

EDITORIAL



TO BE "RECOGNIZED"

We all like to be recognized. When we go down town, it is good for people we run into to smile and greet us by name and ask how things are going for us. It means being a worthwhile person and being respected. What a desolate feeling it would be to always mingle with other people and nobody ever speaks to you or shows signs of knowing who you are.

Native American organizations of this modern era often struggle with the issue of "recognition". We are all aware of the various federally recognized tribes or nations of indigenous peoples that reside within the borders of the United States Of America. Being federally recognized means that the government acknowledges the historic validity of the group and implies certain benefits or perks from the government. It also means being respected and entitled to a certain degree of sovereignty and self government.

It would seem that the U.S. government has a bit of a "guilty conscience" regarding broken treaties and bad treatment of American Indians

during the era of settler expansion and occupation of historic Native territories. To help sooth this guilty conscience, monetary benefits have been awarded to recognized Native nations based on this "recognition".

Over time, there has been intermingling and intermarriage between Native indigenous persons and non-Native persons. The result has often been a loss of traditional Native culture and traditions. Also family tree lines have been lost or obscured. Some even tried to conceal the fact that they had Native ancestry.

Now days, there are many "mixed blood" persons who yearn to learn more of the traditional ways of their Native ancestors. They seek to unite with others of similar situations and learn and perpetuate the "old ways" of the First Nations on this continent. Such persons have often formed modern day "tribes", often in the form of a federally recognized corporation.

Those fortunate enough to be already on the tribal rolls of federally recognized Indian tribes usually take a very dim view of any other organization that purports to be Native in culture and goals. This is especially true if such organizations are actively seeking to attain Federal recognition status. Could it be that part of this attitude is based on jealousy or a fear that any further recognition of Native groups by the government would mean further sub-dividing of the "monetary pie" that is now made available to recognized American Indian Nations?

In these times it is a rare thing for Native groups to obtain recognition by the U.S.

government. A few more applicants have been successful in attaining recognition by the state in which they are based.

This all brings us to a question we need to answer for ourselves: What does it mean to be truly "recognized"? We all want to have some form of recognition as individuals. But we of modern Native "tribes" also desire some degree of validation and respect. We do not want to be called "fraudulent".

Here we must walk a fine line. We must make sure we do our homework in the most scholarly and sincere way when we do our ceremonies or teach others about the nature of our ancestor's culture, history and spirituality. Unfortunately, it would appear that now days there is a lot of misinformation out there due to bad research or carelessness. We need to know our limitations and try not to present ourselves to the outside world in any different light than what we are.

And who are we? We are a people of mixed heritage that love the old ways of our Native ancestors. We want to emulate the good things of their culture that included a reverence and care of Mother Earth. We want to perpetuate the handcraft skills, re-tell the stories and legends, re-enact the ceremonies to best of our knowledge and ability. We want to promote and elevate the people who comprised the First Nations of this continent. We would like to be respected for this.

We do not become part of the South-eastern Cherokee Council to get perks from the government. We actually see advantages in NOT being recognized by the government.

We do not have to feel obliged or obligated to the "big brother". We can be independent and self governing within our own sphere of existence.

I say "being recognized" is something that should exist in our own hearts. We know who we are. We can walk tall and proud. As long as we walk a noble and dignified path, the respect and recognition of those not of our tribe will increase.

We know who we are. We are the Southeastern Cherokee Council, a modern day tribe widely dispersed numbering approximately 6,000 souls. Yes, we are a work in progress and we are not perfect. Nevertheless, we can feel comfortable in our own skins and never feel embarrassed to tell others who we are and what we stand for. This is the kind of recognition we should seek.

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