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## **My Family, My Identity: An Ethnohistorical Exploration of a Multiethnic Family**

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MY FAMILY, MY IDENTITY:  
AN ETHNOHISTORICAL EXPLORATION OF A MULTIETHNIC FAMILY

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A Thesis

Presented to

The Graduate Faculty

Central Washington University

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In Partial Fulfillment

of the Requirements for the Degree

Master of Science

Resource Management

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by

Sarah Oosahwee-Voss

May 2015

CENTRAL WASHINGTON UNIVERSITY

Graduate Studies

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## ABSTRACT

### MY FAMILY, MY IDENTITY:

#### AN ETHNOHISTORICAL EXPLORATION OF A MULTIETHNIC FAMILY

by

Sarah Oosahwee-Voss

May 2015

This thesis focuses on family identity in a time when multiethnic couples are increasing in population. How will this populace choose to define who they are? The purpose of this thesis is to focus on a multiethnic family, specifically one with different tribal heritages, and explore how their identity was formed over time and maintained through various times in their history. Multiple ethnographic methods were utilized in tandem to collect the information. A framework was then created to determine the main themes found throughout the history and information compiled in order to define the core values within their family identity. The family in this study is my family and by researching one's own family, a new and deeper understanding of one's own identity is achieved. This thesis creates an outline for others to apply in their search for helping to discover the themes in their own family to find a way to sustain and shape their family identity.

## ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

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Next, to my special little friends, Wesa, Svno, Mapi, and Taakaan, thank you for all the love you have shown me over the years.

To my mother-in-law, Nora Voss, my late father-in-law, Tom Voss, my grandmother-in-law Elaine Cottew, and my sister-in-laws, Eva Palmer and Aron Watson, thank you for accepting me into your family with open arms. I love you all and cherish the time I get to spend with each of you. I am fortunate to have beautiful and loving in-laws. Tom, you are greatly missed by us all.

Words cannot express the amount of love and gratitude I have for my grandparents, siblings, and for my amazing parents. Every time I think about how much love I feel for each of you, I get choked up. There are not enough words to express the feelings and love I have for you all.

To my late Grandma and Grandpa, I cannot wait to see you both again and I love you. We have so much to talk about! Thank you for the priceless memories of amazing food, country living, treats and tootsie roll pops, and of course, the countless hours of dominos with Grandpa.

To my Grandma Bea, the times we have shared together are truly priceless to me. Thank you for allowing me to be a child for as long as possible and I love you. I only hope and pray that our children have the same relationship with their grandparents as I did.

To my beautiful sister, Donita, thank you for helping with editing my thesis. I treasure the relationship we have built over the years. You have a huge heart and I respect and admire you more than you know.

To my other beautiful sister, Sedelta, thank you for the encouragement over the years. You have become a role model to me in your career and I am so proud of you for all the work you do. Thank you for being an amazing big sister to me and for all the love you shown me through my life.

To my amazing brother, Adam, I love you unconditionally and I believe in you. You too have a huge heart and I admire you and look up to you for your strength and humor.

To my parents, Mary and Harry Oosahwee, you are my heroes. I am so blessed and thankful to call you my parents. You are the world to me and I can never thank you for all that you have done for this project and supporting me thus far in my educational

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## CHAPTER I

### INTRODUCTION

I am from northeastern Oklahoma, from a town called Tahlequah in the foothills of the Ozark Mountains. As of the 2010 U.S. Census, Tahlequah's population totaled 15,753 and 4,726 of those marked American Indian and Alaska Native alone on the census (U.S. Census Bureau, 2014). My family has lived in the same house for 32 years, my entire life. I grew up in that home and that community with my two older sisters and my younger brother.

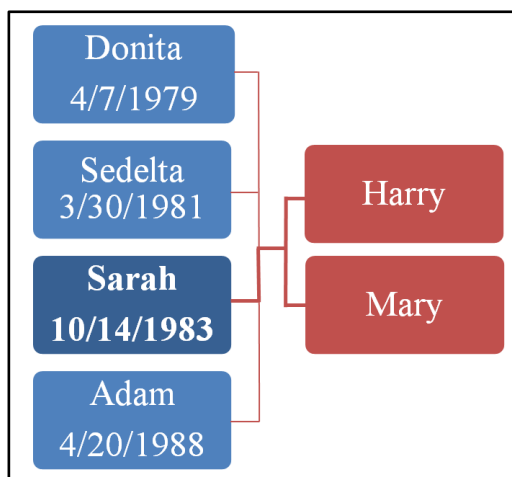
When I asked my parents recently to describe the town where we were raised, my mother's first statement was that Tahlequah is the capital of the Cherokee Nation. She followed up by stating that the Cherokee population is high in comparison to other areas in Oklahoma and Cherokees, plus many other tribal groups, were prevalent. She noted that since the town has two hospitals (a city hospital and an Indian Health hospital), a university (Northeastern State University [NSU]), and other educational institutions, many of the adults and parents in the area have professional and/or educational backgrounds. This allowed us to have many positive role models in our lives besides our parents.

Our family came from two different regions and from even more diverse backgrounds. When asked what my nationality is or what my ethnicity is, my response is always the same. I smile and say, "I am half Cherokee but I am an enrolled member of the Mandan, Hidatsa, Arikara Nation in North Dakota. I am also Norwegian, German, French Canadian, Irish, and Scottish. The next response from them is, "How did that

happen?” To which I respond nearly always, “My mother is from North Dakota and my father is from Oklahoma, they met one summer in South Dakota.”

In the late 70s, my father accepted a position to work at a summer program called Upward Bound at Black Hills State College in Spearfish, SD. My mother is from North Dakota and was in Spearfish working at the College. My father told me he had no idea he would find someone to spend the rest of his life with in South Dakota. My parents were together for 3 years before he proposed while on a trip to Yellowstone National Park. They were married in New Town, North Dakota, at St. Anthony’s Catholic Church on August 6, 1977. My father’s parents could not make it, but two of his brothers were part of his wedding party.

In 1979 they began their family. First was my sister Donita who was born that year, then Sedelta in 1981, me in 1983, and finally my brother Adam in 1988. Figure 1 illustrates my siblings and our birth dates.



**Figure 1. My siblings and our birth order.**

My siblings and I were raised together but we each have our own individuality. Our sense of individuality is based on the experiences of our family, living together through certain relationships, phases in life, all within our household. In my eyes, I had the perfect childhood. I spent time with my siblings; we got to be children and enjoy the life of a child by playing games, running around outside year round from morning until after the sunset. My parents were always there for us and continue to be amazing role models for us. As siblings we are close and even though there is the occasional sibling quarrel, we can always count on each other. My parent's home will always hold a special place in my heart. Even now, when I turn onto their street after being away for months, I get that excited happy feeling in my stomach because I am heading home.

The characteristics of this home along with the material culture and contents, illustrate the elements, themes, and values that exemplify our family's life together. Changes in the home happened for some reason. Their history all came from somewhere. By sharing my parent's history, the history of our home and the contents within, the identity of our family is made remarkably clear. Values and themes have continued to reoccur throughout our lives and contribute greatly to our identity as a family.

Because of our diverse background and the community where we were raised, we had a strong sense of identity that as we got older was challenged by society. Many complicated layers create an individual's identity. External elements, such as the shape and color of someone's eyes, do not solely determine who they are. Hair colors, hair types, hair styles, again, none of these are enough to determine a person's identity. Even if you add in features that are considered ethnically identifiable like high cheekbones or

almond shaped eyes, is that enough to guess someone's identify? What about the type of clothing, the style of earrings, their shoes, the setting in which you see them; would this change an assumption of that person's identity?

With the increase of interethnic relationships, first assumptions based on external appearances become increasingly problematic. To guess correctly someone's ethnic identity is only the beginning. What if you were American Indian and someone correctly guessed you were. This opens up a number of follow-up questions and many that as an American Indian and Nordic/European decent, I have personally experienced. What tribe are you? Are you a full blood? If you are Cherokee, are you enrolled in a federally recognized band, and if so which of the three? Are you religious? Is it a tribal religion? Do you view the world from a Cherokee perspective or an American perspective? How do you identify yourself as an American? These questions are only the beginning. Identity runs deep, yet changes through relationships, everyday experiences, education, and life in general.

One day, at one of my previous jobs working with the public, a woman came up to me and began asking me questions about the area and the history of the place. The questions asked were those that most visitors ask. However, I noticed that she kept looking at me and as she began to walk away, she turned back and asked incredulously, "What *ARE* you?"

Surprised, I quietly said, "Excuse me?" The woman then replied, "I mean, where do you come from? What ethnicity are you?" To be honest, I am not sure how I answered. How she approached me left me in shock.



On another occasion several years later, my husband and I were at a pizza buffet in a small town in Minnesota with my mother-in-law, my husband's grandmother, and her husband. I went up to the buffet for another slice of pizza when two customers approached me. One of them asked me where I was from and what my background was. She said I looked "exotic" and thought I might be Aztec. They pointed back at their table to the other two people in their party and explained that they were all trying to guess where I was from. Once again, I was shocked.

As many times as this has happened to me, I am blindsided by these questions. I do not expect to run into this question daily but given the number of times it has happened, my defenses go up slightly in these situations. Are people really judging me based on my appearances? How does one respond to such a question from a stranger?

Strangers are happy when they discover they guessed right. They usually say it is my "high cheekbones" or the "shape" of my eyes. Someone even told me I looked "statuesque," which I actually took as a flattering compliment. I have two older sisters and a younger brother and they often get the same questions. My oldest sister, Donita, is the shortest of us. People often mistake her for "Mexican." My other sister Sedelta is a little shorter than I am but people think we look like twins. A child at a store called her Pocahontas.

After such conversations, I end up thinking about how I came to be. These questions asked by strangers seem at first so simple, yet in reality, they are complex questions based on my identity. My curiosity intensified after reading *Blood Politics* (Sturm, 2002). Sturm's research on how culture and identity along with blood quantum

shaped the Cherokee Nation, led me to start thinking about how culture and identity have shaped my life.

### Purpose

In 2011, one of NPR's programs included a story about interracial marriage (Kellogg, 2011). The story listed a number of different percentages on the increase of interracial marriages and the increasing acceptance of these unions in the past few decades. For example, over 7% of all marriages in 2011 were interracial and the numbers suggest that these types of marriages will continue to increase. Kellogg concludes the article by stating how the data clearly show that all ethnic groups are inter-marrying more than ever before. Another NPR story discussed an increase of almost 50% of mixed-ethnicity children in America in the past 10 years (Martin, Richardson, Folan, & Ardan, 2011). Although children from interracial marriages alone do not cause this increase, the numbers suggest that in the future overall marriages of interracial couples will not decline anytime soon.

More and more people are creating families that have more than one ethnicity. According to a study conducted by Pew Research Center, in 2010, 14.6% of new marriages in the US were interracial, more than doubling the percentage from 1980, (Wang, 2012). The Pew Center concluded that the children of these couples would help change the notion of race in the future.

My family is an example of this increasing trend of multiethnic families. When different ethnicities come together to create a family, they bring together two pasts, cultural beliefs, religion, and personal beliefs based on their individual and family

history. Looking at the past and seeing all the historic obstacles my family and ancestors have overcome while still continuing to maintain our identity as a family is incredible. Couple this with the mixing of ethnicities, cultural beliefs, religion, education, and other factors, how can families successfully maintain their identity and their family background?

One of the main purposes of this project is to share a story of a family, my family, and how we have created and maintained a family identity through community, objects, and themes. The use of powerful core values my family instilled in us were created and based on our solutions to these struggles. Who we are, came from a set of themes that have reoccurred throughout my life and my parents life.

### Maternal Family History

My mother's family history is one of intermarriage for multiple generations with an emphasis on maintaining resilience and identity within Mandan, Hidatsa, and Arikara communities. My mother, Mary, was born in Minot, North Dakota, in 1952 to Beatrice and George Charging. Her parents lived in Lucky Mound, North Dakota, on the Fort Berthold Reservation. She is the second of eleven children (see Figure 2).

At the time of my mother's birth, the community of Lucky Mound did not have a hospital and the nearest hospital was fifteen miles away in Elbowoods. However, the town of Elbowoods was in the process of relocating all of their services to other areas. With the construction of the Garrison Dam, Elbowoods was to be inundated by the newly formed reservoir, Lake Sacagawea. The local hospital in Elbowoods was no longer

taking patients because of the future move, so the hospital sent her parents to Minot Trinity Hospital where my mother was born.

By this time her family included at least six generations of intermarriages between Hidatsa, Arikara, Mandan, German, Scottish, French Canadian, and Norwegian. My mother's side of our family illustrates how different ethnicities merge through the generations creating a person of mixed heritages.

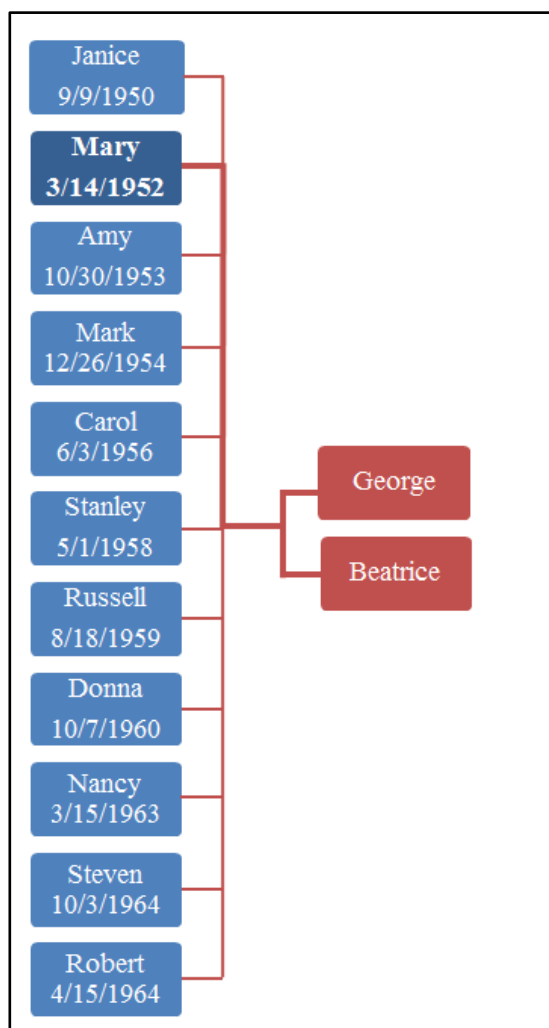


Figure 2. My mother, Mary, and her siblings with their birth dates.

Figure 3 illustrates the generations and the lineage of my mother's side. I tried to include as much information about birthdates and lineage in the diagram. Looking at the chart, the colors of the boxes represent the generations of the past. The nature of the marriage ceremony is included if known. Many of the marriages occurred within the Catholic Church and the Lutheran Church. Indian Custom marriages used to occur by exchanging of gifts and a feast (Bowers, 49). Including the information of marriage is important to help provide insight into our family's perspectives on matrimony and the influence of their identity to their decisions.

My ancestors on my grandmother's side moved from Voss, Norway to North America. Halvord Forde, the youngest son of Jon Halvordson and Ingebjorg Finn Sundsvall Forde, left Norway with his brother on April 26, 1849 on the Kong Sverre ship. Six weeks later, they arrived in America and ended up in Wisconsin, where they worked for 2 years to pay for their passage on the ship. At the time, their trip cost twenty-five dollars apiece. One of Halvord's sons, my grandmother's grandfather Ole, ended up in South Dakota as a lawyer who later joined the legislature in that state.

One side of my grandfather's family came from Scotland in the mid 1800's. Andrew Dawson was part of the fur trade and had a child with an Arikara named Eagle Woman. They had a daughter named Yellow Corn Woman (see Figure 4). On the other side of my grandfather's family, Iron Eyes was considered to be a respected man in the village. *Hidatsa Social & Ceremonial Organization*, an ethnography researched by Alfred Bowers in the 1930's, mentions Iron Eyes a number of times.

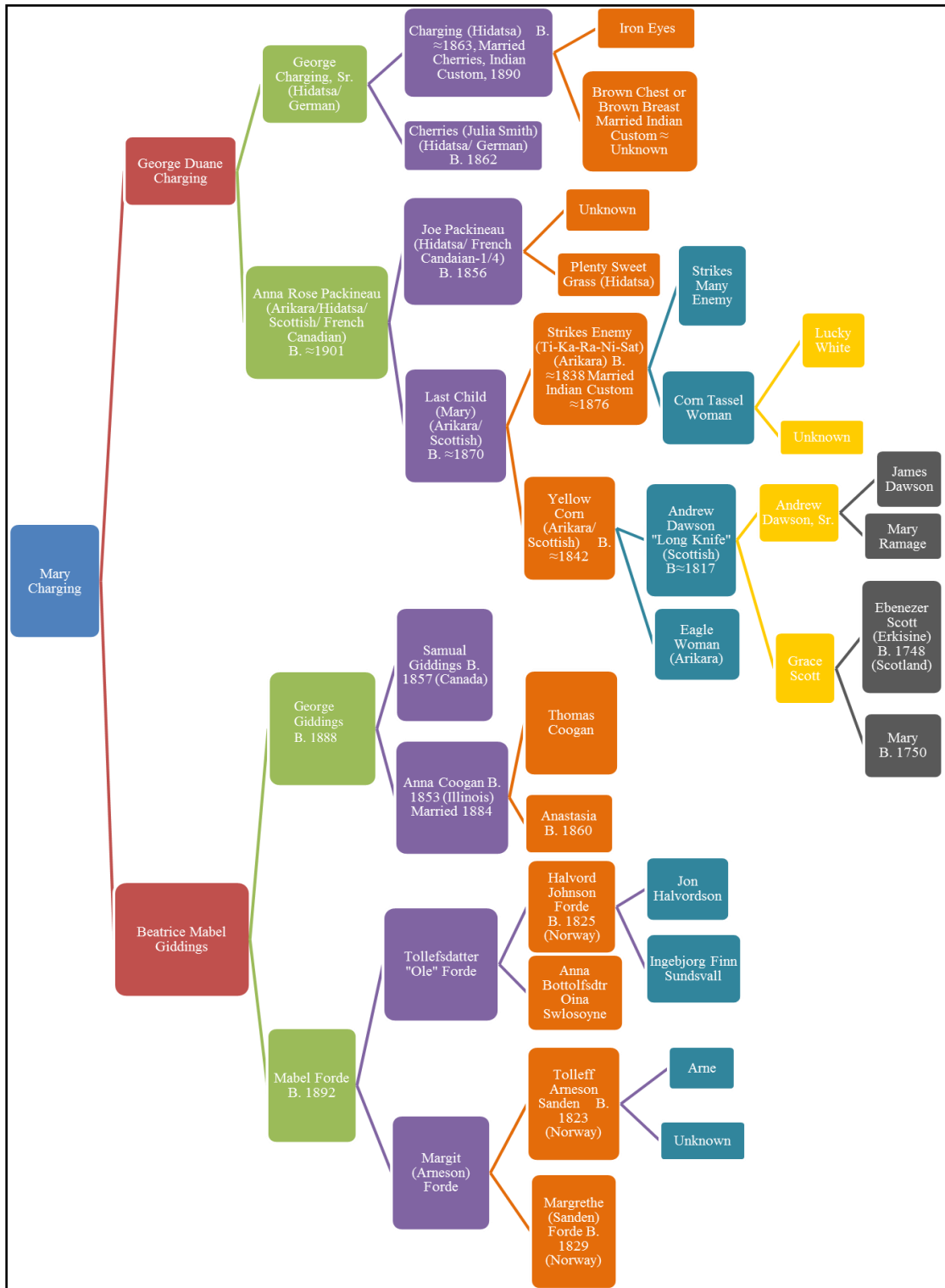


Figure 3. Maternal Family Genealogy.

