



Ancient rock art inside one of the caves.

Earth Medicine Retreat

Exploring the ancient Hopi-Navajo ways

by Sharon Breslin

From as early as I can remember, my dad had a nickname for me – Geronimo. Many years down the track I asked, “Why that name? Where did it come from?” There was no valid explanation. Unbeknown to my dad or myself, that connection would grow to a far greater depth, as today one of my great loves is the healing therapy I practice which has a strong shamanic base. Geronimo was never a chief, but a medicine man, a seer and a spiritual and intellectual Apache Indian. This love was sealed when it was with great trepidation that I found my way to Sedona in September of 2005 to partake in my first spiritual journey on the native land.

Nothing prepared me for the breathtaking magnificence of the red rocks as I approached Sedona for the first time. The sun was starting to fall and the soft hue on the mountains was so beautiful. I felt the energy of the place enveloping me in its arms, welcoming me to this special land as I soaked up the pure magnitude of the different shapes and sizes displayed majestically before me.

With the most incredible array of metaphysical shops, health and wellbeing practices and organic produce to consume, it was going to be Heaven in this little slice of paradise for the next couple of weeks. Little did I know just how profound a journey I had begun. Sacred space, spiritual growth, past life reconnection and deep healing was to be experienced.

Preparation began almost immediately for our much anticipated Earth Medicine Retreat up on the Hopi mesas where there exists three of the oldest continually inhabited villages in North America and deep into Canyon de Chelly on private Navajo land.

Our guide Sandra took us out onto the land in Sedona and introduced us to our

first drumming session where we were to connect with Junipine, our animal guide, and be presented with a gift from the shaman who was with us in spirit. Powerful, bonding, thought provoking and freeing.

The eagle was with me, sharing its gifts to help my third eye see more and I was given a beautiful black stone from the shaman. Coincidentally, on the last day of our time in Sedona, I walked into a shop and there was the exact stone I had been given in the drumming journey meditation. A gorgeous piece of rainbow obsidian with the shape of a heart embedded in it. I had to buy it, as I knew it was significant for me to have. I have since found out that the rainbow obsidian was indeed a shamanic stone. It has been with me ever since when doing my healing work.

Vision quest, medicine wheel and sweatlodge all awaited us, but there was preparation to do. So over the next few days we made prayer ties for our vision quest, and prepared ourselves through meditation so we could be as open and ready as possible for our forthcoming adventures.

Driving up onto the mesas, there they were – many ancestors in spirit welcoming me, just as I had seen in my meditation back in New Zealand. I had been taught to always thank the ancestors before us for allowing and welcoming us onto their lands.



Native American girl in traditional dress.



Colorado Plateau.



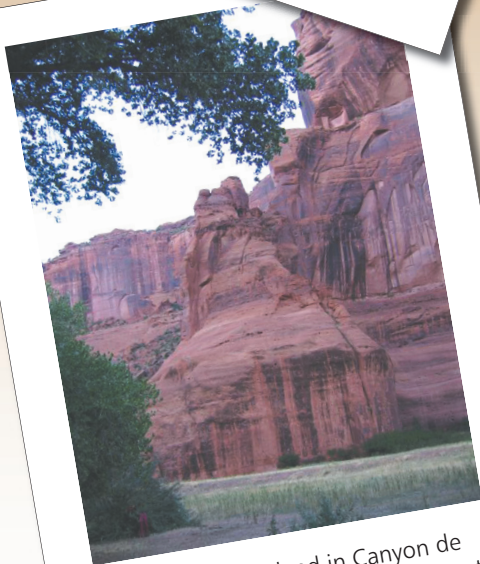
Navajo Festival on the Colorado Plateau.



One of the shields made on the retreat.



Sand painting of a kachina doll by Daniel, the Navajo guide.



Private Navajo land in Canyon de Chelly where Earth Medicine Retreat takes place.

It was a very comforting moment to know I was certainly in the right place and there would be much support from the spiritual realm as we participated in the Earth Medicine Retreat on these lands.

Our first day was to be spent meeting Roanna, the gifted Hopi woman, who would be with us throughout, guiding us along our journey, sharing many Hopi traditions and holding the space for our growth in a safe environment. As head woman in one of the Mesas, she is highly respected and deeply involved in the lives of her people, responsible for many of the ceremonies and teaching the children by passing down the knowledge. We realised what a privilege it was to spend time with this precious person.

