



Buffalo Robe

and the

Internet Turtle

A Gifting of a Buffalo Robe
to a Tribal Elder made possible with
donations from the Internet Community.

American Indian Computer Art Project
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Photography and Art by
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Archive Series: Tribal Elders and Spiritual Leaders

Our goal with this series is to create a sense of the life of exceptional tribal elders of the North American Indian. Many native people lead exceptional and valued lives. Little or no effort is made by the modern society to value or to record these lives. The traditional and ancient teachings, understanding and insights of these exceptional people are being lost.

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This is a revised work from the original posting on the WWW. It has been edited and a new article about Gray Antelope (John Cisneros) has been added.

Buffalo Robe and the Internet Turtle

Giftng a Ceremonial Buffalo Robe to a Santa Clara Pueblo Elder: Donations raised from postings to an Internet News Group (alt.native)

Memorial: Gray Antelope, Master of the Mystery

Life Memorial photographs and commentary on a master of pottery and an exceptional spiritual life.

One day in August of 1994 I was very happy to see my old friend Grey Antelope, at his home on the Santa Clara Pueblo just outside Espanola, New Mexico.

I first met Antelope when he was visiting at some ceremonies in New York state (1980s). At that time, we were introduced as I was there for ceremonial presentations also. He asked me later that night to stand up beside him while he gave his ceremonial presentation to an audience of about 3000 people. We have been friends ever since.

I can still seem him so clearly. Antelope is charismatic, I guess that is the right word. Being an elder Native American he seems something more. He has a great open heart, open to all people. He made his living making magnificent black potteries. Hand coiled potteries fired with composted horse manure. Magnificent ancient pots.

He made his life through praying, singing and dancing with people from all over the world. He was the invited guest of many international tours. He was also a great spiritual man. A resolved and unique advocate of the sacred contract, he was a Kiva leader and an international priest for peace.

I speak about him in the past tense. Antelope passed away in 1997. The incident of the buffalo robe was the last time I was to see Grey Antelope.

This story was originally published on the internet in 1995. This is a somewhat revised edition of the original posting.



Here the Buffalo Robe has arrived at Antelope's house. It is a really great brain-tanned robe.

Frankly, there is some part of me reluctant to share much about this man in this great meeting place of people who have not yet met (the Internet). Many of us have observed that it is better to keep our Elders somewhat hidden from the strange and often negative influences of modern people.

Antelope has his heart open in all directions and views almost every encounter with positive feelings. He works vigorously and hard at all sorts of tasks which would tire larger and younger men. He sings continuously old songs from his grandfather and new songs he has composed himself. He has many grandchildren, 3 daughters, and hundreds of friends from all over (everywhere!). He welcomes people from all cultures and races to his charming home.



It had been a number of years since our last visit. I stayed on for about 5 days in this visit and we talked about many things. I was gratified and proud to see that this very good and very traditional Indian man was meeting life in a prosperous manner, in a traditional way.

Antelope is very friendly. He allows his friends from all nations and races to visit him at his home; but he does not allow any questions about the sacred structure of the Kiva Societies or his personal medicine.

This is the type of Elder who best preserves and protects the ancient cultures of tribal people. He reaches and changes people's minds in all quarters. He preserves language, ceremony, ritual, song and art just by being alive and living his daily routine. He is a far cry from the activists and the purposeful indulgence of many native peoples presented to the modern world and exploited in mis-directed films, books and cheap copies of fine art. This is the Grandfather who preserves the Sacred Path for the coming generations.

I showed him at one point my old Buffalo Robe, which I have had for some years. I always travel with it, as it becomes my bed and my spirit companion on long road trips. I always sleep good and dream good inside of it.

Well, Antelope said he would like to get a good Buffalo Robe before the coming ceremonies in January of this coming year. The minute he said that, though I kept silence, I was suddenly determined to ask for donations on the Internet News-group I have been following and posting to for the last several months.

