Working on the Railroad, Walking in Beauty

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In order to attempt to understand and fully appreciate our fellow human beings, Michael Jackson writes, we need to remember the importance of listening to the actual words of those who are speaking:

To apprehend the intersubjective life in which we are immersed, we not only need theoretical models that are constructed outside the empirical field, then brought to bear upon it; we need to examine the metaphors, images, stories and things that human beings everywhere deploy as ‘objective correlatives’ of the give and take of their quotidian relationships with others. The ways in which we arrange and organize words and things thus provide us with rough analogues of the patterns of intersubjective experience which we are seldom in a position to directly apprehend.¹

This chapter attempts to see and hear these images and stories.

*Cuba, New Mexico*

Tom Martinez—Following in the footsteps of the Holy People

Tom Martinez, a tall, seventy-four-year-old man whom I met in the warm, dry summer of 2006 in Cuba, New Mexico, worked as

¹ Jackson, *Existential Anthropology*, 37.
a trackman for the Union Pacific Railroad. For Tom, the edge of
the Navajo Nation divides two vastly different spaces, an inside
and an outside. Each spring before leaving the Navajo Nation
to go to work on the railroad, Tom attended a Blessingway cer-
emony. Tom used the traditional ceremonies to prepare for the
journey beyond and to ensure good luck, health, and hope. The
stories, rituals, and harmonious effects of the Blessingway pro-
vided a sense of security to steel him for the journey beyond.
It helped him to make what he could of the world out there,
strengthening his ability to face unseen and dangerous forces.

Like other men with whom I spoke, when Tom returned
to the rez from his railroad work, he sought out an Enemyway
ceremony. This traditional ceremony is performed as a healing
after one has had contact with destructive forces. The Enemyway
ceremony is a way of reestablishing agency as well as balance,
goals that can be accomplished only when the unfathomable
forces that are encountered away from one’s land are cleansed.
The Enemyway ceremony helped Tom to rework and reassemble
his person and his meaning after his time away from the bound-
aries of his land. It was an attempt to return to a state of hózhó by
neutralizing contaminating forces and reestablishing the equilib-
rium of good and harmony.

Tom’s use of these ceremonies bears a striking resemblance
to the description by Sam Gill of the actors in these rituals in the
creation story. Speaking of those in the creation story traversing
the lower levels as they move inexorably higher, he says:

The heroes, invariably in the process of a journey, enter
forbidden territories or violate regulations. Consequently
they suffer in any number of ways. When the heroes are
unable to get out of their predicaments, holy people come
to aid and relieve their suffering by performing ceremoni-
als which restore them. The enactment of the ceremonials
not only brings restoration, it initiates the heroes into the
knowledge of the ceremonial ways.2

2 Gill, Songs of Life, 7.
Working throughout the Mountain West for a number of years, Tom Martinez was a member of several track gangs that included Native Americans from northern tribes in South Dakota and Idaho. Like the men with whom Jerry Sandoval worked, members of each tribe, Tom told me, tended to congregate to perform certain ceremonies after the workday ended, often surreptitiously. But Tom suffered a back injury at work in 1986. For this, he visited practitioners of both modern and traditional medicine. He felt that each approach was helpful to him. Now retired, Tom partakes of each major religious tradition common to the Navajos. Tom occasionally goes to Christian churches, sees a medicine man, and attends peyote meetings. His children live off the traditional land in Albuquerque, but when they are having problems they return to the rez for ceremonies with a medicine man directed at their problematic issues. It is back on the nation that they feel they can reconnect with their anchor and access and practice hózhó.

**Torreon, New Mexico**

The Pintos—Husband and wife healers

Interestingly, while medicine men are almost always men, in my interviews I did find one woman, Bessie Pinto, who acted as a religious leader with her husband. On a fine, clear day, Julie took me to see a medicine man in whom she has great faith, Hoskie Pinto, a well-known and accomplished medicine man who uses both traditional and Native American Church practices.  

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3 “Navajo women who choose to pursue careers as ceremonial practitioners face complex challenges. The involvement of women with this side of life takes place within limitations surrounding their reproductive capacities as well as those of their spouses.” Maureen Trudelle Schwarz, *Blood and Voice* (Tucson: University of Arizona Press, 2003), 13.

