Hozho: Walking in Beauty

Native American Stories of Inspiration, Humor, and Life

Essential Writings By:

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Edited by Paula Gunn Allen and Carolyn Dunn Anderson
Foreword by Mark Robert Waldman

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Hozho:
Walking in Beauty

◆ FOREWORD ◆

MARK ROBERT WALDMAN

Looking at Indians Through White-Tainted Eyes

I AM AWAKENED IN THE MIDDLE OF THE NIGHT BY A HAUNTING suspicion of truth, for I fear that somewhere inside, I—like so many others—am unconsciously racist and blind. Ignorant of what it is like to be different and colored, near-dead. I am prejudiced, biased, and unkind simply because I am white. And because I am white, my eyes have been tainted by the stereotypes of life.

I grew up in Phoenix, in a town surrounded by some of the poorest people in the land. Negroes, Indians, Mexicans—that's what they were called in the 1950s when I was a very young boy. My mother, by contrast, was a fighter of hate, an advocate of civil rights, particularly for Jews, Hispanics, and blacks. But she too was blinded by the color of her skin—not out of hatred or choice, but just by a lack of awareness of how pervasive prejudice can be. A prejudice that everyone carries from birth. We may not be able to abolish such feelings from our soul, but we can certainly become more aware.

My mother, out of naive kindness, chose to hire a girl from the local Indian school to clean our house once a week, and thus a primitive conception was formed: a "native" woman who was sensually quiet and withdrawn; a lower-class servant for middle-class whites. But my first visit to a local reservation rattled this simplistic view. I had never seen such poverty before: homes made of mud sitting on dusty lots with rusting cars on the street. I did not know that I was standing on one of the poorest and tiniest reservations in America.

I also saw something else, for it was a day of celebration, with drumming and dancing and costumes and masks. For a ten-year-old boy it was a scene of magic and awe, a stereotypical view that stayed with me for years.

In the 1970s, more stereotypes emerged. Fostered by the New Age movement, hundreds of writers and dozens of movies offered thousands of seekers a hipper vision of Indian life: the noble "breed," an endangered species, keepers of the Great American Spirit. A young, naive, and essentially white generation of seekers donned feathers and beads. Navajo blankets were placed lovingly on the floors, and the walls were adorned with Russell or Curtis prints. With a proud or lonely Indian staring blankly into their homes, the insult went unseen.

Today, new stereotypes are stirred by the reservation quarrels over gambling and land. From Drunken Indian to Noble Savage to Red Profiteer, the prejudice never abates. Of all the colors in the world, red is the least understood, I fear.

That is why this book was created: it is an *essential* anthology for anyone seeking a deeper appreciation of a culture that is still under siege. A

culture that is more rich and diverse than I ever expected to find. A culture whose writing competes with the best in the world, capturing the spirit, the humor, and the lives of a people enmeshed in the fabric of "white."

This book will shake the stereotype inside. It will make you laugh and sometimes cry. And maybe, just maybe, it will help you grasp the inner core of humanity when it is balanced between extinction and life. Through tainted eyes and wounded hearts, come walk in the beauty of this world.

◆ INTRODUCTION ◆

PAULA GUNN ALLEN

May It Be Beautiful All Around

HOZHO—ANYONE WHO HAS READ ONE OF BEST-SELLING AUTHOR Tony Hillerman's Joe Leaphorn and Jim Chee detective novels will immediately grasp what it means: it is the Navajo word for walking in beauty, walking in a sacred manner, walking with a peaceful heart, living daily life "seated in the midst of the rainbow." Hozho is the heart of the Native American spirit, which is so directly involved with the beauty and living

awareness of the land, and thus the stories contained in this anthology will be filled with indigenous people's traditional sense of natural awe.

What makes this anthology unique, however, is its inclusion of humor, for in this country, the stereotypical view of Indians lacks wit. Native wisdom, yes. Respectful serenity, yes. But never satire, teasing, or fun. Indians don't laugh, the stereotype says, but in reality Native life is filled with laughter and joy. Just meet a coyote on your path, and you will see what I mean. In Indian Country the sense of play, of humor, satire, irony, and wit plays as central a role in ceremony as it does in day-to-day life. Wherever Native people gather, laughter reigns. Nor is the humor confined to jokes—though there are plenty of them. Mostly it rests on pun, on irony and ambiguity that several centuries of occupation and genocide occasion. It's a matter of laugh or die. So we laugh. At ourselves, at our situation, at the ludicrous circumstances in which we live and move and have our being.