A few days later, as I was home again, I immediately composed a letter asking for donations to get this Buffalo Robe and posted it right away. Immediately I got some very encouraging donations and I knew this was going to work! I was very excited and filled with good feelings. I think it is important that those of us who spend so much time in computer communications and connections work at touching the real world, at touching our real spirits. I felt this would be a good net project.

Right now the tribal communities of this country need to touch and be touched by the outside world in ways that are not typical of how it is usually done.

People affected in positive ways affect those who come into contact with them. It is just the way my Elders have always encouraged me to work.

I had decided for my own reasons that I wanted to deliver the robe by early October. As donations came in, I located someone who prepared for me a very fine, traditionally tanned robe and who agreed to give it to me at a very good price. I wish I could remember his name, and I apologize for that omission. He listened to my story over the telephone, believed me, and was very generous. A good brain-tanned robe can go for several thousand dollars. He gave us a very good discount, stating clearly that he would support the needs of a tribal elder by working with us. Soon the robe was at my house. UPS.



With about half my own money and half the donations from the Internet which had purchased the robe itself, I took off for the drive to the Antelope family lands, 850 miles away.

I arrived on the 7th of October, late that night. The next day we spent a long time in the morning talking about all sorts of things. We finally talked about the robe. Antelope's eyes twinkled and he was very excited. I read him the list of names for all those who had donated and helped get this robe.

Later, at about 4 pm, we both got dressed in our ceremonial clothing and prepared a room in his house for the gifting ceremony. Antelope brought out from his altar area his water bowl. He always advises me to keep a bowl of water. To think of the water when I am dealing with people. He says the water tells us to open our hearts in four directions.....



As Antelope came into the room, we began the ceremony with Sweet Grass and singing. He stretched out on the floor and after some preliminary formalities of the ritual, I brought in the Buffalo Robe and covered him with it. We both then sang together for about one hour. At the conclusion I asked him to accept this robe on behalf of those who worked it out. He then gifted me with a fine pendleton blanket and some other things.

Afterwards, we went to the Umbudo area along the Rio Grande River and ate a fine meal and later threw corn and tobacco into the river with our songs.

That night we sat up quite late talking about Buffalo Robes, Sacred Pipes and our experiences with modern people from all over.

The next day, we had a great Buffalo Stew for breakfast. What a treat. I watched later as his oldest daughter brought a group of Pots to be fired at the family fire pit.

By 1 pm I was on my way back across the highway which would bring me home. Antelope, though he has never seen a computer, fully understands its value as a communications tool. He thought this was a very significant development, this project. He believes something more will come of it all. I have to admit, I anticipate more interesting developments in the adventures of AICAP on the Internet as time goes on.

Supporting our Elders has always been a priority of my life and projects.

Antelope was supported effectively, not because he was poor and could not get a robe on his own, but precisely because he is prosperous and solid in his devotion to a very traditional tribal life.

As for me, I came home enriched and filled with appreciation for the great mystery which makes us

all take small chances and learn more today than we knew yesterday.

It is a good feeling. I am not embarrassed by it. I feel fortunate.





Black potteries after removing from the Fire. By Antelope's daughter, fired that day of the Buffalo Robe.

I was to see Antelope only one more time, about a year after the gifting Antelope passed away. I was surprised and I feel the loss of this good friend keenly even after these years have passed.

When I learned that he had passed over I came away with the parts that had been the Buffalo Robe. I did not mention in the original story that I had painted the robe, inside of it. I painted some sacred symbols and also a spirit inside that robe representing Antelope's son. His son died when very young. He was so cute and a fine Indian boy. That night of the ceremony we talked about his boy and made a song for him during the ceremony.

These days I make songs to remember this man of the Mystery Life. Of those potteries he gifted me, I still have most of them. I sold one, gave 5 away and the rest are here with me at my home. How dramatic and powerful they look all together. Antelope really touched your life if you knew him. I knew him well.