4 The common overlap of traditional practices and peyotist religion by individual medicine men was noted by David Aberle in his work. Aberle, *Peyote Religion*, 199.
As we drove out, I felt the desert and watched heat waves ripple up to the sky. Surrounded by red rocks and amber mesas, we drove the dusty, rocky, back roads dreaming of the freshness and rainbows of purples and blues that come with the late summer monsoons. It is often a long wait on the rez for the summer rain. We passed trailer homes and hogans with their strategically placed doors and saw bullet-shaped bread kilns that popped out of the ground beside rusty pickup trucks covered with fine, pink, sandstone dust. This is a place where you try to be awake for the sunrise and must be aware of the sunset.

The first thing we saw when we drove up into Hoskie’s yard was his old hogan, within which he performed his ceremonies. He was building a newer, though yet unfinished, hogan next to his house. I was reminded that in the Navajo creation story, it was within such a dwelling that First Man drew a sand painting sketching those things he would create on the surface of the earth and used material from his sacred medicine bundle to produce them.\footnote{Gill, \textit{Songs of Life}, 5.}

When we drove into their yard, we turned off our car engine and waited. It is considered impolite to charge in and knock on the door without giving the occupants time to prepare. As with every Navajo with whom I spoke, the concept of hospitality is important to Hoskie. Part of the reason for this, I imagine, is due to culture and part due to the rural lifestyle. My maternal grandparents lived in a small town in a farming area of southeast Missouri, and though they were not social people, hospitality to strangers was a part of their cultural code. A similar attitude exists among the Navajo.

After a minute or so, Hoskie saw us and came out, and Bessie followed, inviting us in. After our greetings, I looked around the Pinto house. The front room of their home served as combination kitchen, dining room, and meeting area. On one wall were three pictures. In the center was a colorful framed picture of Jesus at the Last Supper. On one side of it was a picture of some
Hoskie and Bessie Pinto, husband and wife healers, standing outside their home.
of Hoskie’s family members; on the other side hung a scene of a traditional Navajo ceremonial dance, a Yeibichai ceremony. I asked Hoskie about the picture of the Last Supper. He told me that he was raised a Catholic by his grandparents; his mother died in childbirth. He laughs when he tells us that he was raised on goat’s milk. Hoskie, it seems, is part Zuni, and as a young man he spent much time at the Zuni Pueblo. Pueblo Indians are likely to be Catholic if they are Christians, because of the sustained and complex historical contact between Pueblos and the early Spanish conquerors. Today Hoskie goes only to a Catholic church if he and Bessie are in attendance at a Pueblo feast day at Zuni or at another pueblo where ceremonies are being held next to a Catholic church.

I ask Hoskie about his time on the railroad. He tells me that he began working for the Union Pacific in 1957. He worked on a gang as a laborer with shovel and pick. Some of the gangs were mixed, with Navajo workers laboring alongside other Indians, Anglos, and Mexican Americans. While he worked on and off all over the UP system for over twenty-five years, he never was able to accumulate sufficient months of working service to earn a pension from the RRB. Again, like many others, he got hurt and his railroad service ended. His story, similar to those of many Navajo workers who leave railroad service because of injury, flies in the face of the historical claims of railroad officials that Navajo workers seldom got hurt. This was certainly not my experience as a lawyer and it does not fit with the stories I heard in my interviews.

Hoskie’s railroad career ended sometime in the 1980s, when he hurt his leg in Cheyenne, Wyoming, laying ribbon rail. In the early American rail industry, lengths of rail often came in thirty-nine-foot sections. Having joints so close together produced the constant “click-clack” noises formerly associated with rail travel. In addition, these joints would cause both wheel and track wear. With improved manufacturing techniques, significantly longer sections of rail could be produced, ameliorating these problems.
Now, such sections of ribbon rail are nearly a quarter of a mile long—over twelve hundred feet of steel. For the trackman, however, the ribbon rail is quite difficult and dangerous to manage.

In Cheyenne, a piece of rail fell on Hoskie’s foot, severely injuring it. He was taken to a local hospital. An Anglo company claims agent came to his room, handed Hoskie a piece of paper, and told him to sign it. The paper was a good deal for Hoskie, the man said. Hoskie speaks little English and reads less. He signed the document where he was told. While Hoskie was not given a copy of the paper, most likely this was a binding settlement agreement, in which Hoskie gave up all rights to sue or collect compensation due to his injury. He still has no idea exactly what he signed.

