



INDIAN COUNTRY DIARIES: “SPIRAL OF FIRE”

MUSIC

LEANNE HOWE:

When I was seven years old I was in the hospital with rheumatic fever. Some say I was dying. My Granny appeared to me as a huge brown hawk hovering over my bed. In the next moment she was standing with her hand on my forehead. I closed my eyes. I felt her cool touch. She chanted, "You will be well. You will not die. You will be well." Then, as she ran her crooked fingers across my eyes she whispered, "Indian Girl, the ghosts of your ancestors will visit you. There."

In the Cherokee clan system, birds are the messengers. Granny always said she heard many different birds in her head. When I want to be in touch with her I remember the stories and hear her voice.

GRANNY:

Grandma Hattan had the power to call the light. She was the seventh daughter of the seventh daughter. She had strong medicine. Do you remember the stories of where we came from, and how you came to me?

LEANNE HOWE:

Somehow my grandmothers are with me as I begin this journey to the Cherokee homelands.

I am a *Nukfoki*, a teacher. Native stories have power. They create people. They author tribes. They burn through our lives like a sacred Spiral of Fire. I am LeAnne Howe and these stories have shaped my life as Native Daughter... Woman... and Writer.

PBS ANNOUNCER:

This program was made possible by the Corporation for Public Broadcasting, the John D. and Catherine T. MacArthur Foundation, the Ford Foundation, and by contributions to your public television station by viewers like you. Thank you.

MUSIC

ANNOUNCER:

A round of applause for the Cherokee Heritage singers and dancers from right here in Cherokee, North Carolina. It is now show time on the Cherokee Indian Reservation!

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LEANNE HOWE:

I have come to Cherokee, North Carolina, from my home in Oklahoma. But I am not prepared for the tourist spectacle I find. From the visual paradise of the Great Smoky Mountain National Park to the stoic wooden Indians, cheesy dream catchers on sale in every store, Pocahontas dolls, the worst Hollywood stereotypes, all marketed by the Cherokees themselves. And the big chief in plains headdress.

Makes me wonder what I thought I would find. What am I doing here?

I like to imagine that my parents made me in the backseat of a 1950 Pontiac Chieftain. Of course Mother never said it was in the backseat of a car, but I do know it was after they'd seen a movie... a western.

My father abandoned my mother, and I never knew him. Shortly before I was born, a family of Cherokee women put out the word that they wanted to adopt an Indian baby. My Choctaw uncle arranged for my adoption. And that's how I came to have a Choctaw mother who carried me in her belly, and a Cherokee mom who carried me home like a prize.

But adopted children want to know where we come from. What's our history? Throughout my life I thought I was Choctaw and I even studied Choctaw history in college. That's when my mother told me that my father was Cherokee. So, I've come here to learn about my father's people. But oh my God, I *never* expected they'd look like this!

LEANNE HOWE:

How.

CHIEF HENRY:

Howdy.

LEANNE HOWE:

How are you sir? Are you cold standing out here?

CHIEF HENRY:

It's a little chilly today.

LEANNE HOWE:

It is chilly. It's turning winter, you can tell for sure. You know, ever since I came into town, I've been wanting to talk to you. In fact, I think you're just about one of the first people I saw when I drove in to Cherokee. Let me see what you've got on here. You've got the moccasins.

CHIEF HENRY:

Yeah, I put the moccasins, the breechcloth.

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LEANNE HOWE:

And then, let's see the back. Woohoo! This is... That's a lot of feathers. Do you know what, how come you haven't thought of dressing up like a Cherokee?

CHIEF HENRY:

Movies. Not TV. TV wasn't hardly out then, just black and white. But the movies played an Indian with a teepee, a headdress on. And I figure, if you're going to play a part of something, being Indian -- I didn't have to play the part of being an Indian -- I just dress the way people wanted me to dress so to capitalize on what they were showing American people on the movies.

LEANNE HOWE:

Well, I don't know. I got to tell you. When we... American Indians today, we've been protesting and asking all the mascots to stop wearing those costumes because we don't look like that, and we're not like that. And that was a Hollywood invention. And they've stereotyped us to the point that, you know, we don't want that anymore.

CHIEF HENRY:

Who's to criticize anyone? I mean, of what they do and how they make a living? It is a way of supporting the families. And it's not a bad job. You can wear clean clothes. When I first started, I was carrying two, five-gallon cans of diesel fuel to a bulldozer building the Blue Ridge Parkway, finishing this end of the Blue Ridge Parkway. The guy had a gift shop downtown. He said, "Why don't you wear the feathers for me?"

So I wore them for him Saturday and Sunday. I made \$35 the first day and \$40 on Sunday that day. And I said, "Yeah, I'll take it. It beats carrying diesel fuel."

Actually Cherokee got started right after World War II.

LEANNE HOWE:

Really.

CHIEF HENRY:

There was a chief by the name of Standing Deer; Carl Standing Deer was the first ever to do it. And then Mose Walking Stick was next. When I first started wearing a costume there wasn't a motel in Cherokee.

LEANNE HOWE:

How many people a day, on a busy day, do you take pictures for?

CHIEF HENRY:

Well, I've never counted, never kept track. I think the IRS one time decided they'd keep track of it. And they... after about three days they gave up.

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LEANNE HOWE:

So you've been investigated by the IRS. Everybody thinks we don't pay taxes. They think we live off the government. What else is the other stereotype? That we all wear feathers.

CHIEF HENRY:

Yeah, and we ride horses. Leap out from behind trees when the white people come. And, I have the question asked every day. "How do I get to the reservation? Where's the Indians at? We've been here. We haven't seen an Indian. You're the only Indian we've seen."

LEANNE HOWE:

It's pitiful, isn't it?

CHIEF HENRY:

That's what I say. If I wasn't out here wearing a Native costume, I'd be part of the crowd. And they'd never see me.

LEANNE HOWE:

I think you're... I know you're right about that, that we're invisible.

Chief Henry, and all the others who dress up for the camera, know who they are.

MUSIC

GIRLS IN PARADE:

I'm from Cherokee, couldn't be prouder, if you can't hear me I'll yell a little louder!

LEANNE HOWE:

They're the Eastern Band of Cherokee Indians. The descendents of the 1,400 who hid out in the mountains in 1838 after Andrew Jackson removed the Cherokee Nation to Indian Territory, now Oklahoma. These are the people who stayed. Today most of the 13,000 members of the federally-recognized tribe live on the Qualla Boundary in western North Carolina.

When I was in the third grade Ms. Griggs told the class that I was a Cherokee Indian Princess. She knew my mom and thought I was Cherokee, too. I remember telling her that I wasn't Cherokee, and that I'd never met an Indian princess. Even in the third grade, it was important to me that I was from a different tribe because Mom and Granny told me that, again and again.

WAR WHOOPS

ANNOUNCER:

The Hummingbirds down here are starting to holler, headed towards center ground. Wolftown answers the challenge now at this time.

