

Tape #364 (side 1)
NAVAJO
Rex Becenti Jr.
Tohatchi, New Mexico
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Recorded by Tom Ration

LIFE IN EARLY DAYS OF FORT
SUMNER AND CORONADO
NAVAJO POTTERY AND GREAT
GAMBLE STORY
NAVAJO-PUEBLO RELATIONS IN
EARLY TIMES

This is a record that is being second tape for Rex Becenti, Jr. He is still continue on with the story about life of the world and its people and stories of the life of the Navajo people as they told story as they went through the life in New Mexico and some of the part of the country of New Mexico. His grandfather has been through alot of places in his life as the way that he has told the story to his grandchildren. The old man was been one of the great medicineman of old days. He tells about life during the time of the Fort Sumners and in the Coronado days. Some of us Navajo people haven't gone that far back what has happened in the earliest days of the Navajo life. The old man didn't have no English name, but he had an Indian name as they used to call him a trail man. A trail man the way they call is something like a blood hound. The old great man used to be one of the great trailer as a man would say a detective or find out things of ways of all kinds. He used to trail things if anything happened in lost of things he can find out even if it happened about four years ago, five years ago, he can start to trail it until he finds it. That was why he was called a trail man. As old man Becenti, the reason why he had his name Becenti

was he grew up in a Becenti tribe. Becenti means in the Navajo anything that you divide or separate or taking things apart in Navajo word is Becenti. As people went along with their story they have a great meaning of their story. They wouldn't tell anything that didn't happen, they tell all the story what happened of their early days. They recently have story in artist of painting and remembering alot of things in the way of their story. There are alot of places where the old ancient people has written stories on walls of rocks which we have found, finding today in different places. There were stories that old man Becenti has written, it is still seen near the chapel canyon. So, I think all the story that has been told by Rex Becenti Jr. is mostly all true story what he is telling. So here is Mr. Rex Becenti as he is continue his story. Mr. Becenti.....

According to my great grandfather story, it was told when I was about 16 years of age while we was living in the canyon of Lake Valley Canyon. The story was told in the fall of October, the month of October. My great grandfather used to be one of the great sheep men, he herd his flocks among the great meadows of Chaco Canyon. While he was herding sheep, I used to follow him around, as to be one of his helpers among sheep herders. I was then about close to 16 years of age, and I remember alot of things what has been told by him. During the time of

our herding sheep we used to live around where it's warm, along side of where our flocks are being grazed. Every time he is always willing to tell me a true story and one day, while we was laying on top of big mesa there where all the flocks were being seen if was kind of quiet and then all of a suddenly he started his story. He says that he was looking at one of the old potteries that was laying around near the Chaco Canyon. He says that he was holding it up in his hand and tried to break it to pieces apart, but it won't break. The paddle was so hard that you couldn't break it and finally he start to talk about it. He says that these old ancient people during the time of the Pueblo Bonito time, I know a little story about what my grandfather told me about what people used to live he said and I was kind of interesting with old story. I was just wondering myself, I just wondering what made all those houses till standing up, who made them. I wonder how it came up, I wonder who used to live. I used to think that in one day my grandfather started to tell his story. He himself started to talk about it according to looking at the pottery. He says we got the same pottery way back. Our people has been carried it on from generation to generation. My great grandfather used to tell me that it was part of our people that used to live in this canyon, in this great canyon. Sometime I just wondering they used to be great workers. In these days they don't have no horses, no wagons to haul

rocks with, nothing of a kind. The only way you can haul rock is carrying it in your arm or else with some kind of a bag. It was told that these old ancient people had carried rocks from quite a ways off, some of these rocks are from about 5 to 10 miles away. They say that they used to be slave. One of the great gamble, he used to be gamble lived there and they were slavery of the great gambler. The gambler was a different color of man. Indians had a red skin but this gambler had white skin. Today they claim the gambler was a white fellow of today, the way they think about it, the way they trace it according to the old stories. They say that there was just only two men, they claim the two men was twin. They came from the north, they don't know how they came but they call them snow men because snow is white. They call them according to their flesh of snow men, and they came from the north and finally one of them began to gamble. This great man was a very smart man, he knew mostly anything that he could do. During this time here, some bowls, some bowls around the.... like face bowl or chopping bowl anything in a gambling way that the white people has today he has the same thing. And so alot of these Indians wanted to try this huge gamble but this white snow man knows more than the Indian people does so they couldn't beat him, he wins every time, the snow man, the great gamble he wins because he knows how to make his