When he was physically able, Hoskie was released from care and put on a plane to Denver. Amazingly, the railroad made no plans for where he should go when he arrived in Denver, so when he deplaned in the Denver airport he did not know what to do. Fortunately, he met a Hispanic man from Santa Fe who realized his plight. The kind man let Hoskie follow him and they took a flight to Albuquerque. Hoskie was then able to get a train that took him near the reservation and he was able to get home. However, because of the inadequate treatment he received, his leg still hurts. I have found this kind of callous treatment by the railroads to be a common story among older Navajo men. It appears that railroad management felt that their offer of employment was such a gift that Navajo men should not expect the common, empathetic treatment that all people deserve.

After Hoskie got hurt, his grandfather taught him and his brother the craft of the medicine man. Hoskie learned traditional divining methods such as crystal gazing and hand trembling. He also learned the liturgy of the Native American Church.

Hoskie’s spiritual abilities are now in great demand. In keeping with the belief among many Navajos that personal difficulties, such as an inability to sleep or even a generalized bad feeling, can come from another who has it in for you, Hoskie
works in his ceremonies to stop another person from causing harm. He believes he can restore the harmony, the \textit{hózhó}. Military people who are going to fight in Iraq, he tells me, come to him and ask him to do ceremonies for them. He asks the Great Spirit to watch over them so that they will return safely. Family members come to him carrying pictures of their loved ones and ask Hoskie to pray for their safety. He often provides ceremonies for those with criminal legal problems. Like John Sandoval, he feels that he can make the prosecutor lose the required legal paperwork.

Julie tells me later that one of the reasons that Hoskie is so well-liked is that “his prices are very reasonable.” As is the case with pastors of many churches throughout the United States, leading others in religious practices is a way for Hoskie and Bessie to support themselves. In addition, the notion of reciprocity is strong within Navajo culture. No one would consider asking for a ceremony without paying the medicine man. Kluckhohn and Leighton found that the number of ceremonies performed on the reservation was correlated with increases in income, as people were able to pay the medicine men with greater regularity.\footnote{See discussion in chapter 7 of Kluckhohn and Leighton, \textit{The Navajo}.}

Sometimes family members ask Hoskie to go to hospitals to help their loved ones who are ill. Usually, the hospitals will not let him perform his full ceremonies in patients’ rooms, but he still feels that he does good things while he is there. He tells me of a Navajo Council delegate who was in the hospital in Albuquerque and whose family came to Hoskie to ask him to treat the woman. Someone must have put a bad spirit on her, he believes, resulting in her ailments. In the hospital, Hoskie tells me, he performed a “miracle.”\footnote{While my discussions found a number of religious rituals that took place away from the reservation, there is no question that ceremonies performed on the “rez” seemed to have greater efficacy. The issue of whether traditional Navajo religion can claim power over events off the reservation is contested in the literature.} He prayed for her and put some corn pollen on her
feet. As he did so, her feet “jerked,” surprising the doctor, who had been unable to relieve her paralysis and produce such movement. The woman’s family was so appreciative that they wanted to have Hoskie’s “cure” publicized in the Albuquerque newspaper, but Hoskie felt uncomfortable with this level of notoriety and did not want to do it.

Bessie Pinto works with her husband as part of a team. Bessie was an alcoholic and the peyote she used as part of the NAC ceremonies saved her, she tells us. Hoskie helped her to quit drinking, as he convinced her that the peyote ceremonies would stop her from partying. This method appears to have had the desired effect. Bessie is often in charge of the water at the NAC ceremony. When a woman is involved, she becomes the fifth member of the NAC team, she tells me. When it is only men, there are four. Bessie is accepted “pretty good,” Hoskie tells us; people like having a woman in the ceremony. Bessie said that she knows of three other women who are as active in NAC ceremonies as she is. When a woman is involved she must wear a skirt and put her hair in a bun. “This is the only way that God recognizes you,” Bessie says.