Our laughter is sometimes unabashed hilarity, sometimes bitter cynicism, sometimes embedded in a complexity of observation and tradition. Of necessity, Indian humor must reside alongside rage and grief. At the end of the day, whatever it is that is human pushed to the extreme edge of survival informs these stories, and more: for they are shot through with the glinting skeins of the great spiritual traditions from which they spring, from which All That Is ever arises and into which All That Is ever falls—ordinary sounds and activities of every day, love, death, loss. Each of the stories in this collection shows us how to transcend our circumstances while being firmly connected within them. Each, in that way, follows the way of Hozho, demonstrating how transcendence arises from the exigencies of daily life and informs it.

Perhaps there's something profoundly funny about spitting in the eye of death. After all, the Native nations of the Americas have looked extinction in the eye, and survived to tell the tales. In Indian Country it's been nuclear winter for centuries. We know all about survival, including the fact that without a wry view of history, survival itself is impossible. And that is a history that goes back thousands of years, long before the most recent challenges to our endurance and our sense of humor began.

There's a joke in Indian Country in which some folks are standing around outside the local tribal administration offices having a smoke, and

to their amazement a flying saucer whirls into view and lands in front of them. "Here we go again," one of them quips. We are also all agreed that we're glad the Spanish-Portuguese ships hadn't sailed for Turkey!

This anthology, which contains a sampling of well-known and up-and-coming Native American writers, also depicts the reality of Native American life in exile-in-one's-own-home, the poignant and sometimes painful life of living in invisibility, revisioning, and chronic public humiliation. Thus these stories also exemplify how one of the world's major culture systems has managed to survive, to transcend, and to inspire. These are particularly American stories, for what are Americans but a society of people of diverse language and cultural strains caught alive between two worlds—the old, whether Indian Country or lands across the seas, and the new, which is still in the making.

I can't think of separate world views that are more divergent than that of the Native world and Western civilization. Rudyard Kipling, the bard of the Raj, rhymed: "East is east and west is west, and never the twain shall meet." And whatever truth there is in his observation about diverse Old World civilizations, the difference is magnified tenfold between a world fundamentally grounded in Hozho, and one fundamentally based on progress. *Hozho* means we walk in Beauty, in the Rainbow House of Dawn of balance, spirit, and the All That Is; *progress* means we pit ourselves against what is, and exert every effort to fix, change, and solve it.

And nowhere is this difference more evident than in our literary traditions. Given that fundamental difference (a difference so profound that one wonders how the two cultures can coexist), offering texts that spring from what we call "Hozho" to a readership that has been divorced from its immanent dynamic place seems all but futile. Let me give you an example of the extent of the gulf between the two. I was working with a colleague on a collection of biographies of American Indian leaders in various walks of life, and we suggested the title "Walking in Beauty." Our editor, quite rightly, pointed out that readers would think the book was about cosmetics.

The Hindi-Western doctor and writer Deepak Chopra writes about this difference. He tells a story about a Westerner walking in the country somewhere in India. The traveler comes upon an old man in a *dhoti* who is

talking to someone. But as the Westerner looks around, he sees that the old man in the clearing is quite alone. After watching for a time and unable to restrain himself, the traveler says, "Pardon me, but what makes you converse all alone?" The old man looks up. "Pardon me," he replies. "What makes you think I'm alone?"

The divergence between Western and Native modes of consciousness is one of the basic themes in American Indian fiction, as in "The Problem of Old Harjo," by Cherokee journalist and fiction writer, John M. Oskison. Oskison's complex story explores the two-way nature of transformation. Old Harjo converts to Christianity, although church rules prevent him from being baptized, because his conversion is of the spirit and mind, not one of cultural mores. While the old Indian is undergoing a spiritual transformation, a young white missionary, Miss Evans, undergoes a parallel transformation of consciousness. She encounters a different sense of the meaning of "spiritual life" from the old pagan, to whom *spiritual* implies respect for the dignity and integrity of human codes of decency. The plot Oskison hangs his deeper insight upon is ubiquitous in Indian Country. There is an old joke about an elderly chief with three wives who was ordered by the newly arrived Indian agent or missionary, depending on the locus of the tale, to send two of the women away. The Native man thought about the demand for a time. "You tell them," he said at last. "And you say which one will stay."