Bowers mentions Iron Eyes and the sacred bundle he kept: the principal Mandan Eagle Trapping Bundle, (443) and the sacred ceremony he could perform: the Sunset Wolf Ceremony (422). My family also has a connection to Edward Curtis, a well-known photographer whose subjects were often American Indians in traditional regalia. One of Iron Eye's sons, Charging's brother, Packs Wolf, was photographed by Curtis.

My grandmother, Beatrice, met her husband, George Charging while his mother, Rose (see Figure 5), was a patient at the Indian Health Hospital where my grandmother worked. He made a comment to his mother that he was going to marry that nurse (see Figure 6 and 7). She simply responded in a joking manner, "You are crazy."



**Figure 4. Strikes Enemy and Yellow Corn Woman, daughter of Andrew Dawson.**



**Figure 5. Rose and George Charging, Sr., date unknown.**





**Figure 6. My grandmother and friend Lou in front of Doctor's house in Elbowoods, 1948.**



**Figure 7. My mother's parents, George and Beatrice, on their wedding day.**

I love hearing how my grandparents met. I always imagined the story. The image of my grandfather saying those words to his mother always struck me as incredibly sweet and as a result I never thought to ask any more about their marriage. During my interviews with my mother, this story came up again. As my mother continued to share the story with me, I wondered how his parents viewed the marriage since she was not native. Suddenly, I realized that all the marriages in our family's history required adjustments and acceptance on various levels, whether it was acceptance of a new culture or religion, or adjustments to new family traditions based on the merging of families.

I was happy to hear that they accepted her into the family and even gave her a buckskin dress. My grandmother now lives with my parents so I wanted to hear more about that relationship between her in-laws. She said they were very kind to her and accepted her. My grandmother then shared with me that her parents were the ones that had an issue with the marriage. My assumptions were wrong. I thought my grandmother would have trouble with her-in-laws, not with her own parents. They had uncertainties with the marriage, which led to little to no communication until my grandmother started to have her children. Thankfully, a few years after the birth of her first child they became involved in their lives by coming around and spending time with the family (see Figure 8).

Historically, kinship relationships are extensive within certain tribes. For instance, Hidatsa's have a number of different kinship connections creating ties throughout the community. These ties essentially link everyone together creating a closely bonded community.

The Hidatsa believe that clan members are blood related even if they are not (71). For the Arikaras, kinship ties extend to humans and the environment, specifically heavenly and earthy elements (Bowers, 1992). Embedded within oral histories are terms of kinship to the environment. For example, the environmental kinship found in their history is corn called Mother Corn (Bowers, 1992). Mother Corn is present in their origin stories. After coming from the heavens she led their ancestors from the underground world and continues to help the people today. Parks (1997) mentions Mother Corn also leading the Arikaras to the Missouri Valley, helping them through a difficult journey to arrive safely: “She gave them their cultural institutes and moral teachings, and provided them with horticulture, including corn” (p. 87).

Adoption is another form of extending kinship relationships. Through adoptions, ties were extended through new relationships among different families. In the Hidatsa culture, men and women were often “adopted” into other clans, especially men of high distinction (Bowers, 1992). Kinship relations reached other tribes too because the different types of adoptions included members of other tribes and non-tribal people. For example, fur traders often worked closely with tribal members and, as such, were often adopted into their families. Ritual adoption was common if a couple lost a son in war or if they did not have any children. The tribe also adopted prisoners, specifically women and children, if there were no chances of retaliation from the prisoner’s side. One of the most well-known examples of prisoner adoption is a Shoshone woman name Bird Woman, or in Hidatsa, Sacagawea (Bowers 95).



**Figure 8. My grandmother's parents, Mabel and George Giddings.**

Growing up, my mother referred to her great aunts and uncles as grandparents. During our interviews, she discussed her grandmother Martha, her father’s mother’s sister. The use of grandmother might cause one to think of the direct grandparents but from my mother’s tribal perspective, all her great aunts and uncles are grandparents and our parents have passed this on to us as all of their aunts and uncles are our grandparents (see Figure 9).

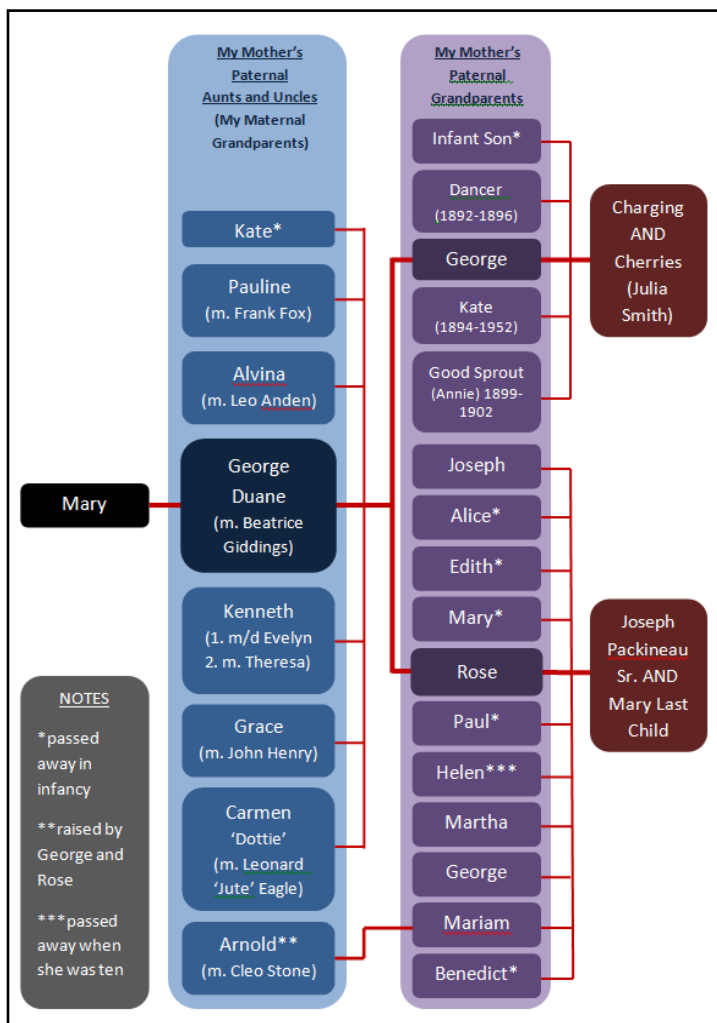


Figure 9. My mother's paternal kinship chart.

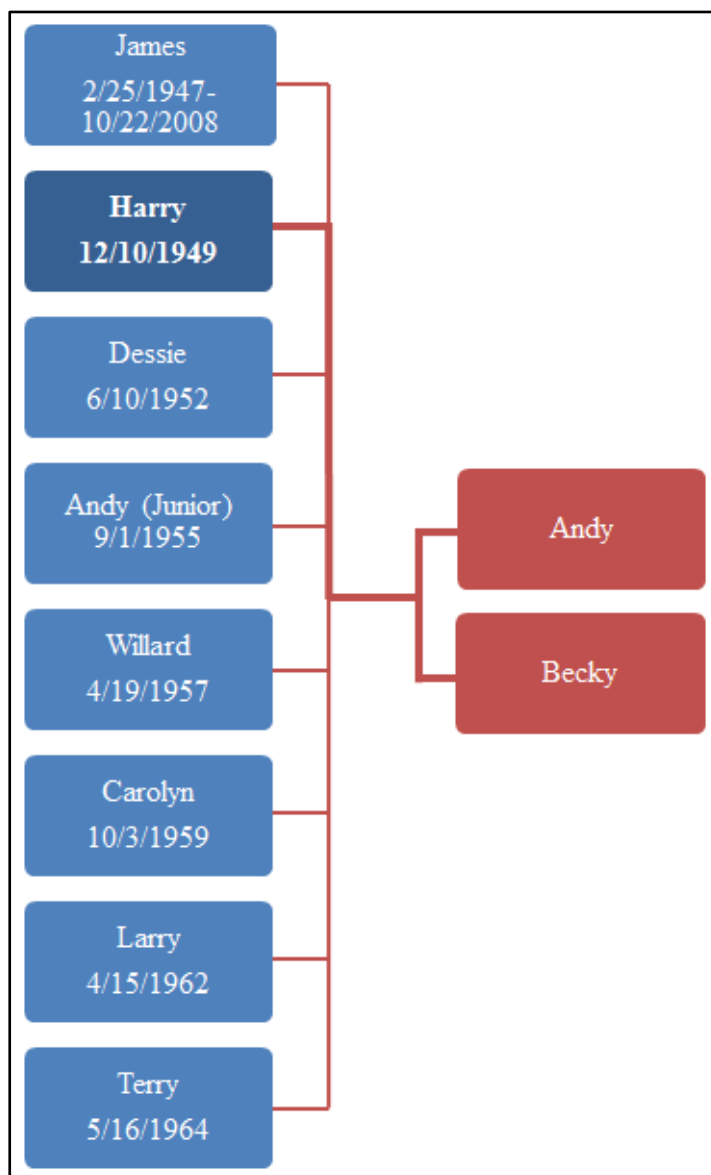
### Paternal Family History

My father is a full-blood Cherokee. He grew up speaking the Cherokee language as his first language and he is descended from Cherokees. My grandmother's maiden name is Grasshopper. The Grasshopper family first came to what is now Southwest Missouri. After the Dawes Act, they moved to their allotted land located near present-day Nowata, Oklahoma. Later, the family moved east of Tahlequah along the Illinois River near the Sparrowhawk family.

Becky married Andy and they had eight children together. My family is not sure where my grandparents met but my father thinks it happened at church (see Figure 10) since both were active in the church. My father, Harry, was the second oldest out of eight (see Figure 11). He was born in Tahlequah, Oklahoma, in 1949 in, the old W.W. Hastings Indian Hospital, the same hospital where I was born. He grew up in a place called Money Bean Hollow, a small Cherokee Community near Hulbert, Oklahoma. His parents continued to live in the same area all their lives.



**Figure 10. My paternal grandparents, Becky and Andy.**



**Figure 11. My father and his siblings.**

After my grandparents passed away, they were not laid to rest next to each other but by their respective families in two separate cemeteries across Cherokee county. My grandmother rests in Towie Cemetery near the Illinois River east of Tahlequah while my grandfather rests at the New Hope cemetery west of Tahlequah outside of the town of Hulbert, Oklahoma. My mother found this unusual, that a married couple chose to rest in separate cemeteries rather than beside each other. Instead, they chose to return to be near their parents.

Figure 12 illustrates my father's family chart. He collected much of the information from the Cherokee Family Research Center at the Heritage Center in Tahlequah, Oklahoma. Many of the records at the center are government documents but there is a small library open to the public. There are employees at the library who research genealogy for a small fee.

As my father and I were working on this chart, he explained the names might not be 100% accurate because those who were documenting the names might not have understood the names. For example, my father's great-great-great-grandfather, his name was written as De-squar-noh-le in the records at Cherokee Nation. However, in the Cherokee language there are no 'r's in today's dialect. My father said that at one time there were three major dialects. The Upper Dialect, also known as the Over the Hill, had the "r" sound but the dialect is no longer used. Today the Western Cherokee (Cherokee Nation of Oklahoma and the United Keetoowah Band of Cherokee Indians) speak with the Lower Dialect, whereas the Eastern Band of Cherokees uses the Kituwa or the Middle Dialect.



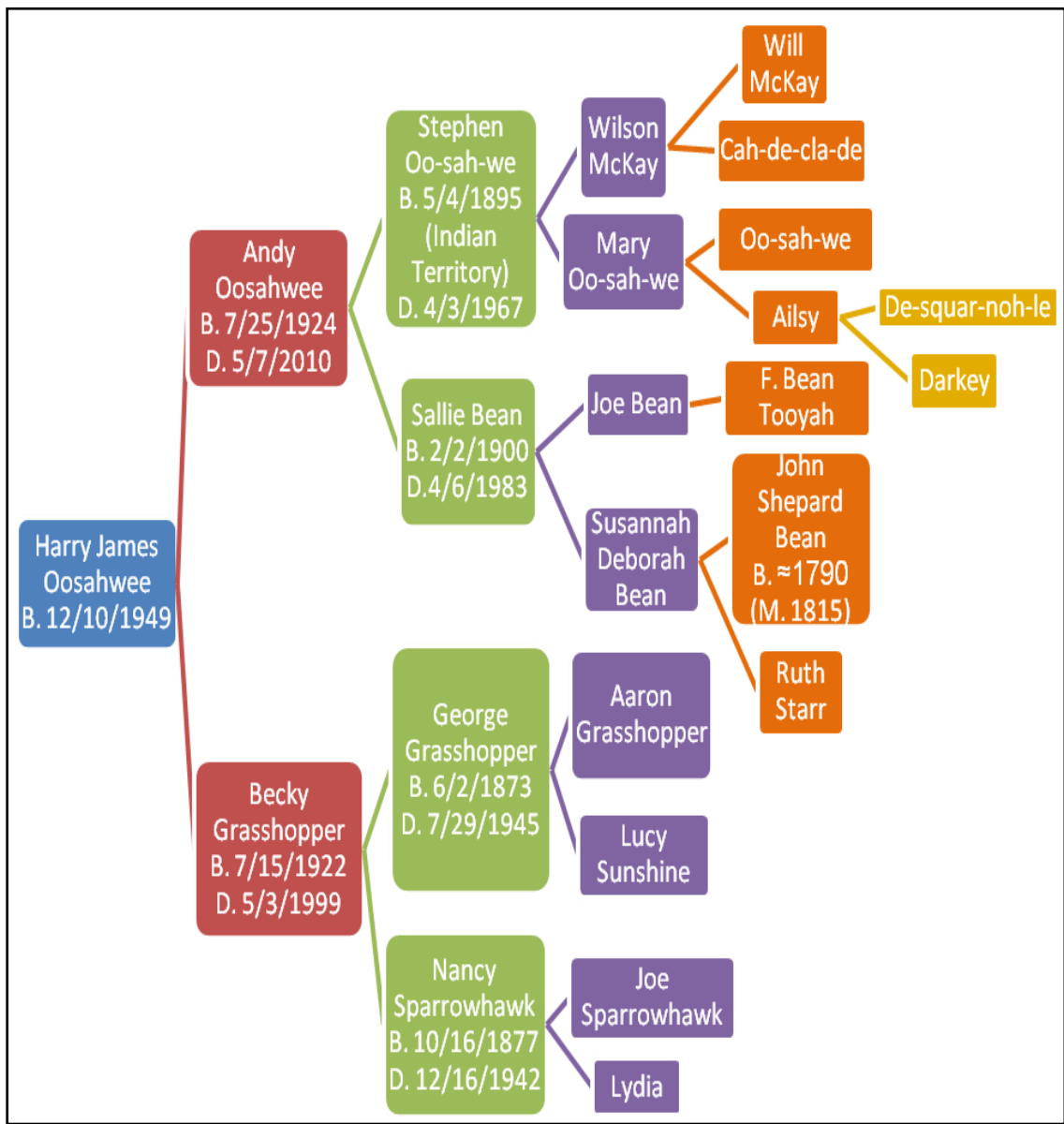


Figure 12. My father's lineage chart.

My father also pointed out that our last name should be McKay (McKey), but when his grandfather Stephen was born, Mary his mother, although married, never took her husband's name and gave Stephen her last name. My dad also suspects that at the time of Stephen's birth, Mary was upset with her husband so she also did not want her son to take his name either. A similar situation happened when my father was born. On his original birth certificate, his last name was Grasshopper. At the time of my father's birth, my grandmother was mad at my grandfather because he had an affair that created another son for him. My grandmother gave my father her maiden last name.

Twenty-one years later, my father went to get a copy of his Certificate of Indian Blood. He requested a copy of his birth certificate and the state of Oklahoma had no records of an 'Oosahwee' born that day. They did however find a 'Grasshopper' that matched up to the same date, place, birth mother's first name, and his first name. All his life, up until that point, he had been an Oosahwee even though his birth certificate said otherwise. His parents enrolled him in school as an Oosahwee and he had been in the Army as an Oosahwee. He was shocked that he had gone his first twenty something years as a Grasshopper on his birth certificate and no one, not even he, had caught the name. He quickly went to the proper places to change his name legally.

The word Oosahwee has two meanings in Cherokee depending on how the word is pronounced. The first pronunciation means, "it's too heavy" or "a burden." The other pronunciation means, "it's empty." My father cannot say if the name "Oosahwee" comes from his Grandfather Stephen's Cherokee name which was Ga-ge-d(I) meaning Heavy, or our Cherokee Family name on his father's side, Dv-no-we-la-ni, meaning "they are

going to write." My father's mother's side's name is To-la-t(i)-s-ga, meaning Grasshopper.