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LEANNE HOWE:

Eu-stugwoe Bring 'em on! Bring on your toughest!

Stickball is a game that's been played for centuries, when old-time rivals would call each other out and play to establish dominance. Today stickball is still being played by the tribes in the Southeast, along with another all-American game... football.

Cherokee High is playing their archrival, Swain County, this week. The Cherokees haven't beaten Swain for over 20 years and they're hoping this will be "the" year. But the rivalry is more complicated than just a game.

SCOOTER McCOY, CHEROKEE H.S. COACH:

To say the word rivalry between Cherokee and Swain may not be a strong enough word. The importance of football in our community goes beyond football. We don't have opportunity to play stickball but once a year now. That's at our annual Indian Fair. That's a great thing to see, and we love to see after all these years it's still there. And football, to me, is sort of our modern stickball. It's the way to prove that we're still tough. We can go out and compete against other non-Cherokee communities, and that we can be successful at it.

So, we don't represent a high school as most high schools in this area do. We don't represent a town. We don't represent a community. We stress every day to these kids you represent a nation of people. And you don't have that opportunity in most high school programs. So, we want to be top notch on and off the field in whatever we're doing.

LEANNE HOWE:

One of the first women I meet is Lynn Taylor, mother of number one, starting cornerback Derek Taylor.

Are you getting all cranked up for the Swain game this weekend?

LYNN TAYLOR:

I've had an upset stomach for a while. Since yesterday or the day before. You know, I'll make it but I'm getting real nervous for the whole team, the whole community. It's a big deal and we want to win. Haven't won in 20 years, but you know, I think it's time.

LEANNE HOWE:

Has Derek been working really hard over the past month or so?

LYNN TAYLOR:

Well, I think the whole team has. You know, they dedicate themselves to workouts all summer long. They've been working on strength and conditioning. I think this is the second, maybe third year of doing that?

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LEANNE HOWE:

Why are they so involved in football?

LYNN TAYLOR:

You have to keep teenagers busy these days. You have to because there's so much out there that they could get into. I mean, that's one good thing about sports. I think that there's a lot of character if you're involved in sports and you're able to get along with others, compete with others, you're learning from each other.

LEANNE HOWE:

Why does this community get so cranked up for the Swain game?

LYNN TAYLOR:

It's just always been the biggest rivalry because it... I guess the towns are so close. And we Indians here feel that they don't treat us, you know, equal.

LEANNE HOWE:

You know, what it seems to me you're talking about self-esteem. And sort of all of us kind of go through that part of teaching ourselves self-esteem and self-assurance.

LYNN TAYLOR:

Yeah, that's true. I think that we need to teach our kids and I think that we do. But I see Indians different. I think we have to overcome two things, not just self-esteem for yourself but self-esteem as far as being an Indian, if you know what I mean.

COACH:

Focus. As much as you can stay focused, stay focused about this. This is a great opportunity. We can right a lot of wrongs. We can right a lot of wrongs, guys. Most of us, its 22 years of it. Isn't that right, Lil' Al? We're going to correct that Friday night. We're going to correct it; and I'm excited about it.

LEANNE HOWE:

When I was going to summer school between the sixth and seventh grade I was supposed to ride home with the other neighborhood girls, but for some reason they wouldn't let me in the car. Their mom drove off. I started crying and I walked home.

When Mom found out what happened she kept asking, "Why wouldn't they let you in the car?"

"I don't know!" But we both knew and we both cried. I understand why winning this game is such a big deal to the Cherokees and why their young men carry the pride of the community on their backs. It comes from a sense that many of us have that we're different from white people. But can a football victory erase years of feeling second class?

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BAND MUSIC / CHEERS

LEANNE HOWE:

The team and the school have spent the day getting revved up for the big game. Ray Kinsland, director of the Cherokee Boys Club leads the pre-game devotional.

RAY KINSLAND:

Please everybody in here; give 48 minutes of 110 percent intensity. And if you do that, then you don't have any sweat. And you can do it, can't you?

TEAM:

Yes, sir.

RAY KINSLAND:

Is that too much to ask.

TEAM:

No, sir.

RAY KINSLAND:

I've told you that you remind me of the story in the Old Testament about Israel. They'd been in slavery for 400 years in Egypt. And finally Moses led them out. And you've seen it. You saw the movie and you read it in the Bible, about where the Red Sea opened and they went through on dry ground and he took care of them. But they didn't go possess the Promised Land immediately because some of them left and joined the enemy. And some of them were afraid to go on. And that happens to us. Some of your relatives and my relatives have joined the enemy. Those ones of Israel who were not afraid and who had courage, who were brave, and who did not join the enemy, they made it to the Promised Land. Can you do it?

TEAM:

Yes, sir.

RAY KINSLAND:

Will you do it?

TEAM:

Yes, sir.

CHANT

ANNOUNCER:

Good evening, ladies and gentlemen, and welcome to the Junior Miss Cherokee pageant. Contestant number one, Jasmine Lawson.

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LEANNE HOWE:

While the boys become football warriors, responsible for community pride, the traditional role for Cherokee women is to teach the culture. In the Junior Miss Cherokee pageant the girls must be able to show that they can speak Cherokee, they have to learn a traditional Cherokee song or dance, and they must wear traditional Cherokee clothes. In essence the women carry Cherokee culture in their baskets.

REBECCA SNOW:

My name is Rebecca Faith Snow. My Cherokee name is Pretty Eyes. I am the daughter of Helen Snow. I reside in the Birdtown community. I am 11 years old, and when I grow up I would like to be a professional singer and skate. Thank you.

ANNOUNCER:

Welcome to Cherokee High School football as they take on and host Swain County Maroon Devils here in Cherokee on the Eastern Band of Cherokee Indians Reservation this evening.

Taking it out and running with it on the left side, working with it is going to be the Swain County Maroon Devils. Taking it over to the 24-yard line on the return as they move it back is number 23, Gavin Smathers. And he picked it up right around the five so it's a return of about 20 yards.

Coming back in at this time is going to be Caleb McCoy, for the last time I think. Moving for a pass... drops back in the pocket. Play action trying to knock it down. Oh, it's going to be complete after the last drive.

Now motion from the right side... Justin Evans switch up. Going out to the west side, Aaron Jones. Looking for a pass. Play action in the back. Touchdown out there. Touchdown.

A punt now, coming away from Justin Evans. Back at the 45 in Swain territory. Derek Taylor for Cherokee. Cherokee at their own play.

Kirkland drops back, rolls the pass, there's right side play action...long pass... Touchdown pass. Touchdown pass.

CHEROKEE SONG

ANNOUNCER:

Contestant number three, Felicia Elizabeth Johnson.

FELICIA JOHNSON:

For my talent I would like to sing the Cherokee national anthem and I would like to say a poem. I would like to dedicate this song to my late Grandpa Emerson who passed away.