He thought the Internet could be good for Indian People.

Honoring our Elders

Part Two:

Grey Antelope:
Master of the Mystery Life

Turtle Heart
Ojibway Artist



Gray Antelope

**Santa Clara Pueblo
Artist, Kiva Leader, Teacher**

1933 - 1996



Black on Black

An ancient pottery form.

No wheels. No tools. Fingers and songs.

Fingers such as these are a treasure
attached

in this case

to a rare spirit, a joyful muse of an elder
a teacher

a great open heart

Mr John Cisneros

the same man is named Gray Antelope

a master of the mystery life

Black on Black

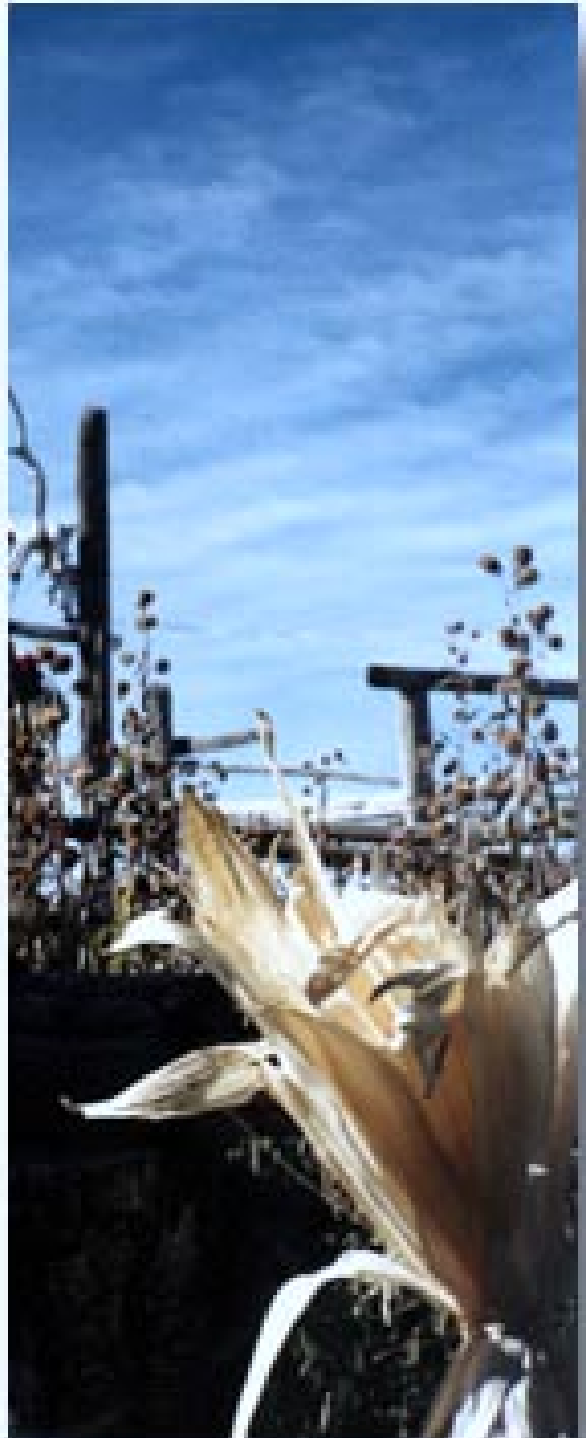
the Earth has taken him back.....

Corn

There are people on the
earth
who honor the sacred
nature of the earth

Corn

like a wand to bless a good
life





Gray Antelope
was
of all things
a man of the Corn
a man of the Flowing Waters



Standing with the old ones

winking at
the line of fools
singing every day
he remembers where he has been
where he is going
to an old place
who must follow must go there too.....