With great pride, she took us around the mesas into their homes to meet the elders, to watch kachina dolls being made, to play with the children and to experience what living on a mesa was like. There is a wonderful sense of community where time almost stands still as they practice many of the old traditions. The Hopi calendar with ceremonies scheduled for certain times of the year was still strictly adhered to. Lucky for us we found ourselves in the middle of a basket throwing ceremony – great excitement, laughter and full mesa participation. The women and men were all dressed in their costumes as they performed many dances amongst the dusty streets of the mesa. There were bodies lining the roofs for as far as the eye could see – the best viewing point to watch and partake in the ceremonies. We were welcomed onto the roof where young and old were perched feeling very humbled to be included in this special occasion.

The following morning, leaving the mesas with Roanna in tow, we drove further across the Colorado Plateau to Canyon de Chelly where we met up with Daniel our Navajo guide. At last, we had Sandra, Roanna and Daniel together – the real learning was to begin.

With the jeep loaded up to the hilt, we left civilisation behind and began our journey deep into the canyon, also fondly known as the 'womb' due to its shape and the nurturing energy it exudes. Breathtaking canyon walls are a deep colour of red with so many stories to tell. The more we looked, the more we saw. The trained eye began to see where the entry portals were in relation to other dimensions, sensing that there is much more than what the physical eye can see.

Finally, after a bumpy ride, we were at our camp which was to be home for the next four days. Totally remote, not another human in sight. Just the walls of the canyon, the trees and wildlife. Immediately we began to unwind, realising all outside influences were blocked and we could immerse ourselves into the ancient ways and fully embrace the traditional ceremonies we were about to partake in.

With the campsite all set up and the fire lit, we began our Earth Medicine Retreat with the first of many drumming journeys where we were connected to the spirit world through the dreamtime, through a past life journey or maybe

some soul retrieval work. All so very very powerful, allowing treasured moments of truth to be revealed and remembered. The drumming journeys were preparing us for our sweatlodge, medicine wheel ceremony and the grand finale, our vision quest.

I will always recall and treasure the healing that was gifted to me in the sweatlodge ceremony. That morning I woke to find two rashes on either side of my hips and wondered where on Earth they had come from. Already a little nervous, I pushed thoughts of the rash aside, thinking it was just part of travelling in a strange land! The day was beautiful, with blue sky and the sun shining. Daniel had been up for hours heating the stones and preparing for the sweatlodge.

Having been smudged with an eagle's feather and smoke from the fire, we crawled into the teepee on hands and knees with our heads almost touching the top of it... Phew, how on Earth was I going to survive the four rounds of a sweatlodge ceremony? However, before long, time stood still and we were cocooned in our own world as Daniel talked to the ancestors, passing the conversation around the circle, allowing it to weave its way through the four directions. Half way through the second round, I heard thunder and rain on the teepee, but how could this be? It dawned on me just how strong the connection was between the ancestors and the elements.

All of the time I had been feeling emotion stirring deep down in my core and I had tried to keep it there, but no, this was not to be. As the conversation flowed, I felt the tears and emotions coming to the surface where I could no longer keep them in. And before I knew it, I was crying and expressing my deep sense of loss of not having children in this lifetime. I felt so exhausted, but at the same time so light, as I realised I had been carrying this hurt for a long time. It was not until we had finished the ceremony and I began reflecting on what I had been through that day, that I put two and two together and knew that the rash on my hips was my physical body preparing to release the hurt that I had carried. The rash was exactly where it should have been – if we think about the saying 'child bearing hips'. This experience helped me tremendously in easing the pain I had carried for quite some time of not having the opportunity to have children.

Each of these ceremonies is such a personal journey. For many of us, life changing moments. The healing that is received from the beat of the drum, the connection with our ancestors in spirit, the wisdom from both our Hopi and Navajo guides, the nurturing element of the canyon and nature itself is profound at a very deep level.

Sharon Breslin runs Lifestyle Journeys, a Wellington-based travel company that offers travellers the chance of personal development while they explore some of the world's most fascinating places of ancient wisdom with indigenous guides. For more information about the Hopi/Navajo tour and other Ancient Wisdom tours, retreats and workshops offered by Lifestyle Journeys –
Website: www.lifestylejourneys.co.nz