

Words for Trudy

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The image of Trudy's face the first time I saw her is forever stuck in my mind. It must have been about 1970. It was at Florida State University. It was either in connection with Trudy being one of the founding members of the American Indian Fellowship, for which I was faculty advisor, or in connection with the one course Trudy took from me, "Contemporary American Indians," which was offered in the "free university" curriculum set up by students but sanctioned by the university administration. Memory on such mundane matters does fade. But Trudy's young face is clear. For some reason her head is cocked at a slight angle, as if looking up at me from off to my side. There is that smile, almost angelic while at the same time a little impish. But most of all it is her eyes. They are shining so bright. The brightest I had ever seen. From within Trudy seemed to project joy and a boundless pleasure in the world around her and that yet to be discovered.

She tells me about her "Navajo family," her plans for the summer, and for her career in art. I am disappointed that I cannot win her for anthropology. The next year she is off to the Walker Art Institute. She keeps in touch with me through her "art years." The arrival of an envelope addressed in Trudy's unmistakably distinctive artist's hand was always a delight. Sometimes she sent me hand-painted Christmas cards. There is a lull.

Then she does turn to anthropology in Arizona. Contacts with Trudy pick up again. Other Florida State University transplants to Arizona anthropology connect with Trudy. She sends me photographs of herself and husband Keith on their adventures. She sends me some of her work—writings, publications, her art. A framed, signed copy of "Navajo Star Gazer" (1985) sent as a present for my second marriage (there have been three) still hangs on my wall. She makes me very proud as her own star rises in the academic firmament.

We begin to see each other at annual meetings of the American Anthropological Association. At one of those, Trudy gives a presentation in which she make passing mention of how one Navajo singer politely declined to participate in her research documenting the cosmological knowledge imbedded in sand paintings by explaining that "if

something has to be written down to save it, it is not worth saving since the life has already gone out of it." What a powerful insight so gently delivered by Trudy. For years afterwards I use that line, especially with some of my historian colleagues and historic preservationist acquaintances in the National Park Service, to point up how the whole historic preservation enterprise itself is in the grips of deep cultural bias despite vigorous self-conscious efforts to become more "diverse" and "multicultural." I learned from Trudy.

As the years passed our correspondence and AAA annual meeting get-togethers became more frequent. At one of those, in Chicago, in 2003, Trudy begins to tell me about her recent contact with the Apache Prisoners of War Descendants. The idea for her book *Chiricahua Apache Enduring Power: Naiche's Puberty Ceremony Paintings* is born. In the two years to follow Trudy suffers the death of her husband and serious health problems of her own. Yet she perseveres and produces a manuscript for the University of Alabama Press series which I then edited. In the coming months we are in frequent communication about the manuscript. She is always up-beat and cheerful, even as she described with detached objectivity her own life's pains. She eventually incorporates those into her book.

The book is published in 2006--from conception to publication in less than three years! Although many others have written about the imprisonment of Geronimo's people, Trudy literally retraces their Odyssey and brings her unique anthropological sensitivities to the story for extraordinarily fresh insights on past history that resonates with the living present. The reviewer of Trudy's book for *American Anthropologist* (Vol. 110, pp. 108-9), John Welch, notes that many others had written on the subject but says, "What's new is Trudy Griffin-Pierce."

In 2008 the book wins the James Mooney Award from the Southern Anthropological Society. Then, shortly after New Year's Day 2009, I received that dreadful personal e-mail from John Olsen informing me that Trudy had died. Somehow, I felt a weird sense of the closing of a circle of kin-connected grief. John was so succinct but gentle in his sad message. I had met John and had known John's father, Stan, as a departmental colleague at Florida State University during those first few years that I was on the faculty and when I had also met Trudy Griffin.

In March 2009, at the annual meeting of the Southern Anthropological Society there is a special event to celebrate the series in which

Trudy's Chiricahua book was published. I open the formalities by announcing Trudy's passing and expressing the loss I feel. Spontaneously, another series author, one who had never known Trudy, raises her glass and solemnly but warmly says, "Here's to Trudy." For me, Trudy's presence was palpable in the room at that moment. Even so, my surest memory of Trudy is that mental image of her confident, open face when I first met her in 1970. Those bright eyes and enthusiasm for her work, for her life, and for whatever-comes-next were still there when we met for lunch in November 2008 during the annual meeting of the American Anthropological Association in San Francisco. That was the last time I saw Trudy.

From now on I will miss Trudy's Christmas cards, her letters, her e-mails, her company at anthropology conventions, but that first image of her from so long ago will live in my mind until I am no more.