

TALES
OF THE
SKINWALKER

A
COLLECTION OF STORIES
FROM
SKINWALKER RANCH
AND BEYOND

RYAN SKINNER

A Voodoo Creations book

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INTRODUCTION

I first became acquainted with Skinwalker lore when I had my first up close and personal encounter with unknown entities on I-70 in Utah, and just south of the infamous Skinwalker Ranch. I have since detailed these encounters and others to follow in my two previous books, [Skinwalker Ranch](#), [The Path of the Skinwalker](#) and [Skinwalker Ranch: No Trespassing](#). While these encounters were definitely not limited to the Skinwalker, I nevertheless found myself extremely fascinated by its origins, and then equally so by its evolution.

For those less familiar, the Skinwalker has been, from the sense of the petroglyphs and petro-graphs adorning the canyon rock all through the Great Basin area and the lands that make up the Four Corners, part of the native culture since people walked upright. In its earliest incarnation, however, it was perceived as a spirit or entity existing on another plane or within some alternate dimension and only crossing over to the mortal world of its own volition. That perception changed in the early part of the 19th century.

In 1864, what remained of the Navajo nation was forced into exile by the United States Army, resulting in what has become known as the Long Walk. Prior to the Long Walk, however, the US soldiers were less than successful in curtailing Navajo activity. To assist in their efforts, they made a deal with the Ute, encouraging them to conduct raids on the Navajo settlements, offering to pay for any stolen livestock and allowing the Ute to keep and sell as slaves any Navajo people taken prisoner.

In response, the Navajo medicine men took revenge by calling upon powerful spirits from beyond, who then sent forth the Skinwalker. From that point on, Ute history is filled with references to its dark deeds, spiritual torment, and, to the very day, foreboding presence among them and throughout the Four Corners.

The short tales to follow are modern day first and third-person encounters with the Skinwalker—mainly in Arizona, New Mexico, and Utah, who in its contemporary incarnation takes on the persona of a Native bogeyman scaring children, bedeviling teens, and exacting revenge upon those who have done it wrong.

The source of these stories are real people, most of whom shared their encounters or experiences with me through my website—[Skinwalker ranch.org](#).—and some of whom I later met in person as I travel throughout

the United States, and—as is the case with these stories—primarily the southwest.

CADAVER DUST

Cadaver dust is ground from human bones. The most effective form is said to be derived from the bones of an infant, and even better if from a relative of the Skinwalker. It is blown into the face of the intended victim by the Skinwalker, and generally from the palm of his hand. Reed, too, may be used, sort of like a blowing-straw. The dust, once inhaled, incapacitates the victim, turning him or her into a zombie which can then be controlled by the Skinwalker using telepathic suggestion. Some believe the dust can also have a hallucinogenic effect, may paralyze the victim, and may even kill in extreme situations. Otherwise, the effect is short-term and wears off after a period.

This event happened just south of Polaca, Arizona, within the Navajo Reservation. A pair of Skinwalkers—supposedly an old couple that lived deep back in the reservation—were seen lurking around this small cattle ranch. Two heifers had disappeared recently; one of which was discovered down by the creek and mutilated. The man who owned the ranch, his two sons, and his brother armed themselves and went out to try to run them off.

One of the sons, not yet 18 years of age, was searching out beyond the barn when a dark shape, seemingly materializing from the darkness itself, loomed up in front of him almost nose to nose. As the boy attempted to raise his rifle, the figure raised its hands up to its face as if it was going to yell something. The boy, trying not to look it in the eyes, then felt something rush into his face, like dust or sand. Although he tried not to, he breathed some of it in and almost immediately things went dark and he started experiencing hallucinations and sensory deprivation.

The others found him only minutes later, on his knees, holding the sides of his head, and his eyes rolled back. He fell to the ground and went into some sort of trance, his body limp and he unresponsive. They carried him back to the house and summoned the local medicine man, who came and said some prayers over him. But, he told the others, there was nothing to be done but to wait for the cadaver dust, traces of which were still on his face and his shirt, to wear-off. He promised he'd come back the next day when the sun was up and bless the Hogan.

Later, after he had regained consciousness, the boy swore to the others that he was the victim of a dog-faced creature. He described it as not quite as tall as he is, thin and scraggly with patches of mangy and dark hair, a canine snout, only shorter than a dog's, and with the smell of rotten eggs or

worse. He said he doesn't recall anything more before passing out, other than suddenly not being able to breathe and having no control over his own body.

