

FOREWORD

In the early 1970s, my father received a parcel of land near the high desert community of Jacumba, California where the peninsular mountain range falls over 4,000 feet to the Colorado desert floor. At that time, recreational vehicles (RVs) were becoming very popular, so my dad set to work on converting the creosote, catclaw acacia and invasive tamarisk sand flats into a paradise of honey mesquite, palo verde, indigo bush, oaks, pines and cacti among the dramatic granite boulder outcroppings. My father and a Tipai work crew set about to construct the buildings, tennis courts, swimming pools and over 200 level concrete RV spaces. My mother worked with another crew on the landscaping. For my brothers and I, this was our first paid employment during the two summers and most weekends. I remember working very diligently although we could not really hold our own against the grown Tipai men.

We had plenty of time to explore the surrounding land and became preoccupied with the rock “caves” and tangled chambers, polished prayer sticks and old mine tunnels, mountains of flaked lithics and wind polished granite, potsherds and a variety of prehistoric tools. We also found paintings hidden among the rocks. My dad’s foreman, a Tipai man named Joe Young, would often come with us during his time off to give some meaning to our discoveries. We had no idea that the area was being researched by Ken Hedges, Ron May, Bob Begole, Daniel McCarthy and Steve Shackley at that time. It would be a few decades before I discovered their work. Needless to say, the Tipai explanations often simultaneously bridged the practical and the spiritual or ethereal for any given object. For example, a rock might be a tool, but it also had a “living being” or essence within it. It was the same with all living things such as a deer or an agave plant; they had their physical body and a “spirit or soul.” The Tipai reality believed in the unity of all things and essentially, everything had a living essence, not just human beings, and was to be treated with respect, a viewpoint known as animism. My father appreciated and admired their perspective having had exposure to Asian philosophy from which similarities could be drawn. He would regularly try to get me to “slow down” and teach me the immensity of little things and the depth behind appearances. My dad was also one of the most honest men I ever knew and he made sure the workers had their needs met and that they always got paid on time. During the course of the project some very close bonds of friendship were made. This was long before the Tipai had casinos or other sources of steady income and they worked very hard to show their appreciation for the opportunity of employment. My father told me that nothing was ever taken from the job site and that the crew always demonstrated the highest sense of what was ethical. To them such characteristics were part of what we would call “karma.”

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Each afternoon, after the work was done for the day, a group of us would walk the job sites to check the progress and make note of materials we needed for the next day from El Centro, Mexicali or San Diego. We would often see deer or coyotes in those days. Once in a while we came across an ill-tempered diamondback or a bright green Mojave rattlesnake or even one of “old man McCain’s” oversized bulls. The diamondbacks would be killed, skinned and eaten. We started bringing in king snakes to control the rattlesnakes for future guests and never had an accident. Scorpions and centipedes were other guests that had to be destroyed. This was the first time I got stung by a scorpion—they are almost impossible to see. In late summer we would regularly spot migrating male tarantulas in search of a mate.

One summer evening, my dad took me across a swale and up a rise that was more like a sand dune. When we reached the top, he stopped and we silently took in the view below.

Then he said to me, “Do you know why I think there is a God?”

I shook my head back and forth. I remember feeling uncomfortable or embarrassed as this subject was way over my head and I felt foolish. Like many teenaged children, my mother dragged us to church, but I had no idea of what spirituality was or how to apply it to daily living. If possible, I understood even less of how spirituality might relate to the wilderness in which we were now living. I had no idea what spiritual growth was, how to obtain it or why I would even want to. On the other hand, my dad had been essentially living on the land for than a year with a group of Tipai—what had he learned?

“Why don’t you dig a hole in the sand at your feet?” my dad told me.

So I did as I was told and scooped out about a foot of bare, hot sand and came across a layer of dusty, but very white shells similar to common sea shells. I dug a few more holes several feet apart and ended up with the same results. The nearest ocean was 80 miles away and 4,000 feet or more below us. At that time, I did not know about the freshwater Lake Cahuilla, but the Salton Sea was around 30 miles away to the east and a similar vertical distance below. If the shells had been traded and buried, how did they end up in a layer over such a large area? There was no rational explanation.

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“Do you think that this is a miracle that God did?” I said, not knowing what else to say.

He replied, “All I can say is that man did not do this, so to me it is spiritual.”

