

Along the Robeson Trail

By Dr. Stan Knick, Director-UNCP Native American Resource Center

After last week's sighting of the Trickster in Pembroke, several people have wondered who exactly this Trickster was. Such questions have prompted me to take another look at an old segment (from nearly a decade ago) about the Trickster.

One of the most delightful parts of traditional Native American culture which endures today is the importance of humor. Although many non-Indian people see Native Americans as stereotyped, stoical personalities who never smile, this is clearly a misunderstanding. Almost every gathering of Native Americans, unless there is a specific reason for being serious, is frequently punctuated by laughter. This is particularly true at powwows, cultural events and reunions, but even in chance meetings of friends humor plays a vital role in whatever happens.

I believe that the importance of humor in Native American culture today corresponds to one specific element of the old way, the traditional way, of Indian culture. Of course there may well be other reasons, such as "making-the-best-of-a-bad-situation" by using humor to relieve the tensions of an oppressive history (since European contact); or just the fact of humor for its own sake, just for the fun of it. But I think one of the main roots of Native American humor today is a character who appears again and again in many Indian myths and legends — the Trickster.

The Trickster is a character who figures very prominently in many traditional Native American cultures. In some myths and legends he is Rabbit, in others he is Raven, in others he is Blue Jay, while in others he is Coyote. But wherever he appears, from the Northwest Coast to the Southeast, from the forests of Canada to the Great

Plains and the Southwest, from the streets of Los Angeles to the streets of Pembroke, the Trickster brings humor to Native American culture. He is what some might today call "a mess."

Sometimes the Trickster causes others to appear funny. He makes people and animals do things they would not ordinarily do, by tricking them, with the result being that they end up looking ridiculous.

A good example of this is the Huron legend of how the trickster fooled a "bad-medicine-woman." She was envious of Trickster's long beautiful hair, and asked how he got his hair to be so long and look so fine. He told her that all she had to do was to find a bent-over tree, climb up in the tree, tie her hair to the tree, and jump down. Of course when she tried this, her hair stayed up in the tree, and Trickster got a good laugh out of it.

But just as often it is Trickster himself who gets fooled. Here is one version of a Ute legend which shows how Trickster (in this version he is a Coyote) can get tricked himself:

One day Coyote was walking along feeling hungry. He saw Spider in a tree, and decided to eat him for supper. Spider said: "What do you think you're doing?" Coyote replied that he intended to eat Spider.

But Spider was quick, and told Coyote that he had overheard some people talking about Coyote, plotting to kill him. Spider promised that if Coyote would let him go for a while, he would sneak over to those people and find out what their plan was, and then come back and tell Coyote all about it. Coyote agreed to let Spider go for a while, but of course Spider didn't return.

So, Coyote walked farther and

soon found another Spider, which he resolved to eat. Spider said: "Wait a minute, and I'll tell you something very important and good. Why do you think I am sitting in this tree?" But Coyote didn't know. "I hold onto this tree, and every once in a while I close my eyes, and I can see everything in the world. You see, this tree is the Great Chief of all the world, and that's why Spiders always like trees." This amazed Coyote. Spider went on: "Don't you want to try it? You could see everything!"

Coyote agreed that he did, indeed, want to be able to see everything in the world, so he did as Spider told him. He grabbed the tree and held on, and closed his eyes. While his eyes were closed, Spider escaped. Coyote never saw anything. The trick was on the Trickster.

This and the hundreds of other Trickster stories show us several things. Of course they are humorous and entertaining, but they also usually teach us a lesson, often about how to behave or how not to behave. Some of the Trickster stories also tell us of particular tribal origins, or important historical things about the tribe which we need to know.

Thus Trickster is both a kind of hero as well as something of a clown. This rich and widespread tradition of humor as a way to communicate, to teach and to entertain continues to be seen in Native American communities today.

For more information about the Trickster and his tribal and international adventures, visit the Native American Resource Center in historic Old Main Building, on the campus of The University of North Carolina at Pembroke (our Internet address is www.uncp.edu/nativemuseum).

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**Source: National Highway Traffic Safety Administration, 1999. **Source: National Highway Traffic Safety Administration, 1999.



In Loving Memory of Mr. Redmond B. Jacobs Jr.

Born April 28, 1921 Died November 24, 2000

Mr. Redmond B. Jacobs was the Husband of Eva R. Jacobs; father of Ronnie D. Jacobs; grandfather of Justin M. and Amanda B. Jacobs and the great-grandfather of Ava L. Jacobs.

Mr. Jacobs' wife recently gave the following Eulogy at the burial of the urn holding his ashes. His ashes were buried in the grave of his mother, Mrs. Ameret Strickland Jacobs at Harpers Ferry Baptist Church Cemetery.

"First of all I want to thank all of you who came to say good-bye to my brother, uncle or friend who left this life last November. We had tabled about this event in advance. He wanted to be cremated and his urn buried in his mother's grave. Still, he agreed with me that I keep the urn for a while at our house til I felt it was time to say my second good-bye. It is now nine months later and I have decided to return to my Native land Austria to ease my loneliness. There I have family and friends. They are mostly retired, having the same kind of humor and the same aches and pains. They told me to come home. So, with mixed emotions, I date to take this next step.

"As you have noticed, there is this new stone added to this grave. It gives our dear R.B.'s date of birth and his date of death on it and then it adds a strange dedication: 'Auf Wiedersehn.' It means 'Till we meet again.' Now why didn't I say this in the first place? Because I wanted for people who visit this graveyard in the future to stop and wonder who was this man? How come he has a German good bye on his stone? It may remind them that beyond war there is love, forgiving and forgetting, reaching out across the ocean as children of one God.

