

The Mojave Flute Player – by Mike Briggs

He often went backpacking alone, preferring his own company. Not because he was anti-social, far from it, he had a wide circle of friends who met on a regular basis. It was simply that he loved the freedom of thought and movement that solo walking gave him. This freedom allowed him to indulge in his other passion; connecting with nature and trying to understand what was happening around him. To do that you have to be alone and, if possible, remote from other human influences.

Yoga and meditation had always been a part of his life. As a child, his mother encouraged him to practice sitting still and to absorb the silence around him. She taught him to use his mind to cut through distractions and find the hidden gems.

As the years passed he travelled to many remote parts of the world. He developed the ability to induce deep, almost transcendental states of awareness. Once entered, they allowed him to experience rare insights into the parallel universe of nature. Things like the cause and effect of weather patterns; wind, rain, snow, searing desert heat and the vastness of space.

He often camped or bivouacked out under the stars, observing and listening to the activities of nocturnal animals, insects and other creatures. All these special moments were stored in the massive data bank which is the human brain. He took no photographs and very rarely kept written notes. It was all filed away in his own trillion byte storage facility.

For this particular trip he had decided to re-visit the Mojave desert. He had not been there for many years and, among other things, he was hoping to find the location where he had previously enjoyed one of the most amazing and beautiful sunrises he had ever seen.

He'd been backpacking for ten days now, and in all that time had only encountered one other human being. That was at the very start of his trip when he had reported to the Mojave National Park Ranger, a Native American by the name of Jim Golden Cloud. During his time in the desert, he felt he had seen more life than anyone could imagine. He followed the dried up water courses, and scrambled down into the depths of canyons and ravines to shelter from the shimmering desert heat. He felt completely at ease and very happy. However his trip was coming to an end, and there was a three day hike to the nearest state highway.

That night, he found the perfect bivi site with a small stream close by. He slept soundly but before daybreak, he was disturbed by the unmistakable sound of a rattlesnake. Through the gloom, he could sense rather than see the snake. He wasn't particularly alarmed, he'd seen many of these and other desert dwellers before.

He slowly reached for his head torch and, carefully placing it on his head, he simultaneously switched it on. The snake was in the raised strike position at the foot of his sleeping bag, its chilling rattle sounding more and more ominous.

They fixed each other's eye, not blinking, not moving. Only the rattle betrayed the gravity of his predicament. 'Is this it then?' he thought, after all his expeditions, 'was it to end here on a dark Mojave morning?'

As he looked out into the desert beyond the snake, he saw a thin line, gold and pink, splitting the darkness like the slash of a rapier on a piece of crimson silk. The deadly rattle increased but he just sat there transfixed, awaiting the mortal strike. Now the gold and pink was joined by red, green and orange as the increasing light illuminated the dark desert floor.

At that moment, about fifty metres to his left, there came the most hauntingly beautiful sound of a flute drifting across the stillness. A Mojave flute player was sitting cross legged beneath a rocky overhang, high up on a steep cliff face.

It was the most uplifting sound he had ever heard and with each evocative refrain the light increased, illuminating and bathing him in the morning rays of warmth, energy and hope.

When he looked down at his feet, the sinuous rattler had slithered away to its rocky hide, the music had stopped and the outcrop was deserted.

Closing his eyes very slowly, he smiled and saved it all to his memory bank...

'Do you think he can hear us?' said the student nurse to her colleague.

'Don't know to be honest' she replied, 'he's been like this for six years now. Crashed his motor bike into a desert ravine.'

'Still, he looks very peaceful' commented the young nurse, 'maybe he was having sweet dreams.'