

My Life Story

By

John Hernandez



Story Keeper



Barbara Patterson

Acknowledgments

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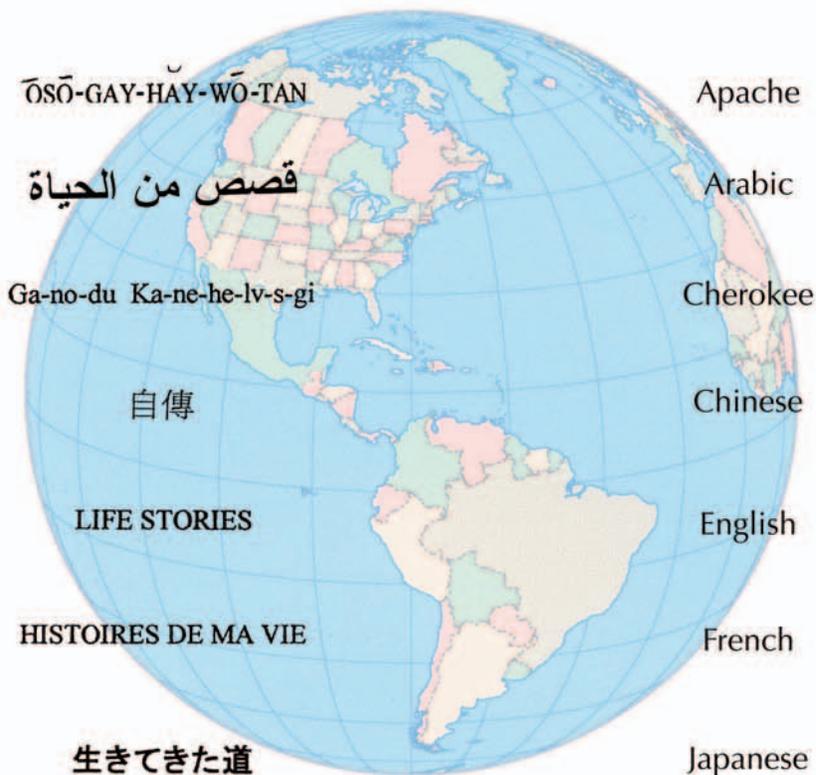
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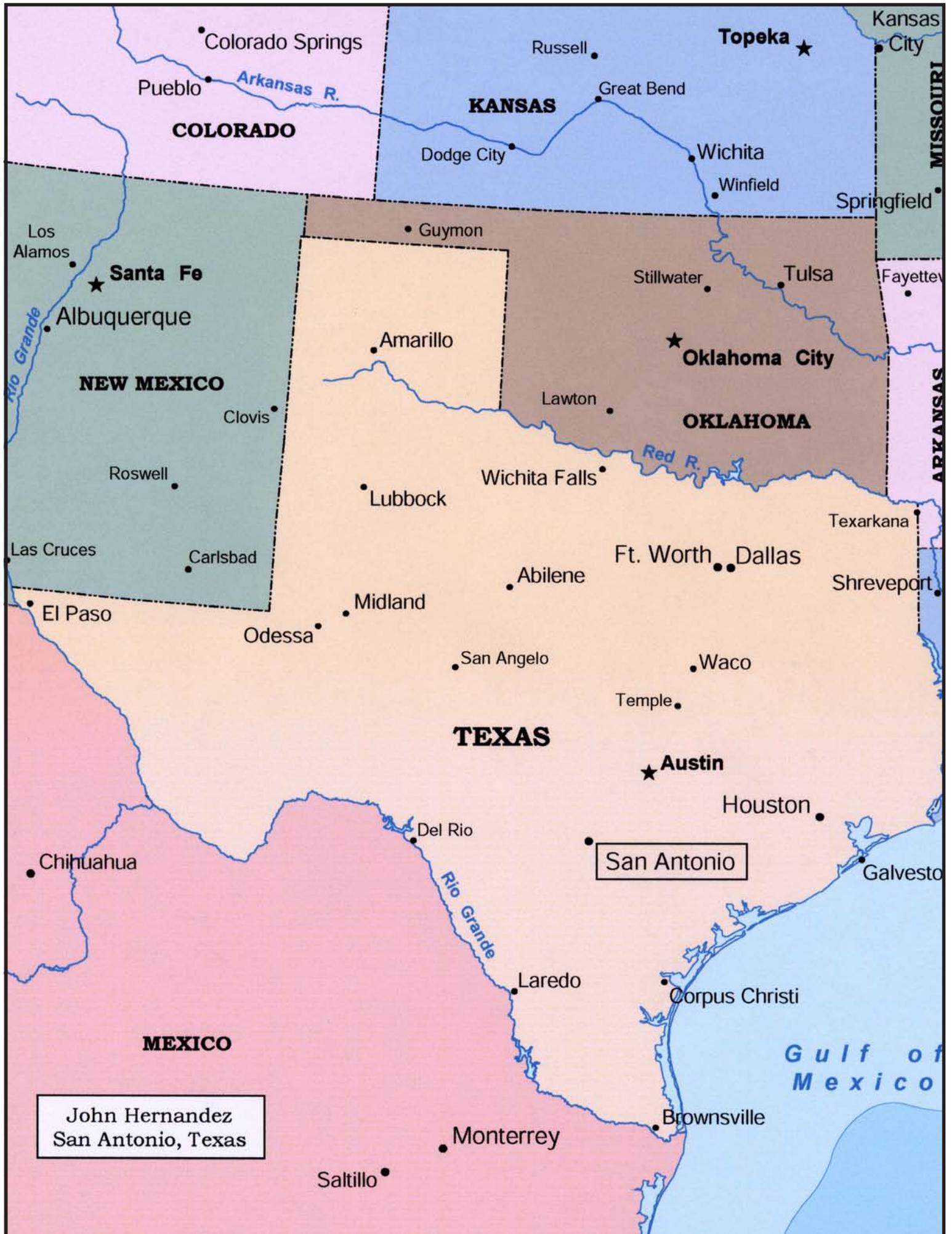
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Life Stories Project

Jim Mauldin, Coordinator
July, 2001

The Ethnic Life Stories Project . . . giving the Springfield community a window to its diversity through the life stories of ethnic elders.





Preface

The earth is his cathedral. He walks through it with great reverence. On every life he touches he leaves his fingerprint. Only a great Warrior, a true Chief, can make such an impact on his part of the world. Such are my feelings about John Hernandez.

Thank you for sharing, John.

Barbara Patterson

Dedication

I am thankful to all the people who made this project possible. I hope this book will help those who read it understand some of the problems that we as tribe people have to go through and conquer.

John Hernandez
July, 2001

Table of Contents

Introduction	1
Beginnings	1
Mom, the Woman of the House	2
Grandpa and Grandma	3
I Grow Up Working with and for My Family	5
The Wrong Color	6
School Years	6
I Join the Army	7
Vietnam	7
Europe	9
Romantic Fool	10
Springfield, Missouri	11
Jeanne and Maria	11
Alcohol	13
The One God	14
Drums	15
Jay Silverheels	16
My Path	17
Storytelling and Kite Workshops	20
Injustice to Native Americans	20
Rooted in Native Ways	22
Death	23
Wisdom Way	24
Private Life	24

Introduction

The last time I drank, my wife said she was leaving me. I faced nine years in the state penitentiary and losing my job as well as my family. Like any alcoholic I was making promises, but I was really insincere. I was really scared. She left that night and took my daughter with her. I was sitting in a chair. I put the barrel of a rifle in my mouth and was going to squeeze the trigger. God intervened in my life. The next thing I knew I was on the telephone talking to someone from Alcoholics Anonymous. I don't know how I got from the chair to the telephone. I don't how I got this guy's number. He was talking to me. That was a miracle in my life.

We are so fragile. We all have so much fear. No matter how big we are or how much we've done in our lives, we all have something to fall back on and that's the miracles of God. I see miracles every day. I AM a miracle every day. People don't realize all that gunk that's happened in my life – all the prejudice, all the beatings, the stabbings and the shootings, the fights and the arguments, the stress, the thoughts of suicide, losing my friends in Vietnam, seeing my best friend die in front of me, killing people in battle – unbelievable stress and pain that takes such a toll on your body. It's not a pain you can put a Band-Aid on it, you can't rub cream on it. It's a pain way down in your heart, way down in your gut. You can't sleep. Thoughts are turning over and over in your head. You want to get sick and you can't get sick. Your mind is racing ten thousand miles an hour and your heart's beating. You're coming to the end of your rope. What do you do? Do you put a gun to your head and kiss the pain good-bye? Are you a coward for doing that or are you a coward for not pulling the trigger? I don't know.

I'm not a coward. I've proven myself many times, in battle, in everyday life. I take chances every day. I'm not afraid to go out there and try something new. But then again, I'm not afraid any more either, not the kind of fear and insecurity I did have. Now I have self worth and self esteem. I've got a good spiritual program. I know there are people out there I should care about. Many people are in the limelight once or twice in their lives. I've had a TV show for four years, I've been on radio. I've been in the newspaper. I've got certificates galore. I've been Man of the Year. I've been Prevention Family of the Year. Everybody in this town knows me or knows of me. I've been lucky that God has shown me that there is a place out there in this world, in this life, for me. I have so much that has been given to me that I want to give it back. I feel good about what I do in my life.

When I talk to people I talk about my life. I talk about the drugs and alcoholism. But I don't talk to them about my parents. They were tough with us, but they had to be because we were crazy children.

Beginnings

John Ernest Hernandez is the name I was born with. My dad wanted to preserve his initials "JEH" in the family, so I am John Ernest and my brother is James Edward. I was named after St. John. I was born on St. John's day, June 24, 1950. My grandfather gave me my tribal name (Os-gla-hay-woton). My tribe is Mescalero, of the Apache Nation. My tribe is not a huge tribe. We have about 2000 members. My Apache name means "Two Bears." I was born in an elevator of the Santa Rosa Hospital in San Antonio, Texas. There was a nurse with my Mother. It was a rainy afternoon.

My Dad's name is Joseph Ernest and my mother's name is Juanita Contraya. My Dad was born in the 1920's on the Mescalero Reservation. My mother was born in the late 1920's or early 1930's on the White Mountain Reservation. I have no idea how old they were when I was born. We never really keep track of age. We celebrate birthdays as a day, not as an accumulation of years. It's easy for my brothers and sisters to remember birthdays because we were all born on saints' days or holidays. I have a sister born on Halloween, a sister born on New Year's, I have a brother born on Texas Independence Day. I have brothers born on Pearl Harbor Day. My Dad had 10 kids; I'm number 3. I told my mother she needed to get a hobby besides having kids. I also

had a sister, Elizabeth, who passed away. My older brother became blind and mentally ill at a late age. I am still in contact with all my siblings. We were all together for Thanksgiving. My parents are Christian, so we celebrate the Christian holidays.

