

NATIVE AMERICAN STORIES

by Vera Blaine

A long time ago, the stories by Native Americans were spoken stories that have been retold and handed down from generation to generation. Often, the stories were messages about nature, the moon and the heavens. They varied from those told by the Inuit of Alaska or the Seminole Indians of Florida and have survived. They are told by a tribe member known as the story teller. The most important and common themes are those that explain how life began on earth and how the tribal nation was created.

My only personal experience of hearing an ancient story came several years ago on one of my visits to Mesa Verde and the cliff dwellings there. Mesa Verde is a National Monument located in southwest Colorado near the border of New Mexico with the closest city, Cortez. The story was not told by a Native American Story Teller, but by a Forest Ranger as we toured the ancient dwellings of the Anasazi Indians who lived there during the twelfth century.

The story, as I remember it, was related to their religious belief of their own creation. They believed their people had originated from an underground world, below the earth. Their religious ceremonies were held in a circular building known as a kiva, and only the men of the tribe would attend. In the floor of the kiva there was a medium size hole that served as a fire pit. A smaller hole was in alignment with the firepit, and this smaller hole had a significant meaning in their belief of their creation. In the religious ceremony, whenever a baby was born they would uncover this small hole to allow the spirit of the newborn to be released from its underworld origin. Whenever there was a death in their tribe, they reversed the ceremony. The spirit of the deceased person was returned to the underworld origin of their people.

There are no written records of this and all the other stories of those ancient times, but they have survived by being retold by the native story tellers.