



THE
Sound
OF
Drums

By Lloyd Kiva New

After four years serving his country in the navy during World War II, Lloyd Kiva New took a spur-of-the-moment drive to Scottsdale, Arizona, to reconnect with leisure and the landscape.

This day trip would both change his life—and make history.

Unexpected and pivotal to a future I never dreamed of was the moment I saw a small white-stuccoed Catholic Church, well proportioned, with gracefully arched portals and a belfry. It stood alone in the middle of an open sand-swept lot edged by dust-covered tamarisk trees. California Mission style, it appeared to be the only “architected” building in town.

In the course of walking around this gem of a little church, I glanced back to the abandoned icehouse and old grocery store I had just passed. There, too good to be true, sat a wood-paneled station wagon that I recognized as belonging to a few members of a ring of my closest pre-war friends—Lew Davis, well-known painter, and his aspiring ceramicist wife, Mathilde Schaefer, and painter Phillip Curtis and his future wife, Marge. Lew and Phil ran the Works Progress Administration Arts Project in Phoenix, and we had met in 1938 when I arrived at my first job as the art teacher at the Phoenix Indian Boarding School.

Following effusive welcome-back hugs and kisses, they declared they had been anticipating my return. They had an idea for forming a guild of artists/craftsmen to fill the whole of a vast empty building. Would I join them? I professed interest (I would have joined the Rastafarians, had I been invited, so anxious was I to be among close friends again; it felt so good to be accepted as an unnumbered human being).

After a few moments’ consideration, I demurred, concluding that I could not see how I would fit in not being a practicing artist or craftsman but a mere ex-Indian-school art teacher.

Eagerly, they hastened to remind me that before the war I was consumed with concern about the decline of most traditional Indian artistic expressions and had talked at length about starting an experimental school for young Indian craftsmen where they could explore their creativity in terms of a modern changing world. They persisted. “Now is the time—do it,” they said.

They were setting up a ceramic shop in a portion of the icehouse and had plans for turning the whole building into studios for a group of people like them—and me. After wavering over a few beers at the Pink Pony, I tentatively agreed to join them, without a clue as to the portentousness of that decision and the new world it would lead to. I had no idea that Scottsdale, this forlorn pre-war cotton-trading/health refuge, would become the center of a whole new life. Even to this day, I find myself wondering what might have happened had it not been for the lure of that little white church.

Following a discussion with my wife, Betty, who long knew of my compulsion to do something about updating Indian expressions in the arts, we launched into an open sea without regard to oars, compass, or lifejackets—into a sea that was to rage about us and threaten our survival at times.

Two weeks into the proposed project, I listened for my metaphorical drums, as I tended to do when things weren’t going right, believing they would help out like in the old days. At earlier stages of my life, the drums had led me, pied-piper style, from one stage of my life magically into the next. And how often during the war had they pulled me through! But not a beat. Not

Opposite: Lloyd Kiva New with his handmade leather goods in Scottsdale, Arizona. Because fine leather was being diverted to outfitting soldiers, New had to be creative in sourcing the leather for his handbags, which were also lined with (often contrasting) leather. Solution: he used unclaimed hunters’ tanned hides found in the area. Courtesy of Lloyd H. New Papers, IAIA Archives, Santa Fe, New Mexico.

How much do I really believe in those drums and all they represented? Do those old Indian things work? These days, just how Indian am I?

a sound. With all the changes in my life since those old days in Oklahoma, had I not moved from one cosmology into another? Or had I abandoned it, and it me? In truth, of late, I no longer listened for the drums as I had before. So much had happened in the intervening years; I was growing away from those formative times in Oklahoma, depending less and less upon the childhood dramas that had anchored my existence. There had been no abrupt or dramatic metamorphic change; my transformation was more like a snake slowly shedding its skin in readiness for another season.