(a pueblo ritual)

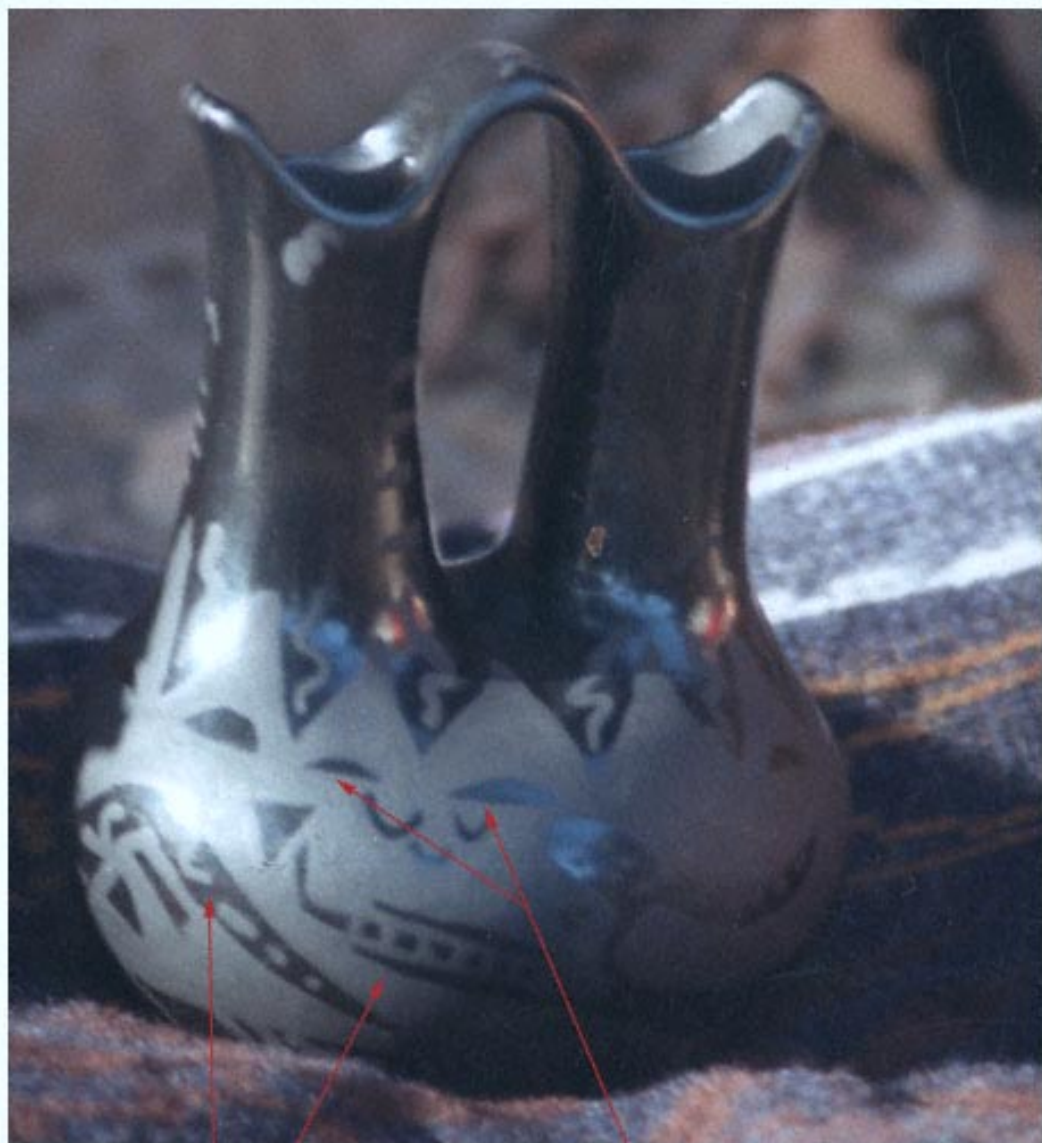
He was younger
raw potteries
four-legged prayers
not yet taken into the black fire
a young Santa Clara Pueblo Man

following the way of pots
the way of the warm earth



More raw potteries
not yet ready to go
into the mystery fire
not yet alive in the mystery life
turtles, owls, beavers, bowls, bears
sometimes an otter
a season's journey of work
one whole phase of the mystery life
he was prosperous
people from all over
the everywhere
found him
sometimes he found them