trick. So, they gamble along with what they got and finally they gamble off their clothes, they gamble their own children even they gamble themselves and their wives. He wins them all and then they become their slave. So one day, the great gamble had so many people of these servants that there was no place for them to stay or to sleep or nothing to feed them with. So he had to do something to living along as the year passed by. Every time there was good weather comes up and that's the time he makes them plant their own garden, feed themselves. They claim that during these old earlier times there used to be a river going from through to Chaco Canyon. One of the river was running from the Crownpoint, 3 miles point, that's what they claim. So they used to see some irrigation through in that part of the country. We still go on continue until what happened to the river, the people has known mostly everything about what happened. As the year passed by, the great gamble for making all kinds of tricks. The trick of ball was the only gamble we had. Time went on, he win mostly all the Indian nation that lives around and then finally he had to think about the way of how he could lead him around. These were all his gambler.... all his servants. He make them carry rocks from miles away and build it for himself as they went along. Every building that they make, they make a platform for him where he could talk from, where he could talk to his

people what he want next, what he want them to do or what he..... where he want them to go. In these time Mesa Verde was also one of the big cities of the ancient time. Sometimes he take his servant to Mesa Verde. He also gambled over there and brings back what people he wins. Nobody can beat him. He wins all the time so he was kind of one of the leaders of Tuba City. Mesa Verde had another leader which was called Tall Feather. Tall Feather was also one of the smart man after all time. As he went along they follow alot of rules which they have to do. There was two other good sized city that he owns it is which they call the Three Mile Point City, and another city which they call a Wind Rock City which is known that lays between, right above Lake Valley. It also has one of the big kiva there which we know of, I think the great gamble owned that city too. They claimed that he owned, he owned around 3 big cities was under his rule and one at the above where they call Pueblo Bonito. It is Pueblo Bonito is around Torreon area. So, that is the way the story about the great gamble which he ruled for many years until he was all out win. His own brother that used to live near the great Grand Canyon and someway rather he was sent notice that his brother was getting too weak and all the people that rules under him was crying for help. If there was some way that somebody could win him out. So one day, his brother made up his

mind to come and see what he could do with him and he came. His brother knew the same trick as the great gamble knew the trick. So he came and the great gamble sometime thinks that he never wish his brother would come he would be the ruler forever up to his old age. But some way or other, the people didn't seem to like him and they had hunt up his brother and see what his brother would think. He had all kinds of good servants that protects him. Nobody would come near his home unless for special reason or to be searched out from toe to top before they see him. They think that they might, he thinks that somebody might murder him. Everywhere he goes he had about 12 servants to follow him around and watch over him. He was one of the high top man in those days. As he ruled the Chaco Canyon he builded alot of houses. He never went down to the crowd, stayed on top, top of the mesa, on top of the cliff where he had to talk and the..... and he had all kinds of servants that could watch over him. In those days somebody was tried to suicide but he was very well taken care of. Time went on and then his brother came. His brother had come around his home, not even his brother would come closer until they finally had to gamble. They been gambling for one month until he loose out. They claim that he was beaten in one month. His brother took all the servants and all the people back. Finally, he was sent away by the black bowl; I don't know what the black bowl is,

but they call it the black bowl and then after he was all the way out he had to be sent away someplace across the ocean by what they call the black rail. The black sun rail they call it and after when he was sent away the people were all set free. They were told that they were free to live anywhere they want to and there is another story starts out.