But I was more and more out of touch; the gods that governed my life for so long seemed to be fading away. I was beginning to find that one could not depend upon any set of beliefs forever, that life had a way of moving from one stage to another like an inchoate painting, or a piece of creative writing. Creativity had become my new God. If one picked up one's brush, stood in front of a canvas, dipped it in a color, any color, and touched it to the canvas, things would usually begin to happen, the order of which would reveal itself as one moved along.

I knew that life was not quite so simple as creating a painting, but I had discovered the similarity in the process. I had made my start. I had put down the first stroke of color, but could I muster the reasoning, the judgment, the selective powers to manage all the unknown elements of this new venture that I had so cavalierly joined?

The drums were very faint. I began to wonder: how much do I really believe in those drums and all they represented? Do those old Indian things work? These days, just how Indian am I?

I sat restlessly in my empty studio on an old chair with a packing crate for a desk, a blank planning pad in front of me, accomplishing nothing. I went daily to the Pink Pony, drank beer with the gang, and kibitzed with others as they prepared their studios for the gala opening.

Should I give up? No, that would be running. Then, one day, unannounced, a young married Navajo couple, Randy and

Priscilla Begay, appeared at my door and said they had heard in Gallup, some three hundred miles away, that I was looking for crafts workers. They were not my ex-students, but they were leather workers. What kind? They showed me Spanish-laced bill folds with buffalo heads painted in blue enamel on the cover—awful taste, but the lacing was perfect, the construction neat, like that of an Eagle Scout. I said, “Come in. I pay minimum wage and furnish a place to live. Let's get started.”


I had never designed nor made anything in leather in my whole life. But now Creativity was my new God. I was a designer, an artist, a creative person, wasn't I? Hadn't I studied art in one of the best schools in the nation? Just remember the formula for creativity—put down that first stroke, something will follow.

The first squall to hit us, almost upending our fragile craft (that Navy lingo again)—there was no fine leather on the markets in Los Angeles, New York, or San Francisco. Sorry, we have been diverted to war stuff, making soldiers' shoes, leather bomber jackets, you know. What to do? Whatever to do?

Lew suggested I canvas the region of taxidermists for deer-skins, elk, panther, cowhides, whatever could be found. I knew, for sure, that we would not be doing \$5.00 blue enameled buffalo wallets—but what? Luckily, we found plenty of hunters' unclaimed tanned hides in the neighborhood.

A month went by. What to make? Many tries—soft deerskin belts, men's rakish leather gendarme caps like the canvas ones we made in the Navy, traditional Navajo moccasins, pouches, knife scabbards—but nothing seem to work. Nothing fit the necessary man hours/materials/prorated overhead/cost formula, not to mention a sure-fire marketable style. Would anyone want to buy it, whatever it might turn out to be? Could it be produced at a profit? Who would dig us out? This wasn't the Bureau of Indian Affairs. And it was not as simple a process as my proverbial painting approach.

I was not a practical man. I was not a boat handler; I never learned a sailor's square knot from a granny [knot]. I never learned the Morse code, or what all those varied shaped and colored pennants meant. I could hardly swim, but when I had to swim, I did (I made it through the war, in the Navy yet).



Perhaps this was not a case of pick up that brush; it was more like jump in, start swimming.

The next squall we encountered was not so sudden, but it was more threatening: we were quickly running out of cash. After two or three weeks of failed trials and errors, Randy and Priscilla despaired. They wanted to give up, go back to the Rez. “No, I’ll drive you to Gallup. You can take my car and visit your relatives. You just need a break.” They reluctantly agreed.

We drove to Gallup. They took the car. I stayed at the rambling El Rancho Hotel on the edge of town. Out of boredom, I walked downtown on the old U.S. Route 66 Highway, alongside the shiny, multi-track rails of the Atchison, Topeka, and Santa Fe. On the street, cross-country pick-ups and trailer-trucks vied for the passing lanes with tourist vehicles, moving jerkily from stop-light to stop-light through a cartoon strip of pawnshops, bars, cheap eating places, and clumps of wobbly Navajos.

