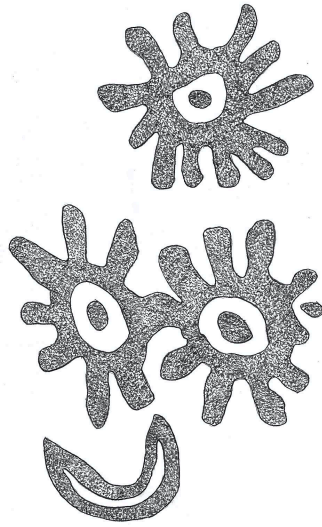
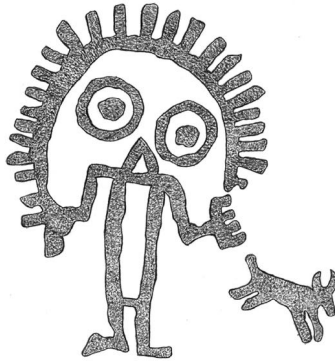


Where the Sun and Moon Live

Thomas Doty



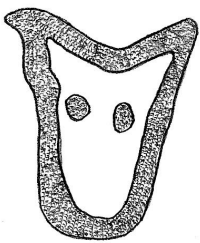
Where the Sun and Moon Live



A Doty & Coyote Story

Thomas Doty

Ashland, Oregon • 2020



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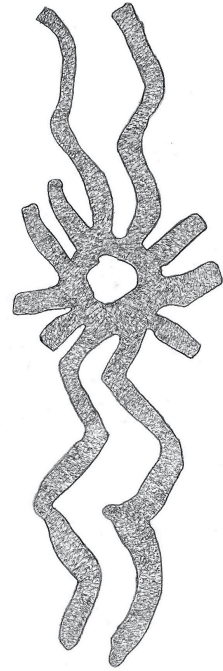
www.DotyCoyote.com

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Back cover photo by Melani Marx

June twilight brings long shadows to the juniper and sage country around Lower Klamath Lake. To the west, moonlight brushes the snowy summit of Mount Shasta. On the lake, ducks and geese gather into flocks for the night.

Coyote and I wander along the twists of Sheepy Creek near where it flows into the lake. Here is the site of the Old Time village of Shapasheni and, looming behind, the crescent-moon-shaped ridge made famous in Modoc myths as the home of the sun and moon. After lighting the world, the tellers say, the sun and night-sun nap in their lair inside the ridge. When they awake, they travel east underground through lava tubes to rise again and begin their journeys across the sky. My mind whirls with the possibilities of what lurks beyond the shadows of the approaching night. I see some hollow place deep inside the ridge. As I walk, my thoughts are wrapped in the words of ancient myths and the ageless chirping of night critters.



Coyote shatters the magic. “Remind me why we’re out here in the middle of nowhere?”

“I’m not sure,” I say.

“How encouraging,” says Coyote.

“I’ll know it when it happens.”

“My, you humans are vague. Want something concrete to add to your dreamy meanderings?”

“Like what?”

“I smell smoke.”

“Ah,” I say. “Surely, it’s a sign.”

“Right,” says Coyote.

I run my eyes along the base of the ridge. Sure enough, from a hidden place tucked in the rocks, the golden glow of a campfire sends a faint glimmer across the shadows, mixing with pale moonlight as it shimmers across the lake.

As we approach, we see a young man sitting by himself. Close up, the fire is full of colors as if someone caught the palette of the sunset and dropped it into the flames. The colors are muted and rich on the young man’s face, and his black eyes shine in the firelight. He stands and waves a

welcoming gesture toward Coyote and me. “Lu’lamna,” he whispers. “Follow me.” He turns from the fire, walks swiftly through a jumble of boulders and disappears into a cave.

Up for anything that might perk up this trek, Coyote leaps into full energy, lays out his tail and follows the young man. I am close behind.

At first, it is light inside the cave. Drops of water glisten on the ceiling. Warm air swishes through, and water droplets plop to the floor like stars from the sky just before sunrise. I imagine that the blazing eye of the sun has recently rushed past and left behind a path of light and heat for the lukewarm moon. I struggle to move quickly over the rough floor of the cave. I look ahead. I have lost sight of Coyote and the young man. I listen. The only sounds are dripping water, the whisper of a warm breeze, and my own footsteps. As I walk on, the cave grows darker.