Our direct descendants were not a part of the Trail of Tears, the forced removal of tribes from the Southeastern US to Oklahoma during the winter months with little to no notice of the move. My ancestors knew the removal was inevitable so they moved before the forced removal. When I tell people I am from Oklahoma, they usually mention how flat the land is there. But, where the Cherokees relocated is similar to the land they were forced from. Located in the foothills of the Ozark Mountains, the landscape is crisscrossed with creeks, rivers, and hills that during the seasons offer a full array of color: green and lush in the summers, full fall foliage, and bare trees in winter. In a sense, my father believes the Cherokees were fortunate because their new environment was so similar to the one from which they came. Even the plants and animals were comparable to their homelands.

The Cherokee language is very important to the Cherokee culture. My mother jokes with my father that the language does not show a lot of love in terms of their English translations (see Table 1). The Cherokee Language will be discussed further in a later chapter.

In the Cherokee culture, kinship is matrilineal. Today there are seven clans within the Cherokee tribe. My father said he heard that at one time the Cherokees had up to twenty clans. As time passed, most were absorbed into the seven clans the tribes have today: ani-awi (Deer), ani-tsi-qua (Bird), ani-wo-di (Paint), ani-gi-lo-hi (Long Hair), ani-sa-ho-ni (Bear), ani-wa-ya (Wolf), and ani-go-da-ge-wi (Wild Potato/Savanna).

Table 1. Cherokee Kinship Translations

Cherokee Word	Phonetics	English translation	Literal English Translation
DᎊᎦᎵ	a-que-tsi	My Child	“My egg”
ᎠᎩᎠᎵᎵᎵᎵ	a-qua-da-li-i	Wife	“Like a girlfriend”
ᎠᎩᎠᎵᎵᎵᎵᎵᎵᎵ	a-ga-sda-yv-hv-sgi	Wife	“My cook”
ᎠᎩᎵᎵᎵ	a-gi-ye-hi	Husband	“One who carries me”
ᎠᎩᎵᎵᎵᎵᎵᎵᎵ	o-sdi-ne-li	Husband	“The one I live with”

Because the tribe is matrilineal, Cherokees receive their clan from their mother. My father’s mother was a member of the Wolf Clan so my father is too. My father said that clans are not as relevant today as they were in his grandparents’ time because not a lot of people know them or know their history.

### Significance

The significance of this thesis is to share ethnography of my family, a family from different cultures (specifically American Indian tribes) becoming one nuclear family, by using life histories of members that brought different heritages and backgrounds to the family. With the increase of multiethnic and multicultural families, understanding the complexity of unique family histories becomes key in respecting a family’s history and identity. The various methods used in this discussion allow for a more complete look into the family’s story by providing multiple angles to discover history and identity. For example, the Cultural Inventory helps illustrate a family’s history and other important aspects of their lives by sharing objects and spaces that have meaning to them. The

Inventory allows us to learn and view the family's identity through the material side of how they live.

Fernández-Kelly, in her research on Hispanic women, writes that although there are numerous studies comparing whites and minorities, there are few studies exploring experiences within ethnic groups (1990). For instance, in her piece, her specific focus was Hispanic women working in the field of apparel manufacturing. She categorized the label of minority, first to Hispanic, then to gender (females), and narrowed down the field even further to a specific economic class (educated and employed). The discussion that follows is similar to Fernandez-Kelly, in that there is a breakdown of the generic labels, American Indian and an interethnic family, by centering on a family identity.

The approach used in this paper, is a cultural resource tool that can serve as a framework for others to use when they research their own cultural identity through family. With all research projects, the conclusions are difficult to predict, but important influences from within and outside the family reveal themselves in such an effort to gather multiple kinds of data. Barbara Myerhoff, a second generation American from the Jewish faith, wanted to research a different ethnic group from her own background (1978). She quickly found it difficult to find participants and many asked why she was not researching her own people so she did just that. Myerhoff summarized it best when she said working within one's own familial heritage and ethnicity is risky, but this research, "has a certain validity and value not available in other circumstances" (1978).

As families' combining their ethnicities and cultures becomes increasingly common, the importance of researching where we come from also grows. If families are

able to appreciate different ethnicities or different backgrounds, maybe we as a whole can find peace with each other. My research intends to serve as a framework to show the methods and tools I used to research my family identity. My goal is for others to learn from my experience, find helpful tools, and customize those tools to benefit their own research.

The significance to the academic community is to help provide an example to replace “generic labels” such as “Indian” by providing an analysis of cultural identity for someone who personally/socially identifies as an American Indian but shows there is much complexity in a generic label. In addition, my lineage of my four tribes is unique because of the geographical differences among the tribes. My intentions were to contribute to the literature by adding my history and ethnography for others to read in order to illustrate the complexity of these relationships and the inutility of generic labels. This specific label of “American Indian” is used to refer to over 500 different and distinct tribes creating a term that simplifies and disparages a large group of vastly different people as a singular group.

As part of my research my parents shared their memories from their lives. They have both witnessed and lived through significant times within their tribal histories. My mother went to boarding schools operated by the Bureau of Indian Affairs (BIA) and the Catholic Indian Mission School. She also remembers the aftermath of the inundation of the Fort Berthold Reservation after the Army Corps of Engineers built the Garrison Dam. 90% of the population on the reservation had to relocate from their homes along the riverbed up into the higher grounds. The Corps moved her family from a community

called Lucky Mound and the impacts from the removal greatly affected the tribe as well as my family by dispersing the communities and dividing the reservation with the newly formed lake.

My father grew up speaking Cherokee as his first language in a Cherokee rural community. He has experienced firsthand the shift of the Cherokee language from decline to revitalization. His perspectives and history on the language are invaluable and along with my mother's history give an insider's perspective that adds significant information for the academic community.

The following chapter, Chapter II, describes several methods selected for this project. Chapter III discusses growing up in our home, from a discussion on land, to the home itself, to various memories from certain times in our lives. The next chapter, Chapter IV, is an in-depth inventory of one of the main rooms in the home: the living room. The inventory will list a brief history on each of the pieces, art, and furniture found in the living room to discover themes and values which are important to my family. These themes are discussed in subsequent chapters, V- VIII, with each chapter focusing on the intertwining of core values which have helped my family successfully maintain their identity. The final chapter, Chapter IX, is the conclusion to the study.

My mother and father are from very different backgrounds but share a number of similarities. The history of my family is becoming increasingly common as families blend cultural backgrounds. My intentions are for others to understand from an insider's perspective how culture, education, and diversity shape the lives of a multiethnic family.

Our identities are constantly changing and evolving and by learning about our past, we can continue to maintain our identities for tomorrow.



## CHAPTER II

### METHODS

Have you ever walked into a new friend's home and immediately seen an item, whether it be a piece of art or furniture, and wondered where, or even why, that item is in their home? Was it a family heirloom? Where did they find the piece? Was the piece a gift? What about entering a home that creates such a comfortable environment that you feel it could become your second home but never thought to ask about the small painting hanging up in the corner of the room? Maybe you've seen the painting so often that you can picture the colors, the content, the artist's signature? Then again, maybe as you try to recall the image, but because you have seen the painting so often you no longer look at it when you enter the house so recalling it is difficult.

Such items have meaning in one way or another. Their presence in the house has an emotional, historical, or even a comical connection to the residents of the home. What are the stories behind them? What do they tell us about their owners or caretakers? Why did they choose these particular pieces for their living room and not the hallway? What other things can we learn about spaces in the home? These are questions I present to my parents' home and in particular their living room in part as a way to see with fresh eyes an altogether familiar environment. Including the history of the home to explain values and themes creates a way to organize and orientate aspects of the story of family. Over the years this living room has had several superficial changes. Furniture moved around, replacing items as necessary to accommodate the needs of those living in the house at the time, and adding or removing certain pieces of artwork. An important method has been to understand my home and family through ethnography.

Ethnography is an important element of fieldwork in anthropology that helps us understand how other people and cultures view the world, both through their senses and perspectives (Spradley, 1979). To understand another culture or in this case, family, a person must be willing to learn and immerse him or herself within the family they are studying, discovering their terms and language by using interviews, and observing their everyday life moments or special occasions. These are also important steps in understanding their identities. Within these immersion experiences, the objects in a family's home have the potential to offer valuable insight into their values and their way of life. What they display and the stories and emotions connected to them provide a look into their history and their lives. Together, all of these areas create a way for us to research and understand their identity.

I used six methods in my research: informal interviews, interviews regarding specific photographs, a review and comment period, family charts, an assessment of my parent's home, and a cultural inventory/discussion. All of these methods are interspersed throughout the chapters while working together to create a full picture of the story of my family with chapters titled and based on themes. The first method was informal interviews. I interviewed my parents on various topics: childhood, family life, education, religion, and culture. The purpose of these interviews was to provide the background of family history and to understand their perspectives on these topics.

During the interviews, we looked through photographs of my family and photos of milestones or special occasions, such as graduations or holidays that resulted in other areas of discussions. My purpose for utilizing the photos as part of my interview was to

create an understanding of their history and determine emotions behind the images to create an accurate sense of these milestones. When Collier (Collier & Collier, 1986) interviewed two of his subjects, the Plenns, he expected a certain emotional response when the couple went through the pictures of the city where they worked. Instead, the couple was devoid of emotion because the couple had no desire to connect with the area they worked in on a daily basis. Before going into the interviews, I expected certain responses, stories, and emotions from my parents. Making assumptions and reading into photos are easy to do, but these assumptions may be wrong. Having the people involved sharing the stories behind the photos allows us to understand the story and the emotions behind the picture. This emotional knowledge and subsequent understanding of the photo would not be possible without the insiders' information.

Throughout the interviews, I reflected on how my preconceived thoughts and perspectives might change. Different experiences shape our different perspectives. These differences happen because of memories, history, and stories we have experienced. Even though they are my parents, we each have a different perspective. My siblings' perspectives are also unique and different from each other. This is why the interviews with my parents are important to this project. Hearing their stories and their perspectives allows us to discover through their words their views, identity, and intentions. For instance, my idea and definition of a ranch is very different from my mother's and equally different from my father's.

I remember my mother telling us about the "ranch" she grew up on and mentioned in her stories of her childhood. As a child and teenager, I had a preconceived image of

what a ranch looked like in my head. I knew my mother had gone to boarding school and her father was an alcoholic, so I knew her childhood was not perfect. But based on knowledge gathered from books I read, movies I saw, and even what we learned in school, I associated a ranch with a high-end version of a farm. In my mind, ranches were a picturesque setting with a little red barn, a windmill, and a perfect white two-story farmhouse out in the countryside. Based on my perceptions, that is what I envisioned for her “ranch” in North Dakota.

It turns out I was somewhat correct; the house was a white two-story farmhouse in a beautiful scenic area located in a small valley near the Missouri River. The ranch had over two hundred head of cattle, pigs, horses, and chickens. It was not until around my junior year in high school that I learned the ranch was located on a tribal reservation. It never occurred to me that my mother’s ranch could be located on a reservation because of my definition of ranch. Suddenly, a new understanding of my mother’s history revealed itself to me.

My preconceived, idyllic, picturesque ranch vision suddenly became a harsh, sad place that raised more questions based within my knowledge of what a reservation was at that time. My knowledge was gathered mostly from hearing news stories about poverty and alcoholism. I can remember feeling sad that my mother grew up with these things. I knew my mother was born on and “from” the reservation but the fact that the ranch existed *on* the reservation was not part of in my perception. I had grown up believing that there was a distinction between the ranch and the reservation because I saw the ranch as a happy place and the reservation as a sad place. This new understanding of her

history helped me to connect more with my mother's family, and the larger picture of her past became clearer for me.

Going into the interviews, I questioned how my preconceived thoughts and possible expectations might change when I interviewed my parents and discoveries occurred. How would viewing and discussing photos with my parents change my perspectives and my preconceived ideas? Being a visual learner, my intention of using photos in the interviews helped reinforce the history in my mind. As I listened to my family describe stories behind the pictures, I was able to visualize the images in motion as they shared the stories behind each of the photos. The photos also encouraged them to remember and share new stories from their past that I had not heard before, thus enriching the overall information they shared.

Another example of the importance of using photography, Hirsch (1997) discusses the many kinds of information one can obtain from a single photo. A photo cannot only tell a story, but it can invoke other memories and powerful emotions of sadness, grief, and happiness. A photo also has the ability to show a person who is no longer with us during a moment in their life experiencing that moment. Hirsch shares a story about her husband. In 1945, a photo of his aunt arrived with a letter. The photos proved she was survivor of the Riga Ghetto and of a concentration camp. Although the letter detailed her survival it also brought news of the loss of the rest of the family. The photo and letter proved equally important. The photo was the physical representation of the letter and the news of the loss. Hirsch described the photo as a moment "floating

between life and death” (18). In our family photos, what reflections of histories are present? What emotions or stories did the pictures evoke in my parents?

Fortunately, I have a good rapport with my family, in particular, with my parents. They were willing to share both the good and the bad because this was not merely a project for my education, but a document for my family. Of course, there were challenges because I am familiar with some of our history. Throughout the interviews, I continually filtered my questions and responses in order to not influence, or in my father’s word, “contaminate” his perspective. For instance, when he spoke about curriculum in school, I held back on my views of white privilege, instead making a note to discuss that issue within my paper, not during the initial interview.

Another concern I had during my interviews was about accuracy and thoroughness. Did I overlook certain areas and not include them because I did not see their importance on first glance? Did I forget the readers were not as familiar with my family background, which might have caused me to leave out important details? I overcame this by having multiple readers for this paper in order to determine if all the necessary information was included. This became the third method. To make sure I included important details or all the necessary information to the history, my parents reviewed my chapters to check the accuracy of the stories. Their review and comments helped to fact check and add missing information if needed.

In order to understand my family’s lineage, I include family lineage charts and a discussion of the history of our family throughout the chapters. This became my fourth method. My intention for the chart is to show the integration of different ethnicities. As

I began writing my parent's history, I quickly realized I would need to add an additional chart to illustrate the relationship of an American Indian perspective. As I said before parents have multiple grandparents because in their culture, they view their relations differently from Anglo-Americans. When I interviewed my mother, she often spoke of her different grandmothers. Including a chart with all the grandparents was necessary in order to refer back to see their lineage and history.

My fifth method was an assessment of the home my parents currently live in. This is an important piece for the thesis because it helped set the stage for the cultural inventory (the sixth method), and the establishment of the importance of the home to our family history and culture. Forrest (1988) discussed the aesthetic form of a house in his research of a place he calls Tidewater, North Carolina. His focus is the architectural style of the buildings, the history of one house in particular, and the organization and uses of space over time as well as changes the owners saw fit to make. This was an important element to my paper because, as Forrest illustrated, homes share a connection with the occupants' history and lives, meaning the house too must often go through changes that parallel the family's lives. The objects also have culturally important roles, meanings, and placement too. At one point, Forrest discusses the importance and history of pieced quilts from the colors to the names of quilt patterns down to the placement of the quilts (76). To a visitor, these quilts might appear to have been haphazardly created, but to those who know the history and who make the quilts, the intricate use of design and colors creates a piece of art. These quilts are often times passed down from one generation to the next, which in itself creates connections from the past to the present.

Du Boulay (1994) discussed the cultural connections a home can have with the occupant's culture. Her writings illustrate a moment in time where the culture intertwined with everyday life. She describes the deep connection between the physical structure of the house and the family. The home is the literal foundation on which a family grows and the traditions and values become deeply rooted within the house as well as the family (1994). I believe this to be true in my parent's home.

I include diagrams of the home in relation to different places to create a sense of the location. The history of the home illustrates changes my parents have made along with the cultural influences they have included in the life of the home. Our family also has a number of cultural connections to the house itself. For example, after we lost our baby teeth, the tooth fairy would always come and leave us a dollar. Years later, I discovered like most children, the tooth fairy was actually our parents. Years after that, I remember my father mentioning he would take the tooth we lost and throw it on the roof. He mentioned this was what he was told to do by his parents so that no one will step on the tooth and the new tooth will grow straight and strong. This illustrates how the Euro-American ritual of the tooth fairy and a Cherokee ritual and belief blended to exist and continue in our home.

The sixth and final method for my thesis was a cultural inventory of my parent's home. Collier (Collier & Collier, 1986) found that objects in a home and their placement within the space could describe a number of different definitions of how the people in the home view their space and illustrate important beliefs or areas in their lives. This type of inventory can "describe acculturation and track cultural continuity and change" (p. 45).



The primary focus of the inventory for my parent's home is the space that visitors see the most, which is where my family spends time together: the living room and the kitchen. Included in the Cultural Inventory section are photos to help illustrate the spaces. I wanted to discover how their home might reflect their personal and cultural values and beliefs. How do they use, perceive, and decorate the space? This space is where my siblings and I grew up. The purpose of the inventory is not to create a simple list but to use this inventory as a tool to illustrate how a space can teach others about those who live in the home. Why did my parents choose the pieces in the home and what might we learn from their responses?

Bourdieu's (1977) in-depth chapter on the Kabyle House in Algeria illustrates the magnitude of how culture permeates in a home. He describes in detail the space, objects in an Algerian home, even the positioning of items. The purpose, placement, and meaning of the home and the contents express the culture by their existence and his description helps to understand the culture and the people. In the home he describes, there is a loom. If a stranger were to visit, they might only see the loom and process it as only that, a loom. But not only is the loom a source of a cultural practice, weaving within their culture is viewed as a central symbol of protection (136).

Bourdieu (1977) went on to discuss the relationship of the loom in terms of a young Algerian bride. Before her marriage, she sits behind the loom. The shadow cast by the loom signifies protection, similar to the protection of brothers or her own father. Behind the loom an umbilical cord of a baby girl is buried to protect the virginity of the maiden. On her wedding day she sits in front of the loom, in daylight for all to see. After

her marriage she will sit there and weave as now a productive and reproductive member of the household (137). By understanding and researching a home, the opportunity exists to discover a culture through what we perceive as an ordinary, everyday object.

Myerhoff (1978) provides another example of the intangible significance of an everyday object as she researched the community at the Aliyah Senior Citizen's Center in California. Her scope of research stretched onto the pier near the Center. Her discussion of the benches on the pier gives insight into the social aspect of the seniors' culture. Most often males sat with males discussing politics, economics, religion, while the women sit together and discuss life, family, or personal issues. She remarks, "On the benches, reputations are made and broken, controversies explored, leaders selected, factions formed and dissolved" (p. 5). She then compares the area to a town plaza where strong social connections occur. One unfamiliar to the area could easily walk by and never understand the micro-society that is being formed on those benches.

