



Video Story Transcript

NAVAJO CODE TALKER

By: Storyteller Gene Tagaban

Link to YouTube Video:
<https://youtu.be/wQxU3-DxyZU>

Note : The following is a transcription of a spoken story performance and may not reflect textbook perfect English. It will guide you as you listen (or read) along.

Gunalchéesh! My name is Gene Tagaban. My Tlingit name is Guy Yaaw. I'm of the Takdeintaan clan. The Raven, Fresh Water Sockeye clan from Hoonah, Alaska. I'm a child of a Wooshkeetaan, Eagle, Shark clan Káawu huna in Juneau, Alaska and I'm a Tlingit, Cherokee and Filipino. And I tell people I'm a Cherotlingipino. It's good to be here.

Ah, you know our elders are precious. In fact, we often refer to them as our, our precious objects. I mean... but they're more than that, our elders, and we hold them in reverence and honor. I had the opportunity to travel around the country with a man; his name is Andrew Osano from Cochiti Pueblo, USA.

Now Andrew was a medicine man or, you might say, Andrew was a holy man. But when you're from the Pueblo or the reservation, things just move slower. And I was telling Andrew, "We're going to New York." I said, "Andrew, when we get to New York, everyone's going to be moving really fast. And so you need to just move just a little bit faster than you're used to."

He goes, "Oh! OK, OK, OK!" And so when we're flying into New York, he's looking out the window and his perspective on it was, "Oh, look at that! New York City! All the buildings looked like headstones. Interesting, eh!"

So I'm walkin' through New York with Andrew Osano and we go to the top of the Empire State Building. And it was a time when Hale-Bopp, the comet, was going through. And so Andrew, he takes those binoculars and instead of looking at New York City, he looks up into the sky, "The comet! Oh! Ah!" And he starts to say

some prayers, singing a song and everybody around him starts looking at Andrew Osano, Cochiti Pueblo, USA, medicine man, holy man.

A few years later after that, I drove to Cochiti Pueblo to see Andrew and he goes, "Oh! Oh, Raven T! Oh, it's good to see you. I need a ride. Ah! We go see my uncle." And so we're driving to another pueblo, to see his uncle. And as we're going through certain areas, Andrew stops, closes his eyes sings and says prayers. "Spirits all along this road," he says. So we pulled up to a small house. He goes, "My uncle lives here. My uncle, he is a Navajo Code Talker."

"Navajo Code Talker? Ah!"

"Come in, let's visit." We walked in and there's a small Indian man there, wrinkled skin, dark. And I look into his eyes and they're just deep, dark brown.

We share a little bit of coffee and I ask him, "Navajo Code Talker! What was it like?"

And he goes, "Oh! You see, I grew up out here, out here, taking care of the land, taking care of our animals, livin' on the land. And then the government comes in and tells us we can't speak our language, sing our songs, practice our culture. They took us to schools to teach us a new way.

And then World War II came along. And they called on our services. You see, they wanted us to fight and defend our country but they wanted us to use our language to create a code. Our language that was forbidden! Our language that they told us that we can no longer speak! They wanted us to create a code to help them win the war. Many of the Navajo people enlisted.

And they wanted us to go through basic training. You see, they didn't think that we could make it through basic training. They thought that maybe we were too fragile. But once we got out there during basics... ah, we scored the highest on everything!"

"Well, this is simple," we said, "because this is our life. We live out here." So we went out there. And we developed a code through our language. Nobody broke that code! And for 20 years after the war was over, we were taught never to reveal what we did. And we kept that commitment.

I asked him, "When you came back, what did you do to heal?"

And he goes, "Ah! You know, not like nowadays. Those young men, they come back, they're on a plane. They close the eyes. They wake up. They're back in the city.

Back then, we had time to jump on a boat, a ship and we were together. A brotherhood to take care of each other, to talk, to hold each other, to cry. And then when I got back to our reservation, you see, amongst our people, we are not home yet. We are just spirits until we go through a ceremony and then... we become whole again. That's what's missin' in this country nowadays is that ceremony."

You see, we just sat and had coffee, ate some cookies and just shared stories. And it was an honor for me to sit there amongst a true hero of this country. For if it was not for the Navajo code, we may never have won that war. Huh...! Helps me appreciate who we are as a people. Navajo Code Talkers! Huh!