I love my parents tremendously. They were young when they got married and had children. They had to adapt to that. There's no manual given to new parents which tells them how to parent. You raise them to the best of your ability. My Dad's Mom died when he was nine years old. He had to quit school to help support the family. His brothers and sisters got an education while he was out working to support them, 13- or 14-years old driving tanker trucks, trying to accept the responsibilities of a man while still being a child. My father's father was a steelworker. My mother's father was a master carpenter, master electrician, master blueprint maker. He had three companies... 'course he drank them all up. Unbelievable man! He and my mother's mother raised me while I was a child. It was rough on my parents having so much responsibility to bear when they were so young and were trying to learn how to be adults themselves. I admire my Mom and my Dad for the job they did for us.

Mom, the Woman of the House

My Mom was a very handsome young woman. She's about 5'2" tall. My Dad is slender and about 5'11" and very dark complexioned. My mother is also dark but not as dark as my Dad; my complexion is like hers, a reddish-brown-tan. She had dark hair, dark eyes, and a nice smile. They were a very handsome Native-looking couple. My Mom is now in her 70's, short and chunky, with short salt and pepper hair. She wears glasses. My Dad is still slender, has no teeth and is going blind. My Dad is a very big kidder. He likes to play jokes and laugh. My Mom is a very somber woman. She is the Woman of the house. She'll laugh, but she wasn't a very touchy-feely type emotional person like my Dad. She was brought up very strict. She and my Dad were opposites. They say opposites attract. I'm a lot like my Dad and people say I look like he did when he was younger.

My Mom picked up strays. She picked up a friend of mine who was living in a pool hall because his parents wanted him to quit school and go to work and he wanted to finish school. They told him he couldn't live with them any more so he went to live in a pool hall. I brought him home one night and told my Mom what was going on and, so, she picked him up. There were some other people that my brothers and sisters knew who were living in a very bad situation, so they came to live in my home.

We were poor, but my Mom was a very unique individual. We used to live three blocks from the insane asylum. My Mom never locked our doors. Every once in a while one of the patients would get out. They would come in our house and help themselves to food in the 'frig or they would ask for food. I was always afraid of these crazy people. I didn't know who they were! One time I said to my Mom, "Mom, they're eating our food!" My Mom's answer was that no matter what we had we needed to share it, even if we were down to our last bean. You never know who those people are and it's only right for us to do that because they have less than we have. To them we are kings and queens. I never realized that until I got older. No matter how bad we have it, there is always somebody else in a worse situation. She was saying in her way, it doesn't matter who they are; we need to share that love, we need to share that food; we need to share whatever we have because one of these days we might be in that same situation. She was right!

When I was younger and I was working, I helped my parents buy a house. That house burned down. My Grandpa lived with us then. The dog and the cat saved my Grandpa; they actually dragged him out of the house and saved him. My family had to move into a duplex next door. Our family was big enough that it needed both sides of the duplex to live in. The floor of the duplex was uneven, but it was all they could afford. My Mom had dogs and cats and a pig, which she kept in the vacant lot where our other house had been. Don't ask me how she did it, but my Mom found one little brown pig in the middle of San Antonio.

Mom has the same ability that my Grandma and my younger sister, Dolores, have. She can communicate with animals. I walked into the kitchen one day and said, "I've never seen that dog before!" Mom said, "Well, I just found him day before yesterday. He came to the house and he was starving. Look what he can do!" She took a piece of cookie and said, "Dance, Dance." That dog stood up on its hind legs and turned in little circles and then took the tortilla from her hand. I've seen her walk up to barking, snarling dogs at a junkyard and talk to them and they'll get just as quiet as can be. Those women have no fear of animals; they just relate.

I'll tell you a good story. My parents came to visit me in Springfield, which they don't do very often. They had a parakeet at the time. My Mom loved this parakeet. I forget its name. She gave every animal a name and once named, it became a pet. She told my brothers and sisters to feed the parakeet while she was gone; she said that was their job. They came for two weeks. In the middle of the first week, I get a phone call. It was my sister. We talked for a little bit and then I asked, "Why did you call? What's the emergency?" She replied, "We want you to tell Mom that her bird died." I said, "I'm not going to tell my mother that her bird died under your care. It's your responsibility to tell your mother. Don't tell her over the phone. She'll be home in a week, so you figure out how you're going to tell her."

When the time comes, we take my Mom home. We walk in the room and there's this parakeet in the cage. My Mom walks up to the parakeet and starts talking to it. She turns around and says, "Where's my parakeet? This is not my parakeet." What those idiots did was to take the dead parakeet and freeze it! Then they carried it around in a shoe box to every pet store in San Antonio to try and find another parakeet, which looked just like my Mom's pet, to try to fool her. Mom looked at me and I said, "Mom, your bird died. They didn't want to tell you, but it didn't work." Boy, she looked at them with that look. "What did you do?" They cried, "We didn't do anything. The bird died from a broken heart!" Mom said, "I don't believe that." "We didn't do anything. We didn't tease it. We just came in one day and it was dead!" Then she started laughing and asked, "What makes you think I wouldn't have found out this was not my bird? How long did you carry the dead one around?" They said, "A week. We just got this bird yesterday."

Mom is something else. She is the dominating force in our family. Dad has the last word, but any decision that is made is usually made by my Mom. My Mom's health is not good. She's got arthritis and high blood pressure. Native Americans are tending to have more heart disease, diabetes, and stress-related types of problems. These, I believe, are all due to a change in our lifestyle. When we became American citizens in 1924, our lives were pretty much confined by law to the reservations. Our diet consisted of the leftovers we were given by the government, including a lot of fat and sugar. Whether this was done intentionally or out of ignorance, we don't know. Couple this change in diet with an inability to move around off the reservation, and you have the seeds for the health problems many native people experience today. There were also a lot of mental problems due to children being taken from their parents to be sent to school.

Grandpa and Grandma

I admire my Grandpa, whose name was Frank. We called him "Popo." He was my mother's father. My father's father was a little strange. Whenever we went to visit him, my father would kneel down, grab his father's hand and kiss it. I always admired that about my father. We weren't very close to my father's father.

I had symptoms of polio when I was a child. My Grandpa and my Grandma took me and they worked with my paralysis and did all kinds of stuff to me. They raised me. Grandpa was a very quiet man, but whenever he said something, the whole world stopped to listen. My Grandpa never weighed more than 130 pounds. My Grandma was about 350 pounds. They always loved each other and respected each other. We ate every morning together at the table. We ate oatmeal with cinnamon sticks in it, refried beans, and a piece of French bread sliced down the middle and broiled. Grandpa drank coffee with a spoon of Eagle brand milk and pecans that he would cut up and throw in there. For lunch we would eat refried beans, a piece of meat and tortillas and

I would get a glass of juice or milk. He would drink a cup of coffee with a little bit of milk and nuts. For dinner we would have whatever Grandma cooked. When my Grandpa passed away I went to live with my Grandpa for a while and when he got so old he came to live with us.

No matter what my Grandpa did, he did it right. I admired that. He would walk everywhere. He was an unbelievable genius when it came to building. He taught me how to make kites. He was always there with me to give me encouragement. I use kites in my work now. Of course I had no idea at the time that our kite making would affect me later in life. Flying a kite gives so much joy; there's a trust between you and that kite. Sometimes you fly the kite so far and so high you can't see it, but you can feel that tug on that string and you know it's there. It's like knowing that God is there. It's so peaceful. You're just enjoying the loneliness. When you're flying the kite you're aware of everything around you. You're aware of the wind, of the trees, of the clouds, of the people around you. It's such a relaxing experience.

I don't know where my Grandpa learned to make kites, but the way he taught me how to make them was really neat. He would cut out little pieces of wood. We would go inside and get flour and water and make a paste. He would get the newspaper out and he would cut out the newspaper. He would have string. He would make the frame and we would make the kite and bow it, paint our hands on it and put a tail on it and then go out and fly it. It was an inexpensive toy we created together. We got all my friends to start making and flying kites.

My Grandpa was a great storyteller, too. He told me, "One time there was this young man and he wanted to go to Heaven. He did everything so good, so the angels asked God to give him a pass to Heaven." My Grandpa would get a piece of paper. "So they gave him a pass. During the man's life people would come to him," and here my Grandpa would fold the piece of paper, "and say, 'I know you have a pass to Heaven, can you find it in your heart to give me part of that pass?' 'Sure!' The man would cut a piece of the pass off and give it to the requester. Another man or woman would come and ask the same thing. The man would give them a bit of his pass to Heaven. Well, this went on until the man only had a tiny bit of his pass left and he wondered if it was enough to get into Heaven. The man finally died and went to see St. Peter. He asked, "Is there any way this little piece of paper can get me into heaven?" St. Peter took the tiny bit of paper and unfolded it and, lo and behold, it was in the shape of a cross. St. Peter said, "Walk right in!"

Those are the kind of stories my Grandpa would tell me, stories about life and about people. His stories would give me ideas about how to live my life. I've been telling stories for ten years. It was a passion that I have always had but I didn't know I had until I had my daughter. Some of my stories are ones my Grandpa taught me, some I make up. The stories my Grandpa told me are very personal to me and I don't like sharing them a lot, but I will, because you can't keep something unless you give it away.

My grandma died in 1964. She was a happy person; I have very few memories of her getting upset. She was an herbal medicine woman. When we got tonsillitis she would make a concoction with kerosene, dip her wrapped fingers in it and scrub your tonsils! She'd say, "Don't you bite me!" You'd sputter and cough and she'd get all the infection out and by the next day, you'd be well. See this scar on my head? One day my grandmother was watering her garden and my cap pistol was in there. I asked her for it, moving from her left side to her right. She didn't see me move. She picked up my pistol and threw it over her shoulder. It hit me in the head, splitting the skin over my skull. She took spider's web and laid it in the cut, poured peroxide on it and stitched me up with a needle and white thread. The spider's web coagulates your blood.

My Mom is the same way. I went home one day with a splitting migraine headache. We walked out back and she picked up some stuff that looked just like weeds to me. She boiled her pickings and gave me the liquid in a cup saying, "Put some sugar in it and drink it." It was nasty! She then told me to close my eyes and lie down. About five minutes later my headache was gone. I couldn't believe it! Of course I had to go to the bathroom for two days. I have no idea what it was that she gave me.

