

# UC Berkeley

## UC Berkeley Previously Published Works

### Title

Food Sovereignty the Navajo Way: Cooking with Tall Woman by Charlotte Frisbie with recipes by Tall Woman and assistance from Augusta Sandoval Albuquerque: University of New Mexico Press, 2018. 398 pp.

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**Food Sovereignty The Navajo Way; Cooking With Tall Woman.**

Charlotte Frisbie, with recipes by Tall Woman and assistance from Augusta Sandoval, Albuquerque: University of New Mexico Press, 2018. 398pp.

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In *Food Sovereignty The Navajo Way*, retired anthropologist Charlotte Frisbie reflects on four decades of ethnographic work with the Mitchell family, specifically with their matriarch Rose Mitchell, or 'Asdzáán Nééz, Tall Woman (1874-1977).

The bulk of the book is comprised of food gathering and preparation stories and reflections garnered through the 14 years spent with Tall Woman-- interspersed with some recipes learned from Tall Woman and refined by her daughter Augusta--bookended between an introduction and final reflections sections that includes updates on current efforts by members the Navajo Nation to reclaim food traditions and promote food sovereignty. I found it important and meaningful that the work of young Diné scholar practitioners like Dana Eldridge-- who helped to draft the Diné Policy Institute's Food Sovereignty Report-- is included alongside the wisdom of the Navajo elders who preceded them. The book contains an overview of Diné history as it relates to changing food traditions, and then organizes the information Frisbie learned from Tall Woman and her family into seven sections, organized in a way that made the most sense to the Diné people Frisbie worked with: Wild foods; Possible Additives (including sweeteners, salts, edible clays, and culinary ashes); Cultivated Crops; Cakes and Breads; Meats; Stews, Soups and Mushes: and Drinkable Substances (juices, teas, etc.). The end of the book features an appendix containing a summary of the commodity food program, which could prove useful to anyone looking for a succinct history of the program, and another appendix containing a history of restaurants in Chinle, AZ, which will likely have more limited and localized interest.

As a non- Diné person, I am not in a place to conjecture how this book has been or will be received in the community, and how useful community members will deem it to be. Conversations with a chef of Diné ancestry have indicated an appreciation of the longitudinal richness of this work, which will prove helpful to a younger generation seeking to

move past more contemporary foods like frybread, to reclaim more of their culinary history.

The main contribution of this book is as a storehouse for culinary wisdom gathered from Tall Woman and her family (with very rich footnotes containing additional stories and notes, as well as counter information from other community members on some food uses). But in addition, this book's contribution to the field of Anthropology should be to encourage other ethnographers who have spent decades with communities working on particular projects, to go back to those notes and draw out food related information and stories that could now prove useful to the burgeoning indigenous food movement. Frisbie describes how many of the notes and recipes gathered from Tall Woman were done in the process of writing her life story, as well as books and articles about particular ceremonies. It was only later, as she realized that she also had a rich collection of information about traditional and changing food ways that Frisbie decided to update the collection with recent information, and work with Tall Woman's family to create this book. It would be interesting to see if other ethnographers were able to do the same for the communities who have shared so much knowledge with them.

Another interesting methodological contribution made by this book is in the way that Frisbie worked with the Cultural Compliance Section of the Navajo Nation Historic Preservation Department (NNHPD) to determine what material was appropriate to publish, even though the department was created long after Tall Woman shared her knowledge with Frisbie. The NNHPD felt that information about medicine shouldn't be part of this published story because it is traditional cultural knowledge-- tribal intellectual property-- that needs to be protected and restricted. Restricted materials that were taken out of the text at the behest of this Department are stored in archives with the tribe. Sacred information was kept for tribal access only, and knowledge that was deemed acceptable for public consumption was shared in the book.

In considering future directions for this work, Frisbie writes in the introduction that the publisher made her cut out most of the recipes because the book was too long. She also notes that she did not have the time or resources to work with an ethnobotanist to properly explore the Diné, English, and Latin names of all of the plants mentioned, or include photos or illustrations of them. This project should really be a three book volume—this manuscript as a narrative of Tall Woman's life and experience with food; a separate community cook book that could include all of the recipes that were left out, along with photos of the finished meals (perhaps a project that could be taken up by the culinary students at Navajo Technical University?), and an ethnobotanical volume

including photos or illustrations of the various important food plants described in Frisbie's book.