They just had wondered out places and building their own homes here and there all over through the country and one day..... and during this time there was one night it happened. That the star fell near Flagstaff. It was so bright that it came down like the daylight and then at the same time the great volcano burst out near Grants, south of Grants which they call the ice cave today. It happened the same night when the star fell and the earth shaking so hard that all the buildings had fell in on the people while they were sleeping. There was nobody left to save while they were sleeping. That's what most of the great people in the ancient days has still know and what people was left to be saved some of them had to wander far away off in front of the warm wind, the hot sheet that came off of the lava. The heat floated so low on the earth as the wind had pushed it around some of them were choked to death and out of that lava there was some kind of a smoke came out and from the star too. It was poison which what people there was left off of the volcano smoke

and the star it wipe out what people was left to live. Some of them keep going further and further throughout the country. Some went move out way down west, some of them move way far north as far as to the great Rocky Mountains.....and up to Great Lake. Some of the people move off way down west as along the coast of California, Atlantic Coast. This is the way it went on. But the time around 5 to 600 years betwen time, maybe 700 years they gradually coming moving back where they came from, where they came from, where they started out. Some of the pueblos reached back from the east up to Rio Grande River. They settled down along the river where they can get water. Some of the people has learned that around Pecos, New Mexico, near Las Vegas; some of the Navajo people have wandered out that way and most of the pueblo Indians some of them kindly stayed together as they went about and some of them came back and started to settle down along side of the Rio Grande River, the Jemez, Mesilla and the San Juan and San Ildefonso. The Pueblos that live along side the Rio Grande River was one of the people that used to live at Pueblo Bonito, half of it was Navajo. Some of the Navajo people went towards the north. During that time, the Navajo people used to talk one language. They separated from many periods of years, they used to talk one language, there were more Navajo people in the earliest days that were separated for long years. Their language

was kind of different. The Navajo can't.... Jicarilla Apache Indian talks pretty near the same and the Apache Indian, Mescalero Apache and the San Carlos Apache pretty talk near the same language also but they been apart so long that the language was just lost out but still they still understand each other. The meaning of the language. This is the way that things came about until most of the Indians came back into New Mexico. Today we found know that most of the pueblos and the Navajo people has originated in different countries. As the story came on from years after years, the story of the people keeps continue as they live along. They have been telling and drawing most of the stories on the wall as they went about. Finally, they went on separate as according to their language they were all separate different tribes then. One don't understand each other. So they call themselves different names as the Navajo people call the people (NAVAJO WORD) means mixed child. So that's what we are. The Mesa Verde people got the same thing, went the same way. The Hopi Indians and the Walapi Indians that live in Arizona. Two or three different tribes that live towards the west that came out from Mesa Verde. Most of these stories are being told about old people and very careful story and the closest remembers which they have today. Way before that, the Navajo people have stories of which they call the Ice World. The Ice World is way back from 1,000 years or more back. They were

still some people there where no one used to live. It took many years to build a good village where they can live. In these days, most of the buildings have small windows and small rooms. In earlier days the people had used to live by planting corns. Corn was only thing that has been known to eat in these days. Meat and corn..... hardly any planting any potatoes, the potato came from the white people. There was wild potatoes but they were tiny little potatoes which the Navajo people used to look for. This is the way that they had feed themselves by raising corns. Indian used to love hunting game. They hunt bears and they hunt animals buffalo. Anything that they can get to eat they hunt for. So, Indian always tells about wild, hard like, how they came about. As the Indian people gradually lived together they said that most of the Indian people used to get along very well in the earliest days. Finally, according to the weather each year, sometimes it comes good weather, good climate sometime it come bad years, maybe for 2 or 3 years it's like that. It don't rain at all. In these days there were not enough livestock. There were just barely know here and there all over the country. Finally they were so weared down that they had to do something about living. They had to live hard life to be living. Sometime they go without eat for many days and they were used to doing things like that but still they had to live together. Some-

