

## Therapist draws on new, ancient teachings in western Colorado practice

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GRAND JUNCTION, Colo.— The first time Kent Tompkins stepped into a hogan on the Navajo Reservation, where people burned cedar boughs and recited prayers, he said he felt like he was home.

Tompkins worked as a school counselor when he first went to live on the reservation in 1978. That lasted six months. Tompkins realized as an English-speaking Anglo he could better serve kids there by teaching art.

Tompkins found a teacher as well. In the village where he lived there was a medicine man named Emerson Begay, who took in young apprentices to study with him.

"I knocked on the medicine man's door every day for one year," Tompkins said.

And the medicine man would send him away or ask him to do various mundane tasks for him.

"I did everything he asked me to," Tompkins said. "I was driven. I could see all the people who came to him for healing."

Finally, one night the medicine man knocked on Tompkins' door and asked, "Are you ready?"

For 15 years Tompkins lived on the reservation, in various villages, learning spiritual healing methods of Navajo medicine men and women.

Tompkins spent six weeks in the summertime living — without electricity or running water — with old medicine men in the high country.

"I'd mend fences, fix trucks. We'd sit around the fire and talk physics, life," Tompkins said.

Eventually Tompkins was invited by the community to photographically document sacred sites that were being vandalized. Those photographs became part of a traveling exhibit funded by Arizona arts commissions. Tompkins sometimes uses those photographs in his healing arts practice in Ridgway and Grand Junction, where he counsels individuals, couples and families, and provides spiritual mentoring.

Tompkins, a 57-year-old Fruita native, works at an integrative medicine clinic in Ridgway and travels to Grand Junction one day a week to see clients here. He's had a private practice since 1991.

Although he has a master's degree in clinical psychology and is a licensed professional counselor and certified hypnotherapist, his experience with Native American culture infuses his personality and general outlook on life.

Yet that doesn't get in the way of counseling clients of various faiths.

Wilson Calderon, of Carbondale, attended therapy sessions with Tompkins for five years.

Calderon, a born-again, conservative Christian, said he could relate to Tompkins' Native American-influenced spirituality, and that Tompkins had a "gentle way in linking the two together."

"With Kent you always knew he was committed to your happiness and not your buck," Calderon said. "The guy is quite incredible for his capacity to care."

A third of Tompkins' practice is devoted to couples counseling; a third to individuals or families; and about a third to spiritual mentoring.

"I look to see where a client is being held up, where there's a glitch in their thinking," Tompkins said.

"Spiritual practice is about waking up, having more consciousness," he said.

Tompkins said he helps people remember what their cellular memory already holds.

"Sometimes I look at diet, sleep, sexuality, caffeine. Are they being proactive in choosing healthy foods?"

Investing in wellness helps people make smarter choices, he said.

When Tompkins uses hypnotherapy in his practice, it's often to reduce chronic pain or for smoking cessation. He became certified in hypnotherapy at the Hypnotherapy Academy of America.

A female client, who wished to not be identified, started seeing Tompkins for marriage and family counseling.

"What I thought was unique about Kent, he could work with all members of the family — including kids," said the Grand Junction woman. "He has a good rapport and ability to interact with kids."

Since then, Tompkins has become her spiritual mentor, she said.

Sometimes she goes to his office to talk; sometimes he leads her through guided imagery.

"What he's really done for me, is help awaken me spiritually," she said.

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