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SONG

ANNOUNCER:

Kirkland is under attended... drops back, rolls to the left side. He recovered... rolls back to the right, sweeps with a pass across the lane... looking out there to Matt Martin. It's intercepted by Swain. Picked off out there by the Maroon Devils' Mitchell Greene.

Caleb McCoy, single set back in the backfield looking for the pass across the lane. Weaver has... Pressler coming across the lane... and it's going to be blocked down as they call pass interference up there against Cherokee.

Under center is Weaver; Evans will come in for Swain County. Drops back, a pitch out to the right side. Looks back for the halfback pass. Looking at Justin Evans. Now it's going to be complete. Runs the 20... Oh he's going to fall at the two!

Time out. Time out.

Weaver, kick is out to the right side. Touchdown!

ANNOUNCER:

Contestant number seven, Melody Trey Crow.

Contestant number eight, Madison Crow.

I am very happy to announce the winners. Second runner up, Rebecca Snow. First runner up, Madison Crow.

And now then ladies and gentleman, Junior Miss Cherokee... Felicia Johnson. [Applause.]

ANNOUNCER:

It's up. It's good. It's good baby, 14 - 14. Champions tonight are tied... The good thing is that Cherokee scored. But Chris Kirkland is now benched on the sideline. Remember, he had a knee injury and now he's on the sideline. After he jumped Greene I don't think that did his knee any good.

Number three, Matt Martine to kick it away. Right side hash mark at the 40. It'll be a long line drive on the swift kick. Drops back out there to James Taylor. Runs it back to Swain's alley. Almost a loose football but they bring it down right around the 26-yard line.

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Weaver's under center. Drops back, looks for the pass, now to the left side. Who will connect up? Loose football, Cherokee has it back. Cherokee has it back. First and 10 for the Braves at the 37, baby.

Kirkland under center, goes back, hands it to Smitty... heads for the outside... 40, 45... go, baby, go... 30... down to the 20... He's down... and he's in Swain territory out there.

Twenty-five seconds now remaining. And the Cherokee battle flag has been moving around this track here at the stadium for a while now.

Cherokee Braves going back to the line now. And the Cherokee Brave fans are on their feet. It looks like there are about 5,000 of them.

Greene and Kirkland under center from the... touchdown... Touchdown, good!

PANDAMONIUM

PLAYER:

Like Coach said, what a game. We got a chance to be heroes. And we did it.

LEANNE HOWE:

They did it! Cherokee teamwork carried the day. For the pageant girls, too, there's a wonderful sense of accomplishment. These are the kinds of experiences they need to grow up and become business leaders, teachers, good parents and Cherokees in the 21st Century.

TEAM reciting The Lord's Prayer.

MUSIC

LEANNE HOWE:

The Cherokees say that the world was once a great floating island of clear water, wet earth, red fire, soft wind.

The animals wanted to go on the land but they were afraid it was too soft. So, they asked the Great Buzzard to make it ready for them. He flew all over the land, flapping his wings to make it dry. But when he reached Cherokee Country he was very tired. And his wings began to strike the earth, creating a valley. And when they turned up again, there was a mountain. And to this day, the Cherokee homeland is full of mountains. In a way, it was created out of the cooperation between the animals and the birds.

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LAURA PINNIX:

The Cherokee language defines who we are. And if we will ever lose our language we will not be Cherokee, because the language encompasses everything. It tells your identity, it tells your relation with other people, with the world. The language encompasses a person's whole being.

LAURA [in a classroom]:

Shun-a-le means morning, *Di-Ka-no-gi-sdi* is song. So this is a morning song.

The biggest challenge is really not the preservation but the actual application of the Cherokee language. Because when you apply the Cherokee language, you use it on a day-to-day basis. You use it as in your life 100 percent of the time. Then, we'll preserve it. Until we do, we're not going to preserve only a small fraction.

LEANNE HOWE:

Out of the thousands of languages that were once spoken in North America approximately 200 still survive. By the year 2020, all the people whose first language is a native language will be dead.

BO TAYLOR:

To learn a language, you've got to use it, and it's got to become like a living, breathing thing. And the only way that I ever see the language being preserved is through immersion. In order for a language to thrive, it needs to be reinforced. You can't go and learn it in 10 minutes at school and come home and try to speak to Mom and Mom doesn't know it. So what you need to do, it needs to be a family thing and you need to teach the parents. And at the museum, what we're working on now is trying to implement a program to try to do that.

[BO repeating same Cherokee word several times with different inflections.]

Cherokee language is very fluid. It has a certain melodic sense to it. And that's what comes with the language when it's conversing. And they often talk about how the old women when they speak they go, [mimicking high voiced Cherokee speakers]. It's got, like it... they have a... They almost sound like they're singing. It's amazing when you get around Cherokee speakers.

LEANNE HOWE:

When I was five, I can remember watching Great-grandma Hattan coil her long hair into a spiral on the back of her head. As she put in the last pins, she and Granny would talk Indian. I couldn't understand a word they were saying, but I wanted to join in. So, I'd mangle a word or two in Cherokee. Grandma Hattan would pinch me and laugh, "Flea bite, flea bite. That's not right."

Many years later I began to learn Choctaw from my biological mother. Her first language was Choctaw, and on my good days I can say a few words: *Chi nia katimi*, how's your fat? But I'm far from fluent. I missed that from both sides. That may be one of the reasons I teach in an

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American Indian studies program and advocate for native language. So students will have opportunities that I missed.

TEACHER ONE:

We want our kids home. You know, we want them here so that they learn the language and they learn the culture right here in Cherokee. If you lose the language, if you lose the culture, then the kids quit learning. The Native American children quit learning, and our drop out rate...

TEACHER TWO:

We're losing a lot of our kids right after sixth grade, especially the boys. The statistics show the high drop out rates. Studies show that it's just lack of self-esteem. They don't know their culture. They're kind of lost. "Who am I? Am I white? Am I Native American?" Not only that, they drop out because they haven't been taught... they haven't been immersed in their culture and language the way we should be doing it even more so, that we're just really starting to do.

TEACHER ONE:

We really need new facilities because we need to expand this unity concept between the elementary school and the high school. And be able to have the high school kids come down to the elementary and help out the kids because that's the only way we're going to survive, nowadays.

LEANNE HOWE:

The Cherokees have a very innovative approach for their new schools. They want to locate all three campuses in one place to create a cultural and academic village, where the oldest can help the youngest. But they have a problem. Eighty percent of the land on the Qualla Boundary goes straight up.

JOYCE DUGAN:

We knew for quite some time that we needed a new school, particularly at that elementary level because almost every single room had been divided in half to make room for more rooms.

CLASSROOM TEACHER:

Find as many geometric shapes as you can. You study them all and see how many different geometric shapes.

STUDENT, HENRY:

Is this math?

CLASSROOM TEACHER:

Yes, this is math, Henry.