MARK OF THE SKINWALKER

Skinwalker lore suggests that the Skinwalker can move by means supernatural and undetected. Making eye contact with a Skinwalker gives him control over his victim, again by means of telepathic suggestion or some similar art. Often, encounters are limited to disconcerting victims simply by the Skinwalker making his presence known—a vague or unexplainable sense of dread—or allowing himself to be seen. Accepted lore provides that the Skinwalker is not vulnerable to traditional weapons, such as guns or blades, especially when wielded by white men.

This encounter takes place in Chinle, Arizona at our house. The five of us—a school friend, two cousins, my sister and I—were all in high school at the time. We were hanging out and everyone decided to spend the night. Because it was the middle of the summer and so hot, we set up our folks' van and my older brother's pickup truck so we could sleep outside where there was at least a bit of a breeze. We spent most of the earlier part of the night doing what teenagers do, including a little smoke—if you know what I mean—and some beers. Sometime after midnight, the three girls decided to call it a night and climbed into the bed of the pickup truck. My friend and I stayed out on the porch for another hour or so before heading to the van. We must have dozed off soon afterwards.

According to my sister—she's a year younger than me—she is still awake, just lying there and looking up at the stars. The sky out here is really clear at night; there are stars everywhere. Suddenly the neighbor's dogs from across the dry bed start to bark, which around here usually means the local wild life is on the prowl. My sister says she is listening between the yips of the dogs to see if she can hear what's out there. Black against black, she suddenly sees this figure, as if out of nowhere, crouched on the roof of the pickup and staring down at her. She's absolutely frozen, partially out of fear and partially through no will of her own. She wants to scream or at least say something, but she can't find her voice; it's as if she's gasping for air, but without making any noise and as if her lungs just won't fill.

Just then, our younger cousin wakes up—she says because out of nowhere she gets this feeling of intense dread. She sits up kind of suddenly, and at the same time it is like my sister is released from a spell. The air rushes into her lungs and she lets out a scream, pointing to the top of the truck. But whatever it was is now gone.

All three girls are now wide awake and panicking. They jump out of the back of the pickup and make for the house where my parents are sound asleep. My friend and I, totally oblivious to the excitement, and somewhat under the influence, remain blissfully unconscious.

Inside the house, my sister tells the other girls what she saw, or at least thinks she saw. At first they're all scared, but then just start laughing. Then they become brave. My sister grabs a flashlight from the kitchen draw, and the three of them venture out into the dark yard. They come off the porch and point the front of the property with the beam of the flashlight. They see nothing of interest. Now they head towards the back of the house, all huddled together as if the light is some kind of shield. As the beam moves across the open yard and then to the hill at the back of the property, they see this figure, moving quick and steady but awkwardly as if unaccustomed to a new pair of shoes, making its way to the top. Before they can get a good look, it disappears over and down the other side.

My sister wants to go after it, but my two cousins pull her back towards the house. They go inside and wake up my parents. My mother refuses to leave the house, but my father, thinking he's got some sort of burglar or thief running around his property, grabs up his shotgun—.20 gauge—and makes for the hill. Of course, whoever or whatever it is no longer is to be seen. He fires off two shots into the darkness anyway.

Not that she needs to after two shotgun blasts, but my sister then comes over to the van to wake us up to go inside the house. I'm only ask why the old man's blasting away at the night. She tells me her story. My friend, who definitely partied harder than I did, doesn't stir an inch. I tell my sister I'm stayin where I am. So the three girls decide they too are staying outside and set up a watch. All three girls promise they won't fall asleep. Nevertheless, the two cousins are soon nodded-out; my sister is again alone with the stars. She says it's not more than 20 minutes, if even that many, when she hears what sounds like someone talking to themselves in Navajo, but it's old Navajo and she doesn't know what's being said. The sound is coming from back by the hill and in the direction of the corral. My sister wakes up the other two girls and they run back up to the house.

My sister makes her way back to my parents' room. My dad is out like a light and not responding. My mother, however, is talking in her sleep as if admonishing someone; at the same time she is invoking the name of Jesus. We are Christian, after all. The next morning, when my sister asks her if she remembers any of it, my mother recalls having a dream in which something dark and menacing is outside the door and trying to find its way in. She has no doubt it was intent on evil. She says her prayer made it go away.

