

Arizona Republic, The (Phoenix, AZ)

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January 17, 1999

HOPI WEDDING TRADITIONS SURVIVE ONE MORE
GENERATION MODERN COUPLE FOLLOWS OLD TRAIL

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Edition: Final Chaser
Section: Front
Page: A1
Dateline: Polacca, Ariz.

Index Terms:
NATIVE AMERICAN MARRIAGE

Estimated printed pages: 11

Article Text:

The bride walked up the hill, barefoot in the dusty driveway, wearing a manta, the black one-shoulder dress of the Hopi maiden. Her eyes downcast, Delight was beautiful, dignified, somber; a modern woman following an ancient tradition.

She carried a basket of blue corn meal tied in a cloth. With her were her two daughters, Mariah, 3, and Miranda, 5, and her female relatives.

According to custom, the aunts and cousins of the groom formed a noisy blockade to try to turn back the bride. To symbolically fight for their man, they held signs humorously mocking the bride, such as one urging her to "Speed on by."

"Chill out!" little Mariah yelled at the protesters, not understanding. > > >

Delight Dalton and Frank Poocha grew up on the Hopi reservation. She is from the most traditional area, Third Mesa, and speaks the Hopi language. Frank's mother, Idella Poocha, a fifth-grade teacher, is Pima. His Hopi father, Fritz Poocha, was a day school principal at Polacca and Moencopi.

"I have three brothers, and for a long time my dad wanted us to have Hopi weddings, to keep the tradition alive," Frank said.

When Frank's father died, he left each son a cow for their weddings. But there were to be no Hopi weddings for Frank's brothers; they all married Navajos and didn't have the ceremony. When Frank and Dee were joined in a civil marriage at Phoenix City Hall a year ago, Frank's mom gave them a dinner. Dee's family arrived with multiple truckloads of food, in the traditional way.

And the two families began planning the wedding Frank's late father wanted. > > >

Delight, 35, and Frank, 34, have been together for six years. They live in central Phoenix

with their daughters, a chow named Buffy, and Hopi baskets on the walls of their home.

Delight has worked for 12 years at American Express, where she is a telephone customer representative. Frank plays trumpet, keyboards and acoustic guitar in a Native American band, Clan/Destine. The band performs all over the valley and many other parts of the country. Clan/Destine has traveled to Germany twice to represent the state on behalf of the Arizona Office of Tourism, and to Australia as part of an exchange of indigenous peoples' arts. > > >

So why a Hopi wedding?

"It's good for us," Frank said. "We are in that era where our culture is the connecting link. Either we learn and continue the religion, or it's gone." The realization makes him feel almost desperate, he added.

Just in their parents' generation, Frank said, many of the traditions have been lost. He said the next two generations are crucial.

"We grew up on the reservation doing all the things little Hopi boys and girls do. But now we have to teach our little kids how to be as Hopi as they can, trying to teach them a way of life."

Frank and Delight's wedding was part of the teaching, and it involved many family members. Idella's godparents, who live in Moencopi near Tuba City, worked with Dee's mother, Sylvia Dalton, and aunts to plan the events.

Once the couple agreed to the wedding, they had little say in it. Almost every weekend for a year, they made the five-hour trip from Phoenix to Hopiland, helping get ready.

The work seems endless.

"We more or less have to prove that our family is worthy of having him," Delight said of the massive food exchanges that are central to Hopi weddings. "In Hopi tradition, when the man gets married, he belongs to me."

By tradition, during the opening part of the wedding, the bride grinds corn at her mother-in-law's home while the men weave her wedding robes in the kiva. Corn is sacred to the Hopis.

No one in Frank's family weaves anymore, so his family members divided the responsibility of hiring weavers. Each family provided some of the special clothing for

Delight and her daughters. And Delight's duties were lightened.

'My aunts told me I was so lucky I don't have to grind corn for four days,'
Delight said
before the wedding. 'They said, 'Your arms hurt, your back hurts, your knees hurt.'
'', > >

The ceremonial parts of a Hopi wedding usually last at least a week. This one was compressed into three days over a long weekend.

On Friday afternoon, the arrival of the bride at the home of the groom's mother was the first major event of the Hopi wedding - not counting the mud fight earlier in the day, when the women from both sides of the families pelted each other with wet dirt, a muddy mock battle over Frank.

