

## **“The People” in the Beginning**

**Cari RayBourn**

“In the beginning...” These three words have great importance to me. They make me wonder where my ancestors came from, and their relation to the beginning of time. These words conjure a belief I hold with great conviction, but we know there are people who would say my belief is wrong and their belief is right. Through my studies in cultural anthropology, I have learned there are even more myths and stories of origin than there are cultures in this world. Some cultures or tribes have more than one. Perhaps you believe you came from one source or many sources, or perhaps you believe your predecessors came into existence long ago during a Big Bang. Setting aside my own personal interest in origins, I want to consider whether California Native American coastal tribes had similar creation/origin mythologies. As my base of comparison within this research, I will discuss the origin myths of the Chumash tribe of central coastal California, the Gabrielino-Tongva tribe to the south of the Chumash, and the Juaneno tribe. I will offer a brief description of each tribe with information pertaining to their language phyla (language stocks that, because of shared cognates, are considered likely to be related by common origin), hunting practices, and additional information reflecting each tribe’s beliefs pertaining to creation. After these introductions, I will provide a brief description of each tribe’s creation myth. To read the whole creation myth for each tribe, see the addendum following my references.

Because each tribe was geographically located within close proximity to the others (within 200 miles of one another) information pertaining to each tribe’s language and hunting practices might suggest how each tribe’s story compares to the others. If a tribe has trading practices with another tribe,

similar subsistence patterns, and the two tribes share celebrations with one another, we might expect their creation stories to be shared across tribal boundaries, and to become increasingly integrated over time until they become similar. Let’s see if this was the case.

### ***The Chumash***

The Chumash Tribal Site offers some interesting comments regarding the mindset of the Chumash people. “The Chumash people were physically and spiritually joined with nature. They did not believe in wasting any part of any animal they killed, or any plant they pulled from the earth. They lived according to ‘nature's time’, and believed that man's greed and desire for supremacy could eventually lead to his downfall” (<http://www.chumashindian.com>). Out of a spirit of sharing, without reference to profiteering, they traded things like tools, baskets and herbs with other tribes and bands. They lived their lives with a sense for 3 basic necessities: limitation, moderation, and compensation. The original language of the Chumash was from the Uto-Aztecan language Phyla and the Takic language family (Garbarino, M.). They hunted and fished for sea mammals, land mammals and gathered various plants and berries. They lived in the area around present-day Santa Barbara for over 10,000 years.

### ***The Chumash Creation Story***

The Chumash myth tells of a great downpour that consumed the earth. This natural disaster took with it all living things except for the Spotted Woodpecker, the nephew of Kaqunupenawa, the Sun God. The Sun God, Morning Star, the Moon, and Slo'w the Great Eagle were discussing the creation of new people to populate the earth. The first

of these people were created from the seeds planted on Limuw (Santa Cruz Island) by Hutash, the Earth Goddess (Salazar, 2008).

### ***The Gabrielino-Tongva***

The Gabrielino-Tongva tribe has been indigenous to the Los Angeles Basin for 7,000 years. This history is well- documented through 2,800 archaeological sites, in State historical records and federal archives, and Catholic Church records at San Gabriel Mission and San Fernando Mission. Tongva simply means ‘people of the earth’. Like the Chumash, the Gabrielino-Tongva People built canoes and regularly navigated the ocean. They enjoyed trading and welcomed social interaction with other tribes. Historically, they were a peaceful people. Their language phylum was Uto-Aztecan and the language family was Takic (Garbarino, M). They hunted on both sea and land. They gathered such plants and nuts as acorns, pine nuts and grass seeds. They lived around Los Angeles area.

### ***The Gabrielino-Tongva Creation Stories***

There are two creation myths for the Gabrielino-Tongva peoples. The first is the Quaoar story; the second is the Weywot origin myth. In the first story, Quaoar is the “Great Being” who sings the seven giants into existence. Quaoar has no gender, but is generally referred to in masculine terms. The seven giants then sing and dance the people and the world into creation. In this story there is one great creator lacking specific form or gender. He creates his helpers with a song. The helpers in turn create all else. In the Weywot creation myth, Weywot is a male sky father creator. He looks down and sees only water. He decides to make seven giant turtles so there will be land. This process takes six days. This story explains the origin of

earthquakes and how trees and land came to be, but does not explain how humans came to be (Williams, 2003).

### ***The Juaneno Tribe***

The Juaneno are a Native American tribal organization that was located predominantly in what is now Southern California. Their language was from the Aztec-Tanoan language phyla and the Takic language family. Their subsistence was the same as the Chumash and the Gabrielino tribes, they hunted deer, bear, sea mammals, and trapped fish. They ate shell fish as well. They gathered berries, nuts and various plants. They lived in and around what are now Orange and San Diego counties.

