

EDITORIAL



Fire In Your Belly

Our Native ancestors had a very high regard for fire. Now days, we take it for granted. So easy to make a fire. Just strike a match or flick your lighter. We understand the scientific components that constitute fire and we have never known what life would be like without it.

In ancient times, fire meant survival or death. There were no matches nor Bic lighters. Our ancestors tell a story of what it was like when the people and the animals had no fire. It took grandmother water spider to carry the embers of a naturally started fire and carry them on her back to the animals and the people.

In primitive times, during the winter, fire was necessary for the survival of the people. Cold bitter winds could cause death if some form of shelter and an accompanying fire were not at hand. Fires were started by a laborious work of using friction of wood with tinder, and also the casting of a spark using flint and other materials. Fire brought

light to the darkest night, heat to the coldest day, and a way to cook meat and vegetables.

As the ancestors looked into the dancing flames they could see a mysterious power. The medicine people divined future events by observing fire. Fire was eventually used to hollow out dug-out canoes and to burn small clearings in the forest to make meadows to attract deer.

Fire was sacred to the Cherokee. It was used in the various ceremonies. Specially trained persons were in charge of making and maintaining the sacred ceremonial fire in the council house up on a high mound of earth. The *Fire Keeper* and his assistants took care of the fire mound and the sacred types of wood used during ceremony. The sacred fire represented the presence of Creator during the ceremony. It also represented the great *fire in the sky*, that is the sun.

There was a spiritual element to the sacred fire. This was the *fire inside the Fire Maker*. When making the ceremonial fire, the fire maker put energy from the fire inside of him into the actual visible ceremonial fire.

Down through the ages fire has been a symbol of energy. When a person gets excited, we say he or she is "all fired up". A dynamic person is sometimes called a "fire cracker". When one has great religious zeal it is said one is "on fire for God". If one starts out to do great things, such as run for high

office, it is said one prerequisite is to have "fire in the belly".

To accomplish great things it is indeed, necessary to have fire in the belly. There are always great obstacles to overcome. Discouragements and perplexities come along that threaten to undo our high aspirations. But those who have *fire in the belly* are likely to overcome these challenges and go on and succeed in their high calling.

We of the Southeastern Cherokee Council have great challenges ahead of us. We are relatively small and poor compared to other Native groups. We are scattered over a large geographical area making communication and coordination of efforts more difficult. Also, we live in a world filled with modern distractions that vie for our attention and means and energies. Our young people, especially, are inundated with these distractions to the degree that it is a great concern just how to get them not only interested but excited in their Native heritage. Somehow, we need to find a way to put "fire in their bellies".



Apathy is perhaps our greatest enemy. We all need to get some fire in our bellies. We need to feel a passionate interest in our Native heritage and ever seek to apply those principles into our modern fast moving lives.

I say it is time to look back to our ancestors and re-capture their reverence for fire, in the spiritual sense. Let's get some *fire in our bellies* and put our energy into our tribe, our band, our family and our personal lives as we walk that elusive *Red Road*.

Rick Runningbear



The Talking Leaves is published by the Southeastern Cherokee Council with headquarters near Ochlocknee, Georgia.

STAFF:

Editor: Rick Runningbear
Dunifer

Culture: John Many Winds
Ellis

Language: Lee Spotted Pony
Billingsley

For Women: Ellen Spirit
Seeker Fisher

Staff Writer: Noqah Elisi