I Grow Up Working with and for My Family

A lot of my people were laborers in San Antonio. We spoke Apache and we spoke Spanish and English. I seem to remember always working. I loaded and unloaded trucks. I worked in the valley picking watermelons or cantaloupe; we went up north to hoe peas or to pick oranges, grapefruit, and pecans. My Dad was a truck driver. We were very poor. I remember not having a lot of things that other people had. One time I remember living in a regular trailer...not a trailer house, but a semi trailer. My Dad worked under contract for the U.S. mail. We lived in a yard where all the trailers were kept. My Mom cooked right next to the diesel pump. I remember sleeping in the trailer and my sister sleeping in a smaller version, a bob trailer. My Mom and Dad slept in the office. They were hard times, but we had fun. We played with each other. We knew we didn't have anything, but neither did anybody else that we knew.

We never had a lot of money, but my parents always worked and we always had food and clothes on our backs. Once when my Dad was down after a car wreck, my Mom worked as a cook and a waitress in my uncle's restaurant. Seven of us lived off of her tips. My Mom never let us down. My Dad worked two or three jobs at a time. That's why I say all of my earliest memories are of work. No one asked us to work; they didn't make us work. The three eldest children...we just knew that we had to contribute to make our family survive. We were part of the family and our obligation was towards our family. We used to live in a really rich part of town. My brother Eddie and I used to get up real early, about 2:00 – 2:30 a.m. and go across the street to the 24-hour donut shop to fetch the donuts they threw away about that hour of the morning. They caught us! They said, "You can't take donuts out of the trash can. If you want donuts, you've got to come work for them." So, we went to work for the donut man and got day-old donuts and cash on the side. It seemed unbelievable to us. I know now it was hard on my Mom. My people are very proud people and for their children to be out working like that made them feel they were somehow not accomplishing all they should be as parents. It's not true whatsoever, in my opinion. They did and still do the very best they can to love their children.

My family moved all the time because my Dad forgot to 'pay the rent.' We were midnight movers. We could load a 40-foot trailer in no time flat. Finally we bought a house when I was about 13 or 14. But Grandpa and I lived in the garage because my Grandpa never liked my Dad. Grandpa was a carpenter and we fixed up the garage. Our house rules were don't touch him, sit down, eat all your food. (laughs!) My parents believed that if you worked you should be treated like a workingman. As long as they knew where you were and whom you were with, and as long as you didn't lie to them, it was all right with them. Now we were not the best of kids. We were pretty mean and pretty darn ornery. We drank when we were kids and we drank a lot. Drinking among children was NOT the norm for Native American families.

One of the first pets we had was a dog, named Queeny. Everybody in the 50's had a dog named Queeny. We had to watch her because she would have litters and eat part of them. One time somebody caught her and put a rubber band around her neck, which almost ate through her whole neck. We didn't know it was there. My Grandpa would raise chickens and goats and we used to have to slaughter them as kids. I remember cutting their little horns out, because we would slaughter them at 8 or 9 months old. We ate everything. I remember we made blood pudding. We ate the intestines, the stomach, the heart, the brains, and the head. We ate all the organs. We didn't know what cholesterol was. I'll eat them now. I'll eat almost anything now except spinach and okra. We ate a lot of beans growing up. I don't like bologna because we had a lot of fake bologna growing up. I do like corn, squash, venison, goat, lamb, sheep.

Family means even more to native people than to Europeans. Child rearing is done by "the whole village," aunts and uncles and grandparents and neighbors. Everyone takes care of the kids. You spank those who are misbehaving; you feed those who are at your home at mealtime. The first thing that happens if you go into a native person's home, you are offered coffee. Then you are fed. You are made to feel at home. It's polite and it makes social relations easy. Once you have broken bread with someone, you relax, you talk and you become friends

We celebrated almost all national holidays, Christmas, New Year's, Thanksgiving, and Mother's Day. When my Grandma was alive, Christmas was pretty good. She spoiled me. I liked Halloween. My sister was born on Halloween and she's my favorite sister. I liked going out and scaring the kids and I loved getting candy. Halloween was very different when I was a kid than it is now. We were free to roam the streets. We would beg my mom to buy us store-bought costumes. Today I like homemade costumes better than I like purchased ones.

The Wrong Color

I had tons of unhappy experiences when I was a child. When my Grandma passed away, she was in this hospital. They wouldn't let us in to see her. We weren't the right color. The hospital had gates. They made us kids sit outside the gates while my Mom and Dad went in.

My Grandma died of a blood clot that got loose from her leg and went right to her heart. It was 1963, the same year John Kennedy died. My Grandma was a jolly person. She and her brothers, who were massive men, would dance like ballerinas. She called us from the hospital and the radio was going and she was laughing and telling us how good she felt, and then she was gone. And they wouldn't let us in because we were the wrong color. I've had that problem all my life.

School Years

I started to school at 5 years old. I lived with my grandparents at the time. I was taken by bus to a boarding school where I stayed for 11 months out of the year. It was a Catholic school where the teachers were nuns. I hated them all. After Catholic elementary school I went to a public junior high school. I played saxophone. My brother and I played in a rock-n-roll band called The Blue Virgins, a reference to the Virgin Mary. James was the lead singer and I was the backup singer. We didn't get to practice much, so we were terrible. We had a math teacher, who felt sorry for us and bought all our instruments on his credit card. That was the first time I had heard of anybody having a credit card.

Marvin was my first best friend. He was half Mexican and half white. We were going to an all-white school then. The public school we went to was in a rich part of town and kids would arrive in chauffeur-driven limousines. We were real poor and my brother and Marvin and I were the three darkest kids in the schools. We were always picked on.

After Marvin, my best friend was George Morales. He and I palled around together all the time. We were treated like family at each other's homes. He had gorgeous twin sisters that I tried to date all the time, Orlia and Olivia. They married our other best friends. George and I remained best friends all the way through high school and into Vietnam. George died two feet in front of me. He got shot in the eye and the back of his head was all over the front of me. There were 18 of us that went to Vietnam; I'm the last of the 18. I've had it pretty rough when it comes to relationships and people dying. I've seen a lot of evil. I remember those guys. I try not to think about it.

We had a phone when I was in high school. My Grandpa brought a TV when I was a child, a black and white one. We watched it only on Friday and Saturday nights, boxing on Friday nights and wrestling on Saturdays, and then Grandpa would cover the TV up. That's all we would watch. Dad got us a 13" color TV; everything on it was green. TV's would come and go; we had a lot of them. I watched TV a lot when I could; it was my escape from the pressures around me. I watched Hopalong Cassidy, Lash Larue. My hero was The Lone Ranger. In later years I met Jay Silverheels at a powwow when I was in my thirties.

I graduated from Brackenridge High School in San Antonio, TX, in 1969. I was a problem child. Back then there were segregated schools. I graduated from an all-black school. There was a Caucasian brother and sister there. My brother left before his senior year to get married. I was asked to leave mid-year because I had enough credits to get out. It was a weird time back in 1969. The Vietnam War was going on. I never really got along with anybody. I was working with truck drivers, older men. I felt like I was an older person, but I wasn't.

I Join the Army

I left high school and joined the Army. I had to get my parents' permission to join because I was only seventeen; but for all intents and purposes I had left home at fifteen. Most of my people were warriors. My Dad fought in World War II and in the Korean War. My uncles fought in the wars. I thought it was my turn to go. I went to Ft. Polk, LA for my basic training and then to Ft. Belvoir, VA. I had four years of ROTC in high school and was an MT4, which means I'd had four years of military training. I was a Lt. Col. in Junior ROTC when I graduated from high school, so I entered the Army with some rank. I was a squad leader in basic. When you're young and have some rank, they pick on you; they picked on me plenty.

You make friends in Basic and then you lose them right afterwards because you go to different posts. I remember a guy named Kirkendahl. I used to smoke cigarettes back then. Kirkendahl came from near Brownsville, TX. He said, "I don't smoke but I chew Red Man Tobacco." So he got me chewin' Red Man Tobacco. It wasn't bad, but I spit a lot. When you first start chewing that's what you do, you spit all the time; I felt like a camel. It kinda calmed me down. I remember one time we ran for 20 miles after coming out of the gas chamber. You have your gas mask on and they've got the gas going. The first thing they ask you is "What's your name? What's your rank? What's your serial number? How many brothers and sisters do you have and what are they're names?" Heck, I told them I was an only child! I wanted to get out of there! I came out of there spittin' and sputterin' and I ran and I had this chaw in my mouth. When we got back I laid right down and went to sleep with that chaw in my mouth and I swallowed it. I was sick for two days! I didn't know what had happened to me. But I didn't have any worms afterward. That got rid of worms.

When I first got into Basic they said you could have all the food you wanted to eat. I could eat some food back then. I got in the mess hall and they were yelling and screaming. They filled my plate full – as much food as I wanted – and then they gave you three minutes to eat it all. Then they told you to clean your plate. You had to take any extra with you – in your pants pocket, in your shirt pocket. Walking around with food all day is terrible! I learned to eat fast.

After Basic I went to Ft. Belvoir, VA as a combat engineer. I worked on generators so big that you could fit inside the pistons. Then I went to Ft. Monmouth, which is all underground – top secret stuff. I worked with generators there. I don't like caves, so riding the elevator down underground was really creepy for me. Down there it was like a big office with no windows.

Vietnam

I got in trouble in the service. I had an argument with a man and the next thing I know, they shipped me to Vietnam. I got there May 1. May 15 I was already in battle in a place called Hamburger Hill in Erhouse Valley. I was injured and got a purple heart and a bronze star for valor. That was unique.

The turning point in my life came later. I was scared. People see war movies and think it's all about bravery. I thought I was a mean man and could handle anything. I had all those media-fed visions of glory. When I arrived in Vietnam, I walked out of the back of the plane and the first

thing I saw was a line of silver coffins against a fence. Some of them were being loaded onto planes. Reality hit me. The second impression was the smell – the jungle smell, the rain. A fear came down on me like a weight on my soul. I had never felt anything like it before. I looked around and everyone looked like they weren't afraid. I couldn't tell anyone I was scared. I felt like I didn't sleep for a month. Everything about Vietnam seemed to hurt you. The insects stung. I felt it was a very aggressive place. There was no way to see the beauty of it.

I got injured when we were climbing a hill, returning small arms fire and yelling and screaming. Adrenaline is screaming through your body. I'm shooting, not aiming, just shooting. There is no time to aim. I'm seeing guys roll down the hill. I'm hearing all this screaming and the sound of bullets and mortars. I'm hearing orders being yelled and I don't know which orders to follow. There is smoke. I'm laying on the ground and the tree above me is splitting and splinters are flying everywhere. It's so hot and humid and my mouth is dry and every muscle in my body is aching and I want to close my eyes and I can't...I see movement off to the right-hand side. I turn to shoot, but he shoots first. He misses me but he hits the stump I am hiding behind. I get splinters all in my eyes. They close my eyes in a second, just like I'd been hit by a 2x4. I'm burning. I feel the blood and I think he's blown my head off. I'm hearing somebody yelling, "Medic! Medic!"