In total darkness, time tells its own story. Outside, days, seasons, and years are defined by risings and settings of the sun, and months by the phases of the moon. Deep in the cave, I might as well be traveling through Mythtime or Dreamtime, where sequences of moments are framed by the telling of stories. At any instant it is possible for world floods to rise and fall as a single bead of water drops from the ceiling, or for centuries to whiz past with a few words whispered in darkness. It is no surprise that the sun and moon travel through this cave as they prepare to tell those living on the outside that another day is about to begin.

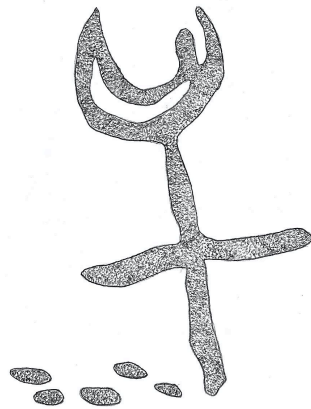
Beyond my musings of time, this cave has genuine harshness. If this is the underground path of the sun and moon, this journey is different for them than their travels across the sky. This cave has twists and turns. There are blind corners that are best to peer around before walking ahead, and side caverns that are rocky crossroads fraught with decisions. A wrong choice might send one groping down a pitch-black passage where the air smells stale and one stumbles over scatterings of old bones that litter the floor. This journey is not the graceful, open-air arcs the sun and moon make across the sky. In the deepest parts of the cave, travel is slow, tentative, uncertain. Here the sun and moon experience a daily drama of earth-bound existence up close.

After several stumbles and one good head-bang on a low ceiling sharp with basalt, I am about to turn back when I see a glimmer of light ahead. I turn a corner and find Mister Coyote crouched in a side opening of the cave.

“Shhh,” whispers Coyote. “He’s resting.”

Across a jumble of rocks, I see the young man sitting quietly, gazing at the sky. He sits on a flat boulder in the shape of a natural chair. I look around. I know this place. Symbol Bridge. Many times I have walked the desert trail to visit the rock paintings. There are dozens, and one of them shows the sun traveling through a cave.

As I watch the young man, the light grows and the first sunlight of the day slips over the rock rim and finds its way into the cave. The young man leans forward. His gaze is intense. He points toward the sky. Something is different. I walk out of the cave and look skyward. All of the stars have disappeared in the bright light of the morning except one, and it shines as bright in the daytime sky as it did at night.



A supernova, I'm thinking, like the explosion that created the Crab Nebula. In 1054, the Modocs saw this star in the daytime sky for months. They painted pictures of it here at Symbol Bridge and a few miles away, in Fern Cave. As I run this through my mind, the young man is busy adding new symbols to the cave wall: a rising sun, a bright star, a crescent moon... When he's finished, he disappears into the cave. Coyote leaps into action, trailing the young man.

As I walk past the stone chair, I see no sign that the young man was ever there. No drops of fresh paint, and the only symbols on the cave wall are the ancient ones I have visited many times. Nothing looks different. I walk back into the cave. The path is smooth, clear of rocks, and I hustle to catch up with Coyote.

“Parts of this cave aren't on the maps, you know.”

“That makes it the best kind of cave, doesn't it?” says Coyote.

“And the symbols he painted a few minutes ago have been there for centuries.”

“That makes this journey even more interesting.”

“So what's the deal?” I ask. “Are we in a story or a dream?”

“What a question for a storyteller to ask,” says Coyote. “I thought we worked through this a few stories back.”

“Well, are we? You’re the expert.”

“I dunno,” says Coyote. “Looks like a cave to me.”

Coyote pushes all four legs into a trot and disappears into the darkness.

At the next cave entrance I see several folks gathered in the faint light. As Coyote disappears into the crowd, I yell to him, “Hey, Coyote, what time is it?”

It’s a silly question to toss at Coyote, of course, but it is the first thing I can think of. I want Coyote’s attention. I’m surprised when he answers, “It’s four–thirty a.m. on the summer solstice!”

