

At the 90th annual Inter-Tribal Indian Ceremonial, Eagle dancers great and small from Jemez Pueblo bring smiles to many at the Evening Performances. *Right:* Hopi girls await their turn to participate in the first Evening Performances.



DANCES with CAMERA

One man's perspective-shifting visit to last year's Inter-Tribal Indian Ceremonial in Gallup

TEXT AND PHOTOGRAPHY BY CHARLES MANN

Dusk is falling as I stride rapidly through the back alleys and side streets of Gallup, a block from old Route 66. An intoxicating fog of the aromas of mingled fry bread, mutton, and chile hangs in the air, and a palpable sense of excitement mounts as the hour nears for the Night Parade of the 90th annual Gallup Inter-Tribal Indian Ceremonial. ▲ At the staging area for the parade, I halt mid-stride, stilled by a 3-D Kodachrome kaleidoscope of Native American regalia. Dancers and groups of all ages and tribes line up for the procession as night sets in. ▲ I see Jemez Pueblo eagle dancers, ash-streaked Miwoks from California, ghostly White River Apache Crown Dancers from Arizona, graceful Olla Maidens from Zuni Pueblo, and feathered Kiowa fancy dancers from the plains. ▲ As the Parade starts its slow crawl along the crowded street, the performers emerge, apparition-like, from the riotous noise of the crowd and the dark of the night.

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One of two major Native American events in New Mexico, the Gallup Inter-Tribal Ceremonial predates its Albuquerque counterpart, the Gathering of Nations, by 62 years. Launched as a cooperative venture in 1922 by the Kiwanis Club and the Atchison, Topeka & Santa Fe Railway, the Ceremonial was popular and successful from the outset. It quickly evolved, according to an article by *Gallup Independent* staff writer Gaye Brown de Alvarez, into “more than a show put on by the Indians for the whites. It became a gathering place of clans, of tribes, of cultures sharing in a little fun.”



Hundreds of people stake out their spots along Main Street with rows of folding chairs. The sidewalks are packed five deep, and as the procession rolls by, it is a photographer's dream. I can't help myself, dashing in and out of the scene shooting pictures, my flash popping erratically like a disoriented firefly's.

A sense of gratitude for being here, and my respect for the thousands who have come to see the parade, compel me to try to make myself small. Consequently, I spend most of the evening down on one knee, in a kind of Tebow position, genuflecting in front of the crowd, squirreling and crabbing in and out of the action. Fortunately, I am not alone in my trance. I spot three young men who appear to be locals, also busy out in the street, shooting photos and video. I fall in with them, shooting into the night until the entire procession moves down Route 66 and then cycles back around another street in a half-mile circle. As I move to go, one of the young photographers in my cohort walks over to me, extends his hand, and says, “Hello! We are from Japan.”



Clockwise from top left: Tee Willie took part in the Powwow's Gourd Dances; Jerae Curtis, Miss Teen Navajo 2011; Robert “Tree” Cody gave the blessing at the Evening Performances, and played the flute; artist Alex “Pueblo Picasso” Seowtewa is a Ceremonial Living Treasure.

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The next morning, mine is the first car in the large parking lot at Red Rock State Park, the site of most of the activities listed in the Ceremonial schedule. As the large insert in the *Independent* promises, there is “something for everyone,” including a rodeo, a wine tasting, the Miss Ceremonial competition, dance demonstrations, arts and crafts sales, the Powwow, and the Evening Performances.

Like a fire in an *homo* oven, the day begins slowly, warming steadily into a baking-hot August afternoon. I roam the park like a lost dog. Tee Willie, a friendly twentysomething man, meanders around in full ceremonial dress and face paint. Later, I notice the beautiful Jerae Curtis, Miss Teen Navajo. The Miss Ceremonial competition, an old-school beauty pageant redolent with wholesome family appeal, takes place in a small arena. Elsewhere, the Powwow's drummers and chanters are gathering steam, presided over by various tribal elders. In the guide, I read that each Inter-Tribal Ceremonial receives a blessing from an elaborate sand painting created for the occasion. Looking at the

designs from years past, I am struck by their similarity to Tibetan sand paintings and the parallel roles they play.

My day is filled with interludes. I bump into Joe Kyle, Cowboy Preacher, and a young Diné girl wearing a virtual treasure trove of turquoise jewelry. I visit briefly with Apolinar Simbron, who leads the Tezcatlipoca Voladores, acrobats from Mexico who climb an 80-foot pole and spin out into space, supported only by centrifugal force and ropes tied to their ankles. They add yet another layer of indigenous representation, and the heartbeat of the Inter-Tribal Ceremonial begins to feel more global.



