

Nervous Nellie on the Edge: A Mother Teeters on the North Rim

JUNE 2006

ARIZONA HIGHWAYS

Navajoland Mystery Tour

Explore
the Landscape
of Tony Hillerman's
Detective Stories

Plus:
A Biologist
Braves Bear Dens

Cacti Burst
Into Bloom

A Hiker Seeks
a Peak Moment

Navajoland Mystery Tour

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online arizonahighways.com

Online this month, discover the mystery and majesty of Arizona. From the monoliths of Monument Valley, to the peaceful pine country of the North Rim, to the beauty of botanical gardens, go to arizonahighways.com and click on the "June Trip Planner" for:

- Thrilling Hillerman country trips
 - North Rim recreation
 - The buzz on botanical gardens
- HUMOR** Our author imagines cavalry life at Fort Huachuca.
- ONLINE EXTRA** Find the silver lining along Arizona's "Million Dollar Highway."

WEEKEND GETAWAY Walk on the wild side at Out of Africa Wildlife Park.

HISTORY Meet Jessie Frémont, Territorial Arizona's enchanting First Lady.

EXPERIENCE ARIZONA Plan a trip using our statewide calendar of events.

FRONT COVER Sunlight streams through the swirling sandstone forms of Lower Antelope Canyon on the Navajo Indian Reservation near Page. No wider than 18 inches at its start, the depths of the canyon reveal a phantasmagorical world of color and form throughout its quarter-mile length. PAUL GILL ■ To order a print, call (866) 962-1191 or visit arizonahighways.com.

BACK COVER Showy flowers cover a diminutive fishhook pincushion cactus. Generally less than 6 inches tall, the tiny *Mammillaria grahamii* bursts into bloom after the first rains of the summer monsoon season. See portfolio, page 22. JOHN P. SCHAEFER

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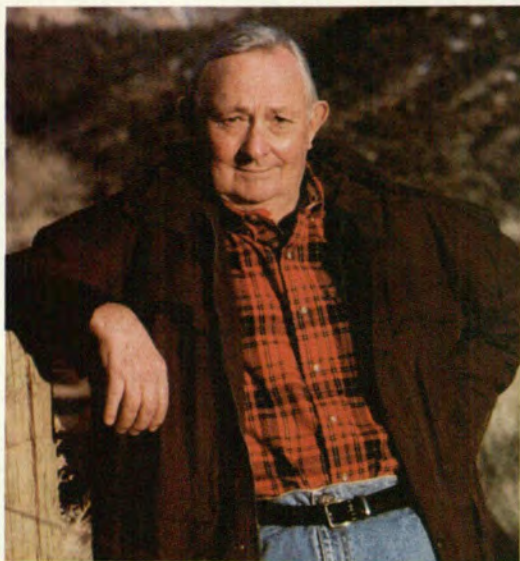
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ICONIC IMAGE Carved from the red sandstone of the Colorado Plateau through the action of countless centuries of wind and water, the striking buttes and pinnacles of Monument Valley remain the final testament to the ancient seas and sand dunes that once covered the area. See story page 8. LEROY DEJOLIE
■ To order a print, call (866) 962-1191 or visit arizonahighways.com.



Tony Hillerman

KELLY CAMPBELL

TONY HILLERMAN TAKES UP A LOT OF SPACE, whether it's in the front of a packed room of admirers all crowded around clutching dog-eared paperbacks and brand-new books for him to sign, or sitting at a table in the local diner eating a chicken-fried steak dinner. Physically, he's a big guy, bearlike as he lumbers across the room, his gait the result of stepping on a mine during World War II.

But it's more than that. He's got a long face and big ears and thinning hair, and his sonorous voice carries in a crowd. His best-selling detective novels made the nation more aware of the Navajo Indian Reservation, and spawned an entire travel industry centered on "Hillerman Country." And although he brought a Navajo worldview to jaded American readers, he was embarrassed by all the fuss.

