suddenly had this feeling that I was very hungry. I asked Marilyn and Lee if they had anything to eat? They said all they had between them was a snack bar. I didn't turn it down. They said that once we got back to camp they would fix a big afternoon meal to celebrate my return. The only thing I could think of was corn, squash and beans.

We made it back to the campsite in plenty of time to prepare dinner before the Sun went down. Lee and I began building the fire and assembling the meal, while Marilyn took my notepad, sat herself down and began reading. She sat off by herself and didn't budge until Lee and I placed a plateful of corn, squash and beans in front of her. Then, she only moved to shove a forkful of food into her mouth.

All the while we were cooking, Lee and I were engaged in a conversation about the day I went missing. I told him how I thought I had actually been gone longer, according to my calculations. Maybe, more like three days. I guess that didn't really matter too much. Lee was more

interested in what I had seen? What Running Rabbit was like?

I stopped what I was doing and gave Lee a quizzical gaze. I asked him how he knew Running Rabbit's name? Without missing a beat, he said that he had heard me say Running Rabbit's name just before I opened my eyes upon my return. He had heard my pledge to Running Rabbit that I would return. I think he and Running Rabbit were in communication the whole time.

Marilyn finished her perusal of my notes, closed the notepad and handed it over to Lee. She knew that he would want to read it as well. I figured the time for reading was done and I was going to have to start explaining things.

I began by describing to Lee what I had seen. I painted the picture of the lush valley and talked about the farming of maize, squash and beans. Most of all, I described the people. What they looked like, what they did and how they lived. Before I was done, I could see that Lee was convinced more than ever that the Ellie Mae story was absolutely real. It wasn't just some mythical river, told as a tall tale by a bunch of Navajo shamans. The Ellie Mae really did run through a lush and fertile valley long ago. Giving life to a people that were his ancestors, whether they were Navajo or not.

I started to describe Running Rabbit, at which point Marilyn wanted to know who Running Rabbit was? She knew who he was. She had just read my notes. Lee and I just looked at each other and said to Marilyn that he was

the shaman that Lee was able to talk with and he was the one who brought me back in time to meet his people.

I think Marilyn was testing us. She went on to say that what she had just read in my notepad, proved to her beyond any doubt, that there really was a secret in the valley of the Ellie Mae after all. That secret was the existence of a settlement of Basketmaker people, living a semi-nomadic life of hunting, gathering and farming within its confines. She knew there was this special place within Twin Trails Canyon where these people lived and died. This is what she had been feeling in her bones for a long time now. She just didn't have the evidence.

Marilyn looked at Lee and said, of course, we still do not have concrete evidence. She said we have the physical remains of an ancient Basketmaker community that she was able to briefly uncover in the caverns. There was plenty of evidence to show that their were at least four pole structure houses built there over time. There were hearths and cists containing vestiges of food stuffs, such as maize, squash and beans. There was evidence of burial cists, both in the caverns and up in the cave. She said that she was sure they would find another burial cist holding a small child, if they looked further outside the caverns.

The one thing they did not have for certain, was the story of who those people were and how they lived. Until now. Marilyn looked at Lee again and said that what the two of them had been searching for all this time had been just a shadow of what was really there. That what I had found, told a different but more important part of the story.

Her face suddenly lit up like when that proverbial light bulb goes off. She said, as it turns out, it never really was just about the two of them. She said that this had always been my story. This whole thing was all about my journey from the get go.

I looked at both of them and finally understood what had been happening here. With tears flowing from my eyes, I thought to myself that this really had been my journey all along. That was my purpose. That was why I was here.

EPILOGUE

CHAPTER TWENTY-NINE

I can see by the sign posts zipping by that we are on Highway 40, some ways past Flagstaff, Arizona. I have seen the same places flying by many times before over the years. I remember stopping at a place just outside of Winona for pastry and coffee. Used to be where I got my morning fix. That place doesn't exist anymore. Instead, the tour bus has prearranged stops so that we can all get something to eat and flex our muscles at one of their contracted locations. According to the bus driver, we have another stop in fifteen minutes. At some diner with, what I am sure they think is, good food and plenty of trinkets.