Above and right: White Mountain Apache Crown Dancers, who invoke mountain spirits, by day and night. In lieu of the four-day Crown Dance, at the Ceremonial they perform an abridged healing ritual.



Left: Young Jemez Pueblo Deer Dancers Jagger Little and Sean Montoya join other tribal members for the Downtown Morning Parade. Below: As part of the Downtown Night Parade, held on Route 66, the Zuni Olla Maidens promenade while balancing beautiful pots on their heads.



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 Nestled at the base of a huge wall of red sandstone, Red Rock Arena fills with hundreds of spectators awaiting the Evening Performances. The red earth, graded flat, holds a circle of chairs 200 feet in diameter. A panoply of participants in full regalia wait in the wings, each ready to represent his or her tribe. Young Hopi girls with traditional veiled wooden headdresses mingle with eagle dancers from Jemez Pueblo, who sport huge white wings and beaked headpieces.

While waiting for the ceremony to begin, I am drawn to the figure of a Native American man dressed in buckskin. His 6'10" height and daunting aura dwarf all around him and belie his quiet, thoughtful personality. His name is Robert Cody, but he goes by Tree. I ask him about Iron Eyes Cody, who appeared in over 200 films with actors such as John Wayne and Steve McQueen, though he was, in fact, Sicilian. Tree reveals that Iron Eyes is his adoptive father. Robert's birth parents come from two geographically diverse tribes, Dakota and Maricopa.

The Night Performances begin. The entrance procession is spearheaded by a bevy of flag bearers. Among the banners I recognize those of New Mexico, Arizona, and the Diné nation. Tribal representatives march in to occupy the chairs in the big circle. Tree Cody rises at the podium and plays a soulful, stirring anthem on his flute. Later, I learn he is a recognized singer, dancer, actor, and a master of the Native American flute who has toured the U.S., Asia, and Europe. The colors of huge bonfires on opposite sides of the arena paint the red canyon wall. Suddenly, another country's flag appears: Japan's. My three young Japanese acquaintances race out onto the field, the Rising Sun flying above their heads. They stand spotlighted in the darkened arena as the announcer proclaims that the entire Gallup Inter-Tribal Ceremonial is dedicated to the Japanese nation and their struggle with the recent tsunami. In the stillness of the moment, the meaning of *Inter-Tribal* expands once again for me, to encompass all of humanity. Japan is not at all out of place here.



Clockwise from top left: Navajo Code Talkers Sidney Bedoni, Sam Holiday, David Patterson, and Joe Vandever Sr., have, sadly, all passed away since Mann photographed them last August.

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 The Downtown Morning Parade is on the schedule for the next day. After the Downtown Night Parade, my expectations are now a blank check, and I am geared up and ready to go at 6 a.m. A family from Jemez Pueblo allows their three young boys, dressed as Deer Dancers, to pose for me. Then a composed, dignified man arrives, dressed in a mustard-yellow shirt, a red military cap, a bolo tie with a big turquoise clasp, and a chest full of ribbons. Samuel Holiday is the first of 12 Navajo Code Talkers I will meet today. They are being honored in the Morning Parade, riding up front in an open coach. I slip in to ask if I can take a picture, and one by one they pause with quiet decorum, as they have done so often in the past. I meet and photograph Bahe Ketchum, Samuel Tso, Joe Vandever Sr., Samuel Tsoie Jr., and Frank Chee Willetto. Some of these heroes of World War II appear dignified and stoic; others are more jocular. Each embodies an unmistakable gravitas, and every one of them causes me to choke up.

The Morning Parade assembles on time under the gentle but firm hand of executive director Terry Frazer, who clearly knows the rhythms and ways of the this community. Once again, the streets are filled with a joyful, exuberant throng of what seem to be thousands of Native Americans. Again, I find myself dashing up and down the street, Tebowing like crazy. As princesses and antlered dancers pass by, I'm flooded with a sense of gratitude, and the wish that all other Americans and members of the world's tribes could feel the sense of unity and belonging that I feel on this Saturday morning in Gallup. ❖

The **91st Gallup Inter-Tribal Indian Ceremonial** will be held August 8–12; for more information, visit theceremonial.com.

Charles Mann is a full-time freelance photographer and journalist specializing in New Mexico culture and scenic landscapes of the Southwest.



Above: The presentation of an array of flags concludes Saturday's Evening Performances. Right: The Downtown Morning Parade's full-scale replica of a Wells Fargo stage-coach is an iconic Western image come to life. Far right: A Fancy Dancer lights up the Downtown Night Parade.