For a brief moment, I felt some kind of presence and peace, maybe a glimpse of the spiritual world? Whatever it was, this was my introduction to the relationship of the spiritual repose in the desert wilderness. My father would live for another 25 years, but his two years in the desert changed him. I guess I would say his interaction with the Tipai and certain aspects of the desert made him receptive to a quiet spiritual conversion of some sort. He did not join a monastery or start wearing an orange robe or anything like that; he just became more at peace with himself, practically unshakable in the face of adversity and seemed to have a new clarity regarding the direction of his life and his relationship with others. He seemed to have become infinitely kind no matter what the situation. Before that time he had episodes where he really struggled to the point of involving himself in episodic, violent and felonious behavior. People around him were going to prison and he was probably involved as well. My brothers and I had what you might call a “spiritual exposure.” A seed was planted. While I never forgot the experience of that evening, I got diverted into a generation of education and career building. I was successfully task and goal oriented for the next 25 years, although nearly spiritually dead or asleep. It wasn’t intentional, it is just a common story of modern civilization to pursue what is tangible and material, leaving the rest for another day or ignoring it all together.

So I never saw the “train coming down the tracks” bringing with it the cry of spiritual necessity that most of

us are going to face at some point. Like they say, it comes like a “thief in the night.” For many people, this is a beginning of a new way of life. For others, it can mean the end to a struggling survival and death. For me it meant accepting my own mortality peaceably.

Civilization is a wonderful man-made world that is designed to insulate us and protect us from having to deal directly with many of the extraordinary forces of nature. Think of the tremendous power that would bring those shells to the mountains or that would cause the oceans to fall and to rise hundreds of feet, the inexplicable forces of the Grand Canyon that would cut through three billion years of basaltic rock, crawling glaciers that are miles thick and hundreds of miles long, of darkness and the renewal of sunrise the next morning, or the day to day dependence on the miracle called water. Through science and technology we have attenuated the terror and the mysticism surrounding such unknowns and variabilities of nature. Yet, these synthetic explanations of the world are luxuries that have only been with us for a few centuries.

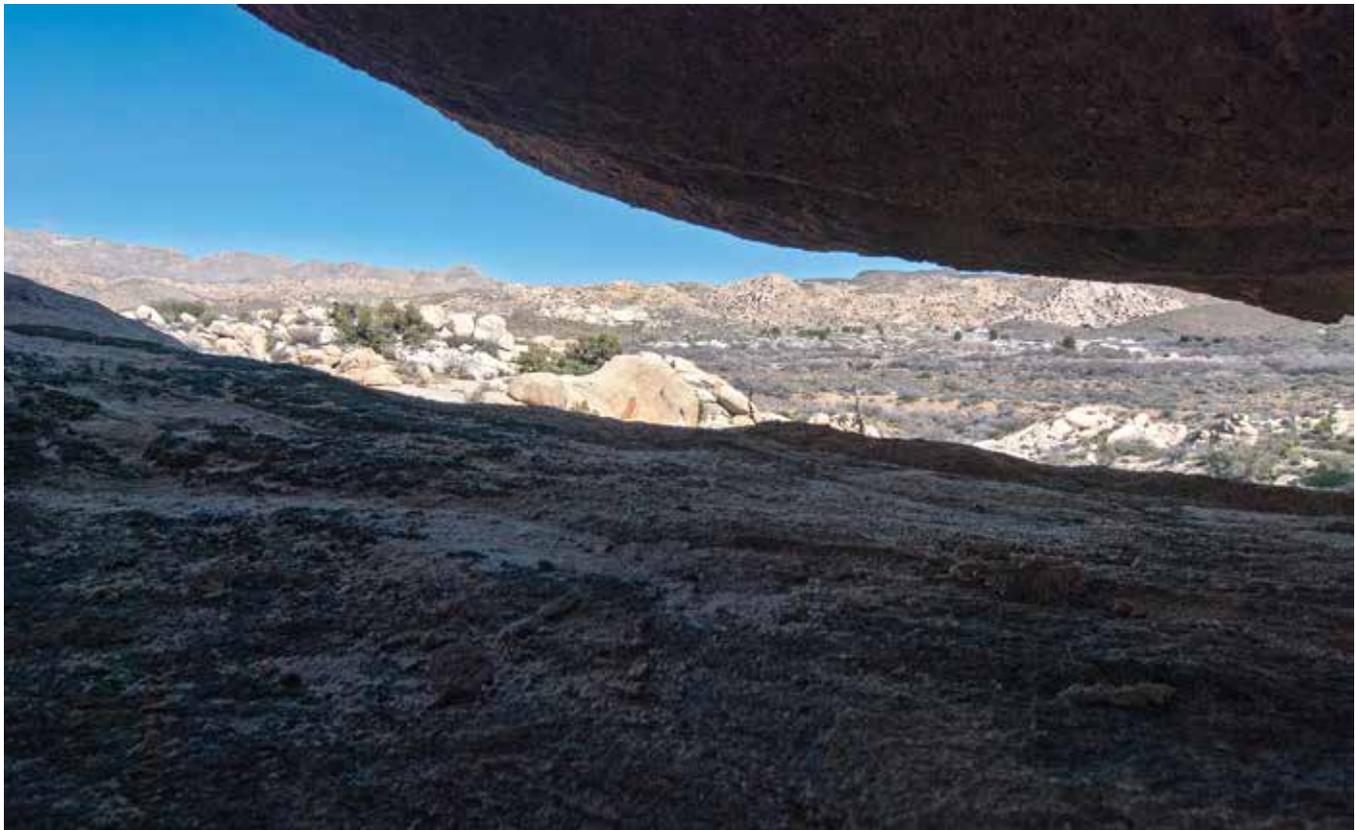
Not long ago in pre-contact (European) times, surviving each day may have been thought to be dependent upon understanding or influencing these unknown forces or communicating with the unknown world of what we call the spiritual or the natural. When you consider the intent or purpose, the creativity and effort to create a single petroglyph or pictograph and multiply that by tens of thousands or hundreds of thousands of images created by Native Americans, clearly it was significant to the spiritual communicators or shaman of the Tipai or Kumeyaay and other Native Americans. If their goal was to work in harmony with nature’s forces for the success and thriving of their own society, then they were extraordinarily successful for close to 15,000 years by interacting with both the physical and the spiritual aspects unifying our world.