These were the people and the story that I knew too much about. I identified with the statistics of alcoholism, poverty, and other social problems faced by Indians. I could not get away from the feeling that there must be some missing link in the government’s futile address of their problems: millions, perhaps billions, of dollars spent and a whole government agency with hundreds of hired specialists to put Indians back together. To me, the problems faced by Indians—those problems I had come to feel bitter about as I grew to learn more and more of my own and their history—were clear. But the solutions were elusive. I felt hopeless and, I guess, ashamed. I closed my mind to their problems, but mine remained.

Back at the hotel, worried and bored, I picked up copies of all available magazines from the newsstand in the lobby, holed up in my room, had my meals sent in, and listened for the sounds of my drums. But they didn’t seem to work anymore. Impatiently, I settled in to wait for Randy and Priscilla to return. After two days and nights of not hearing a sound from my drums, I thought, Randy, you are right, it’s time to give up; I will take you back to the Rez. And as for you, dreamer, go home to Scottsdale. But to what?



Above, top to bottom: At the Pink Pony, Lloyd Kiva New let himself be talked into launching a Native-inspired fashion workshop in Scottsdale, which was at the time, in his words, a “forlorn pre-war cotton-trading/health refuge.” The Pink Pony still exists, although it moved two doors south in the 1970s. Courtesy of Scottsdale Historical Society Digital Collection.

Lloyd Kiva New handbags on display at the Museum of Contemporary Native Arts’ *Lloyd Kiva New: Art, Design, and Influence* exhibition, which closed July 31. This section of the exhibition was curated by Rose Marie Cutropia. The handbag clasps were designed by Charles Loloma. Photograph by Jason S. Ordaz, Institute of American Indian Arts, 2016.

Page 41: After a fire in the humble Arizona Craftsmen Center, Lloyd Kiva New and his fellow craftsmen moved to a five-store building. He then developed and relocated to this elegant complex, the Kiva Craft Center, the site of up to twenty retail galleries and shops. Photograph by Stuart Weiner. Courtesy of Lloyd H. New Papers, IAIA Archives.



Genesis of the Kiva Bag

I was mulling in my mind the story I had heard of the Navajos' Long Walk and the miseries they experienced, rounded up by Kit Carson and moved like cattle to Fort Sumner in New Mexico. I was also thinking about the Trail of Tears of the Cherokees, when, Hark! (Hark, like in my fifth grade drama class). Who cometh? Do I hear the faint sound of drums?

In a kind of waking dream, something said, why are you so embarrassed by your poor Navajo brothers? Go back, take one more walk down that godforsaken street. Don't run from what you see there; face the facts. Those poor Navajos are what your project is all about—you are supposed to try to fix stuff like that. Listen for the drums; they are all you've got. Those are your brothers. Don't be afraid to look at them; it's the least you can do. Without knowing why, I finally "girded my loins" (another fifth grade cliché) and walked toward town—one more time! My eyes suddenly diverted from a drunken middle-aged man wobbling towards me to a pawnshop window, where they fixed upon a medicine man's worn shoulder bag hanging from a peg by a silver-studded shoulder strap. Its fold-over flap held a large Navajo silver concho. The bag was made of stiff cracked cowhide.

In a fast resolve, I saw this unredeemed pawned piece begin to glow idea-wise. I sensed something about that piece far beyond the sad story that possibly lay behind its being pawned by some poor brother for one more drink. I am not sure just how my mind worked at that point, but Eureka! There was the nucleus of the idea for what to make.

For a moment I thought I would buy the magic piece, take it with me; but no, that would somehow be contributing to the ugliness of the system. And what if the original owner came back to redeem it? No. I don't need it for the details; the concept was enough. Slowly at first, I turned back past my drinking brothers and then felt an urge to run. I crossed in front of honking cars and began jogging along the railroad tracks back to the hotel, ideas for a classic woman's handbag tumbling over one another in my head.

