

Taos Pueblo

On July 25, my family and I vacationed in Taos, New Mexico. While we were there, we were able to experience a beautiful ceremony by the Taos Pueblo. Harvest festivals are carried out numerous times during the spring and summer each year to ensure the abundance of rain that is both welcomed and needed for a plentiful harvest. During the winter, the Buffalo and Deer Dances are performed. Another great celebration is the pilgrimage to their Sacred Blue Lake. The Taos Pueblo communities have celebrated different seasonal cycles through beautiful dancing, uplifting prayer, and enchanting songs. They allow for a great connection to nature, the community, past traditions, and their ancestors. These spiritual ceremonies bring a distinct connection between the past and the present during their festivities.

Prior to the start of the celebration our group was asked not to take any pictures, to remain quiet, and to remain seated during the ceremony. The leader started a slow repetitive beat "thump, thump, thump" on his drum, which he held in his arms. He started with a story about the Corn Dance and the importance that these spiritual ceremonies have had for the Taos Pueblo through the generations. Feast days are celebrations that honor the saints of the Roman Catholic church. July 25th marked the feast day of Saint Santiago. A great amount of the Taos Pueblo beliefs are from Roman Catholicism, but throughout the past generations, the Native Americans never gave up their spiritual beliefs or practices. The two religions came together and worked as one.

Dancers were brought out of the kiva onto the place and they slowly began dancing. Each was beautifully dressed with beaded jewelry, elaborate wooden headdresses called a *tablita*, and white knee-high moccasins. The *tablita* had paintings of ears of corn and feathers. The singing and chanting, along with the dancing and drums was a very spiritual experience for me. My children sat and watched the whole time and they were very surprised that many of the dancers were young children and teenagers. Each of the dancers carried either musical instruments, ears of corn, or evergreen branches. The older dancers held drums and did the majority of the singing and prayers that took place in their native language of Tiwa.

After the finish of the harvest festival a young lady went up to visit with our group. She talked about the different festivals that they had each season and about the difficult times that their people faced throughout the past generations. They talked about the important skills that they had learned from friends and relatives that were among their people. The Taos Pueblos are known for their beautiful white moccasins and their handmade drums. They had many items set up for sale, including the moccasins, drums, jewelry, baskets, and art.

The winter festivals are carried out by the Taos Pueblos to ensure healthy animals and successful hunts for the community. A successful hunt was necessary for many different reasons. The animals that were hunted provided food and were used for ceremonial purposes. The skins were used for their moccasins and to make the drums that are both during their spiritual festivals. Numerous festivals are held privately. They are a time for the Taos Pueblo community to come together for thanksgiving and prayer for the blessings that they have received and for the blessings of the future.

The most sacred location for the Taos Pueblo is its *Sacred Blue Lake*. Blue Lake is located in Carson National Forest and has been inhabited by the Native Americans from around 1100 A.D. An old legend tells that a great chief led his people to the foot of the mountain after following an eagle there. The eagle "dropped two plumes, one falling on either side of the stream", this is where the Indians built their permanent home. (Keegan) The Taos Indians believe that the Sacred Blue Lake is the original source of all life and also the final resting place for the soul. The Taos Puebloans make a special pilgrimage there once a year, in which they "hold religious ceremonies only their tribe may attend." (Keegan)

The experience was unique for me and for my family. I had recently learned that my great-great-grandmother was half Taos Puebloan. Her mother was full Taos Puebloan, and her father was French-Canadian. I loved learning about the spiritual ceremonies, the medicine men, and about the old legends. The most difficult part of the experience was hearing about the pain and heartbreak that they endured for many years. Our Native American culture is unique and it has become important for me to learn more about their customs and traditions and also teach my children more.

The Taos Pueblo Native Americans have been a part of this land for over a thousand years and their spiritual prayers and religious ceremonies have been passed down through the generations. It was a beautiful, uplifting experience and is something that I plan on attending again in the future. I hope that someday in the future I can gather enough proof to show that I am also part of the Taos Pueblo tribe and that I too will be allowed to partake in some of the beautiful spiritual celebrations and pilgrimages that they practice year after year.

References

Keegan, Marcia. *The Taos Pueblo and Its Sacred Blue Lake*. Santa Fe: Clear Light Publishers, 1991.