

Pueblo Pottery: Continuing a Tradition

Tessie Naranjo

My great-grandmother, Mother Corn, born in the 1870s in Santa Clara, raised my mother and taught her pottery-making at an early age. My mother had eight children, and we were all introduced to pottery-making as early as she was. We went out for the clay, helped to mix the temper and gathered materials for firing. As we grew to adulthood, we made our own pots. The succession from my great-grandmother to my brothers and sisters and me is a small segment of an old, continuous tradition of Pueblo pottery-making.

Archaeologists say that Pueblo people have been making pottery for almost 2,000 years (Peckham 1990:1). To the Pueblo person, however, the practice of making pottery and its forms and designs comes from our beginnings, from the beginning of creation. My community, Santa Clara Pueblo, speaks Tewa. To the Tewa the world is a sphere of earth and sky. The sky, the upper hemisphere, is called a basket, as in a Tewa song: "The blue-flower basket on the top of heaven [sky] seems. It gleams and all is done" (Spinden 1933:79). The lower hemisphere of this world is seen as a pot or bowl.

Pottery-making is more than the simple creation of an object from earth. The word *nung* in Tewa means both "earth" and "us." It speaks to a feeling that we are of the earth, that the pot and the person are one. Maintaining our relationship with all things that are alive, such as rocks, trees, animals and clay, is basic to our sense of well-being. The potter and clay are partners in each process of creation. A Santa Clara potter describes this relationship, "the clay is very selfish. It will form itself to what the clay wants to be. The clay says, I want to be this, not what you want me to be" (Trimble 1987:13). The clay must be loved and nurtured so that she will, in turn, love and nurture. In this world, generations of

Pueblo mothers have taught their children the making and meaning of pottery. To this day we teach our children to dig the clay, to crush the temper, to mix and shape them into the beautiful forms and to etch designs onto the forms, all while respecting the clay. In all of the 19 Pueblo communities in New Mexico, this connection with clay has been repeated and taught generation after generation.

My mother taught me how to make pottery. Now I teach my children how to make pottery. My granddaughter...she makes pottery. We start from the beginning, making a bowl, that's how we learn (Pueblo potter, 1990).

Tessie Naranjo, Ph.D., from Santa Clara Pueblo, is Director of the Santa Clara Cultural Preservation Program and the Santa Clara Senior Citizen's Building Project.

Citations and Further Readings

- Brody, J.J. 1971. *Indian Painters and White Patrons*. Albuquerque: University of New Mexico Press.
- Dillingham, Rick. 1987. Historic and Contemporary Pueblo Pottery. *El Palacio* 93(1): 26-29.
- Harlow, Francis H. 1965. Tewa Indian Ceremonial Pottery. *El Palacio* 72 (4): 13-23.
- Peckham, Stewart. 1987. The Beginnings of a Tradition — Pottery Making Comes to the Southwest. *El Palacio*. 93 (1): 20-23.
- _____. 1990. *From This Earth*. Santa Fe: Museum of New Mexico Press.
- Spinden, Herbert Joseph, trans. 1933. *Songs of the Tewa*. New York: The Exposition of Indian Tribal Arts, Inc.
- Toulouse, Betty. 1976. Pueblo Pottery Traditions Ever Constant, Ever Changing. *El Palacio* 82 (3): 14-45.
- Trimble, Stephen. 1987. *Talking with the Clay*. Santa Fe: School of American Research Press.