As if in a dream, a perfect design would appear, fully blown, the most beautiful thing in the world, only to lose focus and disappear into a mess of paper patterns. Sheets of abandoned

ideas sketched upon hotel stationery soon littered the bed and the floor all around. I smiled at one sketch, the most promising one up to that moment. It was drawn over the logo of the El Rancho Hotel stationery. What made me smile was the thought: who would want to buy a shoulder bag bearing the proud crest of the El Rancho Hotel?

With a few more adjustments, I could virtually feel the third dimensionality of the finished piece. Let's see now, instead of cowhide, we will use baby butt soft leathers, imported if necessary. Do away with the heavy, crude laced construction; line the bag with a contrastingly soft leather lining. Pink! Why not? Put in zippered pockets to make it roomy; it could never be too roomy! Remember, before you leave Gallup, scout some pawnshops for single old silver conchos. Don't lose the look but shoot for a high fashion item. The ladies will love it! And so, the Kiva bag was born.

Back home, within days, patterns for the prototype for what came to be known as the Kiva Bag were developed. Take an inch off here, make it wider there, and deepen the pocket. At a certain point, we knew that we had something good.



Learning Business the Hard Way

Two weeks before the Arizona Designer Crafts Center was to open, cash was running short and there was a payroll to make. In desperation I found that Creativity in itself would not do. I turned back to my drums. They were back! I did not pray to them; I approached them more like an oracle. Surprisingly, they said, "Go ahead anyway, go!" We continued perfecting the bags, and a week before our big opening day the Great Spirit prevailed again with another miraculous happening!

That morning we were interrupted in our work by a quiet knock on the door. There stood a gray-haired lady, slightly unkempt, dressed in a long pleated Navajo style cotton skirt and typical velveteen blouse. She asked somewhat timidly if I would make her a belt for some silver conchos that she wished to string. I smiled at her in an exaggerated fashion and said, "Oh, no, I am so sorry, we make only ladies' handbags here"—and to myself, "expensive handbags!" "I suggest you go to Porter's, a saddle shop in Phoenix." No, she had heard about our soft





Above, top to bottom: The Arizona Craftsmen Center, where Lloyd Kiva New and his friends attempted to launch a sustainable, retail-friendly guild of artists and craftspeople. Courtesy of Scottsdale Historical Society.

Kiva bag with Charles Loloma-designed medallions, ca. 1955. Courtesy Aysen New. Photograph by Blair Clark.



leathers and insisted that she preferred to have a belt made of soft deerskin (to myself again, “Lady, we have more important things to do”).

As we talked, she reached deeply into the folds of her pleated skirt to pull out, one at a time, a set of six of the most handsome old-pawn Navajo silver conchos I had ever seen. Dazzled by their beauty and the rising beat of my drums, I agreed to make the belt. I thought to myself, “Let’s see, I’ll have to stiffen my leather some way to carry the weight of those silver conchos.” They were big, heavy, and ever so handsome. I turned to her and warned, “I think we can take care of this, but it will take a few days.”

The following morning, much to my consternation, she was back knocking on the door again. Oh, no! I hadn’t had time even to think about her belt. As it turned out, she had not returned early to pick up the finished belt, as I feared, but sheepishly to ask another favor. I thought to myself “Now what? I should have nipped all this in the bud yesterday,” and to myself, about myself, “You Cherokees are just too wimpy to say no.”

I was totally unprepared for what I was to hear. Would I make some deerskin booties for her German shepherd, who complained of sand burrs sticking his feet? What! Me? The aspiring big-time fashion designer? Me? Do boots—for a dog? Indignation was gradually drowned out by the warning sounds of drums. I had better listen. I turned to her and hiding my reluctance said, “Yes, bring him in. We will have to do a fitting.” I couldn’t believe what I heard myself saying.