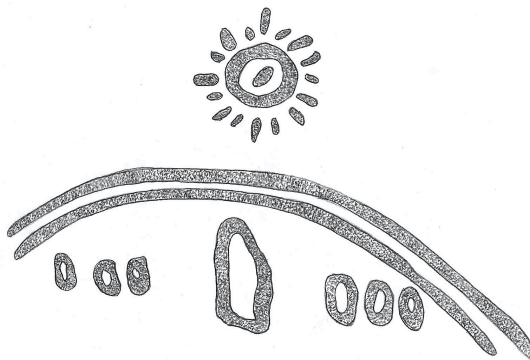
“What year?”

“Doesn’t matter!”

It matters to me. I recognize the rock painting near the cave entrance. It interacts with the rising sun to mark the longest day of the year. I also know that an earthquake a few years back shifted the rock that focuses the sunlight onto the wall next to the painting, and it hasn’t worked since. I scratch my head.

“Why are people here?” I ask myself. “There’s nothing to see.”

I remember the words of the Modoc elder who first led me to this place. “Each year in June, the Old Ones say, there is a time in our calendar when the sun and moon and an ancient rock writing combine their powers to herald the coming of the warm days, days that ripen the gooseberries, days that green the marsh around Tule Lake and fill our world with the heat of the summer sun and the warmth of moonlight.”



Recalling the first time I witnessed this event, I speak the words of my own story softly to myself....

Before sunrise, the sky was brilliant, not from the rising sun — though there was a faint wash of color in the east — but with the light of the moon which rose full the night before. Through clumps of sagebrush and shadows of tall pines, mule deer crisscrossed our camp and owls talked from treetop to treetop, telling stories of last night’s good hunting under the moon.

I was camped with friends on the forested edge of the desert basin. From an owl’s view, the basin looked huge in the early morning. Tule Lake was shadowed smooth, spotted with flocks of dozing geese and pelicans and coots.

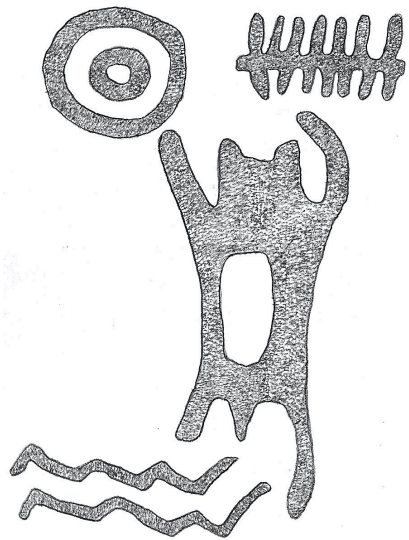
As the shadows shifted and the eastern light turned orange, we were already in the rig driving toward a solstice rock writing, where each year the sun reaffirmed the circling of the seasons, an event that has happened since the Old Time when the Human People and the Animal People were not so different and Coyote was just getting known in this place.

As we bumped along the road, I thought of last night's moonrise. From our camp behind a cinder cone without a view of the basin, the rising came late. Obscuring the moon was a bulk of clouds shaped like a bear. Frustrated at the thought of missing the moonrise, I improvised a Modoc chant. In the best Coyote voice I could muster, I screamed it out. The trees bounced the chant through the forest until the multitude of echoes sounded like an entire tribe of Coyote People....

“Hey hey hey hey hey! Frog in the moon, do you hear me? Can’t you see Bear is swallowing your home? We like looking at the moon and seeing you watching our world. So listen — hey hey hey hey Frog! Let loose on Bear’s nose. Water his nose with your juice. Make him stop swallowing your home. Come on, Frog, we like seeing you! Hey hey hey hey hey!”

It must have worked. Clouds shrank into the trees. Bear went back to his lodge in the stars. The moon rose huge and white, the dark shape of Frog grinning away. The night stayed clear, no rain — Frog didn’t miss and water our camp! — and I went to sleep under the light of the moon, with the coming light of the solstice sunrise in my dreams.

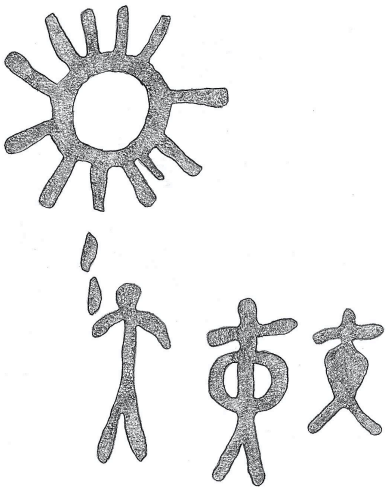
By the time we arrived at the cave the moon was going down, leaving a trace of color, and there were several cars parked along the road. We walked the short trail past an ancient cairn and



scrambled down rocks to the cave entrance. It was near sunrise, and we stood staring at the painted symbols that have come to be called the Solstice Pictograph.