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JOYCE DUGAN:

So the question became, what are we going to do? Where are we going to put it? So it sounds crazy, but I began driving around the reservation and looking to see where we might, [where] there might be room for a school. And one day I had gone to Big Cove for something. I don't recall why I was there. And all of a sudden I came out of Big Cove and came through this area and I thought, "What a perfect place, because you could have all three schools located here."

So I sent back to my office and was real excited about that I had found our place. And I knew it was [National] Park land, but I thought in my... I was pretty naïve back then because I thought, "Well we'll just approach the Park [Service]. And this is not a part of the park that anyone, that visitors see. And maybe they'll just turn it over to us... maybe a 100-year lease." I had heard of some of those kinds of things being done.

LEANNE HOWE:

The tribe wants to trade Water Rock Knob, 218 acres of pristine property that overlooks the Blue Ridge Parkway. The tract includes endangered species and the headwaters of seven trout streams. In exchange they want 144 acres of National Park land. If the proposal is approved, the tribe will build a new school complex where they can educate their future leaders. One of the key spokesmen for this proposal is an 18-year-old senior, Corey Blankenship. The Eastern Band chose Corey to speak to the U.S. Congress, just like the Powatans chose a young Pocahontas to represent them before the English Crown. It's a Southeastern tradition.

COREY BLANKENSHIP:

Cherokee High School has similar problems. The school is currently at capacity, parts of the building have been declared unfit for educational purposes and parts of the structure have been condemned. These school facilities are simply inadequate for the education of our children. But we have the resources and Congress has the power to solve this problem. With Congress' approval of this exchange, the Eastern Band will have a suitable location in which to build three new schools, all part of one multi-generational educational village.

We envision a cultural village where our children can gain an understanding of our culture, heritage, language and our history. They will learn traditional ways, customs, language and natural history alongside the modern curriculum of schools throughout the nation. We ask everyone here today to support the Cherokee people. Help us protect our unique identity. Help us to insure the future of our children and our nation as a whole. Please support the Ravensford Land Exchange and do not allow our Cherokee children to be left behind. Thank you again for allowing me the honor to appear before you.

REP. RICHARD POMBO [Republican, California]:

Mr. Blankenship, I don't know if you're familiar with it, but there's a group called the Sierra Club that has come out in opposition of this. They sent out a letter. Does your tribe have a history of environmental degradation? Do you have a long history of destroying the environment around you?

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COREY BLANKENSHIP:

My people have been there for thousands of years and, because of our commitment to the United States, we were willing to give up that land for the Blue Ridge Parkway to come through. And to say that we would go and destroy something that is sacred to us, something that we've lived off of for thousands of years, goes against everything that Native American Indians and Cherokee people stand for.

CHAIRMAN POMBO:

Thank you. I'd now like to welcome Mr. Mike Olsen, counselor to the Assistant Secretary for Indian Affairs for the Department of Interior, Ms. Napolitano.

REP. GRACE NAPOLITANO [Democrat, California]:

The federal government has long ignored my Indian brothers and sisters and I think it's time we owned up to some of the responsibilities that have been ignored for many, many, many generations. When I looked at some of the information about they're using a condemned building, that sends shivers up my spine. As a grandmother, I would not tolerate it; and I don't see why we should allow the federal government not to take action to remedy those conditions. This has not happened yesterday. Why has action not been taken to remedy the conditions under which these children go to school in?

MIKE OLSEN:

I... I don't know.

CHAIRMAN POMBO:

I don't think there's any possible way that Mr. Olsen can explain to you why, in the last couple of months that he's been on the job, that over 40 years this school was mismanaged and things happened in the BIA. But if you want to get serious about taking care of these problems, we've got to seriously look at the entire issue of how we have yet dealt with the BIA over the last 100 years. That's where the real problem is.

MS. NAPOLITANO:

Let's do so, sir.

LEANNE HOWE:

Although this site is never used by park visitors, environmentalists oppose the exchange because they don't want the land developed. A group of Cherokee High School students take me out to the proposed site for the new school.

STUDENT ONE:

I just want to talk a little bit more about the history of this land. The Ravensford was a logging town. That's what it used to be.

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COREY:

It had homes and stores... general stores and different businesses and buildings over in this area. And you had large logging ponds where the train would run, where they had a big cove right through the center of this tract.

LEANNE HOWE:

What do you say to the environmentalists who say you'll just trash out this land? Indians don't know how to protect the environment. What do you say to them?

STUDENT ONE:

I think Native Americans have lived off the land and they know this land. And we can just take care of it. That's the way we were taught and that's how we were raised to do since we were... a long time ago from our grandparents, from our great-grandparents, great-great-grandparents. That's what they taught us, is to take care of the land. The land is the most precious, one of the precious things here is the land.

BOY:

People that look at our reservation and say, "You have this large reservation that the government has given to you." We've bought every bit of this land that we live on now. And this part right here was taken away from us and we had to buy... Boundary Tree was taken away from us -- the Boundary Tree Tract of land -- and we had to buy that back. So, we had to pay double for land that we already lived on.

GIRL TWO:

Yeah. I think it's mostly... what it is, is things are changing. I think for years now they've been able to, you know, where we've had the tourist... tourism industry and all. They've been able to say, "Well, at least our town isn't as bad as Cherokee is." Where they've had the tourist and they've gone out and chiefting. I think they've always been able to say, "Well at least we've not that bad."

But now that we're starting to help ourselves and help each other out, and we're starting to build a... make a name for the Cherokee. I think it's starting to scare a lot of people. We're not the worst anymore. We're becoming the best.

GIRL ONE:

And everyone wants to be a part of us.

CASINO SOUNDS

GAMBLER:

Made me some money; \$1,226.

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LEANNE HOWE:

The bill to allow the land exchange passed the House and Senate. Thanks to the tribe's casino, construction on the new school is underway.

JOYCE DUGAN:

There's been criticism of Indians and casinos. I think when Congress passed the law to allow this; I really think that they just never in their wildest dreams envisioned what has happened to Indian gaming. Neither did we.

When we started talking about gaming, it wasn't about getting rich. That was not our dream. Our dream was to provide jobs. A year-round job, which was unheard of by many people at that time. It was at a time when our unemployment rate would rise to 50 percent in winter months. What does that do to a people?

Many people still have a hard time today understanding sovereignty. What does this sovereignty of Indian nations mean? I have a hard time with it too because we're not sovereign in this nation. If we were sovereign in this nation we would not have to depend on federal government dollars. We would not have to go to the state for gaming approvals. We would be able to live independently in our own nation, which is what we were doing in 1838 at the time of the removal. Whether anyone likes gambling, whether they despise it, whether they agree with it, or not, because of it we are finally seeing a sense of independence that we have not seen in over 200 years.