"In 1938 my homeland Austria was swallowed up by Germany, the second World War broke out in 1939. The United States joined in December 1941. By the end of '42 the tide started turning. My city, Salzburg, was a red Cross declared city, a so-called 'Protected' city. Nevertheless, on October 16, 1944 American bombing came, destroyed our Cathedral, and water reservoir, together with public houses. On November 17 they bombed again. This time my aunt's house was destroyed. She was buried alive with her four children, her mother in law, and neighbors. Her nine year old son and her mother in law were killed, together with others. Four weeks later my aunt had another baby. The American bombing came more and more frequently. Later on those deep flying hunter planes came and made a sport out of shooting at women and children who were running for the shelters... You may be wondering: why is she telling us this on this occasion? She must have hated us! On May 5th, the Americans took over our city, without resistance and on May 8th the war was over. I remember I was lying in bed been a huge racket started outside. I feared the artillery had come back to fight. I pulled my knees up to my chin so if our house were hit, I would go in one piece. Next day I found out that the Americans had celebrated with huge fireworks and that I had missed a great show.

"Peace broke out and heaven rejoiced. We had the most beautiful spring and summer. With not much to fear anymore former "enemies" became curious about each other. Young, full of expectations about life, eventually falling in love.

"I never expected to find the man I would share 53 years of married life during those days. He was Private First Class R/B. Jacobs Jr., Company B, 242 Infantry Regiment, Rainbow Division, which had joined General Patton's troops in the battles for the Rhineland and Bavaria til the war ended. To me he was "Jakie." I met him in July 1945. It was a tender courtship and when he left Austria in November '45, he promised he would come back for a few weeks later he had saved up enough to send for me the airplane ticket, plus proof of a \$500 bond deposit in case I may change my mind and wanted to go back home.

"I immediately went to the American Red Cross office stationed in Salzburg to apply for a Visa so I could go and use my airline ticket for the trip to Chicago. A few days after that a C.I.C. officer and a civilian interpreter came to our house to check out my reputation from my neighbors. Then they interviewed me in my room, asking all kinds of embarrassing questions. Like had I ever been pregnant, what was my occupation, what was my parents' jobs and so on. Then they say R.B.'s picture on my night table and really grilled me. Where was he from? If he was an Indian, did I realize what I was in for? I would have to give up my white life-style and learn to live Indian style on a reservation. I would be poor, poor, poor. I told them they could not frighten me, I truly loved my man and would follow him to the ends of the earth, if need be. They finally shook their heads and told me I was beyond help, wished me luck and left.

"In September 1947, I arrived in Chicago with two suitcases and an American quarter in my pocket. We were married two weeks later and I have never regretted coming to him. As happy as we were, my parents were worried about the big step I was to make. I still have the letter my mother who was a stern disciplinarian gave me to give to my future husband. I reads as follows:

"Dear Jakie! Today is the darkest day of our lives as we have to let go of our younger daughter. It comforts us some what to know it will be the best day in your life when she arrives in your land with solid trust in your and full of hope to make a good home for you and a family. We all wish you the best and much luck and God's blessing. Good health to both of you. Our daughter was raised to be a diligent, decent and honest human being and will be by your side to share whatever fate may bring. Never doubt her honesty. Be gentle with her when she should get homesick. This she may not be able to avoid, even if life for the money is pretty rough at home. But she never in her life was away from home and thus she may get homesick at times. We hope to get through our tough times and remain healthy so it will be a beautiful day when you will come for a visit. As she lands on your shores, we send our heartiest greetings with this letter and wish again the best of luck and God's blessing in all your endeavors. Signed your in-laws in Salzburg."

"Well, our marriage was a permanent success although our interests were miles apart, we respected each other's individuality. There was no meanness between us. As we repeatedly visited my folks, everyone saw that I had fond my happiness at the other side of the ocean.

"I feel that my man is dying in three stages. The first was with is last breath when I stroked his hair, talked to him quietly and kissed him good bye as his life faded away like the flame of a doused candle. This here today is the second step with his ashes being given back into his beloved mother's lap. The third and hardest step I will take when I turn the key for the last time in our home of 41 years where we were so happy, where he put his heart and soul into to make it a real home.

"Although I will be many miles away, "Auf Wiedersehn" on his gravestone shall be a reminded that there is a "rainbow bridge" to connect us forever from Continent to Continent.

"Thank you for listening."

Eva R. Jacobs

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Pembroke First Baptist Church

- Birthdays
- Sarah Bell 9-3
 - Lambert Brewington 9-5
 - Morgan Chavis 9-7
 - Ms. Marquerite Holmes 9-7
 - Chis K. Kendall 9-13
 - Sarah Maynor 9-14
 - Allie Oxendine 9-14
 - Joey Oxendine 9-14
 - Tara Lowery 9-14
 - Jessica Huggins 9-16
 - George Anthony 9-20
 - Courtney Anthony 9-21
 - Larry Brooks 9-22
 - D. J. Lowery 9-25
 - Mark Scott 9-27
 - Nicholas Maynor 9-28
- Please also remember our sick and Elderly:
- Ms. Tammer Graham - Just turned 94 (8-18)
 - Ms. Stella Jacobs
 - Ms. Esther Lindsey
 - Ms. Marguerite Holmes - Just turned 96 (9-7)
 - Ms. Bonnie Maynor
 - Ms. Libby Beasley

Saddletree Church of God to present Gospel Music Explosion

The Young at Heart of the Saddletree Church of God are planning a Gospel Music Explosion on Friday, October 5, 2001 at 7:30 P.M.. The featured singers will include the Saddletree Church of God Mass Choir; the Sycamore Singers; the Locklear Brothers and windy; the Tylers; and Rev. and Mrs. Terry Oxendine. The pastor, the Rev. Dr. Millard Maynard and the congregation extend a cordial invitation to the public to attend.

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