### ***The Juaneno Creation Stories***

The Juaneno had 2 very different creation stories. There were the Playanos of the coast and the Serranos of the mountains. The Playanos believed there was one creator who was named Nocuma (Native American Myths). He, believed by the Playanos, created the earth, sea, animals, and people. The Serranos’ believed that the people were transplanted to their area by the ‘Lord’ from another ‘planet’ (Ramon and Elliot, 2000). The word ‘planet’ can have different meanings. It could be another planet from the universe or another area of this earth.

### ***Findings***

All three tribes spoke very similar languages. They hunted, fished and gathered the same foods. As stated in the Native American Heritage text, they were in contact with each other during celebrations and days of trading. They lived within 200 miles of one another.

The following table clusters the creation myth for each tribe, along with information pertaining to the origin of humans and earth:

| <i>NAME OF TRIBE</i>                                      | <i>SINGLE CREATOR<br/>GOD/NON HUMAN<br/>FEMALE</i> | <i>SINGLE CREATOR<br/>GOD/NON HUMAN<br/>MALE</i> | <i>1 CREATOR<br/>WITH MULTIPLE DIETY HELPERS</i>   | <i>EARTH PRODUCT<br/>HUMANS<br/>CREATED FROM</i> |
|---|--|--|--|--|
| CHUMASH<br>CREATION<br>MYTH #1                            | HUTASH<br>(EARTH<br>GODESS)                        |  |  | SEEDS  |
| GABRIELINO-<br>TONGVA<br>CREATION<br>MYTH #1              |  |  | QUAOR-CREATOR<br>WEYWOT (SKYFATHER)<br>CHEHOOIT (EARTH MOTHER)<br>TAMIT (GRANDFATHER SUN)<br>MOAR (GRANDMOTHER MOON)<br>PAMIT (GODDESS OF SEA)<br>MANIT (LORD OF<br>DREAMS/VISIONS)<br>MANISAR (BRINGER OF FOOD<br>& HARVESTS)<br>TUKUPAR ITAR (SKY COYOTE)<br>TOLMALOK (GODDESS OF<br>UNDERWORLD) |  |
| GABRIELINO-<br>TONGVA<br>CREATION<br>MYTH #2              |  | WEYWOT THE<br>SKYFATHER                          |  |  |
| JUANENO<br>CREATION<br>MYTH #1<br>PLAYANOS<br>SUBDIVISION |  | NOCUMA   |  |  |
| JUANENO<br>CREATION<br>MYTH #2<br>SERRANOS                |  | THE LORD   |  |  |

The following table provides information that does not directly reference the creator but plays a key role in the tribe's creation story:

| <i>TRIBE</i>      | <i>GODS/NON HUMAN, NON ANIMAL LISTED</i>  | <i>DANCING &amp;/OR SINGING INVOLVED</i> | <i>#OF DAYS TAKEN TO CREATES WORLD LISTED</i> | <i>TRANSPLANT-FROM OTHER PLANET OR PLACE</i> | <i>ANIMALS LISTED IN MYTH</i>   |
|-------------------|---|--|---|--|---|
| CHUMASH           | SUNGOD-KAQUNUPENAWA MORNING STAR AND MOON | NO                                       | NOT STATED                                    | NO   | SPOTTED WOODPECKER, EAGLE, LIZARD, SKY COYOTE, SKY SNAKE, DOLPHIN                           |
| GABRIELINO-TONGVA | NONE                                      | YES                                      | 6   | NO   | EAGLE, DUCK, BEAR, FROG, COYOTE, TURTLE (LAND & MOOUNTAINS ARE MADE FROM TURTLE), AND BIRDS |
| JUANENO           | NONE                                      | YES                                      | NOT STATED                                    | YES  | FISH  |

There are 5 creation myths accounted for in this study. 4 out of the 5 stories have a single non-human creator listed as the one entity responsible for bringing the earth and/or humans into existence. 3 of those 4 creators are male. None of these single creator deities are animal. All 3 of the tribes have animals listed somewhere in their creation myths. Eagle and coyote are listed in the stories of 2 of the 3 tribes. Dancing or singing are involved in 2 of the 3 origin myths. Only 1 tribe has humans being transplanted from another planet or place because of overcrowding.

***Closing Comment***

I chose to research 3 tribes that were similar in proximity, language, hunting practices, and

food subsistence patterns. I assumed that their origin myths would be very similar. Although the creation stories generally refer to a single creator and non-human deity, the stories themselves differ in significant ways. The 3 creators have their own distinctive qualities. The animals they reference are varied, with the exception of the coyote and eagle. The messages from the stories are diverse, as well. One lists the reasoning for earthquakes; another demonstrates how mountains were formed. There are a few similarities, however. Each tribe identifies at least 1 non-human, non-animal deity in their story, and all three tribes offer an explanation for how humans came to populate the earth.