Anyway, at the same time my mother is talking in her sleep, my sister feels a presence to the back door of the house of something she describes as evil. All three girls swear there's a heavy smell of something dead which makes them nauseous. No sooner does my mother name Jesus, the feeling and the smell go away.

When morning comes and the sun is up high and bright, the three girls and my mother go outside and have a look around. There up on the hill is a spot in the high grass all flattened down as if something was sitting there. But there are no trails, tracks, or footprints of any kind. As they all come back to the house, my sister leaves the group and goes to the pickup where she left her sandals. She finds upon one of them a clump of long black hair, frizzy and tangled. All of the girls, including my mother, have dark hair, but none of it like that clump. She shows it to my mother, who tells her to immediately throw it into the fire of the stove. She tells her it is the mark of a Skinwalker who intends bad medicine and must be destroyed.

POWER OVER THE MIND

Skinwalker lore does not necessarily limit a particular Skinwalker to a particular transformation. However, it is generally accepted that the Skinwalker takes a preferred form, for example wolf or coyote. These two forms are related to the creation myth in which it is believed the Earth was at one time completely covered with water. The coyote (or wolf), at the time the wisest of Earth's creatures, tired of endless swimming and brought about the creation of land, which leads to the eventual arrival of man. It is also accurate that, beside the bison, at the time the ancestors of the Great Basin native people arrived to the area, the most common animal they encountered was the coyote.

In addition, the Skinwalker once transformed is recognizable as awkward and unnatural in presentation when compared to the actual beast

he is mimicking. As such, while running or loping, the sound he produces is most often associated with the clopping produced by a running horse.

I was only seventeen at the time. This particular night I wake up feeling thirsty. I'm just lying there staring into the dark and deciding if it's worth the effort to get up and get something to drink. All I can hear is the clock ticking out down the hallway and the muted silence. It is just way too quiet. I check the time on my cell phone. It is a few minutes short of 2:30 am.

I sit up and get out of bed. I then make my way towards the door of my bedroom. It is really dark. I go down the hallway towards the kitchen. As I get out to the living room, I chance to look to my right and in the direction of the front door to the house. The only light is coming from a street light that is down at the end of the property and not all that far away. There at the inside of the door—inside the house—I see this figure standing there. Its face at first appears human, then serpent-like, and then back to human, as if it can't decide how it wants to present itself to me. For some reason, I'm just standing there taking this all in. I'm not afraid, but I don't feel like I have any control over my senses either. I'm not sure if I could've moved or said anything even if I wanted to, which at the time, I can't say I did.

As the two of us are standing face to face, he assumes his human features. His face—more handsome than I'd like to admit—is fully painted, a thick stripe of black across his eyes and the rest white. He has a feather woven into the hair at the top of his head. He looks young, not much older than me. He is bare-chested, not real muscular, but definitely cut. His torso is painted red. His lower half is covered in what looks to be khaki-colored pants, well-worn and faded, cut-off and frayed just below the knees. He is bare-footed, but both his wrists and ankles are wrapped with animal skin of some sort. It is hairy and light colored like that of a coyote.

He doesn't say anything to me, not aloud, anyway. But I do hear his words in my head, although for the life of me, I can't remember any of it. It's as if he at the same time with this cold stare of his, working like long fingers, is pinching away layers of my memory.

I do remember wondering why he is in my house, and having the idea that he was expecting to find someone else. Just then he lowers his eyes, almost as if checking me out. I am, after all, dressed only in my boxers. At the same time, I feel his hold over me fade and begin to feel like myself. Without even thinking about it, my cell phone in my hand, I begin entering 911.

With the phone ringing, I look back to the painted stranger. He gives me a thin smile and vanishes through the door, which, by the way, is closed and locked. To the other side, I hear what sounds like a horse galloping away. I move over to the door and pull it open. I see this figure taking long strides across my yard, away from the street light, and out into the street. There's a car parked on the other side. He goes around to the passenger side, ducks down and into the car, and it drives off.

It all happens in a matter of seconds. I then realize there's a police operator talking back to me from the phone. I tell her there was someone in my house, but I leave out the part about his changing appearance and leaving through a closed door. The operator, or whoever she was, tells me not to worry about it, that mine's not the first call of this kind on this night. She tells me to say a prayer, telling me that she too is Navajo, and go back to bed. I won't be bothered anymore by it.