I feel this guy coming up and he's pulling splinters out of my eyes. They feel like red-hot poker. He bandages me up and asks, "Are you OK?" I say, "Yeah." I can still see a little bit through slits. He says, "You need to go down the hill." As I start down the hill, he stops me and makes me grab the belts of two other men and says, "I want you to run down the hill." So I start running down the hill. People are shooting at us, I guess. I can't remember because I was so petrified. I get to the bottom of the hill and the medics say, "That was unbelievable! You carried those two guys down the hill!" I say, "I didn't carry nobody. We were all running down the hill. These guys were my eyes." That's how I got my bronze star, for valor. I kept tellin' those guys, I wasn't brave, I was scared!

That experience happened with the 101st Airborne. I went with the 9th Cavalry and spent the rest of my Vietnam tour with them. The 9th Cavalry were insane people. We did a lot of killing. All that stuff you saw in the newspapers and read about in magazines, we did. We were crazy. We were insane. That's the only way I could block out the horror, the carnage. We weren't always in battle, but we were definitely out in the jungle and in the rice fields a lot. I got blown up the last time working on a tank. Four of the guys in the tank were killed. My friend, Locos, was paralyzed from the neck down. I had a cracked skull and shrapnel in my shoulder. They stabbed me in the back and left me for dead.

We were out there for 2 ½ days. I was MIA for 2 ½ days. I don't remember much of what happened. We fell into a ravine. Locos says I crawled and placed my body over his to protect him, but I don't remember that. He also says that the water in the ravine began to rise and I dragged him to high ground, but I don't remember that either. I do remember the black Marine who found us, looking down at us and yelling for assistance. I remember they tried to get Locos fixed up. I remember that my back really hurt and I had a headache like you wouldn't believe. Then I went completely numb; I couldn't feel anything, I couldn't hear anything. Off and on I remember sky or complete darkness. I was put into a helicopter and taken to a medical unit. Then I was flown to Japan for neurosurgery. I remember being in Japan and being told that I was being flown home because they didn't have the ability to perform the surgery there. On the way we spent four hours in Hawaii, but I don't remember much of that because I was on morphine. I remember being in a naval hospital in San Francisco and having surgery on the 3rd floor. They told me I'd never walk again; I proved them wrong. Don't tell me I can't do nothin' 'cause I'll prove you wrong.

The recruiter came in and asked me if I wanted to re-up. He quoted me a big price. I said, "I'll stay in the service as long as I don't have to go overseas." I was sick and tired of that. I missed things like corn dogs and flushing toilets and being able to get a decent cab, a hot bath, ice cream, popcorn, French fries. When you're out in the boonies, you get what they give you: rations in a can, dehydrated food (we called it Shake and Bake).

I didn't want to go overseas. The recruiter said, "No problem."

I went home. They hadn't told my Mom that I'd been found. They told my Mom I was MIA, presumed KIA (Killed in Action). They hadn't had a funeral for me because they were in limbo, but they were prepared for the worst. Heck, I walk in the back door and my Mom almost passed out. It was unbelievable. She said, "You're dead!" I said, "Mom, I just smell dead!" I didn't realize what was happening until she told me the story. She was living in San Antonio and the letter had come from Ft. Sam Houston telling her I was MIA, presumed KIA.

Europe

I spent 15 days leave at home. Then I reported to the Air Force base and they put me on a plane to Germany. I thought, I've got 'em now. The first thing I did when I got to Kaiserslautern, I went to see JAG, the lawyers for the military. I went up there, threw my paperwork down and said, "I'm outta here! You have to send me back home. You owe me \$." The guy said, "What are you talking about?" I said, "It says right here, no overseas assignment, and here I am overseas." He told me, "Germany is not considered an overseas assignment." Boy, we went round and round about that! I'm not going to tell you what I told him 'cause it's not very pretty. I wasn't very happy!

I was sent to a place called Baumholder, with an armor unit. I was an engineer and got to work on anything having to do with electricity. They put me in a room with cousins named Grack and Hillbury. I knew them from Vietnam. They were crazy! One of them had stepped on a mine while we were on patrol. I called for the engineers to come and diffuse the mine. I was told it would be a couple of hours. I said, "I've got a guy out here in the open in 115° heat on a mine! I'm not going to leave him out there for a couple of hours!" They said, "Well, we can't come." It was the type of mine we called a "Bouncing Betty." If you stepped on it, it would bounce three or four feet in the air and then explode. It's designed to take out men, to maim them if not to kill them. So all of us are trying to decide what to do, whether to try to disarm the mine ourselves, when the guy says, "To Hell with it!" and steps off the mine. I had no idea what was going through his mind. Up it comes and falls to the ground. It was a dud. That was a religious experience. These guys were crazy and they were always getting in trouble. They were always getting me in trouble. I tried to avoid being around them. Then what happens? I get to Europe and I'm in a room with these guys! They were sergeants and I was a sergeant. We got in trouble. I drank severely in those days; we got drunk and got into fights. They were busted down to privates. I was busted down to a Spec 4, which is like a corporal.

Nobody realized how crazy you are when you come out of war. Nobody stopped us and asked if we were OK. Nobody asked if we were having any problems or having any nightmares. Nobody cared about us. We were supposed to be men and buck up. That's insane! You do the things that we did and you just don't "buck up." You look for some kind of relief. We weren't right in the head but we fit together perfectly. The holes in their heads fit the rocks in mine. It was a marriage made in hell. They transferred out after a year.

I started drinking with this guy in town. We became buddies. We wore civilian clothes and didn't know each other's rank. We got to palling around. One day he asked, "How would you like to come and work for me?" I laughed it off and he said he was serious. I said, "If you can convince my captain to let me do that, sure." About three weeks later I got called into my captain's office and I'm thinking, "What did I do this time? Maybe I did something I don't remember." I go to the office all hang dog. The first sergeant was there and said, "Boy, you really did it this time. You just stay here. They'll call you in." Oh, my heart was beating like crazy. I'm trying to remember what I might have done. Finally, they call me in and there's the guy I've been drinking with. He's a lieutenant. He's talking to my captain about me. They've got my file in front of them and the lieutenant is saying he wants me to come work for him. It turns out he works for NATO. I worked for NATO for 2 ½ years. I wore civilian clothes in my travels to Spain and Italy and Morocco. I worked at missile sites.

Those missiles were huge and they had nuclear warheads. The problem with that was that I was still drinking. My alcoholism had progressed to the point that I was having blackouts, walking and talking and not being conscious of my actions at all.

About that time, 1972, I also began working with children. That was good because when I worked with kids I never drank. It was a good outlet for me. I was dating a girl from England whose last name was 'English.' She was a schoolteacher, teaching German schoolchildren how to speak English. She asked if I would come to her class and present a Native American program. I'd never done that before, but I got the official OK. I talked to her class about our lifestyle and our ways and our ceremonies and our songs, our dress and our eagle feathers. It's interesting, in Germany they love Apaches. In the US we're hated because we were fierce warriors and we were seen as hostiles and savages who had to be conquered so that the Europeans could create a land for themselves. But in Europe they have a different outlook on Native Americans. They see us as victims and as good guys defending our land and our property and our women and our children. I can see both sides. The children really took us into their hearts and I really enjoyed that. I really enjoyed the experience of people seeing us as human beings. I had grown up with so much prejudice, not only against the color of my skin but also against my poverty. People think that because you have no money, you are ignorant. Actually, it's the people who have the money and think that way who are ignorant.

Romantic Fool

The first present I remember giving was like a note. I used to be a very shy kid. I was going to St. Agnes Catholic School. There was a young lady there; her Dad owned a little lumberyard in town. Nancy was her name and I was in love. Her Dad was white and her Mom was Mexican. She was the first girl I'd seen with blonde hair. She was just as cute as can be and I was in love. I didn't have the courage to go and talk to her, so I wrote a note on a piece of wood and I tied that piece of wood to a string about 8 to 9 inches long and wound it around a spool. I walked past her house and I tossed that spool. The string got hung up on the gutter, but the sign dangled down so when anyone walked out of the house, they'd be sure to see it. That was the first present from my heart that I gave to anybody. Isn't that romantic? I've been a romantic fool ever since.

Mary DeLeon (Mary of the Lions), long dark hair, sparkling eyes, nice smile, tantalizing lips, nice walk, well endowed...she actually talked to me. I was so infatuated! She had a boyfriend who was treating her bad and I'm a romantic kind of guy. I tried for years to date her. We went steady for one day. That one day I couldn't make it to school, so she got mad and broke up with me. We've remained close. She was working as an operator for Southwestern Bell the last time I talked with her.

I was not my brother. He was suave, debonair, knew how to talk to women, knew what to wear, looked like Elvis Presley with the curl in the middle of his forehead and a ducktail in back. I hated him for that. I was shy and always dressed for work. I would bring girls home and the next thing I'd know he would be dating them. It didn't help that I preferred older women, my sister's girlfriends.

When I got out of the service I went to visit a roommate named Troy in Alabama. His girlfriend had a girlfriend. My God, they raise 'em pretty down in Alabama. This girl lived on a farm with her widow Mom. They were poor. I had a little bit of money and for three or four days I took her out; we had a great time. I bought her some jewelry. I had been brought up to respect women and I guess she wasn't too used to that. She really fell in love with me. She was nice and I liked her Mom. She said she was going to take me to the best place in town. Now I was used to eating in nice French restaurants and such from my time in Europe. The best place in her town was a roadside barbecue restaurant/tavern. It was a great little place. She was so pleased to go there. I kept looking around for the maitre de and the wine. I have to laugh at myself. I remember when we were growing up we'd go to the triple-x drive-in movie next door. We'd turn on our headlights to get service from the waitresses. We were so poor that we'd order one nickel root beer and seven straws! Here I'd started

thinking of myself as so highfalutin. We got along real well, but I had to leave and go home to see my parents. Her Mom really wanted me to marry her and I was very fond of her, but we'd only been together four days. I had quit drinking at the time. A threatened court martial was my inspiration. I hate jail.

Springfield, Missouri

I ended up in Springfield in 1975. I got to Springfield in an \$85,000 vehicle – a Greyhound bus. When I first came home I lived with my parents. I hadn't lived with them for so long; it was not easy to go back into that arrangement. It wasn't working out. I had a problem staying with their rules. I finally talked to them about it. I told them I loved them all, but I felt like a square peg in a round hole. I was used to traveling. I didn't have any money. I left home on December 26, 1975. A friend, Tom Boaz, whom I'd met in Europe, and his wife had told me about Springfield and asked me to look him up if I was ever in the area.