## References

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## Addendum

### *Chumash Creation Myth*

Spotted Woodpecker survived the flood by perching itself atop the tallest tree in the world, but as he saw the water rise all the way to his feet, he cried out for his uncle's help. "Save me, I'm drowning! - He cried. The Sun God's daughters heard him and told Kaqunupenawa that his nephew was dying of cold and hunger. The Sun God lowered his torch, the one he used to light the world and create the stars, and he warmed the Spotted Woodpecker with its heat. He then tossed two acorns in the water at his feet, so that he would be able to pick them up and eat them. The Sun God fed more acorns to the Spotted Woodpecker, which now explains why they are its favorite food.

After the flood, the Sun God, Morning Star, the Moon, and Slo'w the Great Eagle were discussing the creation of new people to populate the earth with the Sky Coyote, trying to decide on their appearance. The Great Eagle and the Sky Coyote argued whether the humans should have hands like the Sky Coyote's, who believed that the new people should be made in his image. He won the argument, and the next day, all gathered around a white rock so that Sky Coyote could press his hand into it to make his hand print, but the Lizard, who had been a silent observer at the proceedings leapt forward and pressed

his own hand onto the rock. Lizard escaped the furious Sky Coyote, and the Sun and the Eagle approved of the hand print and this is why human hands are somewhat shaped like the Lizard's.

The first people were created from the seeds planted on Limuw (Santa Cruz Island) by Hutash, the Earth Goddess. Hutash was married to the Sky Snake (The Milky Way), who made lightning with his tongue and gave the people their first fire. The people kept the fire burning to stay warm and cook their food. Since the people were getting more comfortable, their population grew until the Island became too crowded.

They also made so much noise that Hutash could not get any sleep, so she decided it was time to allow some of the people to cross over to the mainland. Hutash made Wishtoyo, a Rainbow Bridge which extended from the tallest peak of the Island to the tallest inland mountain near Carpinteria. She told the people to cross carefully, and to never look down, but some did, and fell off the Rainbow Bridge and into the ocean, where they were turned into dolphins by Hutash to prevent them from drowning. This is why the Chumash Indians consider the dolphins to be their brothers. The Chumash honor Hutash every September with a great Harvest Festival named after her (Salazar, 2008).

### *Quaoar Creation Myth*

'Quaoar' the great force of creation sings and dances the high ones (Deities) into existence. (While Quaoar has no form or gender he is usually referred to with the male pronoun). He dances and sings first 'Weywot' who becomes Sky Father; they sing and dance 'Chehooit' Earth Mother into existence. The trios sing 'Tamit' Grandfather Sun to life.

As each divine one joins the singing and dancing, the song becomes more complex and the dance more complicated. In turn 'Moar', Grandmother Moon (a very complex deity), 'Pamit' the Goddess of the sea, 'Manit', the Lord of dreams and visions, 'Manisar' the bringer of food and harvests, 'Tukupar Itar' Sky Coyote (who is also our major hero), 'Tolmalok', the Goddess of Shishongna (the underworld) join in the singing, dancing and creating.

Finally the great seven giants who hold up the worlds are created. The High Ones in turn are aided by 'Eagle, Duck, Bear, and Frog' in a grand earth diving story. Frog brings up soil out of the deep dark sea, and the four animals dance it flat and wide. The 'Gods and Goddesses' then furnish the world 'Tovangar' with hills, mountains, trees, rivers, etc. 'Tobohar' (first man) and 'Pahavit' (first woman) are also part of this great 'Creation song and dance cycle' (Wikipedia, 2009).

### *Weywot Creation Myth*

Before the time of people on earth, Weywot, Skyfather Creator, looked down from his place in the sky. There was no earth to look at, but only water. No trees, no mountains, no valleys. Skyfather Creator looked at all the water and he made up his mind; he would make land where things could grow. As he looked down, he saw a giant turtle in the water, so huge it was as big as an island.

"I'll make land on the back of the Turtle," he decided. But the Turtle, although he was huge, was not big enough to make the

beautiful land called Tovangar (the world). So Skyfather Creator called down, "Turtle! Hurry and bring all six of your brothers where I can talk to them."

Turtle went swimming off. It took him a whole day to find his first brother. Then another day to find the second brother. Finally, after six days, he had found them all. "Skyfather Creator wants you all," he told them, and then he led his brothers to where Skyfather Creator waited.

Skyfather Creator nodded. The seven turtles all floating in one spot were big enough to hold up the new land he planned to create. He was very pleased.

"You will make a great land," he told them. "Now stay just where you are in the water. You must always stay very, very quiet just where you are, because this is a great honor I have given you -- to bear the world on your backs." The Turtle Brothers obeyed and stayed very still.