The bench and the loom examples illustrate how an inventory provides insight into culture. What appears to be an everyday object, transforms into a symbol or an important component for understanding the culture. Objects are embedded within different contexts of a culture. By researching an area familiar to the subject, (kitchen, living room) he or she exposes the meanings of these items through their interview, participant observation, or inquiry about their location and positioning in a common setting. The process of creating a cultural inventory allows these moments of sharing knowledge to occur.

Part of the inventory answers the following questions: Why did my parents choose these objects? What do the objects mean to my parents? Do these pieces evoke emotion? How do these objects communicate to others? Stallybrass (1999) discussed how clothes keep the shape of those who wear them, even the scent of the person can reside in their clothes. The memories within each piece of clothing, where it was acquired, stories behind a stain or a missing button, all become a part of the history of an item. Stallybrass shared an example centering on a wife who lost her husband. The wife kept some of his clothes after he passed away to give to her sons. Years later, the daughters began playing in the shirts. One of the brothers told them to stop, that he wanted the shirts and they were too small to wear them. The sisters would only ruin them before he got a chance. This caused an argument at the table where a number of emotions surfaced similar to anger and desperation. The son finally took one of the shirts and the next time the mother saw the shirt on him, she noticed the “fatal pink of red dye” (p. 34) that ruined the shirt. Her son noticed her look and as he smiled, he reminded her of a time when he had done this before when he was younger to his underwear (Stallybrass, 1999).

This story shares the emotions of how an ordinary object such as a shirt, has the potential to cause anger, despair, and as the mother thought, sadness because the piece was ruined due to the dye. In reality, the shirt brought on another memory for her son, a happier one associated to his own past laundry mistakes. The fact that he still wore the shirt after his dye incident speaks to the sentiments people have towards inanimate things. These items have become steeped in memories and feelings.

Another example shared by Stallybrass (1999) involved a quilt. A sister sewed a quilt, composed of pieces of furniture fabric from their mother, her first dress she made, and parts of other blankets and fabrics, then gave the quilt as a gift to her sister when she married. The quilt itself created a blanket of memories but given as a wedding gift, added another dimension of memories. Years later, this quilt covered her sister as she lay dying, collecting a stain of her medication as she coughed the medicine back up. The history of the quilt contains many different layers of history for the family. The emotions connected to each of the memories are also present (1999).

While compiling the inventory, I soon realized that many of the pieces had a story behind them. Before this project, I knew some of the surface information about the pieces, but with many of the objects, I had not heard the stories behind the pieces. What item or objects might be the proverbial “loom” or “bench” in our home?

I understood that although my parents promised to be as open as possible, their verbal answers were not the only way I could find their response. Growing up, I have had a chance to hear their opinion on a number of issues and have learned that the tone of voice as well as body language can also help convey their opinions and feelings. For instance, when my father jokes about my mother’s tribe, my mother will sometimes say, “*Now, Harry?*” with a questioning tone and a look with the mutual understanding that she is amused but also that she too could respond with an equally witty response about his tribe. This example illustrates that even though a family might identify themselves as one ethnicity, in this case American Indian, many times there are subgroups within that label with whom they also identify, such as different tribes.

Each of these methods offered an opportunity to gain insight into the identity of the family. Each method was not a separate entity. The methods were often used together; for example, the photos and family trees were used throughout the interviews. The following chapters illustrate how each method worked together to create a cohesive understanding of my family's identity

## CHAPTER III

### GROWING UP IN OUR HOME

The house where our parents raised us has grown and evolved with our family. As my parents had more children, they needed to add more rooms and safety concerns needed to be addressed throughout the years. Specifically, these main concerns addressed allergy issues, safety for my grandmother who moved in a few years ago, and overall wear and tear to the home. Family dynamic and family members or occupants change through life cycles and the needs of the family evolve with those changes.

The house is the first and only house my parents have ever bought. They purchased the home in 1982. The advantages of owning a home outweighed renting. From a financial standpoint, buying instead of renting made sense. The freedom of owning their own home allowed them to make changes to adjust to their needs and wants and they could even grow a garden. They viewed owning a home as a tax advantage too.

When selecting a home, my parents knew they were eligible to buy a house through their tribal housing program but decided against it. Growing up, we referred to these houses as Indian homes because the tribe built these homes for tribal members. The waiting list was long at that time so they decided to apply for a conventional home loan. My parents had also seen the homes and they felt the quality of the building materials was not good. These homes tended to have many problems and they wanted a home that would last.

Land is also an issue when building these types of homes and selecting the location can be difficult. For example, a family member may give a relative an acre to build a home. That family member owns the acre but has no control over who gets land surrounding their acre. They may want additional land in the future, but if another member of the family inherits the surrounding land, they may not want to part with it and a division within the family could occur. Sadly, there are times when these land issues have broken up families. My parents have seen this happen within our own family. Those involved get so upset, they never speak to each other again. My parents did not want to be in a position where this could happen. The selection of where they wanted their home to be was not a light decision.

### Land

When speaking with my mother, one of the major issues that came up in her history was the impact land had on our family, religion, and major periods in our tribes' history. The US government and tribal histories dealing with land (removals and land assignments/allotments) affected both of my parents' families. I found this to be fascinating due to the ripple effect of these events caused. The Mandan, Hidatsa, and Arikara settled along the Missouri River in present day North Dakota because of the climate. The winters were not as brutal in the river valley and the soil was fertile which allowed the crops to be abundant. This allowed for tightly knit communities throughout the valley.

After the completion of the Garrison Dam, the government relocated the towns to higher ground. When the government relocated the towns, it separated those close knit communities by placing families on land dispersed throughout higher ground, not located within towns. Families became very rural in contrast to their previous locations. Compared to the river valley, the winter winds and weather were harsh above the river valley on the open plains. My mother and her siblings had difficulty making it to school because they were so far away (over ten miles) especially during the winter snow. Add in the fact there were no major roads in the area and the best solution for them ended up being boarding school. Before the dam forced people to relocate, my mother and her siblings most likely would have attended the BIA school in Elbowoods, which would have allowed them to live at home with their parents.

In a similar manner, land issues in my father's geographical history correspond to my mother's in terms of the larger impact to his tribe and the ripple effect for his family. My father told me that the Cherokees in some ways were fortunate in that during their removal from their Eastern United States, they moved to a geographical area very similar to the one they left. However, it did not change the fact that they were forced from their homelands.

Another connection to the land was revealed through the interview with my grandmother and her reasons for not divorcing my grandfather. My mother had always thought my grandmother never got divorced because she is a devout catholic. The main reason my grandmother did not sign the divorce papers turned out to be the land. She



knew she put just as much work into the land as my grandfather and she did not want to lose the land for her children.

Henry David Thoreau's book, *Maine Woods*, discusses his journey in Maine based on his insights into the Penobscot tribe's perspectives on the landscape. Thoreau's interest was in how the Penobscot viewed the area through their eyes and their language, not the perspectives of missionaries and not through scientific words. This allowed him to see the landscape in a completely new way (Dahler, 2014). Through interviews, photos, and the history of the home, I see the connection to the landscape my ancestors and my family have in a new light. Our tribal history formed largely because of our relationship within the physical landscape around us. Living within their environment, our ancestors were forcibly removed, and learned to adapt and continue life within new landscapes.

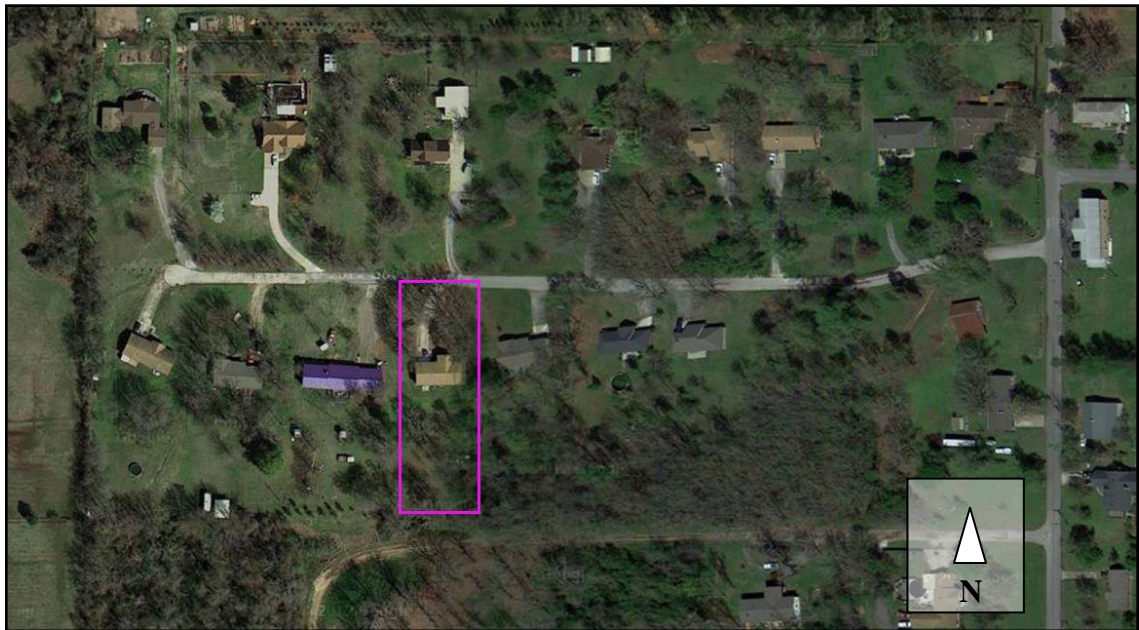
Land was an important component in the selection of my parent's home. By researching the history of the home, it became clear that on a much smaller scale, our home became our landscape. My parents learned to adapt to changes in their family and altered their landscape to fit their needs of a growing family. Our memories of backyard games, gardens, and wildlife have all become part of our history, and I will continue sharing those ways of life with my own children.

### Home

My parents have lived in their present home for over thirty years. Their home is set on a lot on the edge of Tahlequah city limits allowing for short drive times to their

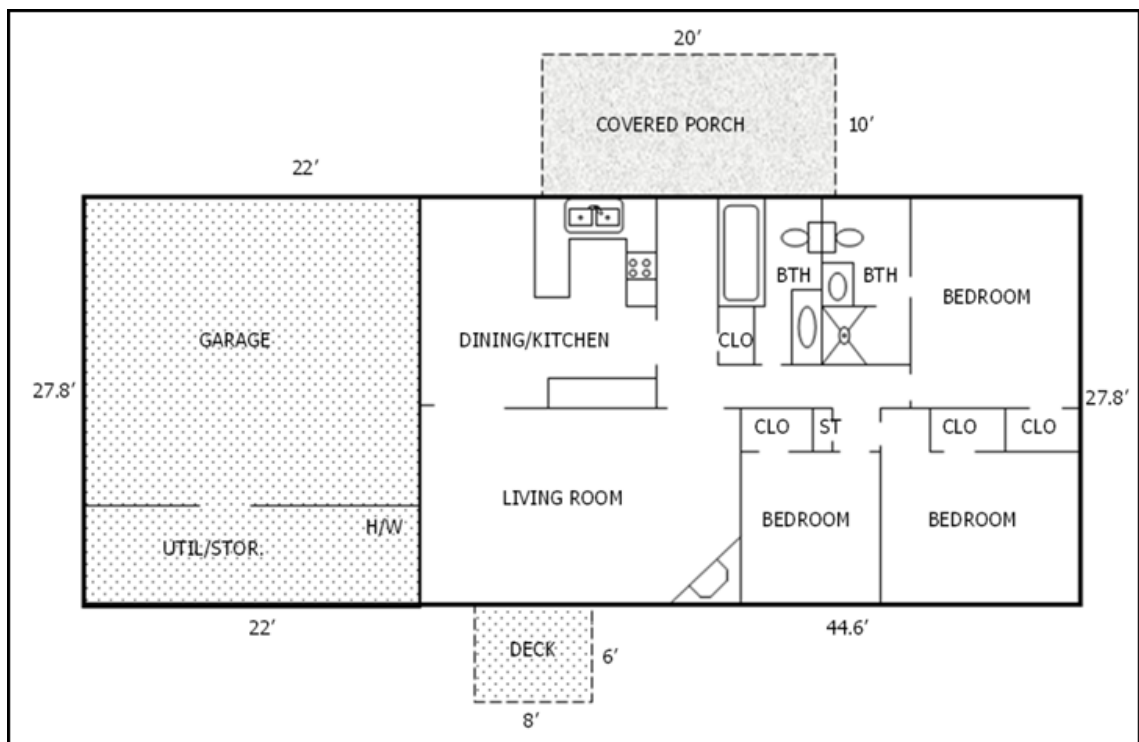
jobs and to town. The two acres of land that surround the home were included in the purchase of the house. The yard has numerous trees in the front and back. When they first saw the home, the house was under construction in a new neighborhood with only a few other houses on a dead end street.

Since the home they chose was on a dead end street, they thought the street was safer, quieter, and overall a nice neighborhood to raise a family with less traffic. Safety played a large role in selecting the area. The area's crime rates were low to nonexistent, and the general area was safe from natural disasters of fire and the potential of devastating floods. The pink box in Figure 13 shows the home and lot today.

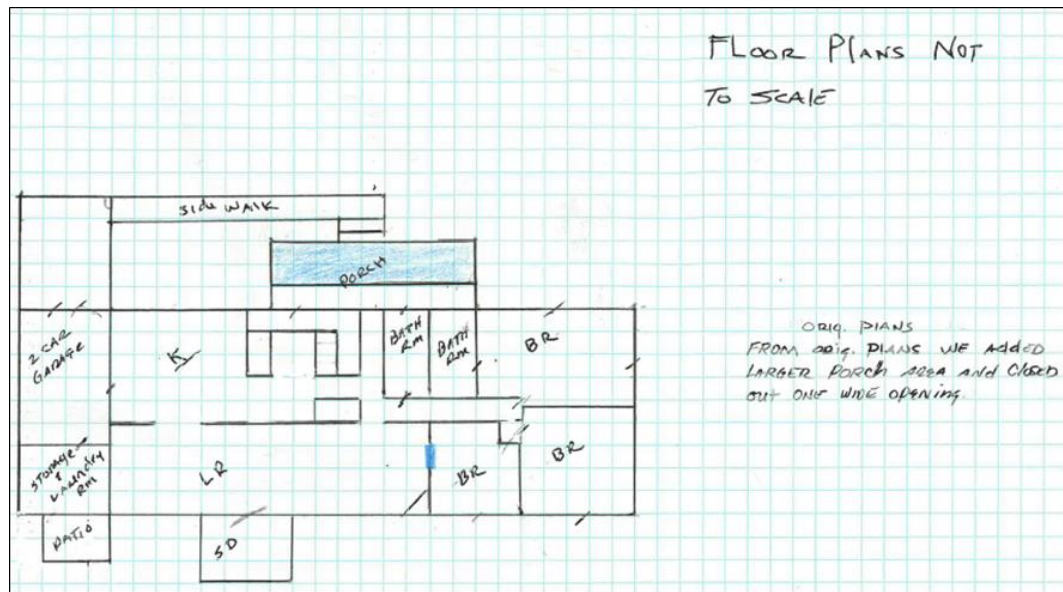


**Figure 13. Aerial view of my parent's home and neighborhood (Google maps 2014).**

While the house was still in the process of construction, my parents were able to make a few changes. The first significant change allowed my parents to enclose an area off the living room to create an additional bedroom bringing the total bedrooms to three. The other significant change was to increase the size of the front porch to create an outdoor space where the family could sit. Figure 14 is the Cherokee County assessor floor plan, showing the original configuration. My father also drew an illustration to show the changes from his perspective (see Figure 15). The covered porch is the front of the house and faces north.



**Figure 14. The assessor's original floor plan.**



**Figure 15. Blue represents the changes my parents made to the original plan.**

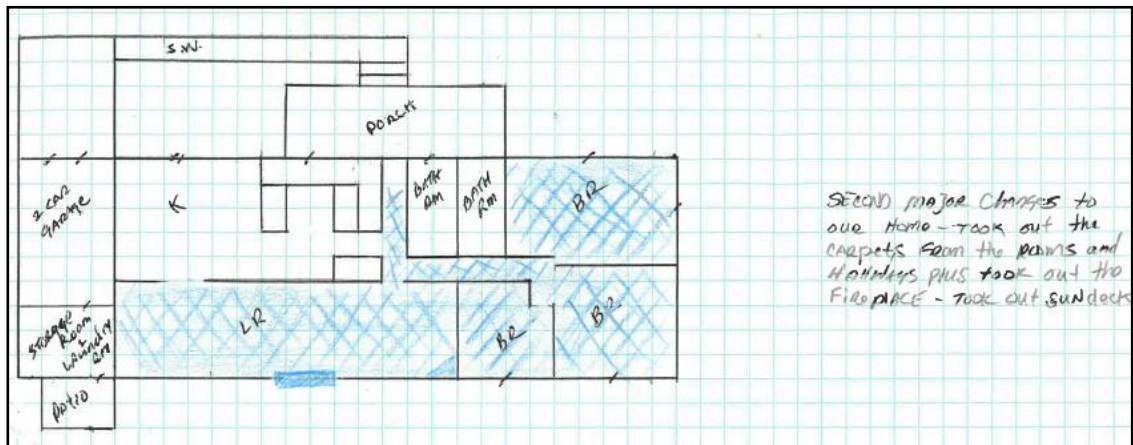
One thing my father mentioned, the entire time they have lived on that street, no one has built a fence. The neighborhood itself is a safe community. Our yard turned out to be where you could find the neighborhood kids playing sports, cards, or just hanging out on the front porch. The Fourth of July was like a big fireworks show and often times included a block party with all neighbors gathering at a central home. Our family got along with all the other neighbors. We would play hide-and-seek and capture the flag in the woods behind our house. No matter what time of year, we were always outside having fun. My father also associates the house with connection to the community. By living in the same home, our family grew roots and ties to the surrounding community

A few years after all the children were born and their youngest child, my brother, was around six, the house was remodeled to fit the needs of our family (see Figure 16). The changes to the home addressed safety concerns of our family. My brother has severe

allergies, so my parents took out all the carpet, which had been in all of the rooms except the bathroom and the kitchen, and replaced the carpet with laminate that looks like wood. They removed the back sundeck and replaced the sliding glass deck doors in the living room, with large windows.