As we are winding up, Hoskie asks me about my religion. I told him that, like the Navajos, my spirituality draws from many sources. Hoskie remarks that there are many kinds of religion practiced by Navajo people, including Catholic and revival. He thinks the old ways are the best. He wonders if that is why I am visiting him, to help bring the old ways back. He and Bessie offer to perform a short ceremony for me. The only way that I can understand what they are talking about, they believe, is to actually participate in a ceremony. But as they are preparing, they realize they are out of the butane fuel they need for the ceremony.

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8 It is a common Native American Church belief that the peyote used in the ceremonies acts as a kind of antidote to alcoholism and drug addiction.
Rincon Marquez, New Mexico

Dickie and Marilyn Sandoval—A family that followed the tracks

Railroad life puts great stress on Navajo families. The academics who studied maintenance-of-way workers in the 1950s wrote of the difficulty that such work brings to the family. “An undesirable characteristic of employment in the mechanized and specialized gangs is that the territory which the men in these gangs must service requires the workers to spend much time on the road living in trailers or camp-cars away from their families. The transition can be particularly upsetting to men with family responsibilities and to men with housing arrangements predicated on nearby section work.” When they visited the gangs in their work, both Robert Young and David Brugge noted the differences in life satisfaction for Navajo men who had families nearby as compared to those who did not. In my interviews, I found one example of a family whose members, in reaction to the difficulty railroad work placed on them, traveled with a railroad track gang.

Julie, Zina, and I went to visit Dickie Sandoval and his family. Their well-tended home was cozy and well apportioned. A number of family members came in and out as we talked. Dickie worked for the Union Pacific from 1988 to 1994. In 1988, he hitched a ride with his uncle Kee Sandoval, who was working on a Union Pacific gang in Wyoming. He was hired on this mixed gang, which included Anglos, Mexican Americans, and Navajos. With much difficulty, his wife, Marilyn, and their two children followed the gang in the summer when the children were out of school, staying in a motel near the work. Later, Dickie worked on steel and tie gangs, and his railroad career took him and his family to Nebraska and Kansas.

However, like many of those who labor on the lower rungs of the employment ladder, Dickie lost his job, because

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9 Haber, Maintenance of Way Employment, 9.
transportation difficulties prevented him from consistently getting to work at the appointed hour. At the time, he did not own a car and had a hard time getting to the gangs when he was recalled after seasonal layoffs. Dickie says he notified the railroad when he could not make it, but he was fired for not showing up at work. He was told that there was no record of his notification efforts. Dickie now works for a fencing contractor and tours the United States with the company, putting up fences.

As we were talking, Dickie and Marilyn told me of an incident on the railroad that still haunts Dickie. When he was working for the railroad in Nebraska, he and some of his coworkers saw an Anglo man who had been killed on the tracks while riding his bicycle. The Navajos have a relationship with death that is quite different from that of Anglos and other groups in the United States. According to Kluckhohn and Leighton, “Death and everything connected to it are horrible to The People. . . . The intense and morbid avoidance of everything connected with them rests upon the fear of ghosts. . . . Most of the dead may return as ghosts to plague the living.”

While in Nebraska, the Navajo members of the gang performed an Enemyway ceremony to try to remove the taint they felt was on them because of viewing the dead man. Dickie did not participate in this ceremony. Now, when he is around a number of Anglo people, he gets dizzy, he tells us. For example, when he goes into a restaurant where Anglo men are present, Marilyn tells me, “the smell gets to him,” and he gets sick. To deal with the problem, Marilyn’s and Dickie’s mothers have taken him to a diviner, who was able to visualize the dead man. He prescribed ceremonies for the condition, but Dickie has yet to have them performed. The Christian members of their family pray for him. But Marilyn tells us that she is reluctant to push Dickie any harder to respond to his condition.

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10 Kluckhohn and Leighton, The Navajo, 184.
Marilyn, Dickie, and their family have the kind of religious diversity or pluralism that I see over and over. Dickie was raised in traditional Navajo religion, but Marilyn was raised as a Christian. There are a number of church buildings on the Navajo Nation, including one within shouting distance of their house. However, at the time I met with them there were not enough ministers to staff all the churches. At present there is no active ministry at the church near their home, so occasionally they attend a Nazarene Holiness church nearby. They also attend services at a local Baptist church when a pastor is present there.