SINGING

LEANNE HOWE:

Currently there are 26 Baptist churches on the Qualla Boundary. Many are against gambling. In fact, one preacher tells his Cherokee congregation to return their annual \$6,000 per capita checks. Pastors like Merritt Youngdeer see the paradox of Indian gaming first hand.

MERRITT YOUNGDEER:

People say, "Well show me the Bible where it says you shouldn't gamble." What were the Roman soldiers doing at the foot of the cross?

LEANNE HOWE:

Gambling.

MERRITT YOUNGDEER:

They were gambling for Christ's cloak. And so we want to get something that belongs to someone else. It's almost like you go into a trance when you go into the casino. They hand you the bucket of quarters or whatever it is and it looks like your eyes glaze over and you stay in that trance until you leave.

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LEANNE HOWE:

An elder was telling me, this was a few days ago, that the people really were not allowed to really vote...

MERRITT YOUNGDEER:

That's true.

LEANNE HOWE:

... about the casino. And this elder said that they were really opposed to the casino and afraid it would bring a lot of changes. Until it happened, and then he mentioned that he really thought it had been a help. How do you feel about that?

MERRITT YOUNGDEER:

We can see the facilities; we can see that we've got things that we didn't have. The thing we don't see and the thing that's not going to ever be advertised and brought to the surface is the same as anywhere. Anywhere that you've got gambling. People get addicted to that just like you do alcohol, just like you do drugs, just like you do all of the other kinds of things you shouldn't get addicted to. You get addicted to it.

And no one wants to lose. After awhile you get to thinking, "What's wrong with me? I'm a loser, I can't win, how come I can't win, what's the matter?" We've had people take their life in the parking lot; distraught because they lost everything.

LEANNE HOWE:

Casino profits have swelled the tribal budget to \$150 million and made the community more self-sustaining. But it's also raised some very contentious issues. Who is controlling this new wealth?

THERESA MCCOY:

I think what I'd like to do is go ahead and ask the council to look at the mailing that went out and we discussed it briefly. "Vote no." And I know you all can see the "No! Don't take my voting rights. A vote yes is to make changes that will take most absentee voters' rights from them." That is a lie.

LEANNE HOWE:

People are furious about an anonymous letter sent to absentee voters that influenced tribal elections and shifted the balance of power between those that live on the Qualla Boundary versus those that live elsewhere.

THERESA MCCOY:

I'm in favor of absentee voting, by the way. But I'm in favor of absentee voting with restrictions on it because, this time, it was your tribal leaders that were affected by the absentee vote. Next time, it's going to be alcohol, and the scariest one is when they drop your blood degree.

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LEANNE HOWE:

Their concern about who can influence tribal politics has raised questions about who is a legitimate Cherokee and who isn't. The tribe recently passed a referendum to audit the tribal rolls.

BOB BLANKENSHIP:

The intent of the people proposing the audit is to disenroll people through that process because they fail to... they were challenged when they drug people in off the street and tried to disenroll them without due process.

THERESA MCCOY:

Our tribe has criteria for enrollment -- you must have an ancestor on the 1924 Fred Baker roll and you must possess 1/16th of Eastern Cherokee Indian blood to be a member of the tribe. I can say without a doubt that there are people on the rolls of the Eastern Cherokee [tribe] that are not legitimately Cherokee Indian. And, therefore, I feel they should be stricken.

MICHELL HICKS:

One thing I want to make sure of is that if we're going to do an enrollment audit that it's done fairly across the board and we're not picking and choosing who we're going to audit just because of that family's last name.

THERESA McCOY:

I know that a lot of people want to assume that the reason the audit came up at this particular time was because we have a casino and every member of this tribe receives a distribution. That's not true. I believe what the audit actually boils down to isn't a matter of money. It boils down to a matter of blood.

BRENDA NORVILLE:

Why not audit our rolls? To me our blood is the most sacred thing that we have. That's why we're a member of a federal recognized tribe; that is Eastern Band Cherokee Indians.

LEANNE HOWE:

I didn't come to Cherokee to claim my Grandma was a Cherokee Indian princess. There are too many wannabees as it is.

Is Wayne Newton a Cherokee?

BO TAYLOR:

Yeah, why not?

LEANNE HOWE:

Is Cher a Cherokee?

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BO TAYLOR:

Is Cher a Cherokee? Yeah, why not?

LEANNE HOWE:

Is Johnny Depp a Cherokee?

BO TAYLOR:

I don't know.

LEANNE HOWE:

Is Elvis Presley a Cherokee?

BO TAYLOR:

Yeah, dang right Elvis is a Cherokee.

LEANNE HOWE:

Am I a Cherokee?

BO TAYLOR:

Well, you didn't tell me you were a Cherokee, so you aren't a Cherokee. Why didn't you say that you're a Cherokee? Are you ashamed of that? Are you afraid of that, why didn't you? I will ask that.

The minute you say that you're Cherokee, I'm going to expect something out of you. I'm going to expect that you know something. What makes me mad is the Cherokees... When people waltz into the museum and they say, "You know, my grandma was a Cherokee. Put me on the roll, I want some of that money." That makes me mad.

Being Cherokee ain't about that. Being Cherokee is about that culture, the language and the history. The fact that we had to hide and that we about starved to death. You know, they don't know that. Even our own people, they need to know that. If, one of these days if, you know, my great-great-great-grandkids are 1/1000 Cherokee and they're whatever color -- I don't know what color they'll be -- but you know I would hope that somebody down the line they're still singing the Cherokee songs. And they're still speaking the Cherokee language. And the Cherokee is always there, and that spiritual fire will always burn inside of them. That's what will make them Cherokee.

LEANNE HOWE:

It's easy to see why the Cherokees have a strong identity with this land. For Cherokees as well as all other Indians, the question of identity is tied to the land as perfume is to the rose. The memories of 10,000 years in this place become a part of us.

Can I claim my Cherokee identity and weave it with my own Choctaw identity? I don't know that I can but I do know this. Who I am, who I grew into, was because of where I was raised as well as the Cherokee women who raised me. I can only imagine how my grandmothers felt since, in their hearts, they'd lived here all their lives.

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Cherokee culture nourishes our identity. But eating is when we really come together. Everyone at the Cherokee Indian Fair says the place to be is Emily Smith's food booth where she serves Cherokee bean bread, fried chicken, greens and fried potatoes.

EMILY SMITH:

Wait 'til I get the dough made. I think you can cut up some bread, okay?

LEANNE HOWE:

And some boiled beans. They're a little hard yet?

EMILY SMITH:

No, they're cooked. They're cooked beans. I cook them all the way done, they're pinto beans.

LEANNE HOWE:

Everybody we talked to in town said, "Oh, you have to eat Emily's bean bread. Don't eat anybody else's. Her's is the best."

EMILY SMITH:

You get enough to hold it in your hand like this...

LEANNE HOWE:

Her daughter, Jo, and son, Jack, along with their friend, Lynn Harlan, take off from work to have fun and to eat at Emily's. Cherokees love to eat.