I stood behind our makeshift counter, listing the final transaction on the belt, wondering how much to charge. I knew it would be tedious to make. As for dog boots, how could I possibly know how much to charge? As I pondered, she wandered about the unkempt shop picking up a finished bag here and there, inquiring as to the price of each. Finally she came back to the desk, where she quietly announced that she believed she would take “those seven,” pointing to the most expensive ones in our sample line! And would I mind delivering them to that ranch house surrounded by the white-railed horse-fence, two miles or so on North Scottsdale Road?

She quietly announced that she believed she would take “those seven,” pointing to the most expensive bags in our sample line!

In those days it was the only ranch up there, white fenced or otherwise. Everyone knew that it was the McCormick Ranch. She had to be Mrs. Fowler McCormick!

Our first customer, no, our first client, savior, saint, angel from heaven! Indeed, she was Mrs. McCormick, the patroness collector of one of the finest Navajo silver collections in the world—Mrs. Fowler McCormick of the International Harvester family. Dog boots, lady? Anytime!

During the course of the dog fitting, we talked. I told her, by way of easy conversation, about my dream for an Indian arts training school, a place to work out some ideas I had about resurrecting some of the dying arts and crafts. Finally, she wrote a check for the handbags and dog boots, which came to about \$750. It was enough for the back rent, the sewing machine payment, and steaks all around! No sooner had we closed the door upon her departure, Randy, Priscilla, and I hugged, shouted, and ran down the hallway, my drums beating louder than I had heard them in a long time.

On her way out, with the dog in his proud new booties looking quizzically at his feet and walking gingerly, Mrs. McCormick had casually remarked, “Why don’t you let Fowler help you?” I was puzzled by the remark, but after a few moments reviewing the whole incident, I got back to work.

The following morning, a dapper gentleman appeared at the door. It was Fowler. He came right to the point. He said that his wife had told him something of my dream, and that he understood I had my eye on some real estate, and that perhaps he could be of help. I told him about a two-acre piece of land that was part of an alfalfa field bordered on one end by tall eucalyptus trees, located two blocks north of town. He said that he had noticed the row of trees there, and that it was a nice site. He then took out a checkbook and filled out three checks totaling \$7,500 (more money than I had ever seen in my life). He said I could pay the smaller loan off after one year and the other two in the subsequent two years. No interest.

This was the turning point in my life, and strangely disappointing: I always expected that moment to be dramatic, bagpipes skirling, cameras rolling. But there were no lights, no

music, and no dancing. He made ready to go. I thanked him; he thanked me and left me standing with my mouth agape.

The future seemed to be assured; but the present was full of problems, and I was beginning to wonder how to get from here to there. The next turn of events was almost eerie. A total stranger knocked on that same magic door through which the McCormick angels had appeared.

He was a well-dressed, handsome, and affable man, and unlike Mrs. McCormick he introduced himself: “I am James Patrick. Your landlord, Tom Darlington, has told me that you might need some financial help. I have just taken a job in Personnel for the Valley National Bank, my first bank job. I don’t have a lot of money, but perhaps I can be of help in other ways.”

I invited him in. Pleasant and direct, he picked up a finished bag. “Hey” he said, “these are all right! How much do you plan to sell them for? You say forty-five dollars?” He went on, dropping immediately into business talk. I hastened to tell him that I neither had insurance, nor had I borrowed money. He said, “You will soon.”

Pencil flowing across a notepad, “Now let’s see, for every bag you sell at \$45 you will be losing about \$10 to \$20. I figure you will have to average \$50 to \$100, or you will be out of business before you open your doors.”

For a moment I felt affronted. Then he said: “The bags are beautiful, and with the right customers, I think you are in business.”

We shook hands. He left his home number and invited me to call him anytime. As he shut the door behind him, he said we would need an accountant and an auditor. Razzled, I said to myself, “What’s going on here?”

Within a year, I was able to pay Patrick with interest; a very clean culmination to a business deal, but messy with slobbers of gratitude. Jim Patrick became President, then Chairman, of the Board of the Valley National Bank, from which we had taken our first little loan. He remained a lifetime friend and advisor to me until his untimely death, and also continued to advise my first wife, when she assumed the business.



