



A DAY IN THE LIFE OF A SALADO FAMILY

Although little sunlight penetrated the stone and earth walls, the woman woke at first light. In appearance, she resembled today's Zuni and Hopi people. She stood five feet tall, had light brown skin, and brown eyes. Her dark brown hair was cropped to supply her constant need of material for string.

She dressed in the dark stuffy room, which smelled of wood smoke from last night's cooking fire. A yucca-string skirt was all the clothing she would need for this hot day. In winter, she would add a cotton blanket, passed under the left arm, fastened on the right shoulder, and held in place by a narrow belt around her waist.

She was 25 and feeling her age. In a society with an average life expectancy of 30, she was already past middle age. Since the birth of her eldest son 11 summers ago, she had borne eight children. One had died in infancy, two more in early childhood. She sat to feed her youngest, a 6 month old daughter. Although it was not yet apparent, the back of the child's head was slowly being flattened by the hard cradleboard.

The room's furnishings were minimal. Mats and blankets of hide or cotton were used for sleeping; baskets and jars for storage and cooking lined the walls. Tools for hunting, weaving, farming, and other activities were also kept in the room.

She picked up a short, hard drill stick, placed it into one of the holes of a broader saguaro rib hearth-stick and rotated it rapidly until the fine sawdust began to glow. She blew gently on the spark, adding dry grass and a few sticks until a small fire blazed in the clay fire pit in the center of the room. Taking a handful of ground corn meal from a storage jar, she mixed it with ground walnut meat and placed it in a cooking pot with enough water to make the morning's mush. Her mate and eldest son would soon be returning from their pre-dawn hunt and she must have the first meal of the day prepared for their return.

More than half of her family's diet came from wild foods that grew in the surrounding hills. Her people had moved out of the valley and up to this cave high in the cliff to escape the crowding in the river villages. Her mate built check dams and grew a few crops on the gentle slopes, but there was not enough water or flat land nearby to grow all of the corn her family needed. Her mate had a thorough knowledge of the trails and water holes frequented by large game. He also gathered jojoba nuts, cholla buds, walnuts, and other wild foods. She was an excellent potter. Her finely painted three-colored bowls and jars were much sought after in other parts of the basin. Her family made frequent trips to the valley trade centers to exchange their surplus goods for the corn, beans, squash, and cotton grown by the valley farmers.

Her mate and eldest son soon returned, descended the ladder from the roof above, and ceremoniously hung their wooden bows and reed arrows from the roof beams. A prayer and the proper ritual were necessary to pacify the gods and ensure the success of tomorrow's hunt. They brought in two rabbits and a wood rat, a good morning's hunt, for meat was scarce in the desert.

Their brightly painted arrows were made of hollow river reeds that had been straightened and scraped to remove the nodes. A sharpened stick had been lashed into the hollow end of the reed to act as a projectile point. Her mate had seen other men fasten sharp triangular stone points onto the end of this stick, but no one in his village was proficient in making them. Perhaps he could acquire some on his next trading expedition. They would be much more efficient in bringing down mule deer and other large game.

The woman strapped on sandals woven of yucca leaves. They were not worn in the pueblo, but would protect her feet while walking on the rocky, thorny desert hillsides. She collected a gathering basket and other tools she would need for the day's work, and climbed the ladder to the patio area that covered the top of the pueblo. Most of her day would be

spent outdoors, on the roof, or in the community work area at the back of the cave. The dark and stuffy room was only for sleeping, storage, and shelter in bad weather.

Two of her daughters took large jars and went a mile from the cave to collect water from the spring at the base of the hill. When the children were old enough, they had to help with the daily chores. Everyone in the family needed to work if they were to survive. When brought back to the village, the water would be stored in a large jar, or olla, located within the house. Everyone drank from a single gourd dipper.

The woman paused for a moment to survey the morning's activities at the busy pueblo. A group of men was building a new room on the front of the dwelling. Each year, additional rooms were needed to house the growing population. The walls were built of unshaped quartzite stones taken from the fractured cliffs and held in place by mortar made of clay and caliche. The walls were built in sections, each about two feet high. When the mud of one course was dry, another section was added. Bonding the corners of the walls was unknown; one wall was simply butted against the other. Once the walls reached a height of six feet, a large main roof beam was placed across the long axis of the room, with smaller crossbeams of pinyon pine or juniper placed on top. Saguaro ribs, river reeds, or grasses formed the next layer; six to eight inches of mud capped the roof.

Behind her, women were gathering in the community work area to grind corn on stone metates or in the mortar holes worn into the ledge. Corn meal was used for various forms of mush, pudding, and bread. The preparation and storage of this important food source consumed a significant part of every Salado woman's day. However, she had no time for corn grinding today. July was the season of the saguaro harvest. This was a joyous time in the village, when the women and children worked together to harvest the delicious fruit. The women knocked down the small green cucumber-like fruits with a long pole made from two saguaro ribs lashed together. A short crossbar was attached to the top. Children picked up the fruit as it fell to the ground, dug the sweet, sticky pulp out of the shell, and dropped it in their mother's gathering basket.

Because of the intense heat of the July day, saguaro fruit was picked in the early morning or late afternoon. The rest of the day was spent cooking the fruit for jams or syrup, or sitting in the shade of the mesquite trees drinking the sweet, cool juice that was drained from the fruit.

She and the children returned home in late afternoon, climbing the ladder through the only entry to the pueblo - a V-shaped notch to the left of the cave. Her mate was sitting on the roof, twine-plaiting an elaborate ceremonial shirt from a skein of white yarn. This weaving technique produced lace-like fabrics in which diamond-shaped holes were made and distributed to form decorative patterns. He would wear this shirt at the time of the full moon to celebrate the end of the saguaro harvest, one of the countless ceremonies that regulated every aspect of their lives.

She sat beside him in the late afternoon sun watching the younger children playing on the rooftops. Even in July, the cave was cool. Her people had chosen the site carefully. The cave faced southeast so the morning sun would warm the dwelling in the winter, and cool afternoon shade protected them from the blistering summer sun.

Times were good in the Tonto Basin, but life had taught her that change was an essential element in their lives. Her people's ancient stories told of cycles of plentiful rains and good harvests followed by drought and starvation. As she rose to prepare the evening meal, an unaccustomed shiver of apprehension touched her. How long, she wondered, would the good harvests last?