An elder translated the message. “At this place, on the longest day of the year, the sun will rise over the eastern hills and shine freely, just to the right of the cave entrance.”

As light began to spread across the basin, the sun rose orange over the curve of the hills to the east, making the tops of a dozen cinder cones glow like fire. People gathered and watched the rock face to the left of the symbols. A few minutes after sunrise, the sun streamed between rocks and formed a fist of sunlight on the rock face. Over the next several minutes, a finger grew from the fist and moved down the rock, past the symbols, until it pointed directly to a crack that resembled the cave itself. Less than an hour later, the fist and finger disintegrated into a mass of sunlight, spilled into the crack, and was gone.



The crowd of people, many of them unimpressed, walked back to their cars and drove down the road. We stayed on and took in the wonder of the day. More shapes of sunlight traveled the rock face. With the crowd gone, the day turned quiet. The morning breeze made the same swishing sound the sun and moon might make traveling through the cave, or the sound of the sun rising and walking west across the sky.

We spent all day watching sunlight and shadows and sharing stories. Near sunset, I walked to where my friends stood at the cairn.

“Hey, Doty! Look at this! Stand here. Put your heels against this rock and look at the sun.”

My heels fit perfectly into a groove. It was worn as if many people over thousands of years had stood here. The cairn was directly in front of me, and the sun was going down in a splash of color over a distant cinder cone, directly over the dip in the crater. This was a perfect alignment: myself, the cairn, the cinder cone, and the sun traveling toward Shapasheni.

In the gathering darkness, we sat near the cairn and looked over the desert basin, waiting for the moon to rise. The air was cool, the desert heat of the day staying on only in the rocks. The green marsh around Tule Lake was in shadow. Mule deer browsed in the open, and owls predicted with vivid voices their nighttime hunting. I went back over the past night and day in

my head. The sun and moon had acted out their yearly ritual, and I had been part of the ceremony, at home in this ancient place where the sun and moon live their lives.

“Hey, Doty!” yells Coyote. “Are you coming?”

“Where did everyone go?”

“Who are you talking about?”

“All those people.”

“You’re nuts! It’s just me and you.”

“Right. Where’s the young man?”

“He went into the cave. We’d better hurry.”

“Did the fist of sunlight work?”

“Of course,” says Coyote. “It always works for me!”

In the middle of the night the stars are brilliant from the top of Petroglyph Point, a rock near the eastern shore of Tule Lake that was once an underwater volcano. Coyote and I emerge out of the cave near the base of the rock, along the old shoreline of the lake, and we walk up the old Indian trail to the summit. We find the young man sitting on a stone bench in the center of the rock. I sit down next to him.

Coyote surveys the top of the rock, the ring of cliffs around the edge, the slope toward the small crater in the center. He leaps into the open. “Hey, look at this place! A natural amphitheater. Just right for a one-dog show!”

Coyote struts in the starlight. “Now, a long, long time ago, Coyote Old Man — that’s me wearing one of my nifty masks — made the world. He reached deep into the water of the lake and scooped up mud and spread it around to make the land. Then he made the sun and moon, and the days and nights, and he placed all the stars just so in the sky. He named the seasons, and he scattered lesser critters called people around until they were as many as stars. They spent centuries telling stories about Coyote the Creator, Coyote the Bringer of Life, Coyote the Eternal Howl of Wisdom....”

A woman’s voice drifts out of the night sky. “Not quite right, Mister Teller of Tall Tales!”

Coyote sticks his nose into the air. “Who are you, and what have you got to do with it?”

“I’m your mother, and I was there.”

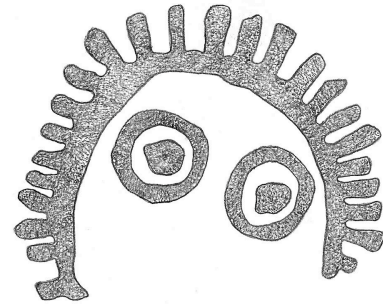
“Oh, oh,” says Coyote, and he slinks over to the bench and sits down next to me and the young man.