Frank was waiting, still wearing his work gloves. He had been chopping wood and doing strenuous preparation, waiting anxiously. He hadn't seen his wife and children in almost two weeks. They had been in Hotevilla, working just as hard.

In procession behind the bride were a line of 20 pickup trucks stretching down the highway. The bride and daughters entered her mother-in-law's home and were seated to one side.

The house, a double-wide mobile home in the shadow of First Mesa, had been cleared of almost all furnishings in anticipation of the arrival of the bride's family from Hotevilla, on Third Mesa.

Delight's family was ready to pay for Frank.

Her family paid two years' worth of corn harvest to Frank's family, and there is more to come to pay off the debt of her robes.

'We think it'll take three years,' said Delight's sister, Lynn Nuvamsa, who was one of the family members who kept track of donations. 'We're shooting for a year and a half.'

Thus do Hopi weddings stretch backward and forward in time, forming a complex web of

□ obligatory preparation and payback. > > >

The trucks following Delight backed up to the front porch. Unloading began with piki bread. The traditional tissue-like bread of the Hopis was folded in the square style for weddings, instead of the usual rolls. So much piki was stacked against one wall under plastic that the mound was the size of a tall single bed. Several of Delight's female relatives slept in the room with it that night to safeguard it.

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Next came ten 30-gallon barrels of blue corn meal, and enough five-gallon buckets of corn meal to fill three-quarters of the floor space of the room where Delight stayed. Each barrel and bucket represented weeks of backbreaking work over the past year. Delight's family had divided up the work: the harvesting, shelling, washing, coarsely grinding, roasting the corn in big cauldrons, and finally grinding it into blue cornmeal.

Next came "lazy flour," as one auntie called it, smiling as she said it. Sack after 25-pound sack of Blue Bird white flour was passed down the chain of men unloading it, 35 sacks to each truck. There were seven or eight trucks full.

The flour was too heavy to store in the mobile home, but it had to be passed through the home.

With each item that came into the house, the men said, "kwa kwai," and the women said, "Askwali." Both expressions mean "thank you."

The sacks of flour emitted puffs of white as they were tossed down rows of hands, out a window and into trucks belonging to the groom's relatives. After the trucks were full, the flour was stacked on palettes in a big tent.

Last were the baked goods, a boggling array of cakes, pies, yeast breads, cookies, doughnuts, brownies, quick breads. Goods filled waiting shelves in the back room, top to bottom, stacked.

The food was Delight's dowry, donated by her immediate family and clan family members. It would be divided up among Frank's family members who helped with the wedding.

"Askwali, askwali," Delight said. The unloading of 20 trucks took an hour. There was a palpable sense of quiet pride.

Delight was now me-we, the in-law. She had been accepted by Frank's family.

In a Hopi wedding, the bride's family brings the hearth-oriented goods, showing their prowess as homemakers with huge amounts of flour, cornmeal, baked goods. The groom's family takes back to her village the supplies a hunter would bring: meat, firewood, clothing, groceries.

At least 12 sheep died for this wedding, plus a cow left by Frank's dad.

Frank's family fed massive quantities of food to guests. After the unloading and stacking the first evening, Friday, the big meals commenced.

Behind the house, 20 feet of cooking fires and a windbreak had been set up. A fire pit was dug, and an outdoor kitchen constructed. The kitchen included shelving from the family's piki house up on the mesa, where the women bake piki bread on flat stones.

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An outdoor dining tent sheltered seating at tables for about 45 people. Indoors, guests sat on the floor around tablecloths covered with food, including mutton stew cooked outdoors in huge cauldrons. Frank's family brought a potluck array of salads, macaroni and cheese, ham, meatloaf, stew with squash, red and yellow watermelon, chili beans. The aunties in charge were as organized as a drill team. As the sun set, lights twinkled on the mesa above.

□
Long before the sun came up Saturday morning, juniper and pinon pine smoke rose from the cooking fires, and a rooster crowed somewhere between the house and the mesa. Frank and Delight and the girls knelt in the living room over tubs of warm water to have their hair symbolically washed.

Mariah, in her pajamas, cried a bit. Mandy was quiet and poised, remarkably so, as she would be throughout the weekend.

