Snowflake Flower
COCHITI PUEBLO

When Snowflake Flower begins to create her pottery figures, she loses all track of the present moment. As she works the clay, she sings songs her mother and father taught her—lyrics about singing frogs, Butterfly Maidens, Coyote, and the events her ancestors celebrated. She remembers expressions on the faces of loved ones, their response to a funny story, the pleasure of a life shared with children. And all these memories, all this affection, find their way into the characters she creates.

A mother and grandmother, Snowflake Flower began making pottery storyteller figures in 1983, with the innovation that in her creations, the animals themselves often tell their stories. Coyote and the Winter Shawl, for example, is one of her favorites—because she heard the Coyote stories so often as a child—and she remains true to the Trickster's sometimes befuddled character by occasionally leaving off a moccasin so one paw peeks through. Faces of little children peek out from under his shawl as his tongue waggles humorously: Coyote loves the sound of his own words.

Owls and dogs, turtles and cows, Corn Maidens and singing frogs, as well as the traditional grandmother or grandfather figures, find shape in her hands, each representative of a story or a song that is part of her vivid memory.

All of Snowflake Flower's storytellers are created and fired simply in black, terra cotta, and white, traditional colors for the pottery of her pueblo, and are created according to the old ways. From observing her grandmother Estefanita Herrera, one of Cochiti Pueblo's esteemed potters, Snowflake Flower learned where to look for the essential pumice and clay from the hills near the pueblo, as well as the meticulous process of picking and preparing the Native wild spinach that produces the black pigment in Cochiti pottery. She took a detour from pottery making at age 46 to pursue a lifetime goal of going to college—earning a bachelor's degree in education from the University of Albuquerque. However, Snowflake Flower always knew she eventually would follow in her grand-mother's footsteps by “making things in clay.”

She made her first storytellers for Indian Market in 1983, the same year one of her daughters became desperately ill. She included in each of her pieces a tiny prayer feather, symbolic of the hope and prayers she was sending for her daughter. These feathers have become her trademark. With each one, she says, go her continued prayers for her daughter and for the people who buy her work.

Above: Coyote Drummer, clay and natural paints, 12” high
Left: Owl Storyteller, clay and natural paints, 7” high
For Snowflake Flower, her grandmother is an inspiration.

“I like best to do the female storyteller because I think of our grandmother,” she says. “The love of storytelling developed in me around her fireplace. In wintertimes she’d roast white corn in a pottery bowl in her fireplace, stirring until it was toasted brown. It was like popcorn to us. She would tell us stories...”

Grandmother Estefanita Herrera weaves a belt on a loom. One of her beautiful bowls is beside her.

I watched my grandma fire her huge pots when I was small. She used to come all the way from the village with the pot on her back in a shawl. We children were told, “Go get the grey [dry] wood and cow chips [dry manure] for the fire.” Sometimes we would make sandwiches early and run away before she came.

I thought later, “Why didn’t I stay around and learn from you?” Then one day I began doing pottery. It was like waltzing into a room. Everything I heard came back. It was wonderful.

—Snowflake Flower

THE SEVEN LOST DAUGHTERS

There were seven daughters and they wouldn’t listen when the grandmother told them not to wander off in the evenings. One day, strong winds came and took them up to the sky. People say if you look up at night you can see them, in the Big Dipper.

Told by Snowflake Flower, 1993

Invent a trademark.
The feather is Snowflake Flower’s trademark, her “prayer feather.” See it on this storyteller’s head? Put your trademark on the work you do.

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