“Now pay attention, you little pip-squeak puppy and maybe you’ll learn something. This is how it happened....”

Voices begin whispering among the stars until there is a chorus of storytellers acting out the beginning of the Modoc world.

Koomookumpts says: It was me who made the world from the mud of Tule Lake.

Coyote's Mother says: After that, Koomookumpts became the sun. He built a lodge called Shapasheni, far to the west. He rested there after long hours of traveling the sky and spreading light across the world.



Koomookumpts says: I called a great Council of Mythological Beings and we made lots of decisions about how the world ought to be. We decided the lengths of the day and night and how the people should live. Coyote wanted the winter to be twelve months long. Everyone thought that was a bad idea, so we made it three months and made other seasons for the rest of the year. We put Mister Bear in charge of the seasons. He built his lodge among the stars, and the people call him Great Bear in the Sky.

Gaukos says: Since I was an orphan anyway, I agreed to be the moon.

Coyote’s Mother says: Gaukos came to visit me in my lodge. I made him twenty-four masks to make him bright and beautiful. One mask covered another, and when he removed one, there was a new month. But one day Koomookumpts stopped by when I wasn’t there, and that no-good son of mine showed him the masks.

Koomookumpts says: Like mother, like son, I said. Twenty-four masks was too long a year. There was no way the people would survive the winters. So I honored the decision of the council and smashed half of the masks. I went back to the council and told everyone that the world was ready for people.

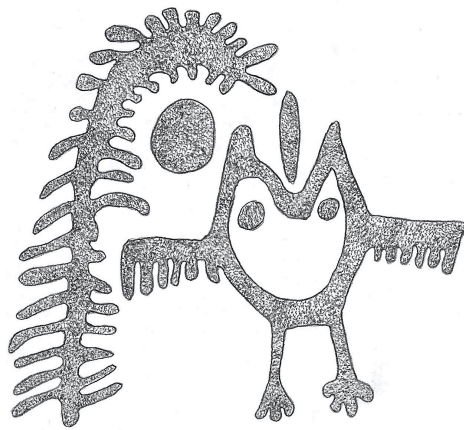
Water Snake says: I wanted people to shed their skins like I do and be young forever.

Mole says: I said the world would get too crowded.

Koomookumpts says: Everyone agreed that people should grow old, get cold, and sit down and shake and die. And that's just what they started doing. That council lasted for five days and

was a lot of work, so when I was done I went to sleep in my stone bed, right where you are sitting. From that day on, the Old Ones called this rock Koomookumpts' Bed. It is the center of our universe. One of these days I'll wake up and put the world back the way it used to be.

Coyote's Mother says: A white owl glides across the top of the rock and lands on the cliff above the stone bed. The rock face is covered with ancient carvings that tell the story of the Modoc world. When they are young, girls and boys come here to seek visions and become complete people. Near the end of their lives, they gaze at this rock where Koomookumpts made the world and are reminded how their own lives began.



Owl says: The roof of my lodge is the night sky. I see all the stars and I listen to their stories. Sometimes a star streaks across the sky and falls to the earth, and I hear him whisper the name of someone who is about to die. I speak the name back so everyone knows. Where the star falls is where the death will happen. Many shooting stars means many people will die.

Voices from Far Away say: We are traveling toward the Land of the Dead, beyond that mountain to the west. Our path is the Milky Way. You can see our campfires at night as we camp along the trail. In the daytime we run so fast you cannot see us.

Coyote's Mother says: Owl flies into the night. His white shape shrinks to the size of a star and disappears into the haze of the Milky Way. The crescent moon clears the ridge and sends a sliver of light across the rock. Shouting comes from the moon.

Frog Woman says: Hey, knock it off!

Great Bear in the Sky says: Who, me?

Frog Woman says: Yes, you! Every night you take another bite out of Gaukos. Just mention your name and the poor fellow starts shaking. We've had enough moon phases for this month. Go

home and do your dance and keep the seasons moving. I'm the wife of Gaukos, and I have special powers. Stick around here and you'll be sorry!

Great Bear in the Sky says: All right, all right, just for tonight.

Coyote's Mother says: Bear returns to his home. He lights a fire and North Star blazes. He dances a circle dance to his left, and the night air turns warm on this first night of summer. The moon travels across the sky as he dances through the night.