Heart Serpent

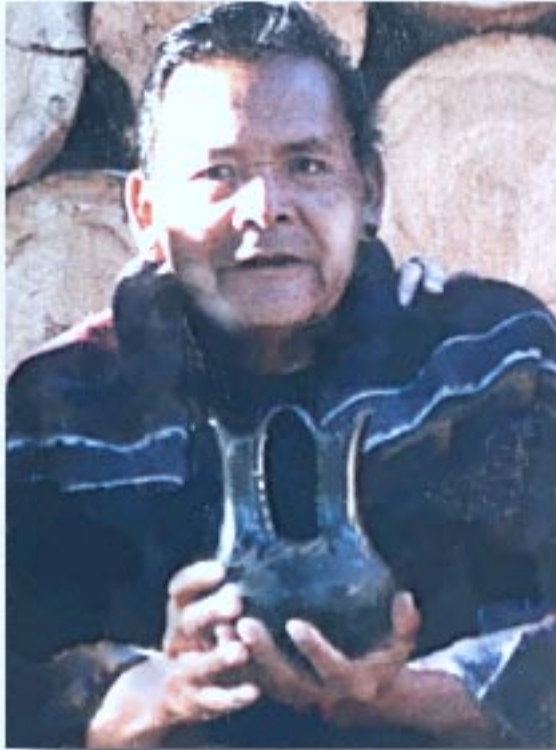
The soul of who Antelope was combined with the potteries that he shared with this world. Heart Serpent is a very sacred symbol. Men like Antelope understood its meaning at a very sophisticated level....this image is the sacred act of an ancient clan....an encyclopedia of learning and understanding is contained within the hands which created this art.

Hills of Clay

These images are of the hills where Antelope gathered his clays. At each place prayers and offerings. This style of pottery contains many teachings and ideas. These are not "abstract" symbols.

"Wedding or Marriage"

Ola. Black Pottery by Gray Antelope.



Antelope and his Wedding Ola
you saw it in the last picture
a well-known form
but not easy to make
no tools, no pottery wheels. The clay
is gathered by hand
by this man's hands

Family life
the center of a circle of life
standing on the earth
dressed for a sacred moment
touched and wondering
a good day to remember everything



Grayscale
spirits of the black fire
alive
mountain air feast
black magic dust
and old hard stone
Black Potteries
by Gray Antelope



Working the mystery life
drawing in the real news
hardly noticed
soon they will
go into the fire
at the dining room table
they are getting dressed up
for the awakening

Prayers with the Water
in the morning
Prayers with the
gathering
of red dust
prayers for the horses
prayers for the old truck
prayers here at the
beginning
of the mystery fire
where the pots will
be born
and given names
and homes





The Door

Antelope once took me
by the hand.

He took me to every
door of his house.

I think there were
6 of them.

He told me
“my brother, all the
doors of my house are
open to you”.....



The day I met him
the first time
he was doing a presentation
to about 3000 people
in NY State.

He asked me stand
up there with him
beside him
as he did what he did

and I did

I took off my shirt
and shoes
and stood there
it was a good day.