You know, I think foods are still the main reason that we get together and celebrate. We always do it around food. Everything we have is around food.

EMILY SMITH:

Then you wonder why everybody's diabetic. Oh gosh, that's my dumplings. They're boiling.

LEANNE HOWE:

Emily and Jack are both diabetic. But at the fair everyone wants traditional comfort food. Starchy bean bread made with cornmeal, pinto beans and covered in grease.

LYNN HARLAN:

That's the only question I ask all day, "You want grease on that?"

PATTI GRANT [speaking to a sparse audience at the Fair]:

Again, I want to welcome everybody to the 90th Annual Indian Fair. We've got a lot of information. Also opportunities to talk to people about interesting things that affect your health and affect your life.

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LEANNE HOWE:

The tribe's diabetes program, Cherokee Choices, tries to raise awareness about Indian country's number one killer. But their words often fall on deaf ears.

LYNN HARLAN:

I think they struggle with getting into the community because they tell us stuff that's not popular like...

LEANNE HOWE:

... don't eat potatoes.

LYNN HARLAN:

This kind of misses its point here when everybody's here to eat grease and fried potatoes. So I think they have to work on their message a lot.

LEANNE HOWE:

Their timing. Timing is everything.

LYNN HARLAN:

You can put the juice from the cabbage on it. It tastes just as good as the grease does. So I think they still struggle with trying to give us the message in a way that we can get it.

LEANNE HOWE:

Patty Grant is the director of Cherokee Choices.

PATTY GRANT:

The medical profession and many other care providers are recognizing what they're doing is not working. Diabetes is still on the rise. And they are baffled as well. What is it that makes us not want to do what we need to do for our own health? The number one thing that people have expressed to me about -- when they talk about the diabetes, them having diabetes -- is the feelings of having a lot of shame surrounding the fact that they have diabetes.

LEANNE HOWE:

This kind of reminds me of what happened to us in the '70s as Indian people. We started talking about our problems with alcohol. We had to bring that out of the closet. And I mean, I remember that real vividly. Nobody thought anything bad about somebody being drunk all of the time. It was just...

PATTY GRANT:

Indian people are beginning to recognize there's got to be a way that we can begin to change our thinking, spiritually, mentally, emotionally and physically, so that we can begin to make those lifestyle changes, to make... for the healing process to take place. It's got to happen. And it's the same way as with alcoholism. But it's the same way... And it's the same way as with domestic violence.

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LEANNE HOWE:

And started from within our own communities though. I really believe that.

PATTY GRANT:

Yes, we have the solutions to our problems, but we have to begin as a community to begin to talk about it openly. And it's got to be laid out on the table, and it's got to be addressed. It doesn't make it bad. It doesn't make it wrong. But it does make it to the place where we have to acknowledge it. And that we can't ignore it anymore.

LEANNE HOWE:

My brother and I were talking recently. Our Cherokee mom told us she had diabetes 10 years before we realized, "Hey, this is a disease."

Mom said, "All I have to do is take some pills and watch my sweets." Why didn't she tell us it was serious? Why didn't we realize it? Why were we in denial?

Near the end of her life, when she was getting injections three times a day, she would just shrug. "I'm going to die anyway, might as well let me have a piece of chocolate."

PATTY GRANT:

Dr. Tischner is going to talk with you about some health and medical problems that you've been experiencing. And then we're going to go from there and you can share with her what's going on.

LEANNE HOWE:

At the Cherokee Choices Diabetes Support Group, one of the women learns she must start hemodialysis.

PATTY GRANT:

How are you feeling about that?

BETSY:

Kind of worried.

PATTY GRANT:

Kind of nervous?

BETSY:

Little bit. When you have to, you have to.

PATTY GRANT:

Right. Betsy, it's something that you've kind of known that it was going to happen. You knew that this day was coming.

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BETSY:

Yeah. I didn't know when.

PATTY GRANT:

Does that mean that you feel like that a part of your life is ended?

BETSY:

Yeah.

PATTY GRANT:

Okay, as you know it today.

BETSY:

Yeah.

PATTY GRANT:

And so, what? So, that's part of your fear is that you won't be able to do the things that you are capable of doing now?

BETSY:

Yeah.

PATTY GRANT:

When you started on dialysis, did you have that same fear about not being able to do the things that you were...?

PHYLLIS:

There for a while I just felt like just laying down and say, "Heck with it."

BETSY:

And for a while, she just about did.

PHYLLIS:

So when I went on dialysis then I felt like I had a lot of energy. And I still feel that way.

DR. ANN BULLOCK:

Dialysis doesn't fix anything. It does save someone's life, but dialysis does not fix anything. And in fact the five-year mortality rate... in five years people who are on dialysis, 50 percent of them will not be alive at the end of five years. Not because dialysis has killed them, but because their disease is so far along that their body just can't go on any longer.



The traditional view in the medical community is that diabetes, type two diabetes, is caused through genetics and life style issues... the interaction between those two. And there is no doubt that those two things do play a role. Why is there so much diabetes in Indian country? Why is there so much diabetes in minority populations in general?

The answer is that there's been an unusual amount of trauma that has happened to Indian people and that there are very clear physiologic as well as behavioral responses to trauma. And that's what we need to understand, because as we try to unravel this, as we try to figure out what's going on with diabetes and domestic violence and all of it, it has common roots. And those roots are what traumatized people do, how that affects them personally and on a community-wide level. Historical trauma is a critical perspective for understanding that.

On top of which there are ongoing traumas. The trauma of racism and poverty is not to be minimized. And that, of course, is happening absolutely every day, as well. Trauma does affect obesity in several ways. It affects it by changing behavior. People who are traumatized will often have coping strategies to deal with when the trauma comes up for them again. And for many people that is to eat and to eat to fill that empty hole, if you will. So since we have that model, how trauma affects diabetes it's very important that we reach out in the community and find a way to help to heal that.

CHILDREN SINGING

DR. ANN BULLOCK:

For all those reasons, that's why the Cherokee Choices intervention is looking at mentoring intervention. To go in and work with the kids, hopefully before some of the trauma has set in too deeply, if you will. And [the mentor] tries to be there for them emotionally, to listen to what's going on in their lives, to offer support in a very appropriate way, to mirror back to these children how critically important their lives are, how beautiful they are. Which is not a message that traumatized people can always give to their children. In fact, they usually can't mirror back. We can't mirror back to a child what we don't have in ourselves. And so when people have been traumatized, they pass it on. The vector of disease transmission, if you will, is parenting. It's not because parents don't want to try or because they're not trying because they don't care. It's because they can't.

So our mentors go into the schools. They also eat lunch with the kids, they go to recess with the kids, play kick ball with them; whatever it is. Give them every opportunity to show adults who care about them and mirror back to them their own worth, their own importance and that their issues do matter.