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An abundance of evidence has been presented that the European conquerors of California misinterpreted the “Garden of Eden” or the pristine conditions which they encountered on their initial contact and exploration of the western coast (Anderson 2005). What appeared to be an untouched “Gauguin-like paradise” inhabited by a simple native people was actually a man-created, complex ecological system based on an intimate knowledge of nature.

According to Anderson: “Although native ways of using and tending the earth were diverse, the people were nonetheless unified by a fundamental land use ethic; one must interact respectfully with nature and coexist with all life-forms. This ethic transcended cultural and political boundaries and enabled sustained relationships between human societies and California’s environments over millennia. The spiritual dimension of this ethic is a cosmology that casts humans as part of the natural system, closely related to all life-forms. In this view, all non-human creatures are “kin” or “relative,” nature is the embodiment of the human community, and all of nature’s denizens and elements—the plants, the animals, the rocks and the water—are people. As “people,” plants and animals possessed intelligence, which meant that they could serve in the role of teachers and help humans in countless ways—relaying messages, forecasting the weather, teaching what is good to eat and what will cure an ailment.” (Anderson 2005:57)

Our “Western European/American” civilization’s 500 year old conquest of the Americas is currently in peril as we come face-to-face with terminal changes and extinctions that are probably too late to intercept.



Jacumba Recreational Vehicle park at the foot of Santa Claus Mountain as it appears in 2016 looking east. Construction and landscaping by Don Liponi, Sr. and Dorothy Liponi, Joseph Young, Tipai Forman and Tipai work crews. Initial construction occurred in 1971.

Despite our enormous technological advantages over the Native Americans, some would say we lived under the delusion that we could dominate and control Nature, so we could safely ignore seeking harmony with other living beings, especially Native Americans. While we will never know for sure, but had we made the effort to learn from these people and to live alongside them, our current perilous situation may have been avoided.

The purpose of this book is to document and share some of the spiritual communications of the Kumeyaay and Tipai Native Americans portrayed in their pictographs and petroglyphs. We are fortunate that these paintings survived the cultural genocide of the Kumeyaay way of life. This art reflects a state of intimate, natural resourcefulness and respect that mankind rarely achieves. Some expressions are seemingly simple and others are quite elaborate. Nearly all of them have not been previously published and most have not been observed even by professionals who specialize in this field. A good portion are no longer visible with ordinary vision or digital photography. They are rapidly disappearing, mostly from natural causes. Others may not have been seen in hundreds of years. I welcome you to walk through prehistory and ancient history with the Tipai shaman and artists who created a remarkable culture in which they and their habitat thrived harmoniously.

References Cited

Anderson, Kat M.
2005 *Tending the Wild*. University of California Press, Berkeley, California.