Anyway, I got to Springfield with \$5 in my pocket, a duffel bag and a laundry bag full of dirty clothes. I lived with Tom and Barbara for a while until I got a job. I started working for the Southwest Missouri Indian Center as a bookkeeper. I got an apartment at Grant and State. Later I became the Director of the Indian Center. Then I went to work for the Upward Bound program at Drury College under a man named Russ Robinson. I got that job through my work with children. I love being with and working with children. I never really got a chance to be a teenager or even a child because we were poor and I was working all the time. I don't want people to think that I blame my parents. I don't. God gives people different lives. That was just my life. I needed to go through all I experienced to get to where I am today. So I don't blame anyone. I met Russ Robinson through the programs I created for children. He had an opening for a head counselor with the Upward Bound program and asked me to consider it. It was just a summer job. I accepted the position, worked the summer, and then the program was dissolved.

When I was in Vietnam for two years, I did some awful things. All of the things that you learn about in "LIFE," and on TV and in the newspaper about that war, I did those things. I was a young kid and afraid. I've been afraid all my life; I drank to hide my fear. I was a sergeant in Vietnam and I had to make decisions about who lived and who died that day. A lot of people died because I thought I had made the wrong decision. I have to live not only with the deaths of my friends and my men; I have to live with the faces of men I killed. When you're young and you're scared and you kill a man, you're looking into his face...that face stays with you for the rest of your life. I was very conflicted...was I doing the right thing? The longer I stayed in Vietnam, the meaner I got as a defense mechanism against my fear and my questions. Because I did not know how to handle fear, I did not know how to handle life. Because I did not know how to handle fear, I failed to meet my goals, I was a failure in my life, and I got deeper and deeper into alcoholism and drug abuse.

I ended up living in a park under a bench for a year. Then I went to live with this crazy guy named Bob Mockingbird. He said, "Crazy Horse came to see me this morning and told me to get that Indian guy living in the park and take him to live in my house." So for another year I lived in this crash house with up to 300 psychotics, drug addicts, alcoholics, and crazy folk at one time. I slept with a 44 Magnum underneath my pillow because you couldn't trust these guys. People slept in the attic, the basement, everywhere. It was just a crazy, drunken, drug party there. Actually, my wife saved my life; she got me away from there.

Jeanne and Maria

I am married to one of the most unbelievable women in the world. To me, she is not only the person I admire, the person I would like to be like, my role model, she's my friend, she's my lover, she's my confidant. God put this woman in my life because he knew I couldn't take care of myself. She has the patience of an angel, the biggest heart I've ever seen anyone have in my entire life. Not only her, but also her whole family...her dad,

and her mom. I highly respect and love them. They showed me how to be a loving, caring human being. It's a miracle in my life. I would not do anything to hurt them. It's a love story bigger than Romeo and Juliet. It's a poem that goes on forever, the poetry of love. I can't describe what this marriage has done for me; I would not be the person I am today. I'm known everywhere. The librarians know me. I can't go to a restaurant or a movie that I don't meet someone who knows me because I work with so many people and I influence so many lives. I'm not saying that to pat myself on the back; the reasons I do all these things are pretty selfish reasons. One is: it keeps me sober. Two is: I get all the attention that I probably lacked as a child, or thought I lacked as a child. Three: I get to do what most people don't get to do: I get to live my life the way I want to live my life. I get to make choices everyday, and that is due to God, and to my immediate family, who actually took me by the hand and showed me how to be a decent person...not a great man, just a decent human being.

I worked for Karchmer Iron and Steel crushing beer cans. They would be brought in by the trailer load. I would go through the piles with a magnet and remove all the steel. Then I would shovel the cans under a device called a bricketta, which squashes the aluminum to a certain size required for the recycling process. I graded copper. I worked right next to a furnace and it was so hot. Every day when I left work the only thing you could see about me was my eyes. Everything else was black.

After Karchmer I worked for a rendering plant across the street; I did day labor cleaning bricks, killing chickens and turkeys. I hated that last job. I did a lot of piddley jobs. I met my wife about that time at a type of Farmer's Market at Park Central Square one Saturday. I was at Park Central Square in Springfield and I had just bought a nice hand-carved pipe. I collected pipes at the time because I thought it made me look intelligent. A young lady walked up to me and asked, "Are you John Hernandez?" I said, "Well, who wants to know?" She told me her name, Jeanne Holdren. She was a nurse at the Southwest Missouri Indian Center and also she was working as an outside sponsor for the Native prisoners at the Federal Medical Center. She told me she wanted me to come out there and show them how to drum and sing and how to make drumsticks. I said, "Yes." So I say I met my wife in prison.

Now I knew a little bit about prison life because I was in the reserves while I was in Springfield. I was an MP, a turnkey, and a prison guard. I had been sent to work as a prison guard at LaTuna, a federal prison in Texas, for a while. I had also worked at a prison in El Paso. So I went to the Federal Medical Center with Jeanne and did my program. I also did things with her occasionally at the Indian Center; but we never really dated.

I got into an argument with another guy after work one day and we had a fight. In the process I broke my tooth. When the pain became more than I could bear, I went to the Indian Center to see what they could do for me. Jeanne worked there and so did my sister-in-law. She and my brother lived with me for a while.

Now I am not a man who's afraid very often. My courage has been tested in battle. But I hate dentists. I hate them with a passion because I'm allergic to coconut, codeine, and pain. I don't like pain. Jeanne took me to the dentist and paid the \$25 to have the dentist extract my tooth. Jeanne said she could hear me screaming all over the front of the building. And the dentist hadn't even started to work on me yet. She felt so sorry for me that she said, "Why don't I take you home to stay at my house?" So I went home with her and I've never left. We really never had a date. A year later I asked her to marry me. I was 29.

I had a seven-day bachelor party. Buff Lamm almost put me in jail down in Christian County. I didn't know Lindenlure was a residential area and we were singing Indian songs out there at 3 a.m. with a big drum.

We got married at Galloway Baptist Church in September, 1980, with a preacher, because that's where my in-laws go to church. Then I went home and had a peyote dancer come and marry me in my backyard. I had two marriage ceremonies in one day. I'm REALLY married. I'm happy being married. Most people are not. I do not wish I were not married. I am so elated that I have this woman and my daughter in my life.

Jeanne's real name is Ivajejan, but she doesn't like that name. I still think she is the most beautiful woman I've ever seen. She is, unequivocally, one of the strongest points in my life. I would not be here today if it were not for her. She is everything I need and want in a woman. The more I see her and the more I hear her, the more solid I want our marriage to be. I have grown physically, mentally and spiritually into a somewhat decent person through the love and caring of this woman.

We'd been married for two years when my daughter was born. I was never sorry that she wasn't a boy. We only had one name picked out, María (pronounced 'Moirá.') Chalella. Chalella is Castilian for Elizabeth. We named her after my aunt and my sister who passed away. I was working at Hagle Industries, and Jeanne had the baby at Cox North on May 5, 1982 (Cinco de Mayo). She was doubled over with pain that morning, but she insisted that I go to work. I called her Mom to come over a look after her, then I went to work. My mother-in-law took her to the hospital and called me to say they were going to keep Jeanne at the hospital. She told me I didn't need to come yet. About an hour later she called to say, "You'd better come." It took me 10 minutes in my 1977 yellow Camero to drive from Ozark to Cox North.

I went into the delivery room with Jeanne. I had seen babies born before and it always makes me sick. They were worried about me going down and I was worried about me going down. Jeanne did not have a good delivery. She had a lot of bad problems. She had back labor and I massaged her back for four hours until my hand cramped. I am a joker and she was not happy with the jokes I was telling. I'm just goofy that way. That all changed when I quit drinking. I've been sober for eleven years now. My whole family life has gotten stronger. Jeanne trusts me more. People don't realize what drinking and drugging can do to a family.

Alcohol

Alcohol became a problem for my people because they never drank before. My people have something called "tish," which is a nasty, foul-tasting beer. It will get you drunk. Most had what we call "Indian whiskey." The people who sold it to us would put chewing tobacco or gun powder in it to make it burn going down; that's why we called it firewater. The more it burned the stronger it was supposed to be. We developed stomach problems and many other problems. We didn't understand each other's cultures.

As a teenager I was allowed to date, but I never had time to date. I worked seven days a week. Also, I never fit in. I started to drink when I was 3 years old. I drank all my life, which got me in a lot of trouble. When you're working with rough men, you start getting their attitudes and viewpoints. Well, I started working with such guys at a very young age and I thought I was more mature than the kids going to school were. I was driving 10-speed road rangers on the road when I was 13 years old. I was a pretty strong kid, I drank, and I looked mean, so nobody wanted to mess with me. When I entered the service I was 190 pounds of muscle from the heavy labor I did growing up. When I got in a fight people got hurt.

I wanted to be a scientist. I was always interested in science. Alcohol kept me from my goal. It became a problem for me. I've been sober for a while, so I hope I have taken care of that problem. When people first talk to me they have a different opinion of what I went through to get to where I am today. When I was a kid I wanted to be a doctor. Then I wanted to be an executive. My failure to do so was due to my shortcomings, feeling inadequate and very alone. I didn't feel I was worthy of attaining those goals. I had my friends and my family around me, but in many ways I didn't feel that I fit into either of those circles. I drank to fit in, to be able to say, "I'm a macho man." I thought I had to be a rough, tough type of guy because I thought that was the way the world was. It's not. It created a lot of problems for me, particularly health problems. More importantly, it made me feel alone. I had no self-esteem, no self-worth.

I drank even after I was married. It was bad for Jeanne. She continued working. At one point, I had to decide whether to stop drinking or lose my family and go to prison on weapons charges for nine years. My personal

life was like Dr. Jeckyl and Mr. Hyde. If I was out working and doing what I was supposed to do, my life was fine. But when I was home, it was totally different. I had to change. That was pretty dramatic. Usually, people with my disease go through three or four divorces and 18,000 jobs. I started doing more work with problem children because it kept me sober, and it made me happy. I started working with children's homes, I started doing a lot more extracurricular activities that kept me away from the bars, and I started hanging around people who really did something. Because of that, I had a TV show for four years called Stone Soup Café for PBS. I started working with the Federal Government.

I'm not an ignorant man. I'm not an overly educated man, but I'm not stupid. Just because I have a disease called alcoholism doesn't mean that my mind has stopped working. I can put things together really quick. It's a gift I was given from God. I'm not an overly religious person, either. But I have to give credit where credit is due. I'm not ashamed or afraid to use "God." That's part of my life. I believe in miracles. I'm not here to sell or push my religion on anybody. That's how I feel. God gave me a sound mind. He just gave me a weak will.