A short while later, we pulled into the dirt parking lot. Dust was flying in all directions, as we came to a screeching stop. Most of the passengers jumped up out of their seats and managed to push and shove their way to the exit doors. I decided to just stay on the bus and try to manage my stress level. I was getting pretty tired of all the chatter and needed some quiet time. The bus driver made it very clear that he was only stopping for one half hour. When that time expired, the passengers grumbled and complained about not having enough time as they stumbled back into their seats.

As the bus pulled away, I quickly did a head count to see if everybody had made it back on board. Since there were no empty seats, I figured they had all made it back on the bus. Truth is, I really didn't care. It was just something to do. What was important was that we were on our way again.

Looking out the window, I started thinking we didn't have too much further to go. Once I started seeing the scenery change, I would know for sure. There would be less of the flat, open spaces and more of the gently rolling hills. Hills that I knew would turn into the gorgeous canyons so typical of the southwest. Once we rolled onto Route 7, on the other side of Chinle, I would know that we were there. Meanwhile? I told myself to try to relax and tune out the din.

Arriving at the Visitor Center for Canyon de Chelly, the bus pulled into one of the many spots especially designed for the tour buses. The passengers impatiently forced themselves out onto the blacktop and assembled to collect their luggage. Only to be accosted by tour guide operators and lodge personnel, looking to book the latest bus to arrive with their services. Me? I opted for going in the opposite direction. Away from the crowds. I knew where I was going and all I needed to do was just get there.

My arrangement was with a local tour operator, who just so happened to be the son of Lee. Lee was the Navajo shaman I met years ago. He and my mentor Marilyn played a big part in why I was here now. I had been using Brian for a few years now and the nice thing about it was that I didn't need to explain anything to him. It was just the two of us.

There used to be a couple of horses, but now, with my age, the preferred mode of transportation was his old four wheel drive jeep.

I met Brian over by the side of the canyon rim where he ran his business. We exchanged pleasantries and then loaded up the jeep with my belongings. This wasn't anything new to him or me. I didn't bring very much with me. Just an overstuffed backpack with enough clothes and things to keep me going for a few days.

The real ride started from the bottom of Chinle wash. It seemed as if that part of the canyon never changed much. Just as dry, dirty and dusty as ever. Most of the dust came from the other tour operators ferrying their passengers in their four wheel drive vehicles. Four wheel drive was of necessity it seemed. Even with that, people got stuck in the mud of the wash after a rain storm and had to be pulled out by other four wheel drive vehicles.

Brian knew exactly where to go. While everyone else was speeding to the tourist spots of Antelope House Ruin, Standing Cow Ruin and Mummy Cave, Brian broke off from Canyon del Muerto and proceeded up Twin Trails Canyon. We were finally on our own, heading to a very private drop off place, known only to Brian and myself. Brian had been well counseled by his father Lee, as to the importance of keeping this location extremely confidential. I could only imagine how that conversation may have gone, Lee being a shaman and all.

As we pulled up to the drop off point, I couldn't help but remember the times arriving here riding atop Cinnamon.

I had wondered what happened to Cinnamon. The last time I talked with Lee, before he died, he told me the story. He and Marilyn, on their last trip, had camped together at the Ellie Mae. At some point in the early morning, Cinnamon broke away from his reins and galloped off, never to be seen again. Lee assumed, he ended up somewhere in the Chuska Mountains.

I got out of the jeep, collected my backpack and sleeping bag and turned around to say goodbye to Brian. I could tell that he was concerned by the worried look on his face. I told him that I was going to be fine. He objected and said that I had not told him when to pick me up. Guess I had forgotten to mention that one.