When my parents first moved in, they loved the idea of a fireplace but as the years went by, the fireplace itself became more of a nuisance. The ashes were messy and difficult to clean, while finding wood to burn became a job. My mother worried about possible fire issues so although the fires were warm, they began to use the fireplace less and less until they stopped all together. Instead of using the actual fireplace, my mother chose to focus on the space around it. She enjoyed decorating the mantle and the hearth with seasonal and non-seasonal decorations. Besides the seasonal decorations, the mantle became a permanent spot for some of the artwork my parents had acquired through the years, for instance, pottery from my father's friend, Mike Daniels.

Above the mantle and decorations, my father had his blowgun. Traditionally, Cherokees used a blowgun made out of a hollowed out piece of rivercane to hunt small game by shooting shoot darts out of the blowgun. These darts never had poison on them because the Cherokees believed the poison would ruin the meat. These days, my father uses his blowgun to shoot recreationally in shooting contests. These contests turn out to be more like a family reunion, since the majority of those participating consist mostly of his siblings and first cousins. During the process of replacing the flooring, the contractor noticed the foundation did not have the proper reinforcement for the heavy brick fireplace. My parents decided the time was right to remove it.



**Figure 16. Second major renovations to the home.**

On the deck, my parents recalled cooking delicious summer meals and roasting marshmallows on the grill. However, the Oklahoma sun and rain soon weathered the deck, creating the problem of wood splinters for the family. During the winter months, condensation would build up between the glasses on the door and window, making the window look foggy. Once the latch broke on the door, my parents viewed the door as a security issue, causing them to use a broomstick handle at the bottom of the doorframe to “lock” the door.

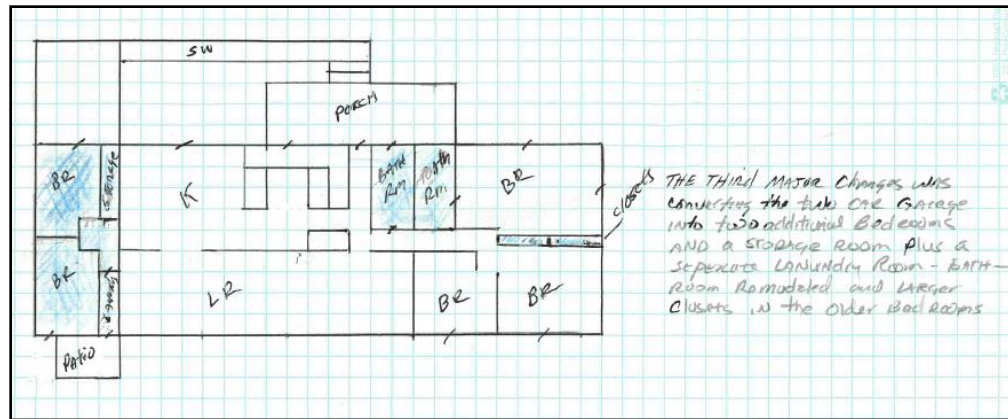
My parents felt that with the demolition of the fireplace, it was also the right time to demolish the deck and replace the sliding glass door with large windows. My father enjoyed drinking coffee on the deck during fall and early spring when the weather was cool, and since they had the large front porch, he would utilize that space instead.

The decision to remove the fireplace, deck, and sliding glass door were not difficult. In the end, although they had fond memories of each piece, it came down to safety for the family.

When my parents moved into the home, I was not yet born so Donita and Sedelta each had their own room. When I was old enough to sleep in a bed, I shared a room with Sedelta until Adam was born. Since Donita was the oldest, she got her own bedroom. When Adam was old enough to sleep in a bed, he got his own room, and Sedelta and Donita shared a room. They moved me out into the living room. At this point, my parents began the process of the third renovation to accommodate family growth and their children needing their own space. With two teenage daughters, they were each getting old enough to have their own rooms.

My parents spoke with a neighbor who happened to own his own construction company. My father's initial idea was to build rooms above the garage but additional floor supports added to the cost. Instead they converted the attached two-car garage and laundry room into two bedrooms with closets, a storage room, a laundry room and an additional closet. Not only was comfort a factor in this remodel but the goal was to increase usability for frequent activities in the house. They also remodeled the kitchen, the two bathrooms and two of the older bedroom closets (see Figure 17).

Over the years the floor around the shower in the master bathroom had deteriorated and since the area needed a new floor, the contractor suggested a larger shower. My parents agreed and decided to move the sink and toilet around to maximize the space. As far as the middle bathroom, the floor again needed replacing due to water



**Figure 17. Illustration by my father showing the changes of the third major renovations.**

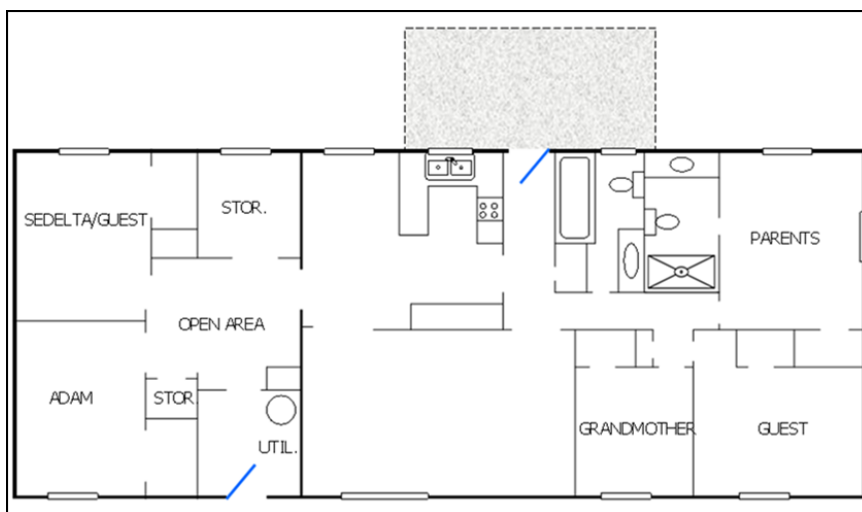
damage and my parents added a larger vanity to accommodate the family need for bathroom storage and counter space. During this remodel, our parents included us in some of the decisions and the designs, specifically paint colors and fixtures. My sisters chose the type of floor materials and paint colors in their new rooms.

The kitchen floor needed to be replaced during this renovation too. After an especially heavy and extensive rain the floor in the kitchen rotted in spots. My parents soon discovered the reason for all the water damage to the floor. The original builders had used particleboard. Run-off from the water would back up in front of the kitchen window between the porch and the paved area in front of the garage. My parents had to redo the dining area floor completely, and my mom decided to redo the counter layout, replace all the cabinetry, and add new appliances to cook meals more easily. Nearly every part of the house has been remodeled or replaced, but it is still the same house on the same land in the same community.



Today, my brother lives there with my parents and my grandmother. Since my grandmother moved in a few years ago, my family has made some accommodations and changes in the home to help her. Eric, my husband, installed wooden handrails down the hallway, an additional hallway light right outside her bedroom that constantly stays on, a taller toilet in the middle bathroom and a handrail in the bathroom. He also added a textured coating on the front porch to protect people from slipping.

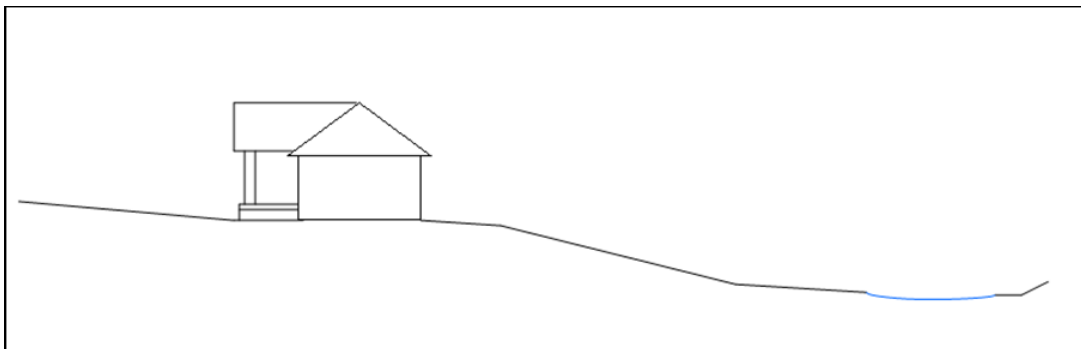
Currently, Sedelta is the Associate Director for the White House Initiative on American Indian and Alaska Native Education. Her position involves lots of travel around the country. Although she has an apartment in DC, her home is in Tahlequah,. She still lays claim to her room and visits a few times a year. She keeps some of her clothes and belongings there, because she loves being able to escape the city life and return to her “home” whenever possible. Figure 18 is the present-day layout of my parent’s home.



**Figure 18. Layout of the home today.**

The yard itself was just as important in terms of memories. Both of my parents mentioned the difficulty of maintaining the yard, mostly cutting the grass in the summer and raking the leaves in the fall. (They only use a push mower when they cut the grass and consider this a form of exercise.) However, they both recalled happy memories of playing kick ball, horseshoes, stickball, and basketball with us. When it snowed, my parents would join us in the backyard where the top half slopes, to sled. Many of these activities resulted in laughter. To this day, my parents still play kickball when we are home and if it snows, they will join us on a sled for a ride down the hill.

After a heavy rainfall, a creek appeared in the lower back portion of the backyard and our parents would wade and swim in there with us. Sometimes the current would allow us to float through our yard and we would have races with them. The water was never over a foot high in most places so it was the perfect depth to play in (see Figure 19). In addition, my parents have always enjoyed watching the wildlife that shares the yard with us, such as deer, fox, and other animals.



**Figure 19. Side profile of yard (not to scale). Blue indicates creek.**

## Memories

My parent's connection to the home comes from their memories. The majority of the memories my parents recalled revolved around our family and neighbors, and the holidays, birthdays, and family events we had in the house. Our birthdays were always special occasions. Growing up, my dad's family all lived in the area so we invited them for our birthdays. We also had relatives from the north come down to visit my grandma on my mom's side. My mother even mentioned that weather events were also notable times for her. In 2009, before my grandmother moved in, there was a bad ice storm and my parents, Sedelta, and Adam were without power for two weeks. Everyone camped out in the living room and closed off all the other areas to keep the room warm. They played games by candlelight at night as they bundled up, sitting around the kitchen table. They turned a potentially difficult situation into a fun adventure.

The neighbors across the street became our friends quickly after they moved in to their home. There were two brothers, one Adam's age, the other, between Sedelta and I. Much of our free time, we all played a number of sports together, mostly in our yard because of our setup of our "ball field and bases" created years before they moved in. We had established bases using trees in our yard and we had two basketball hoops, one our parents bought, the other our next-door neighbors installed for us, even though their children did not play. Our front porch also became the place to play board and card games or the location for all six of us to hangout talking and laughing for hours.

My siblings all have these memoires. Donita mentioned the fact that our parents trusted us. While we were all together, we never tried drinking, smoking, anything liked

that. We were too busy being kids and playing our games. Although one of our parents was usually around, they left us alone. Our parents taught us to be respectful and truthful, so we knew better than to get into trouble. Moreover, they had the added benefit, that if one of us did try something or do something we were not supposed to do, they would eventually find out because I or one of my siblings would tell them.

When my father thinks of the house, he sees a home where he and his wife raised their family. The location of the house also allowed us to get to spend time with our grandparents on my father's side and my grandmother on my mother's side. My parents wanted us to grow up having a strong relationship with our grandparents, not just seeing them on holidays or vacation times. My father believes being around elders gives us values from their life journey and these values are an important element to our life journey.

As our family changed, other improvements were made. We would repaint the walls on the inside every few years to freshen up the rooms. Rooms would often be rearranged but there were always some items or activities that continued to be present no matter the amount of rearranging. The next chapter takes a closer look at one room in my parent's home: the living room.

## CHAPTER IV

### INVENTORY

Growing up within this home, I remember walking into the living room and seeing a number of these objects countless times. My parents may have told us some of this information in the past, but some of the history shared was new to me. The living room is the central area of the home. This is where my parents drink their coffee in the morning and read the newspaper.

Even the ordinary furniture, the couch, can offer details. There is a large dark burgundy leather couch in my parent's living room (see Figure 20). My parents chose that couch because they liked the color but they also liked the dual purpose of the foldout bed. My parents wanted us to have some place to sleep when we had company because my parents give guests the bedrooms. They want their guests to feel welcome and have their own space when staying over.

My parents each have a side on the couch they designate as their own with my father close to the window and my mother's side beside her desk/office corner of the room. They use the couch to fold their clean clothes. One of their favorite things to do is to cover the other with the warm clothes right out of the dryer. I often find my father covered in warm towels fresh out of the dryer when I am home, waiting for them to cool so he can fold them. There are throw blankets on the couch that my mother uses when she sits down to rest from her daily activities. She enjoys sitting under a blanket, while reading or watching the news, movies, or her shows, with one of their cats on her lap. Figure 21 and Table 2 provide additional details of the pieces

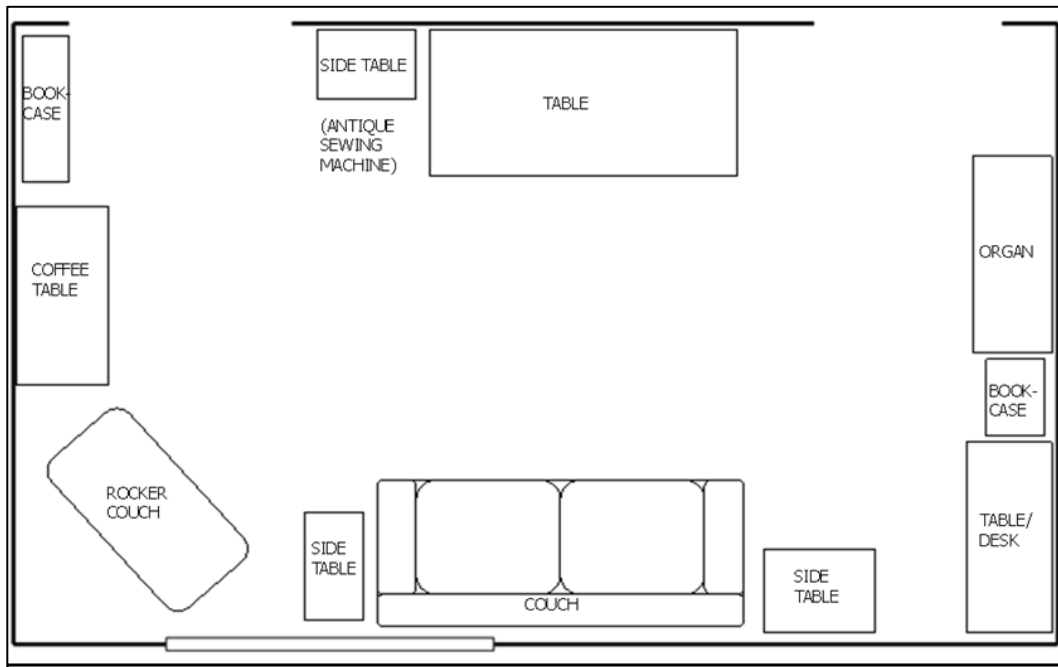


Figure 20. Above view of living room.

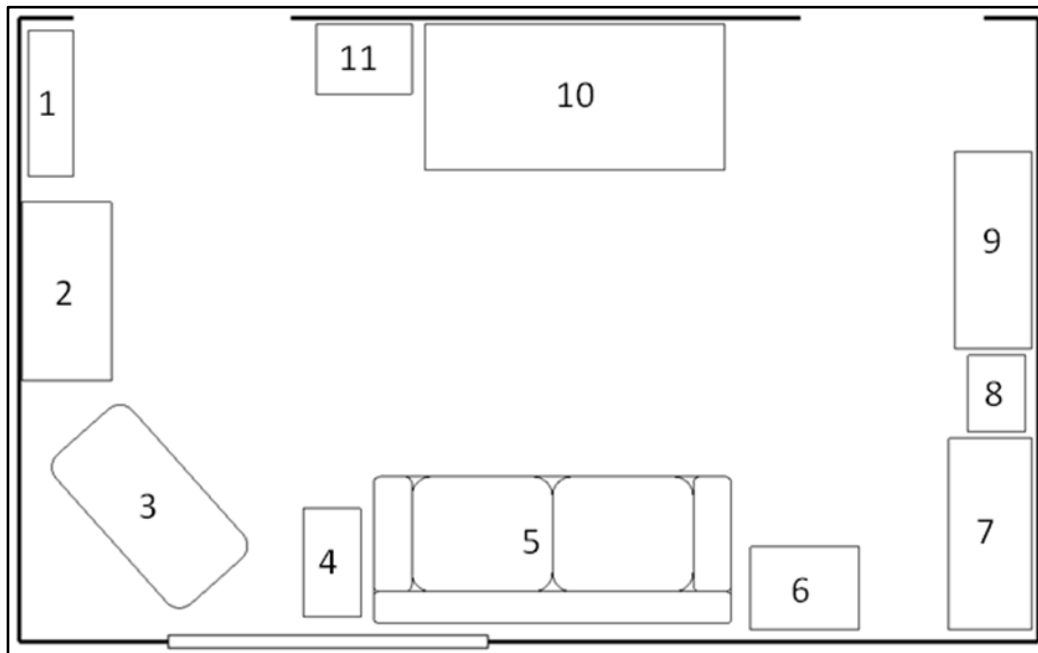


Figure 21. Layout of the furniture. Use Table 2 for descriptions of corresponding numbers.