If we do not find a way to change this epidemic, we will have done what the bullets, the treaties, the boarding schools did not do. We will have succeeded in probably eliminating Indian culture in a meaningful way because there just won't be very many of us left who are healthy enough to pass it on.

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LEANNE HOWE:

The closest the Cherokees came to being eliminated was in 1838. Under orders from President Jackson the Cherokees awoke to soldiers beating down their doors, herding them into stockades. For the next year, over 17,000 Cherokees were forced to walk west. They were given \$53 to cover the journey, but only if they survived. Thousands died from hunger, exposure, and disease. The eternal memory was seared into our bodies as *du-na-dlo yi-la-sta-nv*, or "Trail Where They Cried."

When I was six, Great-grandma Hatton showed me how to pee standing up. "Hike up your dress," she said. "Spread your feet wide so you don't get any on your shoes. That's how we had to go on the trail." I didn't know until I was almost grown she was talking about her Great-grandmother and the other Cherokees who walked on the Trail of Tears. That's kind of how our stories go. They happen to us all. And to this day, I still pee standing up. And I've taught it to my own granddaughters. Until now, I never realized I was passing on our historic grief.

MOM:

Leanne. Leanne, have all the Cherokees died?

LEANNE HOWE:

No, Mom.

MOM:

Well, have all the Cherokees died?

LEANNE HOWE:

This is the conversation my 86-year-old Cherokee mother and I had many times before she died. What she really wanted to know is where is *my* family? I dragged out all the pictures of her ancestors, back to 1889. I told her they've all died. But she would quickly forget. Diabetes is the disease that steals your body blind, then takes what's left... your memory. She was an artist and one of her last paintings was of a single Indian woman on the trail, looking back at the mountains she was leaving. She said the little girl was supposed to be me.

I don't know why so many Indians have diabetes, could it be as simple as the grief of 500 years of colonizing our bodies into toxic waste dumps. Like disgusted tourists, our own kidneys demand to be put out midway through their journey. My aunts and both my mothers had diabetes. They're all dead now. Lately, I wake up in the middle of the night disoriented, my face wet with tears. I look around the room and finally fall back asleep, hopefully into someone else's dreams. I want to forget that we were amputated from our homelands, and that I was cut off from my father. Mostly I want to know how we're going to heal ourselves.

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CHEROKEE BAPTIST CHURCH SUNDAY SERVICE:

LEANNE HOWE:

The Cherokees were Christians. And yet the people that removed them were also Christians, were they not? At least they professed to be Christians.

MERRITT YOUNGDEER:

That answers it right there. "Professed to be." Yeah. The Cherokees had won a Supreme Court decision [saying removal was illegal]. But President Jackson -- the very one that the Cherokee had helped defend at Horseshoe Bend and saved his life, the very one -- he's the one that sent them, the Cherokee, west.

Good morning.

CONGREGATION:

Good morning.

MERRITT YOUNGDEER:

Christ offers what we need to sustain our lives. He offers that in the most stressful times that we might come upon. He's there and he will give us what we need.

There's folks that just really are upset as to what's happened to Indian people. It just hurts them. They can't let loose of it. So much of the time people are told, and being brainwashed, that you're not going to be Indian anymore. "You're going to lose your identity. You're going to become a white man by accepting Jesus."

I see a lot of young people that are really torn with, "Who am I? Who am I? I've got to be Indian, that's who I am." I talk to young people and people my own age, you know.

They tell me, "Well, I'm going back to the old ways. We need to go back to the fire. We need to do these things." And my heart goes out to them because that's not the answer. Jesus is the answer. We can't put our ethnic identity or our tribe first... putting it before the Lord. He's got to be number one. Then, be Cherokee or be whatever tribe.

LEANNE HOWE:

For so many generations we were told, "You're savage," and "You're full of pagan ways." And all of that stuff has piled up on us to where we are just shut down in so many ways. I think that's what... that's what has happened to us over the past centuries. Don't you? Or do you?

AMY GRANT:

I began to realize the pain that we native peoples have and carry. Several of the local churches were getting ready to acknowledge what the church as the Christian churches had not done over the years, is to recognize the Native spirituality that we have. In trying to force us to be Christians and to not allow us to continue to have our own traditional ceremonies and to discredit it.

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LEANNE HOWE:

You know how the Holocaust victims have recognized the pain of the past.

AMY GRANT:

And so was the people from September 11, 2001.

LEANNE HOWE:

That's right. That's right.

AMY GRANT:

And they're still telling the stories, they're still talking and they're coming together and sharing their pain. We need to do that. We weren't allowed to do it. And now we're having to go back and to connect with that.

LEANNE HOWE:

That's right.

AMY GRANT:

And to look at it and talk about it and feel those things that our ancestors had to feel. Any psychologist or social worker or anybody who works in the helping field will tell you that you have to know who you are. And you have to know that you're okay. And if you've never had that in your life, or your parents haven't had it, or your grandparents haven't had it... there's a lot of pain in this community.

LEANNE HOWE:

My mother walked her shoes off on the bare floors of Auntie Em's, the home for unwed mothers where I was born. Ladies from a nearby church would come and talk to the pregnant girls about their sins. Mother would fall silent whenever she told me this story, but I heard her feelings through the silence. In the '50s, the world had a label for babies like me... bastard. My mother tried to repent but never felt forgiven. Am I now carrying this shame for her and my father?

Cherokee families are dealing with questions like these by bringing them out in the open and talking about them. Reconciliation is about acknowledging the shame and finding ways to heal. My friends Amy and Patty Grant are beginning this process with their family.

MAN:

My mother didn't drink, but my stepfather did. And when my dad left us I was all alone pretty much. When my stepfather would come home drinking, I'd be the one that stood between him and my Mom, to keep him from beating on my Mom. I went and relied on sports, and doing those things. I never done anything like that for myself. I was doing that for approval. I wanted my step dad to stand up and say, "That's my boy. I'm proud of him." But he never did. But I've decided that chain, that cycle stops here. That whenever I have children, they're going to have a dad.

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VIRGINIA:

I went to public school and there was a lot of racism. At that time in my life I didn't like white people, you know, because of the way they treated my family, the way they treated us in school. But I think a lot of people feel that way. But I was like that. But that's no way to live. We're all human beings, and we should all try to get along. And that's exactly what I tell my children, too. I say, "You can't separate yourself from other people. No matter what they might have done, you have to forgive. You have to try to get along."

PATTY GRANT:

You know, we start talking about different things, that if it wasn't for the white people we wouldn't be in this condition. Or, it was the white people that brought this to the Indians. And then it almost takes on the connotation that, "Okay, if I could blame someone else for my condition, then I don't have to do anything about it, you know."

And what this healing and reconciliation part of what Virginia was talking about is that we have to begin forgiving. We have to begin accepting people for who they are because they're human beings. And although sometimes some of our local people are not willing to admit that that presence, that attitude is still really strong here among our people. It's real difficult to convince them that this is an aspect that even this attitude that we have towards non-Indians, that it affects our health.