UNWELCOMED VISITOR

I am Navajo. We had an incident with an unwelcomed visitor in our home. Here's what happened. My cousin is sleeping over. He's the same age as me. We're both thirteen at the time. We are in my room talking and hanging out. It is around maybe 11 pm. It is a pleasant summer evening, so my window is wide open. It is pretty dark outside. My dad is in the living room, supposedly watching TV, but as always he's dozed-off on the couch. My mom has already gone to bed. My cousin and I are keeping it down but not yet ready to call it a night. All of a sudden we hear the screen door to the front of the house open and slam shut. We think it is my dad. Shortly after, my mom—she tells us this the next day—claims she hears footsteps on the carpet. Whoever it is, she says, goes through her room and towards the bathroom. She naturally assumes it's my dad. Then she comes to the realization that she is unable to move as if she is paralyzed.

Still in my room, my cousin and I again hear the screen door open and slam, only this time louder. It wakes-up my dad and he comes to my bedroom to check on us. Finding us both there, he wants to know which one of my friends just slipped out of the house. It takes a few minutes, but we convince him we were by ourselves, and that we thought it was him going in and out. I can see by the look on his face he's not really buying it, but he has to admit we don't seem to be lying. He leaves and as he's closing the door to

my room, he tells us to stay out of trouble and go to sleep. All we could do is shrug.

The next morning, my mom tells us about what she heard and how she could not move. She also tells us that the second time the door slams, she then hears what sounds like horse hooves run by her bedroom window.

She has us all pray. Now every year we hike up the mountain to a high point and we pray for protection from evil.

LONG BLACK HAIR

Skinwalker encounters often occur roadside with people reporting being chased by a Skinwalker at speeds equal to that of a vehicle going over 60 mph. Collisions are also common with damage occurring to the vehicle but after which there is no sign of the Skinwalker, other than, perhaps, some skin or blood left upon the damaged parts of the car. Skinwalkers are rarely described in flattering terms relative to the hair on their bodies. They generally are described as matted, patchy, and mangy.

A woman living in the shallow near Whiteriver, Arizona, comes home late at night from running an errand. She pulls up her driveway, gets out of the vehicle, and using the fob on her key chain, opens the garage door. Just as it's lifting, she hears something run up at her back. As she turns, she sees this dark shadowy figure slip in behind her husband's truck which is in the driveway and to her left. All she sees is that it has patches of short, scraggly hair, and the feet that she saw don't look like they belong to anything human. She runs in through the garage and goes into the house, screaming for her husband. He comes out through the garage and checks all around. He finds nothing. He teases her a bit and tells her she shouldn't let her imagination get the better of her.

Only minutes later, a friend who the husband is expecting arrives. He's all excited and somewhat upset. He explains that as he was coming towards the house, some two-legged creature—he says it looked like a skinny bear, only really mangy and teetering like it was drunk—came stumbling or hobbling out of the linden trees and straight into the side of his SUV. He slammed on his brakes, but when he got out to look, there was nothing on the road or off to the shoulder. The two then go out to have a look at the SUV. Sure enough, there's a small dent and some black hair stuck to the rear fender on the driver's side, and some hair in the bumper. There's no blood.

COYOTE ENCOUNTER

This is another tale from the Crow. A man from the reservation has just delivered a bull to a buyers' ranch out to the far reaches of the reservation, getting lost for a couple hours in the process. It is a large expanse of land and what maps are available aren't always reliable. Anyway, it's late and getting towards dark by the time he gets back on the main road towards home. Just as he gets to the intersection where there's a stop sign, he sees there up ahead right in the middle of the road a lone coyote. It's just standing there. So before he starts driving he leans on the horn. In response he watches as the coyote raises up on its back legs, assumes the form of a man, only his legs and feet, arms and hands seem more canine than human, and with a spastic gait starts walking towards the opposite shoulder. The man, not believing what he's seeing, closes his eyes and shakes his head. When again he looks, there's the coyote sitting off to the side of the road and looking back at him as if it's waiting him to drive by. The man, certain it's the light playing tricks on him, and the fact that it has been a long and draining drive, does just that. But as he passes the coyote, he gives it a quick look and he sees that it is grinning back at him in a way that is all too human. Having heard stories of Skinwalkers, the man blesses himself, and fixing his eyes on the road ahead, steps on the gas pedal.

THIS ENDS THE PREVIEW

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