Marilyn and Dickie’s oldest daughter is very traditional in her religious practices. Their youngest daughter is a Christian, but her boyfriend’s father is a roadman in the NAC. Finally, their second-youngest daughter is married to a man whose mother is a diviner. As we discuss this polyglot religious matrix, Marilyn laughs when she tells me that the children of this medicine woman go to Christian churches. The boundaries between religions are porous on the rez.

Marilyn’s sister, Patty, lives in Thoreau, New Mexico. Her son Jared was serving in Iraq with the US Army when we talked. Marilyn favors traditional religious practices. She had a hogan built near her house especially for ceremonies. Patty made sure that a Blessingway ceremony was performed for Jared when he left for Iraq and when he returned from military duty. While Jared was in Iraq she acted as a “stand-in” to be sung over while traditional ceremonies were performed for his safe return. After each of these ceremonies, she had to stay “holy” for two to three days. This meant, Marilyn tells me, that she could not cut meat, chop weeds, or shake hands with people. Finally, for Jared’s protection, she had a medicine man perform a ceremony on an arrowhead that she had found. When Jared returned on leave, Marilyn gave the arrowhead to him and he wore it for the remainder of his military assignment. When he finally returned from the war for good, he was alive but had two pieces of shrapnel in his body.
Albuquerque, New Mexico

Joe Mace—Finding a personal military connection

Continuing my interviews, on a cold, January day I met Joe Mace. Jerry was staying with his daughter in Albuquerque, but he was ready to return to the rez. “The city is too fast-lane,” he told me. “It is too congested to live in the city. People wait until the last minute to go places, like to work, so they have to rush.” My meeting with Joe came after one of the biggest snowstorms in New Mexico in recent memory. Joe told me that he knew this storm was coming by looking at the state of the local vegetation. He believes that Navajo people have a unique ability to forecast the weather.

As we talked I was startled to see the number of similarities between Joe and me. We are about the same age, but, most surprisingly, we were both in the US Army at nearly the same time. And, we served at the same training bases—Fort Polk, Louisiana, and Fort Huachuca, Arizona—at the same time, in 1972. Though we cannot recall having met, we were both trained at Fort Huachuca for the same military skill, ground surveillance radar, which taught us to operate primitive radars directed at locating enemy movement. These radars have long since gone out of use.

Like many older Navajo people, Joe had what would be considered a spotty schooling record. He attended several BIA schools, including one at Crownpoint and another at Fort Wingate, both in New Mexico. He finished the eleventh grade and then returned home to tend the family sheep and goats. Joe got married in 1971 in what he described as a “shotgun” marriage. When he and his girlfriend applied for government assistance, an official told them that they needed to be married to get the assistance. So, with Joe’s brother acting as a witness, the couple quickly got married, returned to the office, and were granted the needed aid.
Joe recounted his “mixed” heritage. He has ancestors from Jemez Pueblo, and he has participated in healing dances in the pueblos. His father’s great-grandfather was Hispanic. We get a big laugh when he tells me that “half my brothers look like Mexicans with beards.” As in Tóhajiilee, many Navajos on the eastern part of Navajo lands, closest to the original Spanish settlements, have Hispanic names. He believes that more people on the “big rez,” as the main area of the Navajo Nation is often called, have Navajo names and wonders if it is because they are more often “pure” Navajo.

Joe’s railroad work began with a short stint at the Union Pacific on a steel gang, repairing and replacing the long lengths of steel rail on which the trains ride. After 1979, he worked on and off for the next six or seven years. His brother worked for the railroad, too. For most of his railroad career Joe worked on a tie gang with about fifty other Navajos, repairing and replacing defective railroad ties, the wooden posts that are used to secure the rails to the underlying road bed.\textsuperscript{11} Their work schedule was fourteen days on and seven days off. Most of them were from the big rez. The crew needed a timekeeper to stay on top of the required paperwork, and Joe was chosen since he knew how to keep records and he could speak the best English of anyone on the crew. So, he told me, he served in between the bosses—the “hot shots”—and the Navajo work crew.

Joe remains unhappy about his treatment at the railroad. There were many safety issues that disturbed him. He suggested to his bosses that they should hold safety classes in Navajo before work each day, but his suggestions were ignored. One concern was that he felt that the bunk cars in which they slept were unsafe. The stairs leading into the cars were often rickety and dangerous. Robert Young and David Brugge had observed similar problems many years earlier.

