

Weaving
By
Daniel E. White August 12, 2024

In 1932, Lorenzo Hubbell, Jr. in an effort to attract tourists to his trading post in Winslow, Arizona, had a BIG idea. Hubbell was among traders in jewelry, pottery and rugs made by indigenous people like the Navajo nation, Hopi and Acoma members, to name a few, who developed a reputation producing higher quality art works. Why not, thought Hubbell, have created for my business the largest Navajo rug?

Hubbell commissioned a well-known and highly respected weaver from Greasewood AZ, Julia Joe, to create a rug 21 feet, four inches by thirty-two feet, seven inches. Julia's husband, Sam, built a metal pipe loom inside a forty foot by thirty foot by ten foot building constructed especially for the purpose of weaving the rug. Sam and Julia, with help from family members, sheared several hundred sheep for the needed wool. Their daughters and friends helped to prepare the wool for weaving.

The weaving was done by Julia, and the design was hers. She followed the custom of making the last stitch, the *ch'ihonit'i*, a single contrasting color leading from the design to the edge of the rug, a path for the weaver's spirit to safely leave.

It took Julia three years and three weeks. She finished in 1937 what was then the largest known hand-spun and hand carded Navajo Rug. Hubbell took the rug on tour, and when he went bankrupt, new owners continued taking it on tour. But by the 1990s, the rug was in storage.

Enter Allan Affeldt and Tina Mion. This husband-and-wife team acquired La Posada, a Santa Fe Railroad/Fred Harvey hotel/train depot in Winslow, the last designed by the famous architect, Mary Colter. In addition to restoring the hotel to its early 20th-century grace and charm, the couple established the Affeldt-Mion Museum in the old depot building and brought what they now call the Hubbell-Joe rug out of storage and into prominence in the museum. (Attached is a photo of the rug. I'm standing by the upper left corner for perspective.)

Recently, Judy and I were privileged to be enveloped by a weaving of a different sort. Some time ago, a friend surprised me by asking me to "stand up" for her at her memorial service which we both hoped would be many years in the future. She had just come from a memorial service and was taken by the idea of having someone she knew but not a family member or clergy talk about her life.

She told her family about her intention for me, though I had met only one of her four children. I was honored but wondered what I might say about her that was not known to her family and friends already. After all, our contacts to that point had only been in a board room and at a series of lunches Judy and I enjoyed with her over the years.

I agreed to stand up for her when the time came. It came this spring.

Her family and we made arrangements to gather at her ranch on the Big Island where seventy or so of her friends and family would celebrate her life the night before her family would scatter her ashes on the ranch.

We arrived in the late afternoon on a Friday. We left Sunday morning. In the interim, we came to understand that I had been standing up for a master weaver of a different sort.

Would she have thought of herself in this way? Perhaps, given that she was a natural at bringing people together, attentive to the needs of others, and born ready to be active in ways that mattered, in the community and within her family.

I doubt she visualized the tapestry she created in the same way Julia Joe "saw" what her rug would look like. But our friend's weaving was just as impressive for the way "threads" were linked, their number being added to continually.

She and her husband fashioned a family compound, a physical place for them to gather with their children and grandchildren, and a center for partying with their friends in a special Party Barn they built. They had started with a two-bedroom house and some land and grew the ranch to several hundred acres and cabins for their offspring.

The impact of that shared space away from the quotidian in Honolulu was an important factor in the weaving. It supported an extended family that likes each other and finds it easy to embrace newcomers into their warmth. This is a powerful foundation for the tapestry she left.

At the event, we met people whose lives had intersected with her in myriad ways. The common theme was how her generosity of spirit included them in.

Her contributions to the wider community in Honolulu were significant and noticed. If she had been visualizing a tapestry, I am sure that these accomplishments would be parts of the design. They would be no more prominent, though, than the people who gathered, first in Honolulu and then that night on the Big Island, to celebrate her.

As long as the Hubbell-Joe rug has patrons who appreciate its beauty and the achievement it represents, it will be on display for anyone to see.

As long as the people whose lives were interwoven through the life of our friend live, her weaving will continue to bind the hearts of those who make up its threads.



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