Since he first stumbled upon an Enemy Way ceremony in 1945, Hillerman has been studying the Navajo culture. He was sent to El Paso, Texas, after stepping on the land mine in France, and while convalescing, he took a job driving a truck loaded with oil-field equipment out to the Navajo Reservation. "I just happened to drive into—literally—an Enemy Way ceremony for two Marines who were just back from the Pacific war," said Hillerman. "And of course, if you know about Enemy Way ceremonies, their primary goal is to get you back into the culture and let you forget all the bad things you learned and get rid of all the anger—forgive and forget. That's really deeply

Sculpted Sandstone Appearing from aboveground as a mere crack in the earth (opposite page), Antelope Canyon's play of light and shadows on wind-and-water-sculpted sandstone may be visited only by arrangement with Antelope Canyon Navajo Tribal Park.

■ To order a print, call (866) 962-1191 or visit arizonahighways.com.

ingrained in the Navajo culture. I thought about all the people I knew who fought the Japanese and just hated them. What a difference this was from the way I was greeted coming home. More than any single thing, this chance encounter caused me to be attracted to the Navajo way."

Growing up during the Great Depression in Sacred Heart, Oklahoma, Hillerman was no stranger to Indian culture. He attended a Pottawatomie Indian boarding school run by the Roman Catholic Church as a day student. He went there partly because the religious education was important to his family, but also because his father wouldn't allow him to attend the public school where the teacher was a bigoted political extremist.

Hillerman grew up with Indian friends, both Pottawatomies and Seminoles. "We were all friends and grew up together and didn't get into any of these racial differences," said Hillerman. "We had one thing in common that held us together—everybody was dirt poor."

Hillerman's father ran the general store in town. When Hillerman was a teenager, the family moved a couple of miles out of town onto a 40-acre ranch bought with money his mother made by selling a homesteading lot she owned in the Oklahoma panhandle. Not long after the move, his father died, leaving his mother responsible for three teen-aged children. Hillerman's sister attended nursing school, and Tony's mother was determined that one of the boys would go to college. Barney, the older brother, offered to stay home and work the farm. Soon World War II intervened, and both boys found themselves overseas. After the war, the GI Bill allowed Tony to finish the education he started half a dozen years earlier.

Hillerman grew up surrounded by books. His father, in particular, was a voracious reader and passed the love of reading on to his son who eagerly read everything he could get his hands on. His mother passed on a sense of adventure and a deep love for the land. As a teenager, she left Nebraska with her brother, two teams of horses, a wagon and a buggy and staked a homestead claim in the prairie of the Oklahoma panhandle. She built her own sod house and lived in it long enough to get title to the land. This remarkable accomplishment by such a young woman wasn't lost on her son, who has shown a similar sense of adventure and passion for the land throughout his life.

After working as a newspaper reporter and editor for 15 years, and teaching journalism courses at University of New Mexico from 1966 to 1987, Hillerman tried his hand at fiction. A couple dozen books later, he thinks he's gotten it mostly right. With millions of

Guide to Hillerman Country

Tracking Jim Chee Through Navajoland

By Pauly Heller
Illustrations by Peter Thorpe

Travelers can now follow the tracks of author Tony Hillerman-created Navajo Tribal Police detectives Lt. Joe Leaphorn and Officer Jim Chee through Diné Bike'yah, NavajoLand. Visit www.detoursaz.com or call (866) 438-6877.



In Hillerman's novel *The Blessing Way*, a murder takes Leaphorn to Ganado, home of Hubbell Trading Post, the oldest continuously operating trading post in the United States. Established by John Lorenzo Hubbell in 1878, the nonprofit Western National Park Association now operates the post. The site maintains its original 160-acre homestead, family home and visitors center, enhanced by Navajo artisans still trading there.

Open daily, May through September, 8 A.M. to 6 P.M., and October through April, 8 A.M. to 5 P.M. Closed Thanksgiving, Christmas and New Year's Day. User fee \$2.