time they have good time like playing with different games they have today. Older generation people that used to live ancient time used to be good to one another. Every year and then things keep changing as they went about as I was saying there was bad years for 2 or 3 years. Good years for one year, this is what causes the people to have trouble among themselves, among each other. The Navajo people was increasing more and more and the younger generation makes changing country as they went about. The younger people they make trouble for the old people. Some old people wanted to live together happily but the younger generation..... Finally, they were quite a few animals had been taken care right to raise different places where they might make good living out of. All these old people has remembered all these things from way back from the ancient time. They have written numbers or written artists that tell what has happened. Finally the Navajo people had find out ways to carry on the great story that they have. They find out ways to make artists to live on for their people. Finally, the Navajo people had scattered out because of their increasing each year and younger generation came up and grew up into back living a way for each people. The Navajo people scattered out moving west and northwards from New Mexico into Utah. Finally they had to be overgrowing in different places. There was hardly nobody around which we call white people, white people was never

known in this part of the country. I think they were way out, far northwards. Finally, in around 16..... 1880, or 1870 there was little known about the white people coming from the north and west. In these days the word was very slowly travel from places to places. The time of Santa Fe settlement it was still not known very much until after about 5 or 6 years later, the word the story about Santa Fe reached the Navajo country. People was talking about that there was some building being made at Santa Fe and train track was being built. Finally, it was coming through along the Rio Grande River and on up to Albuquerque. From Albuquerque it went westward up to Laguna reservation today and up to continental divide and on up to Gallup. The time when the railroad was reached below Grants there was a discussion about the railroad between the Indian, the Mexican people that which side the railroad can be made up through Ice Cave and on down to Alamo and on down to Ramah on to Zuni into St. John and up to Flagstaff. That was the way that they discuss the railroad company which it would be best to put it through North Chavez, Blue Water and North Chavez and on up to continental divide and up to Gallup because of the reason why that the ground was level in that direction. There were not very many mountains to work on and not rough mountain that they can go through. In around Ice Cave and on down to Alamo was different so the agreement was

made and finally the railroad went on in through Chavez and continental divide and on down to Coolidge and on through Wingate and up to Gallup. And all down the way to Manuelito and Lupton and up to Chambers and on down to Holbrook, Winslow to Flagstaff. So things were being talked over as the railroad went on in through. During the time of the railroad the Navajo people didn't say anything about the railroad because it didn't went through their real country. It was just part of their land that it went through. This is the way things has settled in between time and during the time of the discussion about the railroad, the railroad company made an agreement that Indian people can work while the railroad is running through their country. So there was quite a few Navajo people. But on the railroad job it was the Santa Fe Railroad Company that went through. Some of the older people during the time been working all along up here to California, Gulf of California and all around there some are still moving about, the younger generation that's been working on the railroad. Some of them and some of the old Indians has retired from the railroad and they have helped from the railroad of retiring. There is alot of stories about the railroad during the old earlier days. What the Navajo Indian people had done in the past time. When the railroad went through they have an argument with different Indians and there were alot of trouble coming up among them

as they grew long. According to the livestock the younger generation was going into things that were not right according to law. The Navajo people been among other Indians to give troubles among other Indian according to get the livestock. They been treating each other the same way. The Ute and the Sioux and the Cheyenne and the Laguna and Mexicans are having same trouble among different tribes. They been killing off sheep herders, taking away sheeps and other livestock like horses. This is the way things started out. That was the only reason why that they didn't get along among themself. As time went on it was getting worse, worser and worser each year. The older people was not to blame, the older people like to be friendly but the younger generation among these tribe was the one that brought up all these things. Years after years it wouldn't stop among each tribe. They have war path here and there among each tribe. Finally the other nation, the Pueblo Indians got together and discussed it over among themselves how the Navajo people would be stopped. So they went into deeper discussion which they got to the point that there was a way that they can be stopped. It was through the Santa Fe government and most of the other tribes, the pueblo tribes got together and the head leaders, went up to talk to some of the people, the cavalry in Santa Fe. They have cavalries, army camps around Santa Fe to protect