The dynamics—the pain, the humor, the great gulf in perception and values—of Indian-White relations are best captured in stories like "The Problem of Old Harjo." The title itself is an ironic comment on what the U.S. government and Anglo-European settlers were wont to call "the Indian Problem." In fact, according to historian William Brandon in his wonderful study *The Last Americans*, the first item of business on George Washington's first presidential agenda was "the Indian Problem." His hawkish idea was that all Native people should be exterminated. The liberal view, held by leaders such as Thomas Jefferson, lay in two parallel courses. One counseled cultural extinction, assimilation of the sort that the federal- or church-controlled education system spent nearly a century attempting to implement, along with economic, religious, and political methods they

also used. The other strategized removal to regions beyond the then borders of the United States of America. Over the course of the nineteenth and twentieth centuries, varying combinations of these three approaches were implemented with tragic consequences and mixed results. As the new century dawns, a fourth possibility is emerging, one that more closely resembles that suggested in most of the stories in this collection: a kind of peaceful and creative coexistence that itself may be as new as the American experiment.

At any rate, a multitude of implications lurk within that phrase, "the Indian Problem." One of them constitutes a major theme in American literature, both literary and popular, and can be summed up as a cultural identity problem. As a polyglot people, who are not really what we were, we find ourselves at a loss to define who we are. Neither Old World nor American Indian, a new society without land- and blood-connected traditions, we are faced with the necessity of making sense of our transitional collective nature. It was a problem, and still is, and there have been many like the fictional Mrs. Rowell who have had what they believed or believe to be a simple solution. Old Harjo's story reveals the grace of humor as well as the saving grace of faith, while addressing both the complexity of our situation and the place of humor in leavening it.

One of the more amusing effects of the biculturalism of the modern Indian story, as well as modern Indian lives, is captured in the hilarious satire by Charles A. Eastman (Ohiyesa), "The Singing Spirit." Like "The Problem of Old Harjo," "The Singing Spirit" was published in 1907, penned by a writer who was a physician sent by the U.S. government to gather medical evidence at the site of the Wounded Knee massacre of 1892 (about which he elsewhere recorded his horror). "The Singing Spirit" merges the heroic adventure story based on nineteenth-century revisions of the Scottish narrative tradition popularized by Sir Walter Scott with the beliefs about Native people and wilderness current among non-Indians in Dr. Eastman's time. This merger makes for a slyly hilarious narrative that is nonetheless not without its pointed commentary on biracial relationships. The story poses a question about the nature of wilderness, and responds, "It depends on who is doing the reporting," suggesting that like

beauty, meaning is mostly in the eye of the beholder. Conflating the surreal with the factitious, Dr. Eastman lets us perceive how identity slips and changes as readily in a short story as it does in the oral tradition, and how humor lends texture and depth to both. Stories of the Little People abound in the oral tradition from many Native Nations in the western hemisphere, as they do among modern-day descendants of the Celts of Ireland, Scotland, and Wales. In "The Singing Spirit," Dr. Eastman combines the two traditions into a bifurcated narrative, adding a couple of trickster twists of his own.

We have followed the Oskison and Eastman stories from early in the twentieth century with one by Lorenzo Baca, "San Lorenzo Day in Laguna." While this story is as contemporary as tomorrow's news, it is timeless in its close connection to ancient ways at a modern Pueblo, Laguna, which is in New Mexico. Baca's story puts a very Native spin on the identity question explored by his early twentieth-century predecessors.

Although we have included only two selections from early twentieth-century fiction, let us not forget that that icon of American humor, Will Rogers, was Cherokee. His humor was singularly American Indian, and it struck a resonant chord with the larger body of the American people. It was Rogers who quipped, "I belong to no organized political party. I'm a Democrat." His on-the-spot commentaries, blistering and deadly funny, made him a celebrity and drew fire from every side of the political aisle. Like Native writers who would follow him in the later years of the century, Rogers's commentary was biting, pointed, and leavened with dry Oklahoma cowboy wit.

