

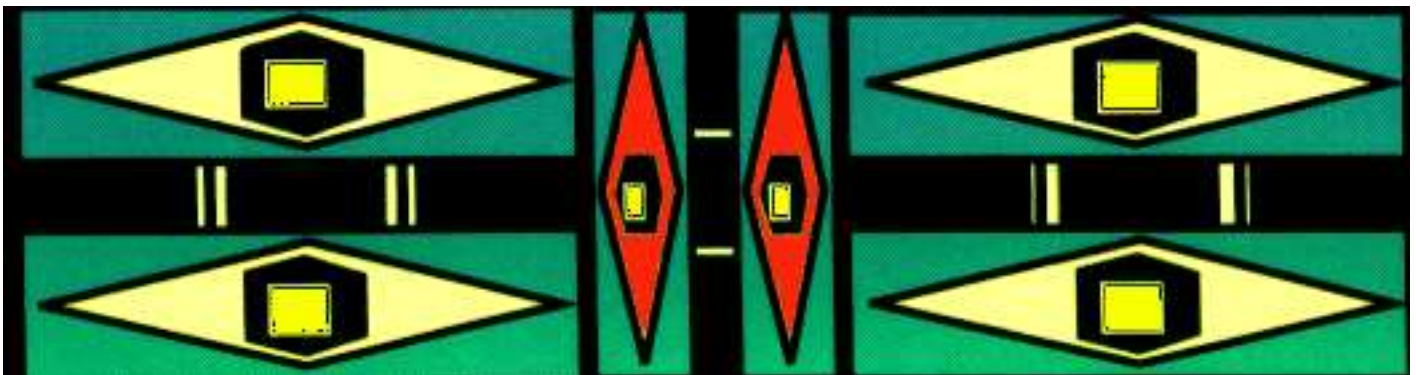
Shamana of the

Uchitwi

A Story of We'Wha

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This story's once upon a time was one hundred and fifty years ago. This story's place far, far away was what we now call New Mexico, in the South Western United States.



Taos (Pueblo) house, courtesy bradknapp.com

There are a people we call the Zuni, but who call themselves the A:shiwi. These people are the proud inheritors of the Anasazi tradition. The Zuni are one of the nineteen Pueblo tribes. The Pueblo indians lived in houses made of adobe brick and packed close together, very much like apartments. The Anasazi, from whom these people are descended, had built a great civilization a thousand years ago with cities and roads, but the story of the Anasazi is not our story today.

Today, I am going to tell you about a child who was born in 1849 and who would be called We'Wha.



From his earliest memories, We'Wha knew he was different. He did not like the boy games and preferred to play with the girls. As he got older, the boys began to make fun of him and then the girls would make fun of him too.

We'Wha's mother was concerned and she went to the tribe's shaman for advice. A shaman is an important person in the tribe and knows many things that are only needed when something unusual happens.

He explained to We'Wha's mother that We'Wha was very special. Usually Earth Mother, Sun Father and Moonlight-giving Mother make each person incomplete with only a male spririt in a male body or a female spirit in a female body. The male and female spirit both realize they are incomplete and it is the desire to be complete that causes men and women to bond, to fall in love. Every once in a while, a person is born who has both spirits. These people are especially blessed by Earth Mother, Sun Father and Moonlight-giving Mother. They are complete within themselves and have a fuller understanding of the world. The Zuni call these two-spirited people the lhamana.

The shaman told We'Wha's mother that it was important that We'Wha receive special training and it was agreed that We'Wha would travel to another village where the shaman would take We'Wha as an apprentice.

We'Wha went away for many years. He learned to listen to the girl within so that she could express herself when she wanted.



They learned the sacred symbols and the sacred dances: he learned the Winter Buffalo Dance, she learned the Corn Dance,



together they learned the Eagle Dance



and the Deer Dance.

He learned to listen to the spirits that are all around us. She learned what berries or plants could be used to help them walk in the spirit world.

One day the teacher addressed We'Wha as friend rather than pupil and told her she was ready to return. The winter solstice which marks the beginning of the year would be soon. She would return home in time for Yatakya-ittiwanna-quin-techikya (“sun middle-at place arrives”).



When she returned home, the children who used to make fun of him were now adults and, with adult knowledge, knew how lucky their tribe was to have a lhamana for their new shaman. They greeted We'Wha with a great feast. They baked bread and danced the Eagle Dance in her honour.



As the years went by We'Wha gave wise council balancing the power of the male within against the nurturing spirit of the woman.



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It was while We'Wha was the tribe's lhamana that white people began to settle in the area and from them we have a picture of We'Wha.



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Afterword

We'Wha Famous Zuni Berdache>lhamana who visited the Whitehouse in the late 1800's. Expert weaver, she shared her skills and talents openly in an effort to preserve her culture. Advocate of her people's rights she once threw 2 US soldiers out of her doorway. One got his coat tails stuck in the door and had to cut them off with his sword to escape. We'Wha was loved by all the children and even though she was the biggest and strongest of the Zuni none of the politicians in Washington even questioned that she was a woman. To find out more about We'Wha read Will Roscoe's The Zuni Man-Woman