LEANNE HOWE:

The Cherokees are trying to find innovative ways to heal their community. The *Kitauwah* spirit is strong. Women like Amy and Patty Grant and Joyce Dugan make me realize that Cherokee women have strong power as they have had for generations. They remind me of my adoptive family of strong Cherokee women. Perhaps I am more Cherokee than I realize.

LYNN HARLAN:

Do you the name of this place is *Kitauwah*.

CHILD:

No.

LYNN HARLAN:

Do you know why it's named that?

CHILD:

I don't know.

LYNN HARLAN:

Because it used to be a gathering place for Cherokees. What's the word for Cherokees?

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CHILD:

Ani-a-wi-ya.

LYNN HARLAN:

Yeah.

JOYCE DUGAN:

The *Kitauwah* site is very important to the Cherokee because it represents an ancient mother town that had been lost over the years and was not accessible to our people.

LEANNE HOWE:

Several years ago the tribe was able to purchase *Kitauwah* from private owners. *Kitauwah* is the oldest Cherokee town. It is the sacred ceremonial ground of the *ani-kit-u-wa-gi* and dwelling place of the sacred fire of the Cherokee people. The old ones say that the fire still burns here, deep in the earth.

LYNN HARLAN:

Wow, look at that, that's an axe. Know what they did?

CHILD:

They made this rock into an axe.

LYNN HARLAN:

They tied this onto a handle and made an axe out of it, that's right.

JOYCE DUGAN:

It's not a 200-year-old site or a 300-year-old... it's thousands of years. I think it's a confirmation that we were here for thousands of years. That we didn't just come here, travel here. That we've *been* here.

LYNN HARLAN:

Looky here, there's part of an arrowhead. Can you hold on to that one? It's another piece of that quartz. I bet we found a place where they were making arrowheads out of this quartz. You gonna keep this axe? Okay.

JOYCE DUGAN:

There's a new theory being explored now that our emotional and our spiritual health, or the loss of it, leads to those other physical problems that... diabetes, heart disease, and certainly alcoholism, and many other diseases. What caused the loss of that spiritual and emotional health were the very things that we've been talking about and that's loss of our land and loss of our pride.

Now we can use *Kitauwah* that we have it back. Let's bring back a sense of pride. Let's bring back a place where people can come and regain some spiritual well-being, emotional well-being and physical well-being. *Kitauwah* can bring back our health.



WALKER CALHOUN SINGING TRADITIONAL MORNING SONG

BO TAYLOR:

I love Walker Calhoun; he's just an amazing person. He's helped bring back a lot of the dances and stuff. He grew up watching the dances of Will West Long. Will West Long was... helped James Mooney, back in the 1880s.

LEANNE HOWE:

Walker Calhoun is the spiritual leader of the traditional stomp ground in Cherokee. He revived the stomp dance there after it was almost forgotten.

WALKER CALHOUN:

Oklahoma Cherokee, they picked me to bring that... what I call fire... to bring the fire back to Cherokee because that's where it belongs. That's where it comes from.

BO TAYLOR:

A lot of times people think that we run around naked and worship the devil up there. It's not that, they're singing and dancing with it. We're just... it's just like praising music in the church. Singing to the creator praising. Thanks for what you do for us. It can be very magical, very good things.

The universal symbol for the Christian is the cross. But if you go out to our grounds, you're going to see four logs, north-south, east-west, they make a cross. And that center is going to be a flame, you know, where we sing and dance around that flame. Where people say, "They're a bunch of heathens. Look at them talking to that flame. Look at them talking to that fire."

Well, how did God choose to talk to Moses? Talked to him through the fire. You know, the cross and the flame. As you go by the United Methodist Church, you can see the cross and the flame. I always tell people that Cherokees were Baptists before there were Baptists. We were using the water for cleansing, spiritual cleansing, you know. We were in touch. Cherokees were in touch. So when Christianity came, it wasn't so different for us.

LEANNE HOWE:

I've been invited to go to the dance this weekend and shake shells with the other women. Several of my Cherokee aunts were shell shakers, and I feel right at home here. Shell shakers are the rhythm of the dance joining with the men's call and response songs. Lawanda, Louise, Walker's daughter Bernice, and Bear shake shells at the grounds.

BEAR:

I feel it's important to know who you are and where you came from and why you're here today. And if you don't, then you're missing something that's vital to you and that's part of your life.

LAWANDA:

And I know a lot of us -- not just the Cherokees but all the Indian tribes -- have had that anger. And we've had to find some way to get ride of that anger because it can destroy you.

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BEAR:

Yes it can. And sometimes you have conflict in your life and you go there and you leave your problems there.

LEANNE HOWE:

And in some ways I've been trying to work through some of my own things, you know. And just being up here has helped me.

BEAR:

And it was probably a connection that you probably felt to this land and to the people. And that's probably why it makes you feel special.

LAWANDA:

There's something special about this place, about these mountains. And I said you know, it's probably the spirits of our ancestors. I have set out and watched the girls dance and I have seen the other women there. And it's just a strange feeling because I know there's only two or three women out there. But when I look out and they're going around the fire, there's more than two or three women out there. But I know that the spirits, and probably my great-grandmother, are there doing it.

LEANNE HOWE:

They're all there. I feel... You know, when you put it on and you put that foot down and you begin to go around the fire and the men are calling and the earth is... I feel the power then around me. And that's why I do it.

WALKER CALHOUN:

That's what the stomp dance is about. The fire is in you.

BO TAYLOR:

It's the flame that burns within all of us, you know. It's like when we used to greet the sun in the morning. The sun is part of that flame. It heats the world and gives light and makes things grow. Then there's the fire that we dance around and sing around and praise. We use the fire. You know, that fire warms us, cooks our food, takes care of us. And inside of us there's a fire that burns. That's the eternal flame. That fire, you know, keeps us burning at 98.6 degrees. Then, when we die, it goes out. But the thing about it is, as what they told me, the old people, they said, "As long as you believe in the old ways, as long as you go out and do the dances, the flame will never die."

LEANNE HOWE:

As a writer I've always tried to find an image. Then I believe it's memory will trace a pattern for me to decipher the meaning.

I imagine a Cherokee double-weave basket, one story woven within another story inside another and another.

INDIAN COUNTRY DIARIES



I came here to satisfy something deep inside me, a ghost of a wish decades old. The certainty of my journey I had kept secret, half hidden even from myself. But the stories I've been gathering and weaving together are also partly mine. Some things will not be abandoned.

When the double-weave basket emerges we carry it into the future.

Here we are, together at last... daughter, mother, grandmother, great grandmothers, father. We stand together at *Kitauwah*, the mothertown. Called by the light, called by the spirits *anie gaduwadgi*. I will speak of the things I have learned on this journey. That for healing we must forgive. Together we can reconcile our past, for peace, for the future.

MUSIC

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