Rogers was an advisor to presidents and himself a short-lived candidate for that office. At the 1924 Democratic Convention, two delegates from Arizona favored him for the nomination. In his final Convention dispatch column, Rogers thanked the men for their "unwavering support during the entire fifteen minutes which they stuck so staunchly by me." In the 1928 presidential election, Rogers gleefully accepted the tongue-in-cheek nomination for president by the humor magazine *Life*, creating campaign promises and rhetoric in the finest political tradition. He was the presidential candidate for the Anti-Bunk Party, a position for which his

columns and commentaries on the lecture circuit showed him to be well-suited.

In 1932, Rogers was given twenty-two votes from the Oklahoma delegation when Alfalfa Bill Murray released his delegation to "that sterling citizen, that wise philosopher, that great heart, that favorite son of Oklahoma. . . ." As recounted in her book about her husband, Betty Rogers quotes Will's later column about this event:

> *Politics ain't on the level. . . . I was only in 'em for an hour, but in that short space of time somebody stole twenty-two votes from me. I was sitting there in the press stand asleep and wasn't bothering a soul when they woke me up and said Oklahoma had started me on the way to the White House with twenty-two votes. I thought to myself, "Well, there is no use going there this late in the morning," so I dropped off to sleep again, and that's when somebody touched me for my roll, took the whole twenty-two, and didn't even leave me a vote to get breakfast on.*

The editors of *Hozho: Walking in Beauty* made our selections for this collection with an eye to giving readers a sense of the complexity of Native writing in the twentieth century. We hope to reveal the range of experience and reflection upon it that Native writers command, while providing you, our readers, with a book of rousing good stories. We think we have accomplished our goals. Certainly there was no lack of short stories to choose from. We have collected twenty-five stories that demonstrate the dexterity of thought and style and the diversity of talent and voice that, taken together, provide a tapestry of American Indian life in the contemporary world.

Living within traditions as old as the hills and creating lives as untraditional as those of every American, Native writers have long been and remain singularly American writers. Both editors of this volume have functioned as instructors, writers, and anthologists, and in these capacities we have found that readers of whatever cultural background relate to American Indian fiction with surprising fervor. It is our thought that the reason for this powerful response is not due to the "exotic" nature of American Indian life outside of Indian Country, but rather to the basic

shared experience embodied in these tales. Americans are, at base, hybrid people. One way or another we find ourselves in a world none of our forebears could have imagined, yet we must locate a common sense of coherence in that world, one within which our lives as individuals and as social beings makes sense. It is the act of revealing the inner coherence of American life, with all of its vicissitudes and affronts to every kind of sensibility, at which American Indian writers excel.

Just read how a young Native man tries to locate coherence in the gulf that yawns between his Native world and his life as a university student, lover of a woman who has never seen the rez, in D. Renville's stunning "Siobhan La Rue in Color." Or wait and watch with two frightened Native women in a modern condominium outside of Santa Fe as the sky opens and reality wavers before their frightened eyes, as that noted teller of tales, Anna Lee Walters, chronicles in "Bicenti." The boundaries between the real and the supposed are not fixed, these stories tell us, and this is an idea that is as much a part of the old traditional, ritual way of seeing the world as it is the shocking reality of life in modern America. As Vickie L. Sears, in the narrative voice of first a small child and then a woman, reminds us, deciding what is real, what is true, and what clarity means, exactly, are decisions not easily come to.

It seems that Old Coyote is alive and swinging in these stories. Carter Revard, whose day job as a professor of Medieval English Literature enhances his Ponca wit and quirky humor, as his wry "Never Quite a Hollywood Star" proves; and in his print-media debut Suleiman Russell gives us an eye-opening peek into the true machinations of good and evil on the superhighway of our time. Extrapolating on his riff, one might see that Old Man Coyote is alive and kicking in the White House, enlivening the Cherokee President William Jefferson Clinton's administration, much to the delight of comics, and to the dismay of Old Man Missionary in his many incarnations at this time.