"Now for some land where things can grow," Skyfather Creator murmured. He took some tules and spread them over the turtles' backs. Then he scooped up some earth and spread it over the tules. "These humps will make good mountains," he said to himself.

When the soil was all patted down, he wiped his hand on a clean white cloud and decided what to do next. "Trees!" he cried. "I need some trees to grow." He stuck his fingers into the earth on the Turtle Brothers' backs and made the trees grow.

Then he let a little water seep up between the edges of the turtles; shells to make lakes. Water from the lakes leaked over the earth and made rivers. The rivers ran down into the sea on the west side.

Skyfather Creator realized that everything was too quiet in the new world. "That won't do," he said. "I need birds to sing." He picked some leaves from the new trees, blew on them and they flew away singing and turned into birds.

Skyfather Creator smiled, looking at the new land he had made. He looked at the young trees rustling their leaves. He listened to the music of birds and he turned away satisfied.

Then trouble came. The giant Turtle Brothers began to get restless. They wanted to swim away. "I want to swim east," said one. "No," snapped another, "west is better. West is where the sun sets. I've always wanted to see where the sun goes down."

For days, they kept quarreling among themselves. They just couldn't agree. One day, four swam east and three swam west. Grrrrumble went the earth under Tovangar. The ground trembled and split with a loud grinding noise. A crack opened in the earth, trees shuddered and roots twisted. Birds fled into the sky where they wheeled and screeched in fear.

Suddenly the shaking ceased. The giant turtles stopped swimming away from each other. All the turtles and earth that Skyfather Creator had piled on their backs was too heavy to carry far. Also, the land was so packed and hardened that it held them back. So they made peace and the earth stopped shaking.

But, even now, every once in a while, the Turtle Brothers that hold up what is now called California start quarreling among themselves again. You may hear again the earth Grrrrumble. Sometimes buildings go down and a crack may split through the earth. Then, when the Turtle Brothers make peace, everything becomes quiet once more (Williams, 2003).

#### *Playanos Creation Myth*

An invisible, all-powerful being named Nocuma made the world. He rolled it into a ball with his hands. But it did not sit in its appointed place so he inserted a great black rock called Tosaut as ballast. In the beginning the sea was a series of small streams choked with fish. It was so crowded that some of the

fish tried to colonize the land, but they failed and died in the hot sun. Then some of the larger fish attacked Tosaut, releasing salt and more water; thus was the ocean produced. With the sea and land completed, Nocuma took some soil and sea-water and made a man, calling him Ejoni. Then he made a woman whom he called Ae. They were the parents of all human beings (Native American Myths).

#### *Juaneno/Serrano Creation Myth*

Indians apparently used to live somewhere else. They were living on some planet similar to this one. The Serrano Indians came to a new world. There were apparently too many people on the old planet (not the planet Earth). They were killing each other (due to overpopulation). They did not get along. Then their Lord brought them to a new world. Their Lord brought them. There were too many people: they did not fit any more on their home planet. This is why he brought them here, to settle here for good. This was to become the new planet. It was a very beautiful world. So many of them left (with their leader). They all came. They apparently believed in their Lord. He did not force them. He even asked people whether they would move to the new planet. Some of them believed in Him. He apparently led them to this planet. They came here. From there He brought them to this planet. I don't know how many years it took Him to bring them here. Finally they got there. And they are still here today. The Serrano reference this in their songs. The Serrano named this place when they came to this world.... The Serrano people lived here. Coming from that other planet they started over at *Maara'* (Twentynine Palms). They had been living on their lands for many years. This is in their songs (Ramon and Elliot, 2000).

In a second narrative, Mrs. Ramon reiterated: It's there. They call it 'Twentynine Palms' nowadays. That was their place of origin, the territory of the *Mamaytam* Serrano.

There was nothing but *Mamaytam* living there. It was their home. There were different tribes. There were many different kinds. The Serrano territory was extensive. It ended at the Colorado River. Their territory extended over here on the other side. Today they call it 'San Bernardino'. It continued all the way through Los Angeles to the coast (where the oil wells are). That was the Serrano people's territory long ago. I don't know how wide it was. That's what they used to say and that's what I say now. That's the extent of it. That's what they used to say, and that's what I say. There were others living at the place known as Maarrênga' 'Twentynine Palms'. That was

the place of origin of the *Maarrênga 'yam Hiddith* 'the Orthodox Serrano'. Then all the Serrano got scattered. There are different tribes. There are a number of tribes. Today I only know (the name of) some of their tribes. I still know that Twentynine Palms was the territory of the *Mamaytam*. There was also *Muhatna 'yam Maarrêng 'yam* living there. That was the tribe of my relative, of my father's father. They also had an extensive territory. It's going to be that way forever. No one is ever going to own it. That land belongs to our Lord. It is not our property. That is all (Ramon & Elliot, 2000).



**Newspaper Rock, Painted Desert National Park**