

Two Different Worlds

by Rick Runningbear Dunifer

We of Native ancestry who desire to stay connected with our Native heritage, live in two different worlds. We live in the modern era of fast cars, incredibly capable personal computers, and the multiple distractions of modern life where one must get up each morning and go to work to earn a living or engage in our usual routines.

Yet we feel the haunting call of the past. When we travel through the mountains of Western North Carolina, East Tennessee, or Northern Georgia; in those hills and mountains mostly now changed, yet still with remnants of pristine forests and streams, we feel the "presence" of our ancestors when they walked and stalked on trails barely perceptible to the human eye in search of game or trade or war.



At our Native gatherings and "pow wows" we re-enter for a time that feeling of hearing the drum beat, seeing and doing the dances, trading the hand crafts, and eating the traditional Native foods. But when these events are over we return to our homes and usual modern day routines. We become just like anyone else, it seems, whether of Native descent or not.

Yet, I submit, it is possible to live in two worlds without sacrificing commitment to either. But it takes a bit of extra effort. One thing we have to constantly battle is "forgetfulness". It easy to forget what our Native ancestors went through in the past 300 years since coming in contact with peoples from "across the great waters'. We need to constantly remind ourselves of our Native Ancestral lands, and how they were 300 years ago and how our people lived in harmony with Nature, not hurting the water, nor the air, nor the earth. We need to visualize the balance in their lives as they mingled their agriculture in the growing of corn, beans , squash, and many other foods; with their hunting of the deer and wild turkey, and fishing of trout in the pristine streams of the mountains. We need to consider the spirituality of our ancestors as they perceived the spirit of Creator in every animal, every tree and stone, every body of water.



Another obstacle to overcome is the tendency to stop making things with our hands. It is so easy to go to the supermarket and buy things and gadgets that we feel we need. Our Native ancestors lived a simple life with few possessions compared with our modern life stye, yet they made much of what they used with their own hands. They enjoyed the process of making things and benefited from the use of them when completed. They daily used their CREATIVITY, a thing we are in danger of losing as we now entertain ourselves so much in a

passive non creative way by means of the television or computerized entertainments.

Much has been written in excellent books about our Native roots, its history, its traditions, its ceremonies, its legends. These should not just sit on our bookshelves to gather dust. Rather we should review the steps taken in the past to get us to where we are today.

Native peoples are a proud people. We are a resilient and hardy people. We have changed, and new blood lines have been introduced into our people. Yet this need not dilute our proud culture and tradition. It is not bloodlines that change us, rather it is forgetfulness and apathy that sneak into our lives which at times threaten to erase the proud heritage of our Native past.



I suggest we recommit ourselves to stay connected with our Native culture and traditions without just "living in the past" in some kind of dream world existence. We can be the cutting edge of modern society with our education and our high principles of living. At the same time we can devote time and energy to preserving the "old ways" so that this treasure of our heritage will not vanish from the face of the earth.

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