From Flagstaff, take Interstate 40 east to Exit 333, then drive north on U.S. Route 191, 38 miles to Ganado, then west on State Route 264.

Information: (928) 755-3475 or www.nps.gov/hutr/index.htm.

Note: The Navajo Indian Reservation observes daylight-saving time, while Arizona does not.



Hillerman Country



About 6 miles west of the place in the Chuska Mountains where Lieutenant Leaphorn is shot in *Skinwalkers*, stands Diné College, the first Indian-controlled community college in the United States. With hogan-inspired architecture, the seven-story Ned Hatathli Cultural Center forms the college's core, offering a museum and gallery with cultural exhibits and sales of Navajo arts and various crafts. The Diné College Bookstore carries volumes on Navajo religion, language and culture.

Open Monday through Friday, 8 A.M. to 4:30 P.M.

Information: (928) 724-6600 or www.dinecollege.edu.



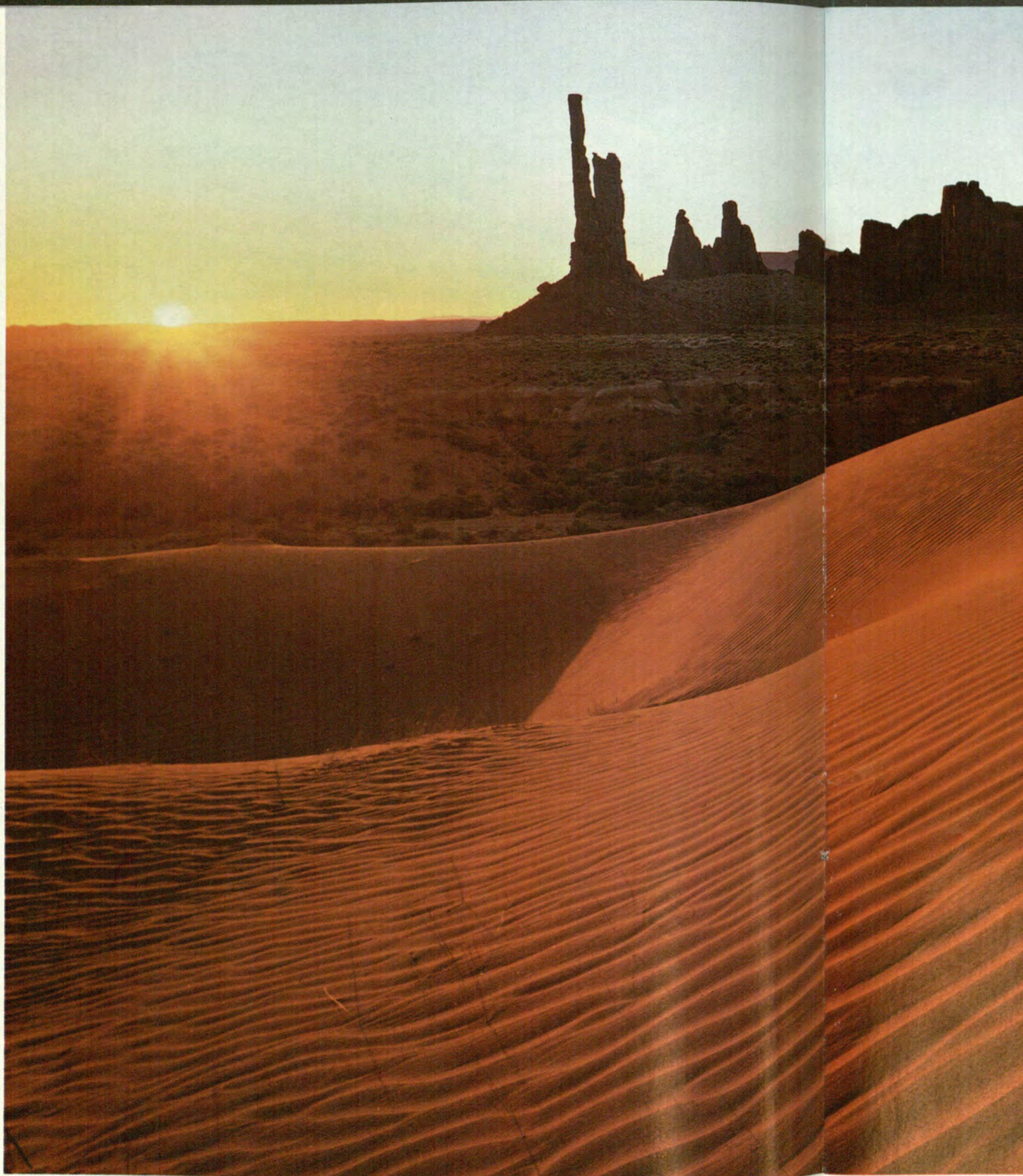
Blind *Listening Woman* gives Lieutenant Leaphorn insight into solving a murder in Monument Valley.