**Table 2. Furniture in the Living Room**

#	Object /Description	History/Significance
1	Wooden bookcase created by a shop in downtown, Tahlequah, OK.	The bookcase contains books my parents have collected over the years. Many of the books are old textbooks, books on American Indians and others books of interest to our family.
2	Wooden long low table	My parents bought this at an estate sell.
3	Rocking chair loveseat	My parents bought this at an estate sell.
4	Wood side table/magazine holder	My mother's younger brother Russell built this table in woodworking class while attending Wahpeton Indian School.
5	Large burgundy leather couch	The previous couches were all fabric. My parents wanted a couch that also pulled out into a bed. They liked the color of the feel of this leather couch and thought it would be easier to clean
6	Small enamel table/desk with black trim	My mother likes the classic style of the enamel tables.
7	A white enamel table with red trim.	This table came from a friend of ours Elsie Jacobs who had some rental property in Tahlequah. This table serves as a workstation for my mother, complete with laptop, printer, and a lamp.
8	Tall narrow wooden bookcase	Gift from my sister, Donita.
9	Antique wooden organ	From the Catholic Church in Elbowoods, N.D. My great-grandmother's family helped buy the organ. The church moved to White Shield because of the flooding by the Garrison Dam. The birds and mice were taking over the building after the church was no longer used so my great-grandmother told my grandfather to take it home for my mother. She was the only one interested in music at the time. She used a very small covered moving trailer to move the organ from N.D. to O.K.
10	Old large two-seated wooden desk	Elsie Jacobs, friend of the family, gave this to my parents. They use the desk as a table for their TV.
11	Old Singer sewing machine	My mother's mother used to mend their clothes with the machine. After my grandmother moved in with my parents, she gave the machine to my mother. Now used as a side table where the DVR and DVD sets

My parents enjoy attending estate sales and finding unique items that they find intriguing, appealing, or aesthetically pleasing. A couple of the larger furniture pieces are from these sales. What I found interesting about the furniture was that two pieces are from North Dakota, the organ and the sewing machine. These pieces demonstrate the importance and connection to family history for my parents. The position and placement within the living room sets these two pieces in a prominent location. The organ itself has a unique journey from Elbowoods, a town that no longer exists, to a home in Oklahoma. It comes with a personal story and connection to our family. My great grandparents bought it, moved it, and then gave the organ to my mother, all because she was the only one interested in music at that time. Where would the organ be if she had not shown interest?

When guests visit, the majority of times, my parents offer them a seat in the living room. The space is the largest in the home, which allows for a number of people to sit in the area comfortably. The walls in the living room are a sage green. My mother chose green because it is a calming color for her.

The lighting in the space depends on the time of day the guest is present. If they arrive during the day, the window on the west side of the south wall is open illuminating the living room space. During the day, daylight is usually the only source of light, unless the weather is cloudy, because the window is so large and brightens the space. If guests arrive in the evening, the overhead and the two side lamps on each side of the couch are on with the curtains drawn creating a cozy environment.



If my parents are expecting guests, they clean the living room floor, throw away old newspapers, dust the furniture, and make sure the room is clean and organized. My mother organizes her corner, next to her side of the couch where her desk and workspace are located. They want the space to feel welcoming for their company.

The fragrant aroma from the kitchen greets the guests. My father makes some coffee and my mother makes iced tea if the weather is warm and if she knows the guests like her sweet tea. A number of times, if guests have never been to their home they make Indian tacos. These tacos consist of a circular piece of fried dough, creating fry bread, beans, meat, lettuce, tomatoes, cheese, onions, salsa, sour cream or a combination of these ingredients on top of the fry bread. My father makes the brown beans earlier in the day, allowing for a few hours to simmer. He also cooks the hamburger meat while my mother cuts up the vegetables and prepares the rest of the ingredients while she makes her fry bread. These tacos are famous among our friends and family. A friend of the family who actually sells fry bread mix in stores and museums around the country told my mother that her fry bread is very good.

### East Wall

The east wall is where the organ sits. On this side of the room, a number of diverse pieces decorate the area, ranging from religious symbols to native art pieces (see Figure 22 and 23, Table 3). On the far right of this wall, my mother has her office space where she sits and pays the bills, checks her email, and works on her genealogy. Many of the objects were given to my parents as gifts. The history of the lithograph is similar to the organ. The lithograph came from the church in Elbowoods.

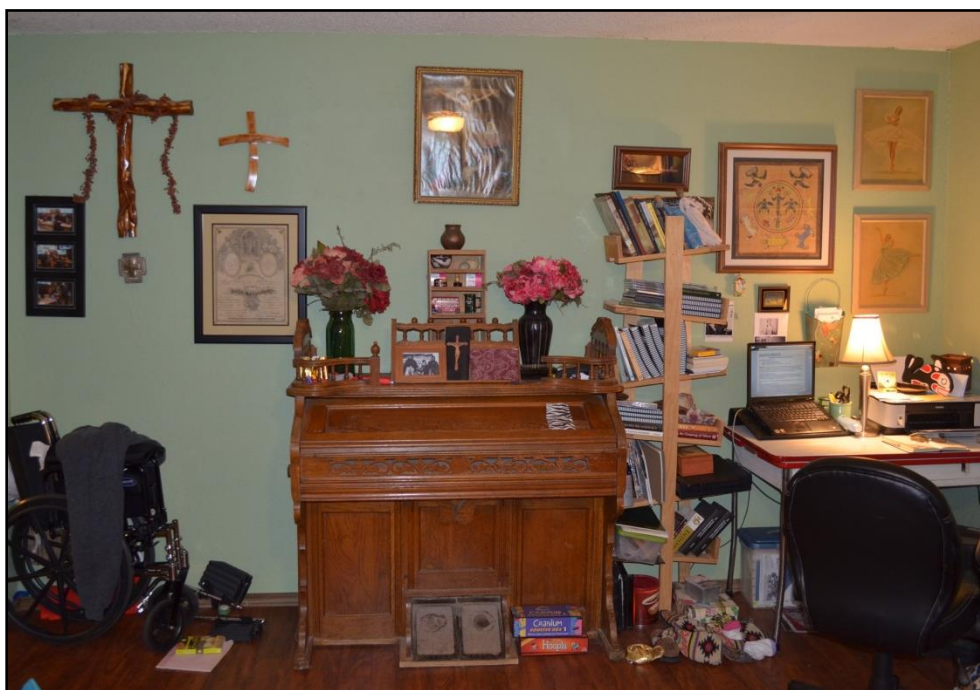


Figure 22. East wall in the living room.

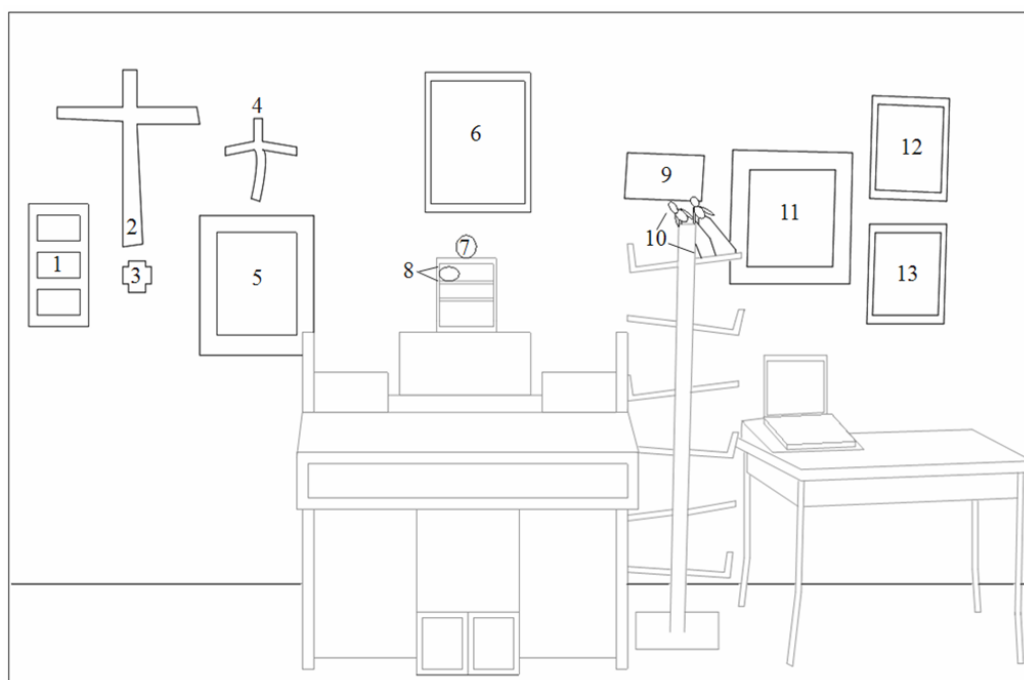


Figure 23. Diagram of east wall. Use Table 3 for additional information on items.

**Table 3. East Wall Items**

#	Object /Description	History/Significance
1	Small three picture set framed in black frame	Photos taken during Donita and Sedelta's trip to New York City in 2012. The pictures show them in FAO Schwartz creating a Muppet of our father for a Christmas gift and another Muppet that resembled them.
2	Large wooden cross	Made by my Uncle Stan (brother on Mother's side) from diamond willow wood. Used to be in my grandmother's bedroom until she moved in with my parents.
3	Small silver cross	Sedelta brought this cross at the Loretto Chapel, home of the Miraculous Staircase, located in Santa Fe, NM.
4	Small wooden cross	Made by my Uncle Stan (brother on Mother's side) from diamond willow wood.
5	Original Marriage Certificate framed	Document of my maternal great-grandparents (George Charging and Rose Packineau's) Catholic wedding ceremony. The document certifies they were married in Holy Matrimony October 12, 1917.
6	A picture of the Crucifixion with Jesus on the cross, old religious lithograph	Fridolin Leiber print, printed in Germany. This print came from the old Catholic Church in Elbowoods sometime before 1920 and has been in our family since then.
7	Cherokee pottery from North Carolina	My father received this as a gift of thanks for attending a conference/meeting out in North Carolina.
8	Southwest pottery	My sister, Sedelta, bought this piece during a visit to that region.
9	Small shadow box with a pipe made from Minnesota pipestone. The pipe has light blue, dark blue, yellow, and red beadwork around stem.	Made by my Uncle Stan and given to my parent's as a gift. My dad believes the pipe was my Uncle's first pipe he ever made.
10	Cherokee Buffalo Grass dolls	My friend from elementary school, Malinda Blackbird, made me one of the dolls. Her grandmother taught her. The other was made by Lorene Drywater, a Cherokee Nation Living Treasure.
11	A cloth (possibly Navajo sand painting design)	My parents had the cloth framed in a brown wooden frame. A gift from their friend Pete Coser given to them several years ago.
12 & 13	12 and 13 are paintings of ballerinas	Both of my parents enjoyed this painting and bought it at an Antique Store in Prairie Grove, Arkansas. They liked the image because the ballerina reminds them of the famous Osage Indian ballerinas the Tallchief sisters.

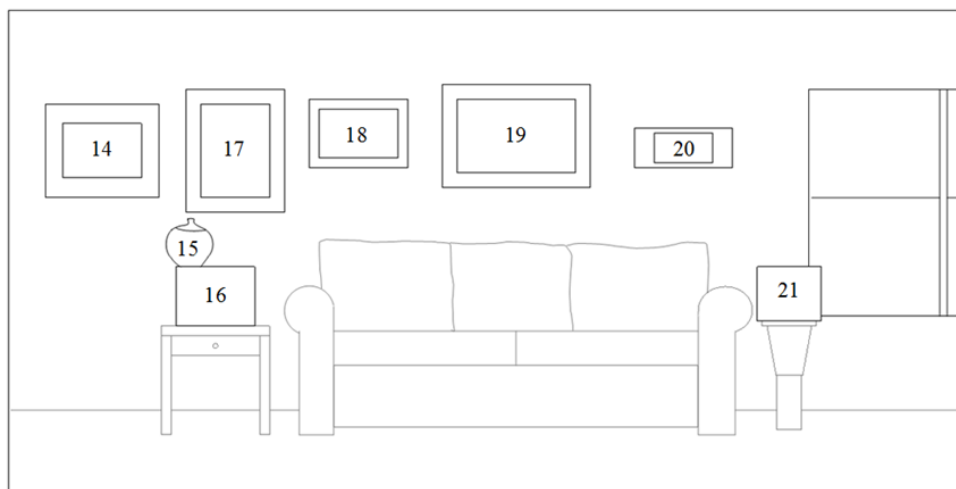
### South Wall

The south wall is the longest wall in the room (see Figure 24-26 and Table 4).

When sitting on the couch, one can see the entry points into the room. This wall used to have a sliding glass door but now has a large window instead.



**Figure 24. South side wall in the living room.**



**Figure 25. Diagram of south wall. Use Table 4 for additional information on items.**

**Table 4. South Wall Items**

#	Object /Description	History/Significance
14	Action shot of two men with a white shirt riding a horse	A photo of my grandfather, Duane Charging, and his friend, Nathan Little Soldier, at a rodeo in New Town, North Dakota. They are working as pickup men at a rodeo. My grandfather gave this to my parents as a wedding gift.
15	A large coiled basket with lid	Given to me from my Grandmother (on my mother's side), given to her in 1948 by her friend who worked in Alaska (see Figure 26.).
16	Bose Radio 5 disc changer	My mother enjoys listening to NPR and music when she works at her desk, so my parents bought this a few years ago.
17	Design painted on a cloth.	Given to them by a friend.
18	A print of a sculpture from the Little Bighorn Battlefield Indian Monument Indian Memorial Crow Agency, Montana entitled "Spirit Warriors", designed by Oglala Sioux artist Colleen Cutscall.	Print photo of a sculpture created by a close friend of my mother while she attended St. Paul's High School at Marty, South Dakota. My mother bought the print on my parents return trip home from our wedding near Kalispell, Montana in 2007.
19	Large print of a woman wearing a cloth dress with a wide leather belt and knee high moccasins, hair braided, sitting on the hillside with the moon behind her.	This is a promotional poster for the Knife River National Park in North Dakota. The woman in the poster is my mother's aunt Grace Charging Henry, (Indian name is Black Corn Woman), portraying Buffalo-Bird woman, a Hidatsa woman born in an earth lodge. She used to work at the park.
20	Small framed black and white photo taken in 1902 of a family sitting on a porch	This photo is of my great-great-grandparents on my mother's side, Joseph Packineau, Sr. and Mary Last Child with their children.
21	Replica of an old radio that plays cassette tapes, CDs and records	My father saw this at a store and liked the style and the different media formats that played



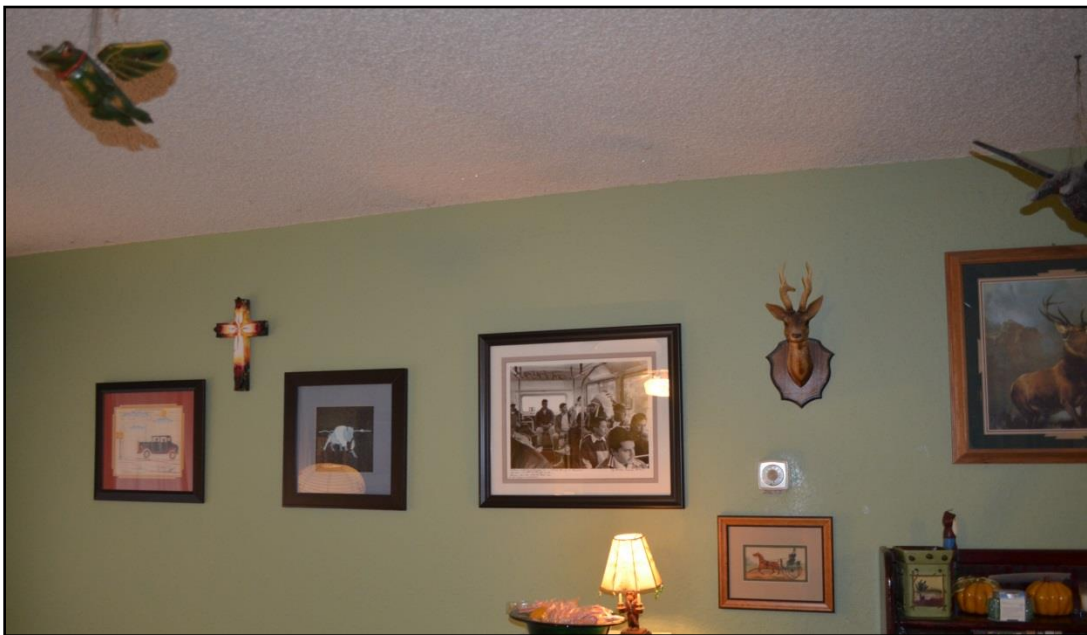
**Figure 26. Close-up of the basket my grandmother's friend gave to her.**

The South Wall enforces the importance of ancestors and family. Three of the photos display my mother's ancestors. It displays my grandfather, great-great-grandparents, and one of my grandmothers. Looking at the pieces, visitors would most likely be unaware of the significance of each piece to our family history, if they were visiting for the first time.

My parents were married in New Town, ND. My mother's father walked her down the aisle. Due to his health, my mom was the only daughter he walked down the aisle. My mother cannot speak for all her relatives, but at this point my mother had had formal education in counseling and had learned that alcoholism is a disease. When she tells us stories of her father, she does not hold back the truth, but she also shares the fond memories too. Having her father at their wedding created a special memory for my mother. This photo of my grandfather on the horse reminds my mother of her father when she looks at it and one can only imagine the memories his image recalls for her.

### West Wall

There is a wide assortment of objects along the west wall, from the variety of books on the book shelf to the different types of art (see Figure 27-29, Table 5). The bookcase alone showcases a variety of topics my family is interested in, with topics ranging from historic books on American Indians to old college textbooks from my undergrad years, as well as the Harry Potter series and several DVDs. These are only a small fraction of the number of books that can be found at my parents' house. Growing up, we all enjoyed reading so there was never a time where we had a shortage of books to choose from.



**Figure 27. East side wall of the living room.**





Figure 28. Bookcase on the west wall.