The water was saved to take back to Hotevilla, where Delight's mom used it to mop the floors, a symbolic marking of the space. Frank had a brief, chilly ritual bath on the front porch in a washtub, and after it, Delight's mom gave him a blanket.

The family sat together, cornmeal applied to the faces of Delight and the girls. They also held ears of corn. Family members took turns rubbing small amounts of cornmeal gently on their arms. Delight's hair was in two pigtails wrapped with yarn and her bangs cut on either side in the traditional married-woman style. Then there was a lull, as the participants waited for the sunrise.

'I think they're going to throw the corn stuff at the sun,' one of the teenagers in attendance told another. She was right. Accompanied by their mothers, Delight and Frank walked toward the sunrise and tossed cornmeal, an offering with a prayer to the sun.

The rest of Saturday was devoted to food and 'lady things,' as Frank termed the food preparations.

Breakfast was as big a spread as the meal the night before, with a couple of delicacies that the older Hopis relished and the younger ones avoided: boiled sheeps' heads and intestines, and a pudding made of blue cornmeal and sheeps' blood.

After breakfast, the men left for the mesa with bundles that contained the ceremonial bridal clothing. They went to the kiva, to smoke and pray over the robes.

About 50 women in aprons sat on the floor to make two ceremonial wedding blue-corn dishes.

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Both were made with the same filling of blue cornmeal and a little sugar, mixed in tubs with hot water to the proper consistency. Stuffed into rehydrated corn leaves and tied into triangles, they became tsukuviki. Fashioned into slender rectangles and wrapped in corn husks with double ties, they are called somiviki. Both were boiled and served at subsequent meals.

Delight, wearing a lace-trimmed apron over her black dress, still barefoot, led the preparations with her mother. She had never made any of these dishes before, but she was the perfect bride, intent and patient. Mandy, in an apron just her size, made the blue corn dishes with her mother and grandmother, serious and focused beyond her years.

Delight also prepared pik-ami, a pudding of sweet corn flour and sugar. That dish was put into the fire pit and covered to bake overnight.

Frank's Pima aunts from Blackwater on the Gila River reservation made their traditional food, too - chumuth, paper-thin flour tortillas as big as pizza pans.

At noon, Delight's paternal Su! n Clan aunts and her maternal Corn Clan relatives went into action. They drove up to the mesa, unloaded food from trucks, and passed it down the ladder to the men in the underground kiva with the robes.

When the men returned two hours later, they were fed again.

Special hominy had been soaking since dawn in four big washtubs. Frank's relatives had cracked and dried each piece of hominy by hand for a special wedding stew. Cooked with diced mutton, the kernels flowered like popcorn.

□
All day long, food was exchanged. The Hotevilla contingent brought blue corn in buckets for the tsukuviki and somiviki; dried ears of corn were placed in the empty containers for them to take home. Frank's relatives brought over clothes they had made and basket after basket of groceries, to be taken the next day to Delight's village.

When 3-year-old Mariah was given a shawl, she put it on and started dancing.

At the wedding dinner of cracked hominy stew, no soda pop was served, in deference to the stricter traditions of Third Mesa.

Sunday morning dawned, and soon thereafter Delight and her daughters had a final ceremonial hair washing. Frank and Delight were exhausted from lack of sleep, but this was the last big day.

Breakfast featured the sweet pik-ami pudding. And for the first time there were as many

men as women, Frank's deer clan and immediate family relations.

Sheets were spread on the floor for the dressing of the bride. Delight wore her black dress. Over their little-girl clothes, Mandy and Mariah were dressed in long-sleeved dresses made for the occasion.

Over the dresses the girls wore their own black mantas, one-shoulder maiden dresses secured with a red, woven belt that had to be wrapped and tucked a certain way. The men put the sashes on Delight and the girls.

Two women worked on each side of Delight to put her hair into the married-woman style, wrapped with yarn. The emotional meaning of the ceremonies was now coming home to Delight, who kept swallowing a lump in her throat.

The dressing took a long time, and the arduous nature of the process caused one unmarried guest to make a laughing reference to a place where getting married is a far quicker affair.

"Las Vegas is looking pretty good," she said.

Working patiently, aunties dressed the girls' hair in a short-haired version of the Hopi maiden butterfly style, wrapping yards of yarn around each section of hair, fanning it out at the top and bottom.