To see the valley's iconic rock formations—such as the Mittens and the Three Sisters—take U.S. Route 89 north from Flagstaff to U.S. Route 160 east to U.S. Route 163 north. Drive 4 miles to Indian Route 42 east into Monument Valley Navajo Tribal Park. The Navajos consider the area sacred, so visitors must stay on this road unless accompanied by a licensed Navajo guide.

Open daily, 7 A.M. to 7 P.M. April through September, 8 A.M. to 5 P.M. October through March. Closed Thanksgiving and Christmas.

Admission: \$5, age 10 and older.

Information: (435) 727-5870 or www.navajonationparks.org/index.htm.

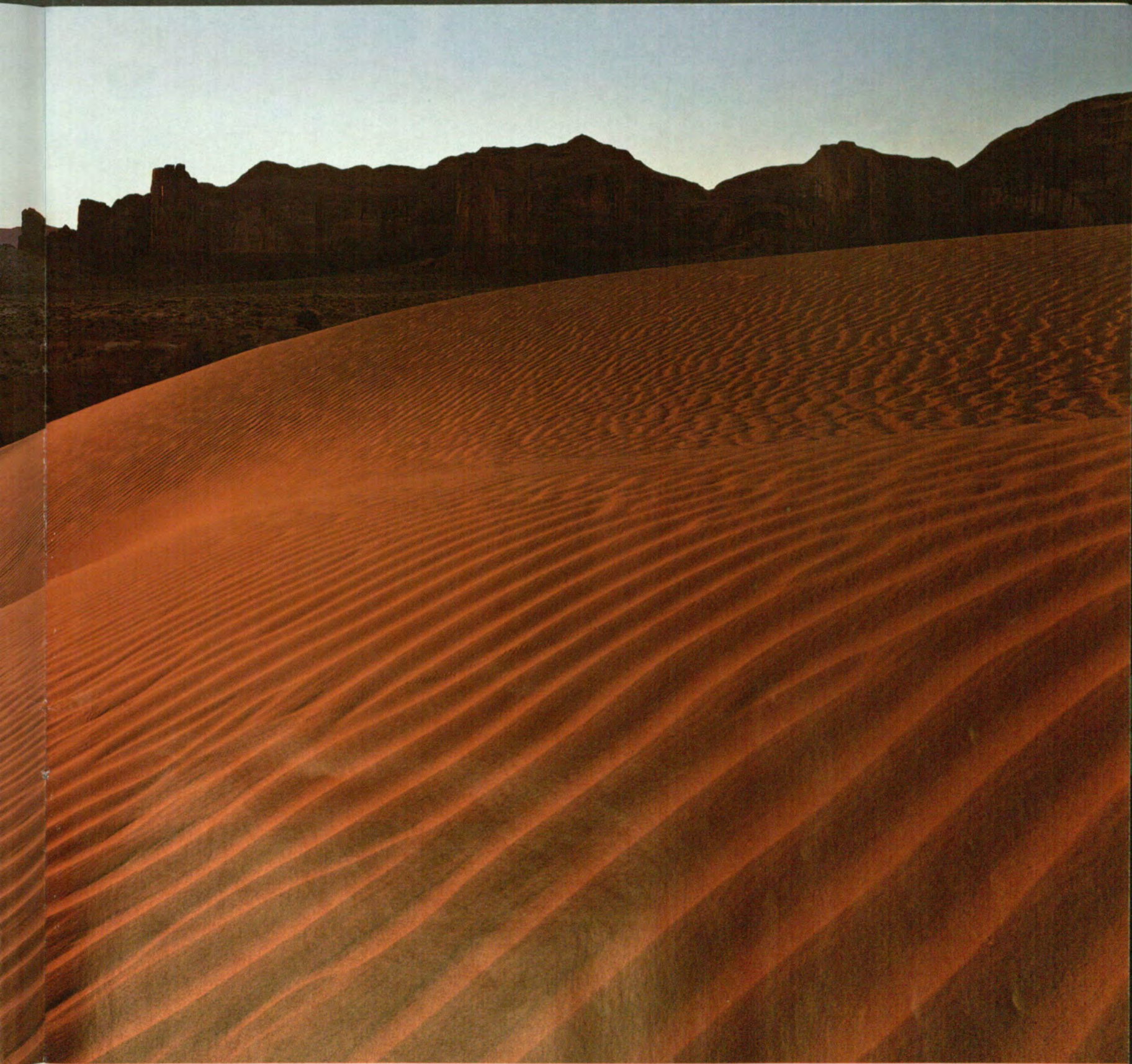


readers eagerly waiting for the next installment of the mystery series featuring Tribal Policeman Jim Chee or Lieutenant Leaphorn, Hillerman has managed to crank out a new mystery almost every year. Characters from the Navajo, Hopi, Zuni and Apache tribes appear in his mystery novels, but he always comes back to the Navajos and tribal policemen, Chee and Leaphorn. His readers have learned about Navajo ceremonies, beliefs, history, cultural clashes and a colorful Western landscape

of canyons and mesas and hogans and ancient cliff dwellings.

Listening to Hillerman talk is like reading one of his books. He lends a strong narrative voice to his written work and is a consummate storyteller in person. Descriptions of weather, rain, sun, approaching storms, gusts of wind—and the landscape—are seamlessly woven into his stories until they become like characters. In fact, Hillerman's people are always pausing to look at