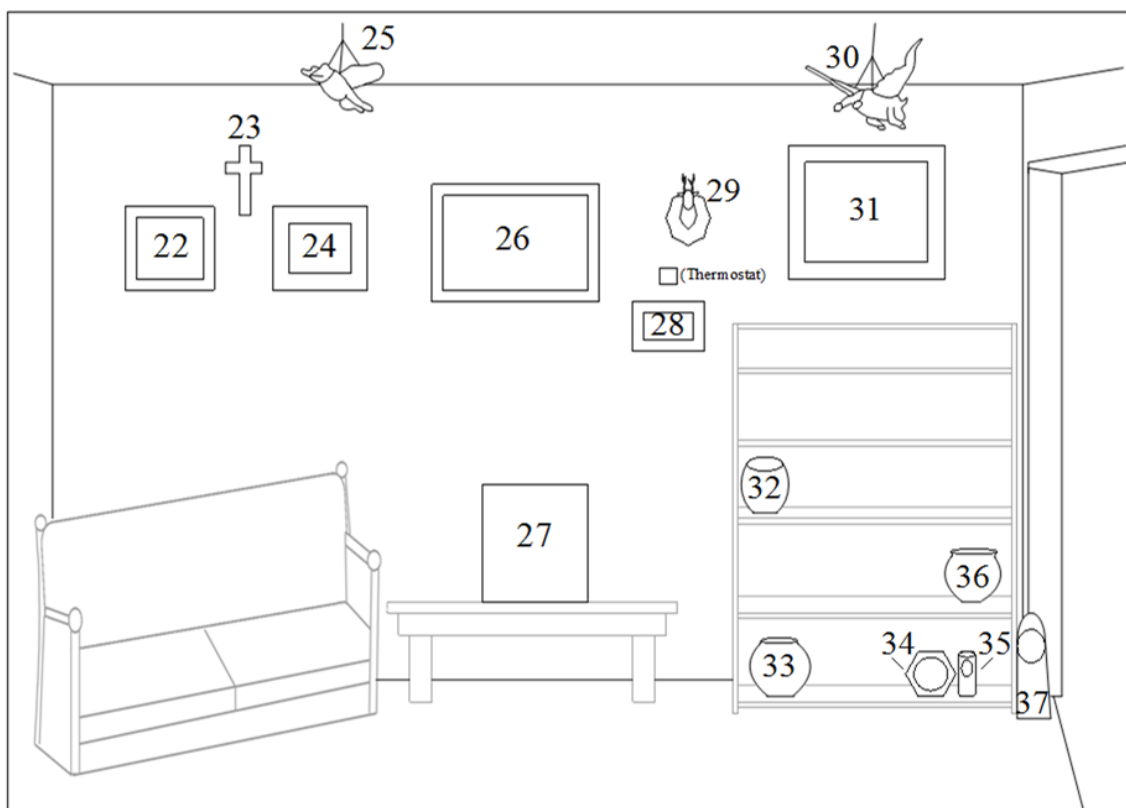


Figure 29. Diagram of the west wall. Use Table 5 for additional information on items.

**Table 5. West Wall Items**

#	Object /Description	History/Significance
22	Original painting of a couple of Blackfeet Indians driving in a 1920's car to Browning, MT	My father bought this piece while attending a conference in Seattle, WA. The artist's name is Terrance Guardipee, a Blackfeet painter and ledger artist. The painting is on a 1918 Box Rent and Key Deposit Register.
23	An orange, black, and white wooden cross	One of my parent's nieces gave them this cross during one of their summer visits to ND.
24	Original framed painting of a white buffalo	Pete Coser, a Creek artist and friend of my parents, gave them this painting.
25	Wooden flying frog	My brother, Adam, likes frogs and my parents thought this frog looked fun so they bought and hung the frog in the living room.
26	Large black and white photo of an Indian man wearing a war bonnet on a city bus, from his series titled "Indian Man in San Francisco"	The man in the photo and the photography is my mother's cousin, Zig Jackson. He is a member of the MHA nation. He signed and gave this print to my mother when he was a speaker at the Symposium on the American Indian.
27	White small fridge from my undergraduate years	My mother keeps the fridge stocked with bottled water and various sodas for the household and for guests.
28	Small old picture of a carriage and horse	My parents bought this at an estate sale and later framed the picture.
29	Small plastic deer head mounted to resemble a hunter's trophy	Sedelta bought this at one of the family's favorite antique store. Donita and my parents liked the way the deer looked on the wall, so piece stayed.
30	Wooden flying bison	One of my mother's favorite animals is a bison. My parents both saw this in a store and liked the symbolism of a bison flying. They added the bison after the frog.
31	Large print of "Monarch of the Glen" by Sir Lawrence Landseer	My parents purchased this print from one of their favorite antique stores. My mother chose the painting for the image and the overall look of the frame.
32/ 33	Both pieces of pottery have a Cherokee design	My parent's friend, Mike Daniels, a Creek/Seminole artist created these pieces.
34	Stone Carving	Carved by my father.
35	Wood Carving	Carved by my husband, Eric.
36	Old-style Cherokee pottery	Joel Queen, an Eastern Band Cherokee, created this piece.
37	Wooden statue	Carved by my father.

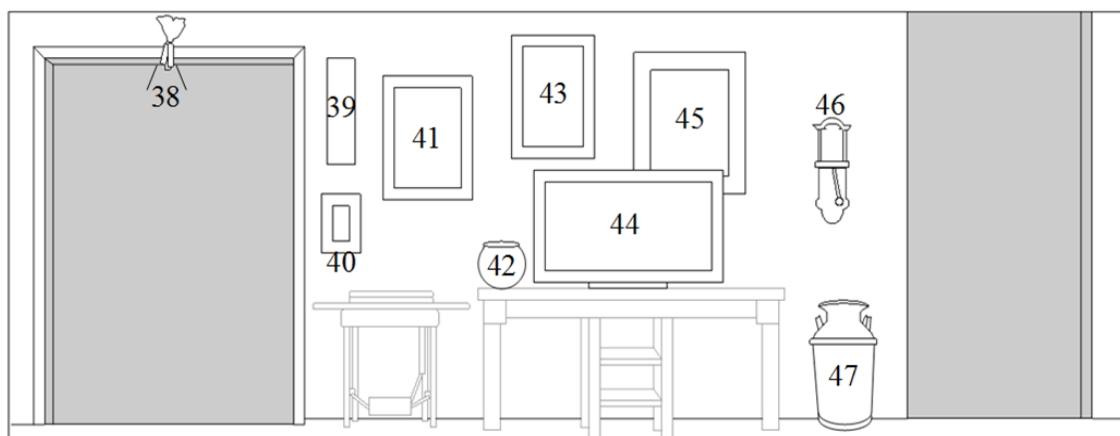
### North Wall

The north wall is where the two entries into the room are located. The position of the large flat screen television creates a focal point for this wall. Surrounding the television are paintings and other unique objects, along with the old-fashioned sewing machine for a DVD and cable box stand (see Figure 30 and 31, Table 6).

The original painting by David Williams and the print by Fred Beavers have hung in the living room for as long as I can remember. I have memories of staring at those pictures for long periods of time, and being mesmerized by the colors used in each one. I cannot imagine the living room without those two pieces on the wall. I see them as a permanent fixture on the wall. Over the years they were moved around but never taken down unless to clean or move them.



**Figure 30. North wall of the living room.**



**Figure 31. Diagram of north wall. Use Table 7 for additional information on items.**

**Table 6. North Wall Items**

#	Object /Description	History/Significance
38	A bundle of three corn and their husks, one is solid red, a mixture of red and yellow, and one is black and yellow	The bundle symbolizes the importance of corn for the Arikara people, who were horticulturists. My mother's oldest sister gave her this gift.
39	Rectangular knitted tapestry of American Indian design	Parents bought this at one of their favorite stores on the way to Fayetteville, Arkansas. They liked the way it looked.
40	Small print of a Buffalo Dancer made in 1977, Fred Beaver	My parents like Creek artist, Fred Beaver's, paintings.
41	Large original painting of a warrior and his horse titled "Wolf Warrior" created in 1977 by David Williams.	My parents bought this painting from David Williams, a Kiowa artist and a good friend of my father's.
42	Large piece of pottery, with Cherokee designs, by Mike Daniels	Creek/Seminole artist, Mike Daniels, gave this to my parents.
43	Print by artist Jerome Tiger	Jerome Tiger (Muskogee Creek and Seminole) made this.
44	My parent's television	My parents enjoy watching movies and television together.
45	Large print of a Seminole family (couple and a little girl) by Fred Beaver	Muskogee Creek artist. My father enjoys the style of this painting.
46	Small wooden clock with pendulum	Parents bought this at one of their favorite stores on the way to Fayetteville, Arkansas.
47	Old cream can	This can was used to haul and hold the drinking water before they had running water at my grandparents' home in North Dakota, after they were moved to the ranch. Sedelta repainted the can a brick reddish brown.

This chapter represents a moment in time. Since my initial visit, my mother has rearranged the room with the help of two of her sisters. Most of the items are still in the room, as their placement has meaning, whether because they were given to them as gifts or they bring happy memories of family, friendship, history, humor, religion, and culture. These items include the photo of my grandfather on the horse and my grandmother's photo at Knife River representing family, the old cream can and the organ representing the history of my mother's tribes past and her past, the religious items that express history within our family, all bring out memories and feelings. These memories and feelings help to exemplify traits that are important to my family's identity.

## CHAPTER V

## EDUCATION

Education has been an important reoccurring theme throughout our history and objects within the household confirm this value. My mother enjoys listening to NPR on her Bose radio, while she works at her desk space often times researching her side of the family tree. During the interviews, my grandmother and parents all mentioned their own parents and how they knew the importance of a good education and instilled this in them. The interview portion allowed me to see the sacrifices that my family made when pursuing an education.

My maternal great-grandparents kept my grandmother in school when they could have really used her on the farm instead. My maternal grandmother, Beatrice (Bea) Giddings, came from a Euro-American family who homesteaded in North Dakota. Bea had one younger sibling; Raymond (Ray) who took over the family farm. Their parents instilled the importance of farming in Ray and education in Bea. After Bea graduated from Ryder High School, in North Dakota, she believed there were only two things she could become: a teacher or a nurse. My grandmother Bea recalled going to school at a small schoolhouse where the teacher had to bring her husband to help deal with some of the children. As a result she decided nursing might suit her better so she enrolled and graduated from Minot Trinity Nursing as a Registered Nurse and joined the Cadet Nurse Corps. Bea first worked in Belcourt, North Dakota, and later in Elbowoods at the Indian hospital where she lived in the nursing quarters (see Figure 33).



**Figure 32. My grandmother's portrait in her nurse uniform.**



## My Mother's Education

When asked to describe her educational background, my mother began by discussing the situation at that time. The construction of the Garrison Dam had begun and the towns had to move out of the flood area. The majority of the people had been located in the river valley. Once construction began, people relocated onto either side of the river. Moving day came quickly. My grandmother knew they had to move but they were not ready for it when the time came. She remembers the workers came and started to jack up their house, while they were sitting at the table eating dinner.

After the move from the valley, the roadway infrastructure needed to be rebuilt to all the new communities and ranches. Lake Sacajawea soon formed dividing the reservation into two main parts with only one bridge connecting each side. My grandparents moved from the town of Lucky Mound and the river valley to the high grounds of the plains. My mother's parents moved to my mother's paternal grandparent's land where they all lived together. There was a winter home and a summer home. Their water came from a spring at the bottom of the hill and they placed the drinking water in cream cans and water for all other purposes in the fifty-gallon barrels. They used horses the first few years, and later a tractor, to haul the water from the bottom of the hill back up the hill using a type of sled called a stone boat.

There was only one option for education. In her interview, my mother said that after the move, the nearest school was fourteen miles away. My grandmother said that my grandfather's aunt, Martha, suggested they attended boarding school where she was a matron. Since many of the roads were very rough and even more difficult in the winter,

my grandparents sent their children to boarding school. My maternal grandparents, Bea and George Charging, sacrificed the many memories they could have made seeing their children grow up and chose instead to send their children to school to increase their religious and scholarly education.

The first school she went to was a K-8<sup>th</sup> grade school operated by the Bureau of Indian Affairs (BIA) in Wahpeton, South Dakota. She was sent to Kindergarten when she was five. She and a few of her siblings would be gone from home from August/September to May. During the summer, she returned home. The school had a yellow school bus that would pick them up and drop them off at the beginning and end of the school year. They spent all the holidays during the school year at the school. They caught this school bus in town with the rest of the children all at one stop. My mother said the feeling on the bus is hard to describe because all she can remember is the complete lack of noise. She remembers complete silence. She thinks they were all trying not to cry. She remembers some of the kids looking back and waving until they could not see their parents anymore, but after that, only silence.

My mother was not entirely without family while she was away. At different times, her siblings would join her at Wahpeton depending on their ages at the time. She also had an Indian grandmother, Martha Voight, (my mother's-father's-mother's sister) who was a matron at that school. She ended up at Wahpeton after her rancher husband passed away. She needed to find a way to support herself so she became a school matron. During school they had to call her Mrs. Voight in front of the other children, but

my mother remembers getting to spend the night in her apartment in town every once in a while on the weekend.

After third grade, my grandparents transferred my mother to a Catholic boarding school. Father Aloysius Bittmann, the priest on the reservation, visited different Catholic families telling parents that their children were not getting a proper Catholic education. He convinced my grandparents to send their children to Saint Joseph's Indian school in Chamberlain, South Dakota. My mother attended that school from fourth through sixth grade. During that time, four of her siblings went with her. Since boys and girls were separated, and then separated by age, she was only able to spend time with some of her sisters.

After sixth grade, my mother said they went home and begged their parents to send them back to the BIA school. In comparison, the Mission School was very strict and Mass and Benediction were part of their daily routine. Some of the nuns at the Mission school were very severe and not nice. She specifically remembers the German Sisters with their accents, "strict German nuns," she recalled. My mother also remarked that the food at Saint Joseph's was not as good as the BIA when it came to quality and quantity. Her parents listened and sent them back to Wahpeton where she completed seventh and eighth grade.

The BIA did not charge tuition, unlike the Indian Mission School. My grandparents struggled with the payments. My mother cannot remember the exact amount though. When asked about the negative connotations the word boarding school evokes, for instance, cutting the hair, treatment of lice, etc., my mother told me the

Mission School was where they put “Bug Juice” in their hair. Bug juice is what the children called the chemical. My mother never knew the real name for the chemical used. The children would have the chemical in their hair for a while until they took a shower. They had a similar process at the BIA school but she does not remember that as clearly. At the Indian Mission School, they had uniforms: a white blouse, plaid skirt, and a green vest. If someone needed clothes, there was a place in one of the buildings where he or she could get donated clothing.

At the BIA, they had to wear white undershirts and underwear. When she first went there, she remembers a blue dress and a green dress they had to wear. She remembers Wahpeton being very clean. When they were ready to shower, someone handed the children their clothes, already pressed and cleaned. My mother laughed as she told me she remembered having inspections to see if they were clean after their showers. She assured me she never failed.

My mother said the first month was always terrible especially for the younger students. People would be homesick every night. It was so lonesome; she would hear the students crying in the next bed. She said many were homesick for their parents. My mother told me she would worry about her parents. She also missed her younger brothers and sisters she “left behind” because during her entire schooling there were always siblings at home. She also would miss all her other relatives she would not see for a year. After a while, she said, “the homesick would wear off” and you would just get used to being in school. Every year it was the same process.

Going away to school was not all bad. She enjoyed seeing her friends again. My mother and her siblings would beg their mother to send them packages, which my grandmother would try to do as often as possible. One time, she begged my grandmother to send them fresh plums. Back in North Dakota, near my grandparents land, there were plum trees used for a windbreak in the fields and my mother enjoyed those plums. When the package arrived, my mother said the box smelled so good! My grandmother also sent them baked goods, such as cookies and cornballs, a Hidatsa treat made out of June berries, cornmeal, and kidney fat. They always looked forward to the packages.

The years my mother attended Wahpeton, on some Saturdays they would get to go to the “shows” if they behaved during the week. The school kept little money accounts for the children where they could check out money. They could go downtown, but there were certain sidewalks and areas where they had to stay. This allowed the school to keep track of the students. My mother still remembers the two candy stores, one on 6<sup>th</sup> street, the other Hyde’s Store. They would take their pennies in and get their penny candy. Her favorite was the store on 6<sup>th</sup> street because at Hyde’s Store she felt Mrs. Hyde did not like them in her store because she thought they might steal candy.

I asked my mother if she ever did steal any candy and she said “No.” She then reminded me that her grandmother was a matron at the school so this helped her stay out of trouble, most of the time. On one trip, she and her sister Amy checked out some money to go to the candy store. My mother thought she would place the money in a safe spot, so she put her dime in her mouth. She remembers them seeing something funny so she threw her head back to laugh causing her to swallow the dime.

When she returned to school, her grandmother was on duty. She told her what had happened and her grandmother spanked her. But afterwards, her grandmother took her to her room she had stayed in for years and gave her candy. There was still more to come though. Every once in a while all the girls attended a meeting and the matrons would talk and discuss problems that needed to be addressed. When her grandmother got up to speak, she began telling them a story about a little girl who swallowed a dime. My mother said her face got so red, and though her grandmother did not mention her name, she was sure everyone knew it was her. Another time my mother got her shoes dirty, so she grabbed a white washcloth to clean them off to avoid punishment. At the next meeting, her grandmother stood up, held the dirty washcloth up, and demanded to know who did it. My mother never told her the truth.

For my mother's high school years, she attended St. Paul's Mission in Marty, South Dakota. At this time in her life, structure and education were important to her, so instead of continuing at a BIA high school, my mother returned to a Catholic education. My mother had visited the BIA high school but realized that more freedom would not be a good choice for her. She knew the structure of the Catholic setting would allow her to focus on education instead of boys and the social environment. St. Paul's had a number of Fort Berthold teenagers so the school had a good reputation among the Catholics on the reservation.

My mother felt her high school gave a comprehensive education. The school also taught Latin to the students. She realized early on in her life, her strength in reading would help in high school and beyond. During high school, she began to think about

what she wanted to do when she grew up. She mentioned in one of our interviews how she would watch the planes in the sky and wish she could travel far away and see new sights. When she went to her high school counselor and mentioned her dream to become a flight attendant, the nun replied, “I don’t think you have enough tact to be an airline stewardess.”

My mother did not know what “tact” meant but she knew immediately she did not want to be a flight attendant. Nevertheless, the lack of encouragement she received from the Sister, quickly built a drive in her to make something of herself. She started looking at college as a way to do that. My mother later thought she might want to be a secretary, but a Sister told her she did not type fast enough, so she dropped that class and enrolled in chemistry. The chemistry teacher Sister provided my mother a morale boost with encouraging words about going to college. My mother understood that for her a higher education degree was the path out of poverty and would greatly improve the opportunities in her life.