\textsuperscript{11} In some areas, railroad ties are now made of concrete.
Navajo workers suffered greatly from discrimination, Joe felt. “A lot of people were making more money than us,” he told me, but “they did not do as good a job as us. You could always count on the natives. Navajos are willing to work in any weather. They were there. They are so used to being mistreated along the way. They are ‘low class’—this was the kind of attitude they have, but in reality, I think, a lot of them were misrepresented in many ways. They did not get the benefits they were entitled to, even in things like safety shoes.”

Ensuring a ritual connection to the First Man and First Woman, Joe carries a medicine bundle with him at all times, containing various spiritually important items, such as corn pollen and sometimes eagle feathers. Older men he worked with had bundles and did ceremonies, too. The younger men were less likely to do so, however. Joe used his traditional bundles when he worked on the railroad and he had problems on the job. He attended and performed ceremonies at the work site when he felt bad, had a bad dream, or knew his family was worried about him. His family worried because they did not know how he was faring in this dangerous occupation when he was away from home.

Unfortunately, Joe developed a drinking problem and eventually could no longer perform railroad work. He wishes that a counseling program had been offered by the railroad, but there was none. Since leaving the railroad, Joe has learned silversmithing and is an active silversmith today.

I ask Joe about his religious activity. Joe practices traditional religion and knows several healing ceremonies. He learned his craft from his brother, who is a medicine man. His mother’s father was a medicine man, as well. Joe tries to help his children with healing prayers.

Joe can perform the Blessingway ceremony; it teaches him to be aware of his surroundings, to treat people well, and to respect people and their property. It is used for many different reasons, he tells me, such as going away to work or to the military, or having a baby. He does not charge for his services, an unusual
practice, and does not like it that some medicine men charge an “arm and a half.”

Practicing traditional religion is like buying personal insurance, he told me. For example, he tells me that some people find an arrowhead and take it to a Blessingway ceremony, as I had been told Marilyn Sandoval’s sister Patty had done for her son Jared, who was off at war. The arrowhead is placed in the middle of a traditional ceremony, and when the ceremony is over it has “protection.”

When talking about his traditional religion, he says, “This is how we Navajos came about. We need to keep in balance with mother earth and father sky.” He has nothing against the NAC or Catholics or Protestants. Two of his daughters went to Mormon school and he is proud that they hold good jobs now. Joe’s children believe in traditional medicine and ceremonies, he tells me. Worried about the loss of the old ways, Joe tries to get parents to talk with their children in Navajo so they won’t lose their ability to speak the language. He wants them to know about the medicine that can be found on the Navajo Nation. He worries that Anglo medicine can be addicting.

**Holbrook, Arizona**

The Spencers—“My crystal is like the white man’s computer”

The most important stories of the efficacy of religious ceremonies for safety and protection on the job came from my former client Kee Spencer and his wife, Ann. Ann, who lived in California for many years and often translates for me, was born on the Navajo Nation in Greasewood, Arizona. She attended Greasewood Boarding School. She has spent much time away from the rez and is quite skilled in maneuvering in non-Navajo society. Kee was also born on the rez and was raised in Indian Wells, Arizona. He left school after the fourth grade and went to
work for the AT&SF railroad in 1967. Beginning as a laborer, Kee worked his way up to a machine operator, a higher classification for maintenance-of-way workers. Ann and Kee were married in 1997.

Kee is a traditional medicine man as well as a medicine man in the Native American Church. His grandfather was a medicine man who performed the traditional rituals. Kee learned from him and together they have performed the Blessingway ceremony. Kee tells me that he performs this ceremony in order to bring good things in life, such as “your own well being,” or to secure needed objects, such as a car or a house. From a fellow medicine man he learned divining rituals such as crystal gazing and hand trembling. Kee is a talented medicine man and he and Ann are strong believers in the life-changing effects of his work.