and comment on the patterns of the land. The way they get their cars to leave the cloud formations, the expanse of erosion on Desolation Flat, "map," he says, "is a friend who waits for you." "What do you g



Windswept Patterns The rising sun beyond Monument Valley's Totem Poles emphasizes the textured patterns of windswept fine sand at Sand Springs. ■ To order a print, call (866) 962-1191 or visit arizonahighways.com.

and comment on clouds, rock formations, erosion patterns, colors, shadows and the vastness of the land. The author says that Navajos will stop their cars to look at cloud shadows on cliffs or cloud formations in the sky. "I know of one great expanse of erosion—it's all colors—that's called Desolation Flats on a Bureau of Land Management map," he says. "I asked Austin Sam [a Navajo friend who was riding with Hillerman that day], 'What do you guys call this valley here?' He said,

'Our name for it is Beautiful Valley.' You see the different attitude? To the white guys, if it doesn't look like money, it's desolation. But the Navajos see all those beautiful colors and the shapes and the forms and that erosion and see the beauty in it."

After the publication of his eighth tribal police book, the Navajo Tribal Council declared Tony Hillerman a "Special Friend" of the Diné. Recently, Navajo President Joe Shirley Jr. praised Hillerman's books in a speech at the Pueblo Indians Cultural



Nature's Cathedral Church Rock's shadowy spires extend heavenward against the violet hues of a post-sunset sky near Kayenta.