The One God

The unseen hand of God has guided my life. I've had this job at Bass Pro for almost 18 years. I've gone from packing boxes to working in the print shop to stocking to working in the mailroom and now working in the education department and the museum. Now I am able to help more people. I work with non-profit organizations, with youth offenders, with adult offenders, with alcohol and drug people, working with children. All of these things were unexpected. My whole life has been unexpected! I worked for NATO for 2 ½ years when I was in the Army. I've been all over the world. I've talked to close to 3 million children.

My religion has always come into play in my life. I was the only kid in the bunch who would walk clear across town to get to church. It's always been part of my life. Sometimes I neglected it; sometimes I didn't want to be there, but it was. When I was down and out, when I needed it the most, that's the only thing I had to go to.

After I came back from Vietnam, my Grandpa told me, "There is something wrong with your true self, not just your body, but your spirit. Go, sing. Sing the traditional songs. Get back in touch with who you are. Accept the things that have happened to you. That is a part of life. Learn from your experiences. Grow from them. Let God guide you through this."

I'm no longer a Christian. I'm not saying it's wrong. I believe our Native beliefs. I believe in one God. I believe in the power of God. I believe in miracles, angels. People call them different names, but I've had it up to my neck with organized religion. I had bad experiences as a child with Catholic beliefs. A lot of native people and Mexicans are Catholic because of the colonization of their lands by the Spaniards, who were Catholic, and the building of missions. We have a lot of ceremony in our religion; we sing and pray and dance. We get together with other Native people as often as we can. There are no set times of gathering.

I believe Christian groups get together out of an agreed-upon way of worshipping, not necessarily because of unanimity of beliefs. The relationship with God of each person might be a little different. There's strength in numbers. There is support for bad times, an ability to help one another when you share the same type of beliefs. There is a shared strength in relationship. It's the same with us. We do have organized religions but basically it's more of an individual spirituality, an individual relationship with God. We don't worship spirits. That common misunderstanding in American culture stems from attempts to interpret our languages. We have no word for "angels." We have a single word for "deity" and the inflection with which we say this word distinguishes "God" from "angels." When the interpreters came in they thought we were talking about a god for the grasses, a god for this and a god for that. No, we were talking about angels watching over those areas and we would ask those angels to help us. This is just like the Catholic religion asking their saints for help. We're not praying to gods; we're praying to the one God. We believe God loves dancing. You read the

Bible...David danced in a religious garment called an ephod. That appalled people; they thought that was irreverent. We believe God wants us to be happy, to be joyous. Some churches leave out all music but the voice, which is the instrument that God gave us. We believe God also gave us drums and other instruments to utilize. I play drums and sing.

The Singer

Drums

I'll tell you about the drums and the eagle feathers.

Drums represent our lives. They are round, but not perfectly round, just like our lives. Our lives are not perfect. The drum also has two sides made of hide. They represent the animals we are related to. The wooden frame represents other living things we are related to like grasses and trees. Every living thing has a spirit and is related to every other living thing. We're made of the same molecules as the stars. That makes us related. Because of our relationship, we have to respect everything.



The straps that hold the two heads of the drum together are our relations with one another, with loved ones, with strangers, with ourselves and with God. They are really thin but they are really strong because they hold everything together. We are not solitary animals; we are meant to have communion with one another. Every now and then one of those strings breaks, and what we have to do is wet it down, tie it in a knot and mend the string. That's the way we fix our relationships. Sometimes letting a relationship go is a way of mending it. Sometimes when we are singing and beating the drums, we put a hole in one side. We don't stop the singing or the dancing. We flip that drum over and use the other side. That's the way our lives are. Whenever we make a mistake or whenever something happens that's not right, our lives don't stop. We stop, we turn ourselves around, and we keep going. When we have the chance we come back and mend the hole, we make amends in our lives. We mend the drum but the dance keeps going.

The beat of the drum is like our mother's heartbeat heard in the womb. It's the only sound that is not alien to us. It is a sound natural to us. We are born with that sound in our minds. It's like coming home. It's God's heartbeat. That is what He makes us feel. That's why when you are around drums with a deep resonant sound, boom, boom, you feel comfortable, you feel at home, you feel kinship to that, because that's your heart. The drums are set on a stand with four poles in it. Those poles represent the four directions and the four seasons, the four life spans – birth, young adult, elder, death. That's what makes life. The drumheads are held on by little strings because that is the way God holds us up – by little strings. That's communion with God. It's done with faith and with hope and with respect. It shows us that we have self worth. That's all we're looking for – for our lives to be of value, for our work to be of value. If I value my work, if it means something to me, then what I produce will be of value to you because you are a part of me. That's what the drum means. It's a sacred object.

When we sing, we are singing prayers to God. I love to sing. I'm not the greatest singer in the world, but I love to sing. Anywhere, anyplace, anytime...I love to sing. It's like a drug to me. It makes me feel SOOOO good. I can actually see my relatives in the past, in the present and in the future. I'm never alone. I feel like they are

hugging me or holding me. I can't explain it to people. They look at me strangely. But I feel so loved. It's the way I believe; it's the way my ancestors believed. That's what I want my daughter to believe...that she's never alone. That belief is what keeps me who I am today.

The eagle feathers....We believe that the eagle flies higher than any other bird in the world and that he takes our prayers to God. We use our eagle feathers on our heads, that's our flag. By Congressional Order, the eagle staff is the only flag that can go in front of the United States flag, the Stars and Stripes. We believe that with the strength of the eagle and the modesty of a mouse is how we should live; the eyes of the eagle and the courage of the mouse. I try to tell the children and the elders these things. What is important is to be able to express ourselves without malice. Even to express our secrets, because our shared secrets help others. I believe in service for myself and for others. I've dedicated my life to showing people the hard way and the easy way. My life is not perfect...Heavens, no! I've got bills, I've got problems, I've got an 18-year-old daughter. But I'll tell you what I do. At least once or twice a night, I tell my wife and my daughter that I love them. I hug them and I kiss them. I make sure they know that. In my home we are able to talk – not yell or scream – and to laugh. A lot of people don't have that in their homes. But I do. I have a lot of things in my life that other people don't have. I have one of the greatest lives in the world.

Jay Silverheels

I wake up early in the morning and I want to be loud and dance. Being married to my wife for 20 years has changed that somewhat because she and my daughter are not morning people. But I woke up early one morning at a powwow in Oklahoma City, I believe, and I went to take a shower. I heard someone singing Morning Song and I thought I haven't heard that song since my Grandpa! (John sings the song – Tape 1, Side 2, ¼ point) “Thank you for this morning. Thank you for the sunrise. Thank you for the birds that are singing. Thank you for my heart that is open to you. Thank you for being here. Thank for my family. Thank you for the elders. I just want to thank you for my life and for the happiness that you've brought me.” I went and got him a cup of coffee out of respect. He looked at me. I asked if he minded if I sat down. He said, “No, sit down.” I didn't know who he was at all.

We talked for a long time. I finally told him that my Grandpa used to sing that song. I told him about my Grandpa. He asked me what other songs do you know. I sang him a couple and he said, “Oh, those are old songs!” He laughed and told me to join him for lunch. I went to lunch and he was married to a HUGE Italian woman. We ate Italian food and he ate a salad and drank nasty, black cowboy coffee. I still didn't know who he was. I returned in the evening and brought him a six-pack of beer, which he liked to drink. We talked some more and he told me he used to do movies. I said, “Really!” He said, “Yea, but now I just race horses.” He used to be a jockey. I finally told him my name and he said, “Well, I'm Jay Silverhills.” I was stunned. He didn't crack a smile. I said, “Tonto Jay Silverhills!” He said, “Yeah!” I was so pleased to meet him. He told me he really appreciated being treated just like any other person; that didn't happen too often. Then I told him I'd seen every episode of The Lone Ranger.

He had an acting school for Native children. He was one of the few Native people that actually opened the door for Native people to become actors. I told him how much I admired The Lone Ranger and what he stood for. I only remember seeing him kill one person in all the episodes. Lash Larue was the same. He'd use his whip to take the guns out of people's hands. Hopalong Cassidy and Jingles were the same. I remember when Roy Rogers first appeared on the screen. Gene Autry brought him in as a bad guy. He wore black.

My Path

A friend of mine, who was going to Drury College, called me up and asked if I would be part of a four-person panel about the treatment of minorities in the United States. I agreed and went to Drury. There was a Latino person, a black person, someone from South America, and me. Their viewpoint about the United States' government was very different from my Native American viewpoint. The others were talking about the support they'd received from the government, being given scholarships and grant money to come to school, and things like that. It seemed like everyone was walking on eggshells about answering questions about the United States government. I don't care! You ask me a question, I'm going to answer it. They asked me and I answered, "The treatment of the Native Americans by the United States government is not what you think!" and I started telling them about all the atrocities that happened in the past and are still happening.

The Civil Rights Movement didn't start benefiting Native Americans until the 1970's. Before that, we weren't even treated like American citizens. We became American citizens in 1924. I told them, "I'm not saying this isn't a great country. I fought for this country; I spilled blood for this country, and a lot of my people died for this country; but you have to look at the reality of the situation. Don't candy-coat things that shouldn't be candy-coated. I'm going to tell you the facts. You figure out what's right and wrong. Some good things happened, and some bad things happened, on both sides. I want you to come to a conclusion about how you feel about that." About three weeks later I got a phone call from the black guy who was there. He said, "We're starting a TV show on cultural diversity. We'd like you to be on the board and to become one of the producers."

I went down and we started putting the show together. [At the time, the local PBS station was housed at Drury College] In the middle of putting the show together, the black man left. So, for four years, we had a diversity show. This area is basically Caucasian. The show was designed to show how Japanese, Chinese, Hispanic, Native American, all these people, have contributed to make Springfield what it is today. It was not just built by Europeans. Through that show, I got to meet a lot of interesting people. It was a boost to my non-profit career because now I work with detention programs, Ozarks Fighting Back and other drug and alcohol programs. I make no bones about the fact that I am a recovering alcoholic, because I want people to know the perils and the pitfalls of using alcohol and drugs. People don't realize that only 4 out of 100 alcoholics survive. I've got a story to tell through my life.

I talk with Vietnam vets. I talk with their children. Lots of times the vets are having problems and their children don't understand. I tell them about the first time I killed a man. I was walking with my squad in the jungle; we had a fire fight. I ran a right flank. This guy popped out from behind a tree. We spied each other at the same moment, but I had my rifle trained on him. I remember I was only five-and-one-half feet away. I remember raising my M-16 up at an angle. It was on fully automatic. I almost cut him in half. I remember the surprised look on his face, not the initial look when he saw me but the look when his mind figured out that I had killed him. Those few seconds felt like an eternity. He bore his eyes into me with their questions. I see him now. I see the others that I have killed, groaning on the ground, parts of their bodies missing.