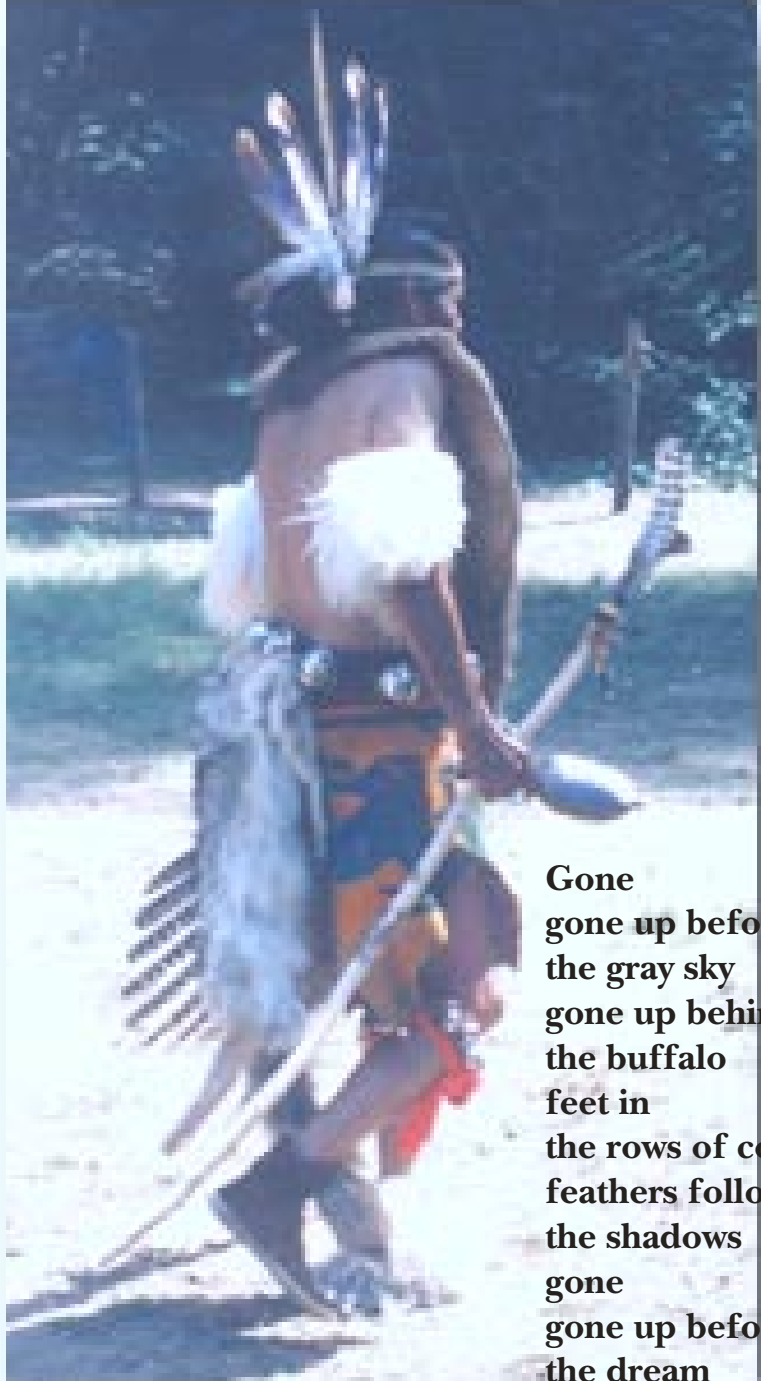


Bless the Internet

This Buffalo was purchased by donations I asked for in a newsgroup on the Internet. *Buffalo Robe and the Internet Turtle*. He had never seen a computer, but he liked what I told him about the Internet. He understand “**communication**”. He thought the Internet could be good for Indian People. He donated \$4,000.00 of his pottery to the project. He had a lot to do with how the www.aicap.org project came into being.

Antelope loved his dad
they were very close
two Indian Elders
now sailing the mystery wave
inside the mystery life
both gone up with the wind now
along the other path
that lay
within yet without





**Gone
gone up before
the gray sky
gone up behind
the buffalo
feet in
the rows of corn
feathers follow
the shadows
gone
gone up before
the dream
gone**



In a life
of a human being
here is an ancient one
male child of his male ancestors
male child of his female ancestors
planted like old corn
in black pottery
scattered like rose petals
a heart made of
some old, old stuff

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