Center in Albuquerque, New Mexico, because they got so many Indian children interested in reading. Hillerman feels honored by these accolades from the Navajo community. He notes that his Navajo nickname is "Afraid of His Horse," which goes back to a festival in Window Rock where he declined to ride a horse in a parade—he thought the horse was a little too spirited—and opted instead to ride in the Chevrolet convertible with the Navajo beauty queen. The people parked their pickup trucks along the highway to watch the parade. Hillerman said, laughing, "These people were all cheering the queen and they were looking at me and they were yelling, 'Who the hell are you?' I'll never forget that.

"What I see especially among the Navajos and the Zunis and the Hopis is a culture of people who have been smart enough to learn a lesson that we're awfully slow to get," notes Hillerman. "They know that being rich doesn't have a damn thing to do with how much money you've got. It's got to do with are you happy and are you content. Most of

the Navajos I know, and the Hopis and the Zunis and the San Juan Indians and the Taos Indians, like the life they live," he says. This doesn't mean they don't have problems. As Hillerman points out, the "imported good old West Coast problems like cocaine" plague the reservations. However he says the Navajos "pretty much hold onto the old ways—the traditional ways—certainly better than we do.

"One way Navajos aren't very similar to the average American is that they don't have what they don't need," says Hillerman. "They're not greedy."

Hillerman often writes about the Navajo belief in witches. He says that if a Navajo believes a witch is causing a string of bad luck, he'll look for the greedy guy—the one "who's got more than he needs and is not sharing it with the people."

James Peshlakai, a Navajo friend and shaman who shows up as a character in several Hillerman books (Hillerman often uses his friends, or at least their names, as characters), thinks Hillerman has influenced the Navajo culture. "When Mr.

'I WANT READERS TO COME AWAY WITH, FIRST AND FOREMOST, A RESPECT FOR THE NAVAJO CULTURE . . .' —TONY HILLERMAN

Hillerman's books became popular, the Navajos were among the first readers of his novels," says Peshlakai. "Then the young people wanted to know, 'Are these legends accurate?' and the elders had to answer their questions. We were on the verge of losing our cultural ways and Mr. Hillerman got the young people's interest back in their culture and history."

Acclaimed Navajo photographer LeRoy DeJolie agrees. "Tony Hillerman is a very thorough researcher, and he uniquely combines the two worlds together—the modern-day world we all live in and the cultural exchanges of the traditional Navajo world. Hillerman exquisitely intertwines these into one knot."

Not everyone can go into a culture and get an understanding of its worldview. But because Hillerman grew up among Indians in the West, he gained access to details about Navajos that might elude others. Fortunately, he's spent the last 35 years introducing this culture to the wider world through his mysteries.

"I get pretty much 100 percent cooperation from the Navajos when researching a book," says Hillerman. "I say, 'Do you guys still do this? Does this tradition still hold?' and they'll say, 'Yeah, my clan does,' or 'No, I haven't heard of that for years.' You know, once they know you're honestly interested in them and are respectful and have a legitimate, honest interest in something, then they respect that. I grew up a country boy, as they did, and they know I respect them."

"I want readers to come away with, first and foremost, a respect for the Navajo culture, and for the other tribes I write about. I want them to get some inkling of the religion of the tribes and of their devotion to it. The Navajos aren't secretive about their religion. With the Pueblos, you have to be very careful because if unauthorized people know some things, it diminishes powers. I'm careful not to reveal . . . well, if it's secret I don't know it anyway."

Peshlakai says Hillerman generally gets the details right when he writes about Navajo history or ceremonial characters. Peshlakai describes Navajo belief as "metaphysical—more science than religion." He worries that Navajo oral history is being diluted because outside religions are being adopted or mixed in with Navajo beliefs. He hopes Hillerman's books will actually help younger people learn about their culture.

At 80, Tony Hillerman is slowing down a little.

Bursts of Yellow Sandpaper mules ears—a reference to the plants' leaves' rough texture—adds bright starbursts of color to the arid landscape below Red Mesa on the Navajo Indian Reservation.