One time I got in trouble and they made me pick up dead bodies that had been out in a field for two weeks. I jumped out of the back of the truck and my foot landed right in a guy's chest. It burst open and the maggots got all over my leg. How do you take those images out of your head? When you walk in a village and see pigs and rats feeding on the entrails of what were once children, how do you get that out of your head? How do you get your own killing, maiming, burning actions out of your mind? The smell of burning flesh, the fear, your own numbness to what's happening. I believe it's that last, that loss of feeling about the horror around you, the horror of war, which makes a person angry. Why do I see this and I know that I should be horrified, and yet I don't feel a thing? What kind of monster does that make me? What kind of animal does that make me? What kind of sub-human does that make me? You don't talk to anyone about that. You're young and immature and are trying to be macho. So you keep swallowing that horror at yourself down until it stays down and festers

inside you. It's a horrible experience. What do we do with those thoughts?

I used to think of them daily. I thought about suicide. I attempted suicide several times. I got help. I started being able to share my thoughts and feelings with others. Once I knew what I needed to do to get rid of those demons inside me and once I committed myself to doing those things and took action, things got easier for me. I stopped having flashbacks. When I'm really stressed out, which is not very often, I dream about those events. I talk to people about my experiences, I tell them stories, and then healing comes. I'm an emotional person and those stories still move me to tears. I've told my story to alcoholics and to people in detention over and over and through the telling I've been able to deal with my feelings. I've got plenty of public parts about my life I can talk about.

I've worked for Bass Pro for almost 20 years. I started working in the Bass Pro museum a year and a half ago. I'm now getting paid for doing what I was doing for years before that for free. I created this job with my boss and her manager. I explained what I could do for them and what I could not do. So far, everything I said I could do has come true. Because of what I've done in my life, they trusted me and gave me the opportunity to do what I'm doing today. Whether I lose this job tomorrow, I will be able to say to people, I actually had a job that I loved and enjoyed. I work a lot of hours.

In the last two weeks we've had about 900 kids going through the museum. I conduct the educational programs within the museum and most of the outreach programs. I do a lot of Native American programs. I started those programs in 1972 while I was in Europe. To Europeans the Native Americans are the heroes and the cowboys are not. I found they especially like Apaches because they have a book in which the hero is half Apache. I talk about our music and our ceremonies. We believe we are akin to everything. We are made of the stuff of stars. That's our tradition. People misunderstand our ceremonies, so I address that. A lot of people think native people have a lot of gods. That's a problem of language interpretation. We have one god and a lot of angels. We pray with songs. We have an extended family. If we go somewhere else and meet an elder, we call them "uncle" or "grandfather."

I work for the Department of Mental Health on their Drug and Alcohol Board; I've done that for almost nine years. I'm the oldest member they've got. I got that job because I worked for the Indian Center doing programs for youth. I did them with Sharon Burkindall, who is like my sister. We did programs and she wrote grants. The department came down to look at what we were doing, and they invited us to Jeff City to put a program on for them. I had children perform to whom we had taught drumming and dancing and singing as a way of keeping off drugs and alcohol. These people now don't drink, and they don't drug. They went through college. Some of them have good jobs. Some of them are mothers and fathers. When they come into town, they come to see me, and they shake my hand. It's respect.

I've been to Washington, D.C. several times. It's all an outgrowth of my work with children and adults through 18 or 19 non-profit organizations. I was September Man of the Year for Springfield. I was Man of the Year for the District in Sertoma, the funders of the Boys and Girls Club. I was given a plaque by The Drug-Free Parents of Missouri for Man of the Year for them. I have numerous plaques and certificates where I've done stuff for people. It's nice to have my work recognized.

Through my work with the Department of Mental Health, I became involved in the Center for Substance Abuse in Washington, D.C. They started sending me to training classes in D.C. and even provided scholarships for me to be able to attend. I was even paid \$900 for going. The same thing happened when there was a regional training in St. Louis. Then I had no money. Now I have no money! I'm not a rich man. People like what I do, but I can't explain what it is I do. People ask me what I do. I say, "I do educational programs at Bass Pro." They say, "What does that mean?" I say, "Well, I come up with an idea, and then I do it." I tell them I'm a master storyteller. I never thought telling stories would get me to where I am today. One thing about alcoholics is that they can give you a line and make you believe it! So I have to attribute my storytelling to my drinking,

because I actually believed the things I was saying when I was drinking; and because I believed them, I could make you believe them.



Gourd Dancers



A Plains House



Kids Dancing

Storytelling and Kite Workshops

I started telling stories because of my daughter. Whenever we went anywhere, my daughter's stomach was attached to her bladder and her feet. When we sat down to eat, she was either running around, or she had to go to the bathroom. My wife never got a chance to eat. She thought food came cold. I wolf my food down. By the time Jeanne had fed Maria, my food was long gone. I started telling Maria stories about the food we were eating. Red Jello™ was dragon tongues. The whipped cream and cherries were Wizard Surprise. I like onions, but Maria doesn't. One morning I woke up and I said, "Maria, today we're going to have a fish scale breakfast." She said, "What's that?" I said, "You know, when you go fishing, that stuff that's on the fish and comes off and looks like little fingernails?" She said, "Yeah?" I said, "That's what we're gonna cook." She said, "Dad, that's nasty!" I decided to use our imaginations. I got out all the meat we had left over and I beat some eggs and then I said, "You know, we don't have any fish scales. We're going to have to use onions." She said, "Oh, Dad!" I said, "No, no, no! It's going to be good. Here, help me cook." We made omelets together. Now, she likes onions. She even likes liver and onions.

That's how I got her to do a lot of stuff. I started telling stories. I remembered stories that my Grandpa told me, and stories that I had read and heard. I started telling stories and I couldn't stop! People would say, "Tell us a story." I would tell one. That's how I got a reputation for being a storyteller. Someone offered to pay me to tell stories. I couldn't believe it! I became a professional storyteller. I began by telling stories I knew from reading or hearing them – real stories. Now, I also make up stories. It's like writing. I remembered what I had liked about stories as a kid – the facial expressions, the jumping up and down, the creation of character right from one's body.

I've got a chance to put stuff together. People like what I do. I started doing workshops, not just storytelling workshops but also kite workshops. My grandpa taught me how to make kites. My grandpa was an unbelievable man. He had time for me. He raised me.

I make kites. I tell the history of kites. It's so relaxing to fly a kite. I love watching the faces of the children as they create a kite, especially the faces of the handicapped children. I tell the children about the spiritual symbol of the kite. When you fly it sometimes it's out of sight but you can still feel the tug of the kite on the string. That's like God. We don't see him, but we still feel the tug of his love on our lives.

Injustice to Native Americans

We don't do things exactly the way our ancestors did. What we now have is what remains of those customs. Each nation or tribe has their own customs and their own language. What the Europeans did was put us on reservations, kill our elders, who would have passed down our customs, and threatened us with bodily harm or death if we did our ceremonies. Even the drum was outlawed at one time. We lost so much.

We are trying to save what we have left. When I was going to school in the 1950's, I was beaten if I spoke my language. It wasn't until 1972 or 1973 that our civil rights movement started and we were allowed to speak our language. By that time many native people had lost their language and their traditions. Taking children away from their parents for 11 months out of the year, indoctrinating them with European ideas and beliefs, punishing them for exhibiting any signs of native traditions – those are very effective ways of destroying a culture. Native people ended up ignorant – ignorant of where they came from and really ignorant of their "fit" within the European culture.

Our elders are often accused of being silent but why put your hand in the fire when you are going to get burned. Our elders were killed for speaking out. We are thought of as being rigid, but we love to laugh, we have a wild

sense of humor, we take care of our children. You have to remember our civil rights movement didn't start until the 1970's. 1973 was the year the Native American Children's Rights Act was passed. Before that someone could come onto the reservation and just buy a child outright rather than going through an adoption process. We lost a lot of people in the 1950's when the government relocated native people to cities to work, never considering the fact that most of them couldn't even speak English. They couldn't read or write. They had no European concept of time. When a ceremony would come up or a member of our families needed us, we just left work and thought our employers would understand. Native people lost their jobs and had no money. They didn't fit in. The next thing you know that despair leads to drinking problems and drug problems. Alcohol was and still is a problem.

The word "Indian" is a form of genocide. By classifying all Native Americans as one, you destroy their unique identity. When the statement is made that "Native Americans have their independent nations," it is actually false. We're still citizens of the United States whether we like it or not. I'm a citizen of the Apache Nation and a member of the Mescalero tribe. Using the word "Indian," destroys my unique identity as a Mescalero, so it's a form of genocide. When we were sent to reservations, we lost our pure bloodlines. I know three boys who are 100% native but have seven different native bloodlines in them. The government won't let them claim themselves as Indians at all. That's a form of genocide. Native people don't like it; other people don't care. They don't care because the federal government owes us according to our treaties. If we die off, no one has to honor those treaties. They honor treaties for every other country, but not for us. We're American citizens!

Movie images of Native Americans are like dime novels. Dime novels have killed as many natives as disease. Dime novels gave readers a distorted view of native people; killing them became easy. Movies are for entertainment; they are not documentaries. Native children adopted away from their culture will have the same prejudices as their adoptive families because both have these media-fed distorted ideas of what being native is all about. The pressure of not knowing where they came from drives a lot of them to drink and drugs. Some people claim there is a genetic component to native people's drinking problems. I think native people drink because there is nothing else for them to do and then their behavior goes back to the freedom of childhood. People think that is strange. Eighty to eighty-five percent of the native population has problems with drugs or alcohol.

Sometimes being native is a blessing and sometimes it's not. I can't blend in – anywhere. I always stand out. My being native comes up all the time when I encounter people. I grew up with the prejudice that "a person of color better not marry my daughter." That kind of prejudice is taught. I always feel that I have to prove to others that I am just as good as anyone else. When I was younger I had a lot of fear and a chip on my shoulder. I don't now. People can say they are not prejudiced, but a lot of those folks have never lived around native people who have drug and alcohol problems. They haven't had to deal with that on a daily basis. They haven't had to struggle with not labeling or stereotyping, just dealing with individuals on the basis of their behavior. They haven't had to confront their racism.