Morning Star says: Better hurry this story along. It's almost daytime, and I need to give the sun a morning nudge.

Coyote's Mother says: Coyote stands up and stamps his foot.

Coyote says: What about me? Surely I do more.

Coyote's Mother says: The star Capella flashes colors just above the horizon to the north. She is known among the people as Coyote's Star.

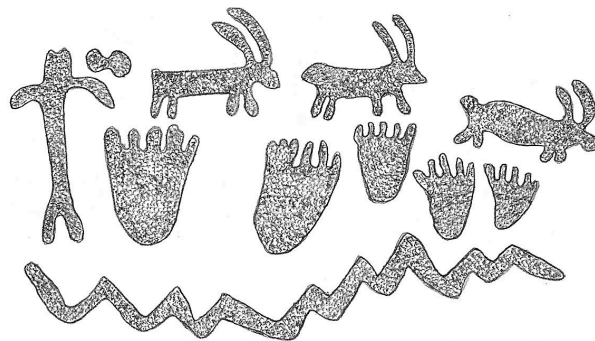
Coyote's Star says: Ooooo, Coyote. Yes, you did a lot more. You're a fool of a dog, you know. One night you danced with me to the top of the sky.

Coyote says: Oh, oh, I remember that. You dumped me! That hurt, and it took me a long time to gather up my parts and put myself back together.

Coyote's Mother says: Maybe so, but Crater Lake formed in the mountain where you crash-landed. That lake is a place of dreams and power and stories, and the best deep mirror of our world we could ever ask for.

Morning Star says: That's all for tonight. Ningadaniak. This story is finished.

Coyote's Mother says: Between night and day there is a deep silence as each storyteller draws a new breath.



“Not much of a one–dog show, was it?” I say.

"Humph," says Coyote. He curls up in the stone bed, closes his eyes, and is soon dreaming heroic stories about himself.

I look around. The young man is gone. “Who was he? Some lunar deity out of Mythtime? Perhaps Aisis, the son of Koomookumpts? Maybe he was just some regular guy who knew the way.”

Coyote half opens an eye. “He wasn’t even there. You just thought you needed a guide. He’s part of the mythological fireworks that live in your brain. Your own mental supernova.”

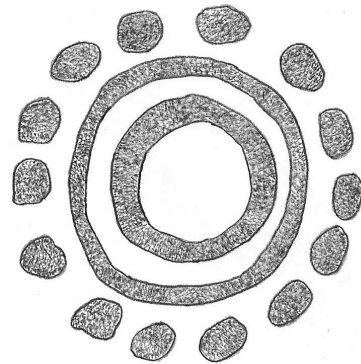
“Imagined? Like you?”

“Right,” says Coyote, and he’s back asleep.

I shake my head and free myself from questions that have no answers. I walk a little ways from the stone bed where I can see east through a gap in the cliff. I hear the chatter of geese as they rise off the lake. I watch the sun rise bright into the summer sky. It looks like a giant eye, wide open. I glance west and see the crescent moon, an eye closing as it heads toward sleep at Shapasheni. I imagine the view of the universe the sun and moon have, a dramatic eye–opener after their dark travels through the cave.

I stand on the cliff–edge at the center of the world and whisper the words from a Modoc song:

“Sun and Night–Sun, you know everything. You see me night and day. Give me your eyes that I may see as you do. You have given me much. You warm me on a cold day. You make all that is my food. You light the day and night. You make the seasons. Sun and Night–Sun, you know everything. You are over me night and day. Give me your eyes that I may see as you do.”



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“A cultural treasure.” — “A master of his art.”



Thomas Doty is a native storyteller. Since 1981, he has traveled the countryside performing traditional and original stories. He learned his art and native cultural traditions from elders, including listening to Grandma Maude, the family storyteller. Doty was born in southern Oregon where he still lives. He is descended from Irish and English settlers who settled in the Rogue Valley in the 1800s, and has family connections to Takelma and Shasta ancestors of the region.

He is the co-founder and co-director of Reading the Rocks, and the author of several books, including *Doty Meets Coyote*, a collection of 40 traditional and original native stories published in 2016 by Blackstone Publishing. His stories have been broadcast on Public Radio, and he is the recipient of a Distinguished Lifetime Achievement Award from the national American Indian Program.

www.DotyCoyote.com