Kee is also active in the NAC and does “meetings,” the NAC term for their ceremonies. His brother-in-law is a roadman in the NAC. Unlike some NAC practitioners, Kee can perform several roles in the ceremonies, including fireman, drummer, and cedarman. He mainly serves as a roadman. We talk about peyote, a major constituent of these ceremonies. White people call peyote a hallucinogen or a drug, but, Ann tells me, “we call it medicine.” Kee shows me his governmental certificate that allows him to carry peyote. Ann and Kee get their peyote from Rio Grande City in Texas, a small town on the US border with Mexico. Peyote cannot be harvested legally in this country now, so they must go to the Mexican border for it. The going price is $250 for one thousand peyote buttons.

Kee has had productive experiences performing NAC meetings for railroad workers. Several years ago he held a meeting for a Santa Fe Railroad worker who came to him complaining of harassment on the job and his fear that the railroad hurried people, making them work too fast. The railroad wanted the gang to install two thousand ties each day on a section of track, resulting in serious safety problems. Kee agreed to do a meeting in response to the worker’s concerns.
Kee performed a traditional Goodway ceremony and an NAC peyote meeting. The ceremony involved around twenty-five people at Burnt Corn, Arizona. As it was summer, the meeting took place in a tepee. In winter it would have been done in a hogan, he tells me. The ceremony lasted all night. It was important, Kee told me, that those in the ceremony “think good thoughts.” In the ceremony, the participants are able to “look into the fire and see things.”

Some days after the ceremony the workers came back to Kee and told him that the railroad had changed its production quota for the men. They had reduced it from the requirement to lay two thousand railroad ties a day down to a manageable five hundred ties a day. There is less harassment now and safety is better. Kee says the ceremony is responsible for the improvement. “My prayers were answered,” he tells me.

Kee has great faith in the productiveness of his work and tells me another story. While on a track gang near Kingman, Arizona, he was working deep in a canyon with several machines. A foreman on another gang, a Mexican man, drove up fast to Kee and told him to come with him; he said he needed some help with an injured man. Kee was taken to the man, who was “already gone.” But Kee held the man’s hand and “tried his best.” The man revived, he told me.

Like John Sandoval and Hoskie Pinto, Kee has performed ceremonies to attempt to influence Anglo legal processes. And similar to many Christian practitioners who pray about health matters, he conducts ceremonies for those with health problems, both physical and psychological. He helps those who have been in vehicle accidents or are depressed because they have lost a loved one. He works with those who have problems in their personal relationships, and with those who simply need to reverse a string of bad luck. When he was personally injured on the railroad, Kee performed a ceremony to attempt to secure a proper resolution for his injury case. Having a good Anglo lawyer was not enough, it seems.
Since much of Navajo healing involves a kind of “changing of one’s luck,” I ask Kee and Ann about Navajo use of casinos. Many Anglos I have met employ various strategies to turn things around, from using casino slot machines to wearing various articles of clothing, such as “rally caps” at sporting events, to achieve a desired result. I had heard that many Navajos used casinos in a similar way. While at the time I spoke with Ann and Kee there were no casinos on Navajo land, I had seen that many Navajo people frequented the casinos around them, most of which are run by various Pueblos, such as the Route 66 Casino west of Albuquerque, which is owned by the Acoma Pueblo.

Ann tells me that when people are sick or not feeling well, others will tell them to go to the casino. Maybe they will get better, as success in the casino can bring good luck in other areas. Part of the reason for this, it seems, is the Navajo belief that, as seen earlier in the writings of Kluckhohn and Leighton, internal problems generally come from external sources.\(^{12}\) Ann remembers that when she was a child, she took a trip when her uncle was sick with a serious hand injury, for which he had had surgery. She was in a car with her family, traveling south from Salt Lake City to Las Vegas. They stopped at a casino and the adults went in. Her uncle started winning and he forgot about his hand. With his winnings, the pain left his hand, changing his luck, and his hand healed well. Kee’s aunt recently had a similar experience in a casino. She used a cane, but when she left the casino she walked out without her cane; she did not need it.

But Ann knows the economic problems that casinos pose for many gamblers. So, Ann says, the casino is both good and bad. We all have a big laugh.

\(^{12}\) When I talked with Harry Walters, he spoke about the Navajo attitude toward “evil.” Walters sees a practical reality to evil, in contrast to Christian beliefs of a free-standing evil. Evil very rarely appears, Walter argues, but when it does, it appears with something—it is attached to something. Thus, the question is how to remove the evil from the underlying matter.