I've had to fight this all my life. I've had to fight people's fear of the unknown. I concluded that the only way to change the mindset of people is to do what I'm doing today. I go to schools and I educate the children. To rise up in an offensive way would attract further atrocities to our people, especially our women. We're still wards of the government. You have one social security number? I've got two numbers, a social security number and a roll number. My land is still governed by the Bureau of Indian Affairs in Washington, D.C. I can't sell my land on the reservation without the government's permission. Can you sell your land? Your house?

I, myself, come from a very prejudiced way of looking at things. I have changed. What has helped me is going back to my spiritual roots and embracing that way of looking at things. A lot of native people are lost because they don't go back to their spirituality. What my elders taught me was how to act. I misinterpreted that as being set in stone. They were just giving me advice.

I was pretty radical and wanted to change things. I got pushed down and slapped around. I got tired of that. So I had to figure out a different way to go about it. I went back to what my Grandpa used to say to me. If you want to change the machinery, you change it on the inside, not on the outside. I now find that common ground and then offer to show people my way of life.

I had to learn how to live in two different worlds. I'm not like most natives. I've had to learn that I was put here for service. I was put here to educate. I was put here to enjoy my life and to bring happiness into other people's lives. But there's a purpose behind this. I want them to have a positive experience with a Native person. I want them to say, "I like the way that guy thinks." I want to be able to speak their language but to use our words. I want to be able to relate to them so they can see us. I want to educate people to the point that they say, "Native Americans are human beings and we are related to them. They have self-worth. I will treat them with respect and dignity." You can take this Indian out anywhere; the physical world is just borrowed. It's what's inside the person that counts. That's where the true home is. You can take me anywhere physically, but you can't take the Indian out of me. I want to be who I am until the day I die.

My way of fighting against the injustice and the atrocities, which have happened to my people, is not by being radical or upset or even quiet. It's by being able to understand the system of American justice and how Europeans think. Once you know how your opponent thinks, you can slowly change the workings of the machine. I used to work in Bass Pro's print shop. When we were trying to align the letters to keep them square on the paper, sometimes we had to move them just a hair. We called that tiny movement a micro adjustment. That's the way it is with my battle against injustice and prejudice and ignorance toward people of color, towards education and close-mindedness and intolerance. I work slowly. I have to understand how other cultures work. Then I show respect toward other cultures and ask for the same in return. I explain things in a language that my listener can comprehend. People don't comprehend anything that's a threat to them; they close up. So I have to understand what threatens my listener and make the surroundings safe and comfortable before I even start speaking. I have to find common ground with my listener.

I didn't learn these things in college. I went to both SMSU and Drury University. I didn't flunk out, I "drunked" out. It's nobody's fault but mine and I have to take responsibility for my actions and my decisions. Most of the time I don't like them, but I did them and I have to suffer the consequences. I'm a fast study and I'm doing better. I don't like pain. If I see somebody doing something I don't like, I avoid that behavior. I model myself after the winners; I do what they do. That's Pavlovian. One time somebody said to me, "Do you know what life is?" I said, "No! Enlighten me." They responded, "It's that little dash between the date you were born and the date you died on your tombstone." I said, "Oh, my God!" What are people going to remember about your little dash? Immortality is very simple – you want that? Make a difference in a child's life. Make a positive difference in a person's life. Then you will be alive through them. Bridges, streets and buildings crumble and are destroyed. We live on. That's immortality without pain and sorrow. What better way to be remembered; what better way to give?

Rooted in Native Ways

I went to the reservation and had a four-day ceremony when I was 13. I went to the sweat lodge and fasted and prayed. It was weird and not weird. Because I had grown up with my grandfather, I thought that was the norm. But that was not true. That was fine with me; I didn't want a lot of people around me.

The women's ceremony is a lot prettier and a lot more elaborate. When women turned 13 or 14 there was a purity ceremony. Gan dancers dance around the fire. The girls wear buckskin and put corn pollen on their heads.

Young men go to sweat lodges with their elders. A sweat lodge is a building, which begins with a pole in each

of four corners, representing the four sacred directions, which are bent into the shape of a beehive. The sweat lodge is covered with hides or a tarp and it represents the womb of the woman. When you go into the womb of the woman you are a man and when you come out you are reborn. Inside it is dark. Hot rocks and sweet grass are brought inside; water is poured over the hot rocks creating a steam bath. There is ritual in how the fire is built; every step of the process means something. Our elders instruct us about life – how to treat our women, how to treat other men. Children can go in the sweat lodges, but teachings start when you are a little older. Even then the children can stay and listen to the teachings. Young people are taught how to “run their sweat,” how to build a lodge, what to bring inside, how to create the steam – every step of the process. Once you are able to “run your own sweat,” you are considered an adult. This is about age 18. There are medicine sweats, prayer sweats, different types of sweats for different types of situations. The ritual is to help you get through life. You’re in there alone, but you’re in there with everyone else. You’re in there with God. You pray, you’re open, you speak honestly, and whatever is said inside the sweat lodge stays there.

We had no holidays. We had harvest days and ceremonies. Holidays are a European invention. We also had ceremonies for illness. A medicine man is a doctor; he works with medicine. A spiritual leader could be the same as your medicine man, but he could be separate. He did the sweat and the sun dances. The sun dance was a Lakota tradition of renewal. A person made a pledge to help the tribe for four years. Young men were pierced in the chest or back and hung from a tree to bleed. They were saying, “I’m even willing to bleed for my people.” The ceremony was outlawed for a while, but it is done now.

Death

I believe my spirit goes to God when I die. I believe that there is another life after this one and that my friends and my family and my ancestors are waiting for me over there. I’m not afraid of death.

If a family member of mine died, we would have a seven-day ceremony. We would stay up for four nights, including the night before we bury or burn the body. We go to them and talk to them and smudge them with sage or cedar and pray for them. Then we go outside and have a kind of wake. We talk about how they were and reminisce. Then we mourn for a year or until the head of the family tells us it’s OK to begin singing and dancing again. Then we have a ghost dinner, which is a ritual of letting go. We select one person to take the place of the departed one. We gather for a meal and afterwards, we give gifts to everyone to thank them. Sometimes the possessions of the person are buried with them, sometimes they were given away. My people used to be burned in their homes with all their belongings. Our graves are now regular graves.

I think my life as John is a pretty simple life. When I grew up there was no gray area; there was only right and wrong. I believed that for a long time and it got me in a lot of trouble. The gray area is now the home of my maturity. It’s the place where things just happened and I had to embrace that and make it part of myself. Before I got there I was not a nice person. I was mean and negative. I had to turn myself around and stop being something that I wasn’t. It’s so hard to be somebody that you’re not. It’s harder than being yourself. I started to listen to my heart and my heart was with my people. I started becoming more of a spiritual person. I started understanding and having compassion for people. I have compassion for my elders; without them and their wisdom I would not be here. I have compassion for youngsters because without them I would not have joy today. I have compassion for people my age because without them I would not have fellowship today.

The fourth and most important part of life is death. For a long time I was surrounded by the awful part of death and I was afraid. But I’ve also had the opportunity to see the beauty of death and to know that they have gone to a stronger place. I have seen the strength in my elders and in my young friends at that time. That gives me hope. It’s a gift from God. I want to be like them. I want to be a decent person who has had compassion and love and peace and serenity in his life. I am so content and happy with what I have. I have people who care about me, who love me, who like me, who don’t like me, who could care less about me...I’ve been able to look

into the eyes of the living and of the dead and of the half-dead. I've been touched by the hands of God in my very heart and soul. What else does a man want? I am so happy with life's challenges. It's all because of where I've come from. I'm made of pieces of the 10,000 people I have met.

Wisdom Way

The life expectancy of a Native American is 45 years old. I'm 51. I'm becoming an elder. An elder is someone with wisdom who has the respect of his community and to whom they go for guidance and advice. An elder is a person with broad shoulders, open ears and a closed mouth. Elders can be male and female.

People look at the differences between cultures. But to understand other cultures we need to examine our common ground, our similarities. So I point those out. Then we can look at our differences once we've established our common ground.

We have our way and you have your way. We are human beings. I condemn no one. I've never seen a native person go up to someone's home and try to convert them to our beliefs. Europeans do that. We believe that if you want to be an example then you must live the example.

Could you become a member of my tribe? If you were adopted into a family you could. Even when we are born, we have to be voted into the tribe. You can also be kicked out of the tribe. Your role card can be taken away by the tribe.

I don't know how I got my insight. I don't know how I got my ability to speak. I don't know why people always want to take care of me, and why doors have opened for me. My daughter will tell you wherever I go, people give me food. In restaurants, people give me extra. I took my family to Medieval World in Florida where you eat a Cornish Hen and other finger food without utensils; they gave me an extra plate. No matter where I go, people have heard of me or they come and talk to me. I'm not a shy person and I'll talk to you until your leg falls off. I think it's a spiritual thing. I ask myself, what do I have in my mind that they want. This ability was a free gift to me. I feel good about what I do in my life.

Private Life

My daughter graduated from high school and went to college for a little bit. Now she's taking a break, but she says she wants to go back. We have our teenage-Dad problems. We're still growing and learning. She plays the flute. She's very bright. She's very self-sufficient and outspoken, just like we raised her.

I still get very emotional when I talk about my family because I usually don't talk about my family. That's a very private part of my life. Their lives do not revolve around me. They have their own lives and activities and friends, and I respect them. They respect me. They have male friends and I have female friends. There is no suspicion between us. Women call me all the time at home, because most of the groups I become involved with are run by women. My wife was sick yesterday and called to ask if I was coming home. I told her I had to attend a Junior League meeting. She had been hoping I would bring some food home. I went and got her food, took it home, and then went to the meeting.

I'll get up in the middle of the night to get her something. I love doing things for my wife. Her smile and her eyes make me feel the way I did the first time I kissed a girl. I love having the ability to make her happy, to be intimate without even touching. It's so beautiful. It's like all the animals in the world singing a love song. It's like being caressed by a warm summer breeze on a top of a hill. It's like smelling flowers for the

first time. It is so beautiful and so quiet and so delicate. It's like looking at a snowflake through a microscope. It's mine and it's so precious. It's a pure and healthy emotion of caring. It's unbelievable the love I have for this woman. I don't know if she has the same love for me. I've never asked her. I don't feel uncomfortable being at home without her. I call her at least once a day to tell her I'm thinking about her. I love the sound of her voice. She is so intelligent. She has a way of being neutral and of seeing the world the way it really is. Other people don't necessarily think she's beautiful, but I don't care what they think. My daughter is the apple of my eye. I love her and I'll do anything in the world for her. I have a great gift and that gift is my family. I could live on without them, but I wouldn't want to. I have the joy of being loved and needed and being respected – that's the American dream. What else could a man want?

Isn't that a great story? From rags to riches, in spiritual terms.



Jeanne and María



Springfield, MO
2001