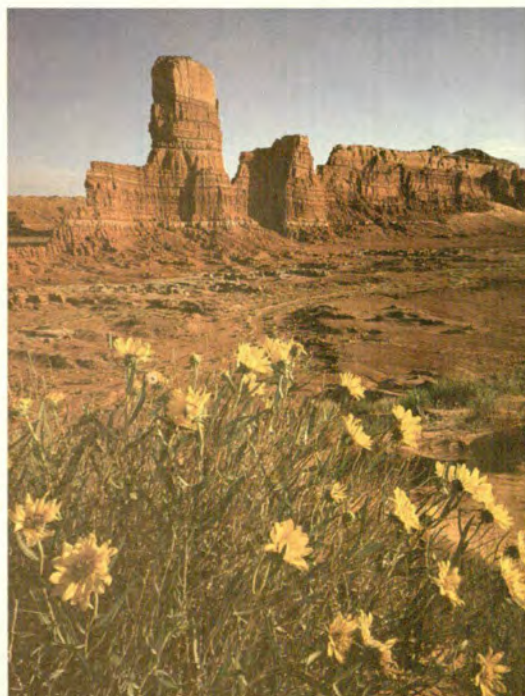
One day he decided to try and get all his legal paperwork in order, but while going through his filing cabinet, he began pulling out folder after folder of story ideas and piling them on the edge of his desk. He still hasn't located the legal papers, but the folders have got him thinking about a non-fiction book he's been wanting to write.

As he sits at his desk, Hillerman can see the trees outside his window turning yellow, and behind them is a bright blue cloudless sky. On the wall hangs a LeRoy DeJolie photograph that draws the viewer through an eroded arch and into a great expanse of the landscape of Navajo clouds, cloud shadows, the rising cliffs and the palette of Western colors. Hillerman country. A landscape Hillerman's spent a lifetime painting in words—trying to get just right—for a grateful audience. He doesn't do it for them, though, he does it for himself. For his need to capture elusive, ephemeral, ever-changing elements on paper. ■■■

ADDITIONAL READING: In *Navajoland: A Native Son Shares His Legacy*, LeRoy DeJolie describes and pictures his homeland as a ruggedly beautiful part of his heritage and culture. The softcover book, with a foreword by Tony Hillerman, can be ordered by calling toll-free (800) 543-5432 or online at arizonahighways.com. \$12.95 plus shipping and handling.

Rachel Dickinson, who loves Arizona and Hillerman country, writes about science and nature from Upstate New York.

Navajo LeRoy DeJolie's photographs are best understood within the cultural context in which they have been created—for the preservation and regeneration of the Navajo ways of life. He lives near the people he loves most on the Navajo Indian Reservation near Page.



**Hillerman
Country**



About 4 miles southeast of the sacred springs at Fort Defiance involved in Leaphorn and Chee's investigations in *Talking God*, Hillerman readers can investigate the Navajo Nation Administrative centers at Window Rock. Within the circular walls of the Navajo Nation Council Chambers, visitors can watch the 88-member council conduct meetings in English for federal business and in Navajo for tribal business.

Afterward visit the Veterans Memorial commemorating Navajo members of the U.S. military forces, open daily, 8 A.M. to 5 P.M.

Just over a mile from Window Rock, a natural rock formation used in Navajo ceremonies stands over the complex that includes the Navajo Museum Library & Visitors Center, open Tuesday through Friday, 8 A.M. to 8 P.M., and Monday and Saturday, 8 A.M. to 5 P.M.

From Interstate 40 east of Flagstaff, take U.S. Route 191 north to State Route 264 east, then north on Indian Route 12 beyond Window Rock to Fort Defiance.

Information: Navajo Nation Council Chambers, (928) 871-6417; Navajo Museum Library & Visitors Center, (928) 871-6675; Veterans Memorial, (928) 871-6413.

For the most up-to-date information on Navajoland, call the Navajo Nation Tourism Department, (928) 871-6436, or online at www.discovernavajo.com.