It was all that I could do to convince him to leave. I wasn't trying to be rude or anything, but I needed to get on. I think the final straw was telling him that his father had always trusted me to do what was right for him, the Navajo and myself. I said that I couldn't tell him everything. I didn't know what everything was yet.

I slung the backpack and sleeping bag over my shoulder and began the hike up the switchbacks to the top of the mesa bordering the valley of the Ellie Mae. I couldn't afford to wait any longer. I didn't look back. I figured Brian could handle it.

On the trip up, I started talking to myself. I did that a lot these days. Kept me busy I suppose. I wondered what Marilyn would have thought about all of this? She had made so many trips up here with me and Lee, until her knees gave out and she couldn't make the hike anymore. Last I

heard she was living up in northern California somewhere. She stopped communicating with me about two years ago. Right after learning that Lee had died.

I thought to myself how she would have been proud to know that I followed through with my pledge to Running Rabbit. Thanks to her. It was because of Marilyn that I got my first job teaching archaeology. After my first trip here, I went back to college, received my PhD and ended up teaching archaeology for a number of years at her old alma mater. Every year I would set aside a few days to meet up with Marilyn and Lee in Canyon de Chelly. It was our time to visit with the ancestors.

The last couple of years had been tough without them. No one else really knew me like they did. No one else did now, outside of Running Rabbit. He was part of the reason I kept coming back. The other had to do with “the people” of the Ellie Mae valley. They were my family. To them, I was the spirit who resided somewhere in between them and their afterlife. Running Rabbit had been kind and wise enough, to allow me to be the link between the two.

It was a rugged climb up the hill and over to the caverns this trip. Years ago, this would have been an easy hike. I found my place inside the cavern was just as I had left it last year. I always wondered if this would be the year some yahoo tourist would have found it and destroyed it. There were so many tourists in the canyon these days. I didn’t have to worry about the Navajo. They knew that this was a sacred place. It was not to be disturbed.

Last year when I was here, I made sure I built a small cache of supplies to last me through this trip. Just enough food and water to last a couple of days. It was time to establish camp. I started a fire and prepared supper. What else but, corn, squash and beans.

As I sat around the crackling fire, I couldn't help but notice all the twinkling stars in the darkened sky above. Seemed like some things never changed. The moon was just starting to crest above the horizon. I looked up at the cave and there was that faint glow of things to come.

Next morning, I was up at the crack of dawn. It had been a cold night, even with my new down sleeping bag. I wanted to make sure that I caught the morning Sun as it lit up the inside of the cave. Hiking up the trail and across the face of the cliff was easier than I remembered it being. Entering the cave, I took one last loop around, for old times sake. I found my handprints at the back of the cave. I felt reassured. The doorway to the adjoining room was the only thing left between me and what lay on the other side.

I cautiously stepped through to the other room, noticing that I wasn't too late. The sunbeams were dancing their way across to the cist. To both cists, actually. The other cist, being the one I had assembled last year. That was the year I found out that this year was going to be my last.

I went over to the wall of rocks and debris separating the two rooms of the cave and started to methodically rebuild it from the inside. Rock by rock, hand over fist. As each rock was added, less and less light filtered into the

room from the cave. Until, the only light left was that shining through the narrow cracks of the cave wall. Splitting the darkness into the haves and the have-nots.

I made sure I brought with me all the necessary ingredients to make the journey to Running Rabbit a permanent one. I believe the doctor called it a cocktail. I bent over my cist to make sure that it contained all the right things to accompany me on my travels. To make sure it was a safe and secure journey.

The cist was layered with bark, yucca fibers and turkey feathers. Lining the sides were my old bracelets, beads and other assorted jewelry, accumulated over time. Some of which had been wrapped together and tied with strands of my own hair.

There was an extra pair of brand new sandals made of yucca fiber that matched the pair I was now putting on. A couple of small baskets were strategically placed, one containing some dried corn meal. Finally, there was a woven blanket and a soft, rabbit fur robe that would help to keep me warm and comfortable during my journey.

The final touch? My notepad and pencil.

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