the white people and the other nation and settlement. You have to have law among themselves, among the white people. So the Indians thought that that might help. It went further on, they want to make agreement to clean up the Navajo people, but it wasn't easy to be done. All other tribes got together and decided to kill off the grown people and just save the young people for the next Navajo generation. So the tribes, the pueblo tribe had come in together in bunches and built up gangs against the Navajo people. They came by the hundreds and hunting up the Navajo people and killing off the old ones, saving the young ones. For something like a year passed, the United States government didn't like the idea what the other tribes were doing to the Navajo people; so, the United States government thought that it would be best to round up all the Navajo people and place them at Fort Sumner for a behavior. Each year the Navajo people was pretty strong to fight, even other tribes getting together they can't beat them off, they can't win the war. The Navajo people was getting stronger and stronger so the government thought that she could join in with the pueblo people according to law and punish them with what they have done. The story went on by some old people that knew more about story how it happen. Finally, there was an army camp came out from Santa Fe to south of Grants where they call San Rafael. San Rafael was first army camp that came from Santa

Fe. Finally it moved southwards close to Gallup, it was Fort Wingate. From Fort Wingate there was still pretty strong. The Navajo people has turned into fight the army and other tribes. I think the first general that the United States had wasn't so strong to fight against the Navajo so they hired another general which they call Kit Carson was one of the general soldier that lead the army. General Kit Carson was not afraid, he went right into the heart of the Navajo country. The only way that it can be a Navajo can be whipped was destroying their gardens and the livestock, so that's what they done. Most of the crop was found in the canyon of Canyon de Chelley way in the heart of the wall where most of the people raised corn, where nobody can get to it. The Navajo people didn't have enough ammunition and guns to fight the army but they kept on. Finally, one day Kit Carson went in Canyon de Chelley in the canyon with his soldiers and destroyed most all camps that they had in the canyon and they destroyed all the corn fields and they turned their horses loose in the corn fields. For many days some of the Navajo people fought back but the guns were too strong for them so some of them just had to wander away. Kit Carson destroyed all the corn up, burn some of them up. The soldiers was the ones that done all the damage and then they came back. Kit Carson start to travel around in the country, in the Navajo country, looking for Navajo people picking them up

here and there. As the Navajo people were picked up, they are sent to Fort Summers. First they were taken to Fort Wingate and on to San Rafael. And then from there on some of the people were kept there and they were forward to San Rafael. From San Rafael they were sent to Fort Summers. As they went about, Kit Carson had round up quite a few Navajo people in through the Navajo country. There was a man known as a Jesus Arviso, he was a full blood Mexican. He was picked up around the Zuni area during the time of the scaring the Navajo people. At that time, he had just had to join the people of the Navajo, the ones that being sent to Fort Summers. So, he went on to San Rafael with the crowd. From there on, he was hired for interpretation because he was well known in the Navajo country as he understand more Navajo language. At the same time, they had a Mexican that was in the army with Kit Carson. Between the two Mexicans they have to be interpreted to the general to talk about what is going on. Mr. Jesus Arviso was then around 16 years old, and he was a very young boy then, and then Mr. Jesus Arviso joined the army. And then from San Rafael he was sent back two time into the Navajo reservation. As he went about the Navajo people knew Jesus Arviso that he was a well known Mexican that lived among the Navajo people. The Navajo didn't bother him at all, so he talked into the Navajo people to go to Fort Sumner as it is the best way to be

done because these are tribes, are cleaning them up as they kill them off. So they thought that to talk into them and bring them in to take them to Fort Sumners, it would be the best thing to be done to help them out for their living. As the people has took quite a few of them to Fort Sumners Kit Carson was still wandering around scaring the Navajo people, looking for them. Finally, there was a place near Gallup that was over 100 or 200 Indians that were indicate where Kit Carson ran across a bunch of Indians and that's the place where they call Kit Carson Cave today. There was a big cave there where the Indians hide, the Navajo Indian hides in that cave for quite a number of months until they were found by general Kit Carson, and that is why it was called Kit Carson's Cave. Time went on story about Jesus Arviso and the Navajo people which was found in the Navajo reservation.

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(side one)