

A Glimpse Of The Past

Some Memories Of Our Tribe's past

by Rick Runningbear

As I look back at some of the past editions of Talking Leaves I catch a glimpse of the energy of the past. Below is a re-print of an article by Jan Wolf Dance Hicks, SeCCI Tribal Secretary which appeared in the Spring 2001 edition, over 13 years ago:

In addition to serving as the SeCCI Tribal Secretary, I also sit on the Cultural Diversity Committee at South Georgia Medical Center in Valdosta, Georgia, whose efforts are to educate others on the various cultures within our society and to assist in understanding the varieties of heritage and beliefs in order to better provide quality patient care. This week they featured the Americas: North, Central and South America. I was asked to arrange a presentation for North America, and being a member of the Southeastern Cherokee Council, I thought it would be an excellent way of educating not only the public of our Cherokee heritage and tribal existence, but also those medical professionals employed by the hospital. I invited John Spirit of Night Eagle Curtis, SeCCI Tribal registrar and Treasurer to join me in this effort.

On Wednesday, January 17, 2001, Spirit of Night Eagle and I dressed in full regalia and made a grand entrance at this occasion. As people were coming in and being seated, Spirit of Night Eagle played his Native American flute, and others, hearing this beautiful music, peeked from around the corners to see who was playing this magnificent sound. After introductions, I stood at the

podium and informed those in attendance who the Southeastern Cherokee Council are, what we do, and what we're about. Many were amazed that we are now 2500 members strong (and growing) having membership in all the lower 48 states, Alaska, the Virgin Island and some in England! I spoke of several misconceptions and misunderstanding people have had about Native Americans in general, especially the Cherokee, and addressed several myths. Many were not aware that Cherokees come in all colors, some with blonde hair and blue eyes and with fair skin, and not always the dark hair, eyes and skin as portrayed in the movies. I also attempted to dispel rumors that Cherokees lived in Teepees as a nomadic tribe, therefore explaining our stationary way of life with long houses, cabins and sometimes, shacks. I then spoke of the perpetuity of racism and discrimination still in existence today and asked that it stop, not only for Native Americans, but for all cultures.

Spirit Of Night Eagle spoke of the Removal, the Trail Where They Cried, and the long journey to the state of Oklahoma, then known as "Indian Country". Heads were bowed as he spoke of those who died along the way and of the great hardship to our ancestors. He spoke of how, after the Removal, many families split off from the Cherokee Nation, intermarried, hence contributing to the large population of "mixed blood" and physical features. Spirit of Night Eagle then presented and explained his two flutes, his two rattles, his hand drum, and three volunteers from the audience came up and played them as he again made the lovely peaceful music from his flute and told Native American stories. It was simply breath taking! All

stopped by listen and enjoy! I think our volunteers thoroughly enjoyed being a part of our presentation.

I would like to mention that special guests in attendance were Spirit of Night Eagle's mother, "Mother Curits" (as I call her) and Nancy Whispering Winds Curtis, his wife. Also, this entire presentation was filmed and many pictures were taken. We received a multitude of compliments on our regalia and thanks for speaking. In addition, we received an invitation from one to speak at her church.

On a special note, I consider it an honor when asked to present our heritage and culture to the public. This not only educates others to our purpose, it has the potential to deprecate racism and discrimination. As I was leaving and walking to my car in the parking lot, I overheard laughter from three grown men who were entering. When I looked up, I noticed that it was me that they found the humor in as I was still dressed in my regalia. When I speak of racism, prejudice, and discrimination, it goes both ways. If I ask you to stop this, I too must stop. I literally had to stop and collect myself in order to forgive their ignorance and rudeness, and NOT be a part of the problem I ask so many to cease. Please remember to continue to be a part of the solution, not the problem. When someone laughs or pokes fun at you, remember all who DO NOT. Focus on those who are with you, not against you.

Wado (respectfully)

Jan Wolf Dance Hicks