Russell's delightful "How Old Man Coyote Lost His Manhood" is a satire on not only middle-class mores but on ethnographer's interpretation of old Indian "pourquoi" narratives. These are stories from the oral tradition that seem to explain how some feature of land or creature came about. "Pourquoi," which is French for "why," is a term that works to trivialize and

diminish ancient knowledge. Such labeling recontextualizes traditional knowledge systems, lending a tint of childishness to stories from the oral tradition. Russell, like other writers whose work appears in this collection, reminds us that the boundaries within the world as defined by lateral-mindedness are far more fuzzy than Western thought believes.

Carolyn Dunn reminds us that the fuzzy boundaries extend not only around us, but in realms above and beyond. Navajo mother Patty Burns, who for a time embraced the Mormon faith of her childhood, had gone back to her father's house and spoke the language of the Old Ones once again. But there was something still that spoke to Patty through the stars. She listened to the instructions she received from "the angel Moroni and Changing Woman," a major supernatural figure among the Dine (Navajo). Here again the usual boundaries ascribed to the external and the inner worlds blur. In "Fishing," Dunn reminds us that culture-bound borders are fragile indeed, that dream is as factual as talking on the phone, and that what is dissolves and reforms around us as a matter of course.

In "Loaves and Fishes," Dawn Karima Pettigrew reminds us of the brittle humor of miracles, and the twists of spirit that composes them, while rapping a riff on old Harjo's problem and Eastman's spirit solution.

The Spirits come in many guises, some more life affirming than others, as Pettigrew wittily—and defiantly—reminds us. In "Loaves and Fishes," we encounter Mrs. Rowell in another guise, and old Harjo is morphed into a young woman and her charge. The situation is no less dreadful in this recent story than in its predecessors, and the solution, while charged with irony, is a point-blank statement of defiance. Trading booze for food may be a unique response, but the willingness of the community to care for the destitute is as old as Indianna—not the state, but the state of consciousness and community.

In many of the stories that follow Pettigrew's, spirits in alcoholic form play a major role. They star in "Six O'Clock News," free little Alyssa and her patroness, and lead a bourbon-soaked would-be swain into dimensions poorly mirrored by booze-induced altered states.

Lynda Martinez Foley takes us south of the U.S. border to explore the relationship between alcoholic spirits and the other kinds, a relationship

that can be disastrous no matter which way it's sliced, and M. L. Smoker hits us again from another region in Indian Country. "Twins' Story" offers a commentary on the ancient sacred stories about the Little Twins, replete as they are both in legend and in our modern world. Like their mythic counterparts, August and Austin are blessed—and cursed—with the gifts of timing and intuition received from their mother, and a kind of recklessness and carelessness garnered from the intercultural conflict that swirls around them.

On the other hand, Emma Lee Warrior gives us another look at the sort of thing that drives a Native to drink. This time old Harjo is several characters, all of whom have resorted to alcohol in a doomed attempt to avoid the ubiquitous intrusion of tourists—some of whom have "gone Native," unfortunately to a Native tradition other than their own. "Compatriots" is another trickster twist on the old identity question, only this time the conversions are going the other way.

No question about it. Identity issues are at least as tricky as Old Man Coyote, his southern cousin, Rabbit, or his northern counterparts, Raven and Iktomi (Spider Boy). In "Jules Bart, Giving Too Much—August 1946," we see how tricky self-definition, like social definition, can be. One thing that is indigenous to Native and Western literary traditions alike is that transformation of some sort powers a good story. Sometimes transformative events come disguised as personal trauma, in circumstances where one must face one's truth. Unmasking the false personality to reveal the true one beneath it is the theme of Debra Earling's story, another example of the old trickster narrative. Her story takes as its familiar theme the exploration of boundaries: where they are located and how they pertain to issues of integrity and significance.

The borderlands of sexual identity directly address the larger issues of our time; those hardy citizens of the crossroads, bisexuals and "closet" homosexuals and lesbians, are in a state of perpetual liminality, much as the Changer Coyote is perceived as being. For it is on the threshold between one set of realities and another that the most sacred events are likely to occur. Like the transitional states of childbirth, near-death, puberty, and dying itself, sexual liminality—between two worlds—is a state in which the most