Dragonfly to the Sun
by N. Scott Momaday

Great one,
Great giver of life and well being.
I lift my old arms in bold entreaty.
Rise and flood the land with light,
Rise and touch the faces of your people.
I entreat you, give us one more day,
And one more. And at last, one more.
I lift my old arms in bold entreaty.

Great one,
With respect I have breathed a smoke.
I have wreathed my words in wisps of smoke.
So it is they are made clean and strong.
With respect I have painted my face.
From my face come words of sacred color.
So it is they are made strong and beautiful.
I lift my old arms in bold entreaty.

Great one.
On the mountain you dance in whispering waters.
In the bear's tracks you pierce the darkness,
And you splinter among the limbs of pines.
The deer and the badger trace the arc of your path.
The prairie grasses tremble in your presence,
And now in the dawn appearing I summon you.
I lift my old arms in bold entreaty.

In 1947, within a few days of the Annunciation and Ascension of Patrick the Angel, Lloyd Kiva (a name I had formally adopted) and other members of the Arizona Craftsmen Guild opened the doors of the remodeled grocery store and icehouse to the public, following a generous multi-page pro bono spread in the *Phoenix Arizona Republic*. To my surprise, people came, and I sold a number of bags, many of whom were well known in the Phoenix community.

Holiday Magazine was the first of a series of national publications to tell the story of the rise of the Kiva Bag. The “hook,” the appealing, saleable theme, was high fashion rising out of the desert from, of all places, a small virtual ghost town in Arizona.

One of our friends, Mr. Bert Grassby, a handsome silent movie actor, advised in the selection of a name: it must look good, sound good, and if possible connect by image to the mystique of the business. New to the field, I was open to professional advice, just as I was in the case of my business advisor, Mr. James Patrick.

Grassby said that for certain kinds of businesses the best approach was to build a following for the name of a person rather than a product manufacturer—Elizabeth Arden, not Elizabeth Arden Cosmetics. He emphasized the importance of the “just right” name and logo.

After considerable thought, and trying out many names in my mind, I finally settled on Lloyd Kiva. I considered the appropriation aspects of adopting a Southwestern tribal name and felt that the word “kiva” had come into the public domain and was commonly used generically to describe a central gathering place in Pueblo culture for religious and other purposes, similar to the word “church” or “temple.” This rationale may not be acceptable to all people. I am proud of the name and have tried to treat it with dignity and respect. One thing for sure, it has served well, and unquestionably better than my own name, Lloyd Henri New, would have. ■

This adapted excerpt was selected from *The Sound of Drums: A Memoir of Lloyd Kiva New* (Sunstone Press, 2016), edited by Ryan S. Flahive. Read *El Palacio*'s spring 2016 coverage of the artist at elpalacio.org/articles/spring16/lkn-kline.pdf.

Lloyd Kiva New on Exhibit: *A New Century: The Life and Legacy of Cherokee Artist and Educator Lloyd Kiva New* is at the Museum of Indian Arts and Culture through January 2, 2017. *Finding a Contemporary Voice: The Legacy of Lloyd Kiva New and IAIA*, is at the New Mexico Museum of Art through October 10, 2016.



Above, top to bottom: During the winter months, Kiva Craft Center's shops and merchants staged fashion shows on Fifth Avenue, featuring Lloyd Kiva New's work, along with that of designers Leona Caldwell, Jerome, and others. This fashion show was held on February 12, 1956. Courtesy of Scottsdale Historical Society Digital Collection.

Lloyd Kiva New with a variety of his handbags, ca. 1955. Courtesy of Lloyd H. New Papers, IAIA Archives.

Opposite: N. Scott Momaday (Kiowa) wrote this poem in honor of Lloyd Kiva New. The background image is a detail of southwestern landscape-inspired, hand-dyed, wool-jersey fabric designed by Lloyd Kiva New, ca. 1950s. Photograph by Blair Clark.