Special shoes and leggings made of perfectly white buckskin were fitted onto Delight and each girl. A cloth shawl with lace trim was tied around each one's shoulders.

"It's time for your Hopi makeup," one of the aunties told Mandy. The faces were gently powdered with cornmeal.

Then it was time to don the ovah, the white wool blankets, with tassels on the corners to represent corn and fertility. Prayer feathers had been attached in the kiva.

Delight explained before the wedding that the robes were "my ticket to heaven." They have a dual purpose! The robes that the Hopi bride wears at her wedding will someday serve as her shroud.

The men stepped forward to the ovah, two holding each one by the corners. As they unfolded them, cornmeal from the religious ceremonies in the kiva puffed into the air like pale smoke.

When Delight and the girls were dressed, they were seated with Frank in a row of chairs, though Mariah had on so many layers she could barely bend at the waist to sit.

Delight then made a thank-you speech, her poise cracking for the first time. "Askwali," she started. Then she said in Hopi, "I want to thank everyone who has labored very hard in order for this to happen, and because of that, we are very happy. we are

finishing
beautifully.''

□
The men stepped forward, one by one, to talk to the couple. Tears rolled down faces throughout the room, and even those who didn't speak Hopi were affected. The speakers talked about family, and love, and how to live the Hopi life. They gave practical advice, too, such as avoidance of alcohol. After each person spoke, cornmeal was tossed in a trail toward the open door.

The talks went on. By the time Frank's mother, Idella, stepped forward and described getting old, and how hard it was, and how lucky Delight and Frank were to have each other, everyone was sobbing.

It was beautiful.

They were married.

By the time the talks were finished and hugs exchanged, Frank's family's trucks were loaded and ready to roll to Hotevilla. There was meat already butchered, and several live sheep in a trailer.

In addition to more flour, loads of groceries, and a load of firewood, there was one truckload of bags of clothing, shawls, and dresses for Delight and the girls, much of it handmade.

Delight carried the traditional bride's 'suitcase' of woven reeds, rolled around the ceremonial sash, its hanging tassels symbolizing rain.

The group assembled, Idella in front, carrying blue cornmeal in a basket wrapped with a cloth. Frank and Delight walked down the hill, married in the Hopi way.

They drove to Hotevilla. They unloaded.

They ate another big meal.

Frank's uncle gave him a blanket. Later that evening, Delight's relatives tried on her wedding robes and she showed them all her shawls. She gave a shawl and meat, flour and groceries to each of those who had contributed.

The wedding obligates the couple to return to the reservation even more often. Since Frank now belongs to Dee's family, he will be responsible for planting and harvesting crops for them each year, carving kachina dolls for his girls, taking care of his wife and the womenfolk in her family.

Delight's robes have to stay in her mother's home until they are all paid for, years

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down
the road.

only when that happens will this Hopi wedding be over.

CAPTION: 1) After the wedding in the home of Frank's mother, Idella Poocha, (right) in Polacca, the family gets ready to travel to the home of Delight's

CAPTION: mother in Hotevilla. Delight carries the traditional bride's 'suitcase' of

CAPTION: woven reeds, rolled around the ceremonial sash, with hanging tassels symbolizing rain. 2-3) In one of the first major events of the wedding,

CAPTION: Delight leads her female relatives to the home of the bridegroom's mother, carrying a basket of blue cornmeal. Trucks followed carrying more food.

After the wedding, a similar procession of trucks delivers food to Delight's

family home. 4) Tears streak the cornmeal powdered on Delight's face as family members speak to her and Frank in the final phase of their wedding. 5) CAPTION: Miranda, 5, (left) and Mariah, age 3, sit very still in their ceremonial

CAPTION: leggings, shawls and dresses as elders speak to their parents near the end of

CAPTION: the ceremony. CAPTION: 1) Two women work on each side of Delight Dalton to put her hair into the CAPTION: married-woman style, wrapped with yarn. She

□ wears the manta, the traditional CAPTION: dress of the Hopi maiden. 2) Long before the sun comes up, Frank Poocha and CAPTION: Delight kneel in the living room over tubs of water to have their hair CAPTION: symbolically washed.

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Record Number: pho63658536

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