

For Pueblo people, courage is key to 'Surviving Columbus'

Stories told with pride, not anger

By Suzanne Gill

Taos. Zuni. Acoma. Pecos. Hopi. Isleta. Laguna. More than a dozen settlements of the Pueblo Indian people adorn the desert Southwest like turquoise stones on a silver necklace. Other settlements, long abandoned — Chaco Canyon, Canyon de Chelly — are North America's Pyramids and Taj Mahal.

The land is so large (a view of 40 miles is common) and fierce, the people, animals and trees so small, who would think to own or conquer it? Not the Pueblo people. In the first millennium after Christ, their respect for the land gave rise to a religion full of ceremony, pageantry and storytelling. They did not share in the perverse practices of the tribes of Central and South America, but passed a heritage of decency and friendship from generation to generation. They farmed and hunted, practiced weaving, pottery and jewelry-making, developed music and dance. Their history was all around them and even in their hands: A favorite

symbol of one artist might be copied by her descendants for generations. So it continued for hundreds of years.

Meanwhile, in another culture, cities were densely populated, and the demand for products and resources was great. Competition was catalyst. Propelled by this feverish energy, Christopher Columbus set sail on a cleverly devised expedition of trade. He missed his intended destination, but any disappointment was soon vanquished by the belief that he had done better than to find a trading partner. Here was a land whose bounty was his — and his sovereign's for the taking.

Within 50 years, Columbus' successors had cut through Central America to the Pacific, turned northward and marched as far as Pueblo territory. In 1539, Zuni beheld Moroccan in the first encounter of an outsider with the Pueblo people.

Surviving Columbus: The Story of the Pueblo People, a two-hour special airing Monday, Oct. 12, on PBS, recounts the Pueblos' 450-year history of interaction with wave upon wave of treasure-seekers, conquerors and settlers. Produced

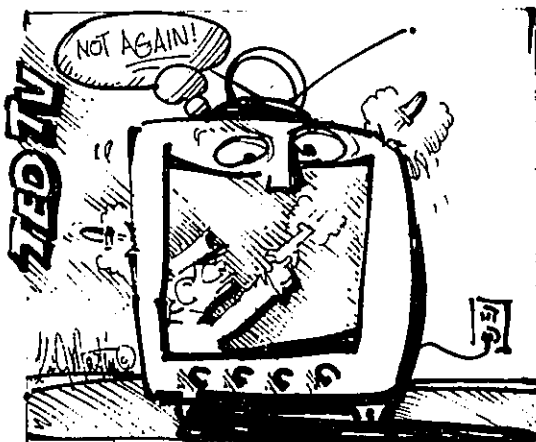
with assistance from the Institute of American Indian Arts in Santa Fe, N.M., the special draws on the expertise of writers, researchers and crew members, many of whom represent Pueblo tribes, including host Conroy Chino, an Acoma Indian who works as an investigative reporter in Los Angeles. The producers artfully weave together interviews, re-enactments and archival film and photographs to tell the Pueblo story, and the viewer often forgets that the face on the screen is not that of the long-dead ancestor whose story is being told.

In their heyday, the Pueblos numbered 50,000, but disease and warfare with the Spanish conquistadors and the European-style governments that followed them reduced those numbers to as few as 7,000 before any action was taken to protect their territorial and civil rights.

At times, the two-hour special seems long, but, as the Indian storytellers say, if you are going to tell a story, tell it from the beginning. *Surviving Columbus* is the first film to tell the complete story of the development and population of the Pueblo region from the point of view of its most ancient observers.

The essence of the story lies in the conflicting visions of the actors: in a stark landscape, the Pueblos saw what was there, while the conquistadors, on their missions to find cities of gold, saw only what was not, and the missionaries overlooked the tribes' moral code in their zeal to introduce one of their own.

In recent decades, well-meaning outsiders have begun to appreciate and collect Pueblo art and artifacts, but even those acquainted with the land will discover how remote their lives have been from the people who live there.



BE A RED CROSS VOLUNTEER