My mother took the ACT and applied for admission to Mount Marty College, a Catholic college located in Yankton, South Dakota. In the fall of 1970, she started classes. Her mother and some of her siblings had recently relocated to Yankton where her mother found employment at a Nursing Home as a Registered Nurse on the evening shift. For the first time in her life, my mother went to school during the day and returned home each night.

During her first year, my mother began thinking she wanted to become a medical technologist. However, she found the chemistry and biology classes difficult. She also

discovered she was not interested in the subject matter, which made the classes even harder. Since my mother had attended all Indian boarding schools up until this point, she found adjusting to this school difficult. She became a minority as one of a few Indian students enrolled at Mount Marty. She felt out of place and questioned if she belonged there. She felt as though she was not at the same level as the other students in terms of being prepared for the educational environment and had the thought that her educational background did not fully prepare her for this setting. Her classes were challenging because she found she was not interested in the science and math courses. She slowly discovered classes she enjoyed and her advisors helped guide her in a positive direction with their positive words.

My mother attributes part of her graduation success to a retention program the college ran. She had a “big sister” who was very kind, helpful, always there to answer questions. Her sister was not American Indian but was always there for my mother. My mother was never afraid to approach her with any question she had. Her “sister” went on to become a nun, Sister Penny Bingham who is a Prioress at the Sacred Heart Monastery in Yankton, South Dakota. My mother referred to her as her safety net.

My mother also had an Instructor from India who taught classes in social organization and sociology of the underprivileged. At the time, he used current events, such as the American Indian Movement (AIM) at Wounded Knee, to teach history from historical perspective, showing privileges for some groups and lack of privileges for others by using laws and discussing history from the various points of ethnicities. His classes gave my mother confidence and taught her that other groups had similar struggles



for freedom and equality, by teaching her about things like the Civil Rights Movement.

He helped her find her voice and taught her that her opinion and perspective did matter in the classes.

Financial aid also helped my mother through college. She received grants and scholarships. She also realized she needed to change her major and to consider a career in a profession where she could make a difference by helping people with an emphasis on working in Indian communities. My mother enrolled in a social studies class, similar to psychology, and enjoyed the classes, which led to getting a degree in that field (see Figure 34).



**Figure 33. My grandmother and my mother at her college graduation.**

My mother worked for Northeastern State University (NSU) in Tahlequah for most of her career. She started working there as a BIA counselor funded by the BIA grant program. She worked with American Indian students. Through the years, NSU eventually took over the program and started paying my mother's salary, after which she began to work with all the students. She helped them with personal and career counseling and set them up with tutoring if needed. She also obtained her drug and alcohol certification to help people who struggled with alcohol and drugs. This helped her and her colleagues in developing a program for all students addressing binge drinking and other problems related to drinking and drugs. It was geared towards both students and staff. In 2005, she retired from NSU.

We were so fortunate to have our mother work in a college setting. We would walk to her office from school and use the computers in the next rooms to type our school papers. She knew when we needed to start looking into college and she set us up with tutoring if we had trouble in a class. She also knew when we needed to start filling out applications and financial aid. She would check out books for us at NSU's library which was located in the building next to her office. By spending time on campus, I became comfortable in a campus setting which I believe helped me when I attended the University of Oklahoma. Campus felt like a piece of home away from home. My mother was also the one to encourage me to apply to grad school at Central Washington University after she read about the Resource Management Program in a brochure. She, like my father, has always encouraged us but never pushed us in our educational pursuits.

## My Father's Education

Growing up, my father's first language was Cherokee. His Cherokee-speaking parents understood that they needed to let their children learn the "White" way in order to make it in the world. They understood their children needed to know that domain in order to survive and to change that world.

He spoke only Cherokee until he was 6 years old and started school at Shady Grove County School, District 26, a public school. The school was about three miles northeast of where my father lived. My father and his siblings walked to school every day through the woods and fields, crossing the same small creek five different times and a larger one only once.

Shady Grove School was a two-room school built by the Works Progress Administration (WPA) project. One room was for the first through fourth grades and across the hall were rooms for the fifth through eighth grades. The school had a large auditorium with a stage and a cafeteria next to the lower grade room. It had only had two teachers, who were non-Indian. When he was younger, he would get in trouble for speaking Cherokee in class. He remembers his teacher drawing a circle on the blackboard and having to keep his nose there as punishment for speaking his language. When he was home, his parents encouraged them to learn English and to use it. His mother told him that by learning their language, he would be able to help his people (Figure 35).

My grandfather became the first Indian elected onto a school board in Oklahoma. When he ran for the School Board, he told the voters that if elected, the first thing he

would do is buy a bus for the school because he was tired of seeing his children walking to school. He fulfilled his promise and when my father was in the seventh grade, he got to ride the bus for his eighth grade year before he started High School. After that, he started walking again a mile and a half up the hill to catch his bus for high school for the next four years.



**Figure 34. My father during childhood.**

My father also shared the difficulty of learning a history that did not coincide with the history he had been taught. When the lesson focused on Columbus, as a young boy, the story confused him. How could this man have discovered this land when there were already people here? This is a perfect example of white privilege. McIntosh (1989) lists activities throughout her day and creates a list of her privileges as a white woman. In her list, she mentions that she could send her children to school and never fear they will not receive curriculum confirming their history as a people. She also mentions that when she learns about national history, people of her color were responsible (1989). This invisible organization of white privilege has deep roots within the structure of American life. She learned racism is defined by acts of unkindness towards another group, never knowing the invisible social system of everyday life to be considered as racism (1989). In McIntosh's view the term privilege in this instance is somewhat misleading. These privileges are really "unearned advantages" based on birth.

My father recognized this concept even before he knew the name of white privilege. As he grew up, he saw different situations in school and in the local towns he witnessed racism because of the color of skin. He mentioned in an interview how he had seen, numerous times, tribal elders at the grocery store not receiving change back when they checked out. My father remembers these times and a feeling of not being welcome in some stores and areas of town because of his ethnicity.

For high school, he attended Hulbert High School, a public school a few miles from his home. He graduated in May, 1968. My father knew he wanted to attend college. He had an older cousin who had gone to Haskell Indian Junior College (later

known as Haskell Indian Nations University) in Lawrence, Kansas, and considered going there. His older brother, James, attended Bacone College in Muskogee, Oklahoma. At that time my father knew Bacone was an Indian college but did not know the school was affiliated with the American Baptist Church. He told me he should have known since a chapel was located on campus. Originally, a man named Almon C. Bacone established Bacone in Tahlequah to educate Indian students in a religious setting. Years later, the school relocated to its present location when the Muskogee (Creek) Nation donated the land it now sets on. My father told me he chose the school simply because it was there and the coach said he could play baseball.

My father did not have a major chosen before he started school. During a meeting with his advisor, when asked what he enjoyed doing, my father replied, “playing baseball.” She followed up by asking what other hobbies he enjoyed. He said running and drawing. She wrote Art down for his major. He sang in the choir and the smaller ensemble as a tenor. During spring break, the choir traveled around the country singing secular and religious songs.

My father graduated from Bacone with his Associate Degree and enrolled at Northeastern State University. At that time, Bacone was a Junior College and he still felt he needed to continue his education. He wanted to prove to people that he could be successful in terms of education. While at NSU, his advisor told him there were only two options for an Indian student: teaching or social work. The advisor told him this because there was such a need for teachers and social workers in their communities. At that time, he did not want to be a teacher so he majored in sociology. He later went back to NSU

and received his elementary teacher certificate. In the mid 2000's my father returned to school and in 2008, he graduated with a Master of Science in Education.

Both of my parents' careers centered on education. My father worked nine years as a Community Resource Counselor at Tahlequah High School when we were young. His position ended after that time so he went and worked for Talking Leaves Job Corp for ten years as a residential advisor. During this time, many of his shifts were in the afternoons to late nights. Even though he worked nights, I still remember him being there when we needed him. He would try to attend as many games or programs as he could. In 2003, he began working as a Language Project Supervisor and Director of Cherokee Nation's Language Immersion Program. In 2005, he started working at Northeastern State University's (NSU) in the Cherokee Language Program as a college Instructor.

My father knows the importance of education as his parents and his grandfather made sure he understood he needed to learn the "white man's" education in order to understand how they think, how they talk, and how they view the world. His grandfather told him this is how he would survive in this changing world. He also said that education can be seen as a curse, in terms of how some of his own people would ostracize those who become educated because what you learn may change you as a person. My father's biggest regret was not teaching us the Cherokee language as we grew up because we would not know that worldview through the Cherokee Language. However, he always supported us in our educational careers because he knew the value of education so that we too could survive in the world.

My siblings and I all attended Grand View School, a public county school a few miles from our home. My parents learned later that the county school for their district was one of the better schools in the county. Education has always been a top priority for my parents while raising four children. The county school allowed their children to go from kindergarten to the eighth grade in one school, allowing us to maintain consistency through the school system. We grew up with our classmates and made those connections within the school community and by staying in one school. We maintained relationships instead of starting over during crucial times in our social developments.

About 50% of the student population was American Indian, specifically Cherokee, and the majority of the students were part of lower to middle class families. Growing up I thought everyone was Cherokee no matter what they looked like. I do not recall anybody in my class who had wealthy parents. The population at the school helped me feel like I fit in and I was happy attending that school.

Over the years, our parents learned which teachers would fit our learning style the best. My parents felt the staff created a healthy learning environment, and having approachable administrators who were willing to listen to parents about their concerns were positive qualities of a school to which to send their children. During various meetings and parent-teacher conferences throughout the years, my parents knew the teachers and administrators at the school as kind, compassionate and great educators who served as positive role models for us.

The school had a number of activities for us to participate in throughout the years – lots of plays, musicals, art and field trips in our younger years, while adding more



responsibility as we grew. Starting in fifth grade, we played softball, basketball, volleyball, track and field, and sang in the chorus. The following year, the school offered band class for 6<sup>th</sup>-8<sup>th</sup> graders as a substitute for chorus. There was also an after-school program we attended. My mother mentioned the equal access of the activities. No matter what the skill level of the children, they could still participate in the activities.

Schooling also brought potential conflicts with our family's cultural perspective, which my parents addressed in subtle ways. Every year, the fourth grades throughout Oklahoma would reenact the land runs that took place back in the late 1880's in April, because the first one took place that month. I remember my class's land run. The students were encouraged to dress in pioneer clothing that day and we all lined up along the fence on one side of the playground. All over the playground, there were flags placed throughout. I remember looking out and seeing the flags near my favorite area and wanting that particular space. Each of the students had their own flag. Other schools divided the classes in four to represent families, but I do not recall that in our school. When the teacher yelled, "go!" we were to run to a flag and replace it with our flag. I still remember winning the flag I had set my sights on.

This activity, in terms of the children feeling how the settlers must have felt, was a success. I saw the "land" I wanted and could feel the anxiety to get a good piece, even though I knew this was pretend. I knew others would go for the flags close by, but they were not by the basketball courts, where my flag was located. I knew I had to be fast to claim my land. The land run experience was fun for me but my parents later taught me

there were two sides to this. The land belonged to tribes before this and the land run was a sad day for some people.

My parents allowed us to participate because they viewed this as part of the curriculum and although they were disappointed, they chose not to fight this battle. My parents did not want the teachers or other parents to view them as the parents who “caused trouble.” They did not want us to feel like outcasts and did not want us to feel anger towards whites, so they delicately mentioned the other side of the history so that we would learn both sides

In high school, my parents stepped in a few times. Sometimes we knew when; other times we learned later that they had. In high school, I played on the basketball team and the cheerleaders were hanging up banners for our upcoming basketball game against an area school with the mascot of an Indian. As I left the gym, I saw a sign that said, “Kill the Indians!” A couple of my other Native friends saw the sign and went over to tear it off the wall. The advisor for the cheerleaders told them to stop, so my friends and I went to the principal’s office to voice our concern. We did not get to speak with him, so I went home and told my parents about the sign. The next day, my mother called the principal and my father called a member of the school board. The next time I walked by the gym, the sign was gone. Feeling the support of my parents, I felt proud of what we had all accomplished together. I do not recall if we won the game that night, but the result of the game did not matter, because together, we had won the bigger battle.

My parents understood the importance of informal education. They would take us out of school for something educational, whether it was scholarly or culturally

educational, for example the NSU American Indian Symposium. They understood these were moments in our lives that would create more powerful and significant memories than another day in school. During the symposium week, if there happened to be an event or a session where we could learn something, my parents would let us miss school to attend the event. Our parents understood the importance of this type of education and maintaining these types of educational opportunities. We gained knowledge and understanding while resisting stereotypes. Even though we were missing school, the form of education these days was for another purpose. The symposium would end the week with a powwow in the ballroom on NSU's campus. I loved these nights where once again we would run around and dance with our friends while also seeing our parents work, all the while enjoying the evening together.

The University also offered us a different cultural education. NSU sponsored plays, live performance, musicals, comedies, and other special events and guests. My parent's also knew the importance of culture in terms of art, music, and expression. My siblings and I spent many hours on campus. I truly believe that by growing up within this community, our educational foundation was solidly formed and we knew the importance of education.

## CHAPTER VI

### RELIGION AND SPIRITUALITY

Throughout the living room, my parents share their identities through the pieces on the walls, which include a number of religious items. There are four crosses, three on the east wall along with a print of Jesus on the cross, and a decorative cross on the west side. The cultural inventory showed that they find beauty and meaning behind these pieces. The print also has a physical and symbolic connection to the Elbowoods Catholic church giving an increased significance to my family. To see my parents display their faith in the living room, illustrates the importance of faith to them.

Within my family there are several dimensions of spirituality and religion. We have direct connections to Catholicism, Baptist, and Cherokee spirituality. Throughout our lives we have had a chance to experience each religion, some more than others. There have also been shifts of religious beliefs throughout our family history but no matter what the religion, there has always been some sort of spirituality that existed within our family.

My paternal grandfather's family had roots in Indian Baptist religion. My great grandfather, Stephen was a Baptist Minister. My grandmother and her side of the family participated in the traditional Cherokee religion, the Stomp Dance. In the middle of the Stomp Dance grounds, there is a sacred fire. My father said that after statehood he heard there were at least twenty-two to twenty-three Cherokee stomp grounds established in northeast Oklahoma. He knows of only six that remain today: Redbird, Stokes, Long Valley (Chewey), Flint Ridge (Jim Wolf Grounds), Squirrel Ridge, and Echota. Redbird

was the first ground established in Oklahoma and Long valley was the next oldest from his understanding, Stokes was formed after a split from Redbird grounds. The Long Valley was the ground that our family belonged to.

Stomp Grounds have rules and rituals like any religion. Each one has a Ground Chief, a fire keeper, a sacred fire, a pipe, the wampum belts, a stickball pole, a stickball field and usually seven arbors around the sacred fire representing the seven clans. There is a kitchen area for feeding people and a medicine house or meeting area. My father says all these elements are significant and have an important part in the ceremonies.

There are seven wampum belts and they represent the history and the spiritual belief of the Ga-du-wa (Cherokee) people. My father said that for several decades, the belts were missing. Finally, in the middle of the last century, they all appeared again. My father mentioned that today, the belts are rarely seen or explained. On special occasions, the belts are brought out, but my father has not heard of them being shown at the grounds in several years. He believes the family that is the keeper of the belts protects them thus allowing few people access. My father explained that the belts carry the life ways and the belief of our people from time immemorial. They show us the path to follow as a people: the good road or the white (pure) road.

The clans are a very important part of any ceremony in Cherokee culture. In each stomp ground area; there are sections for all of the seven present day clans. My father explained how the dances are usually counterclockwise, in single row, with the song leader in the front of the line and the dancers following, “with his – one might say – his principal shell shaker, directly following him with the other dancer following in the same

order man, woman, man, etc.” The first dance is usually the friendship dance and the last dance is the Old Folks dance sometimes referred to as the Old man dance. This will usually take place the next morning and sometimes the Ground Leader might call a dance around one or two o'clock instead of going all night. The weather also determines how long the dance keeps going, especially in the winter months.

After my grandmother married my grandfather, they continued to attend Stomp Dances while also attending the Indian Baptist Church. My father remembers attending one of the seven Stomp Grounds, Stokes, with his parents. However, when my father was around the age of ten, my grandparents slowly stopped attending the Stomp Dances and fully converted to the Baptist religion. My grandfather even started to sing in a Cherokee gospel group. My grandparents and father belonged to the New Hope Baptist Church, outside of Hulbert, Oklahoma. At this church, the language used is Cherokee. Even to this day, there are still sermons and songs sung in Cherokee.

A number of Cherokees still practice both religions. Friday and Saturday nights are spent at the Stomp Dance Grounds, while Sunday morning is spent in church. My father believes that both these religions are similar because in the end, everyone is praying to the same, u-ne-tla-nv, or God.

My mother and father both agreed early to raise us within the Catholic religion and faith. My mother has always been Catholic and she wanted us to have a good solid foundation of what is right and wrong. She wanted us to have an anchor, a way to understand and deal with grief, death, and rough times within our lives by having a firm spiritual and religious base to help us through difficult times.

Although my father had ties within the Baptist community and the Stomp dance, he converted to Catholicism. My father's parents supported his religious choices. His mother even attended his baptism and confirmation at the Catholic Church. His mother taught him, as long as you have some kind of religion and spirituality within your life, a church was a church, she believed. His father taught him that one does not need a church (as in a building or structure) to pray and be religious.

My father had no objections with raising us Catholic. He knew spirituality and religion were important. He sees a difference between the two. Spirituality is mind and heart, while religion is a denomination, a set of beliefs. His parents taught him that one has to believe there is a stronger force in life and to believe in that higher spirit.

Although he grew up within the Baptist Church, he understood it but did not feel a strong connection with the religion. His first experience within the Catholic Church occurred with his Army friend, Nicholas, an Italian from Philadelphia. He asked my father if he wanted to go to church with him. Catholicism seemed strange at first to my father, when compared to his Baptist upbringing. After he met my mother and spent more time with the church he began to see similarities between Catholicism and the Stomp Ground Ceremonies, as in the actions of the rituals (Table 7).

My parents chose to raise us Catholic even though they knew Catholicism was a rarity among the other religions in the area. Their parents and teachings instilled in them that having a belief in a high power is essential to life. My parents view is that no matter what religion one believes in, a greater being or spirit is important to getting through the struggles and hardships in life.

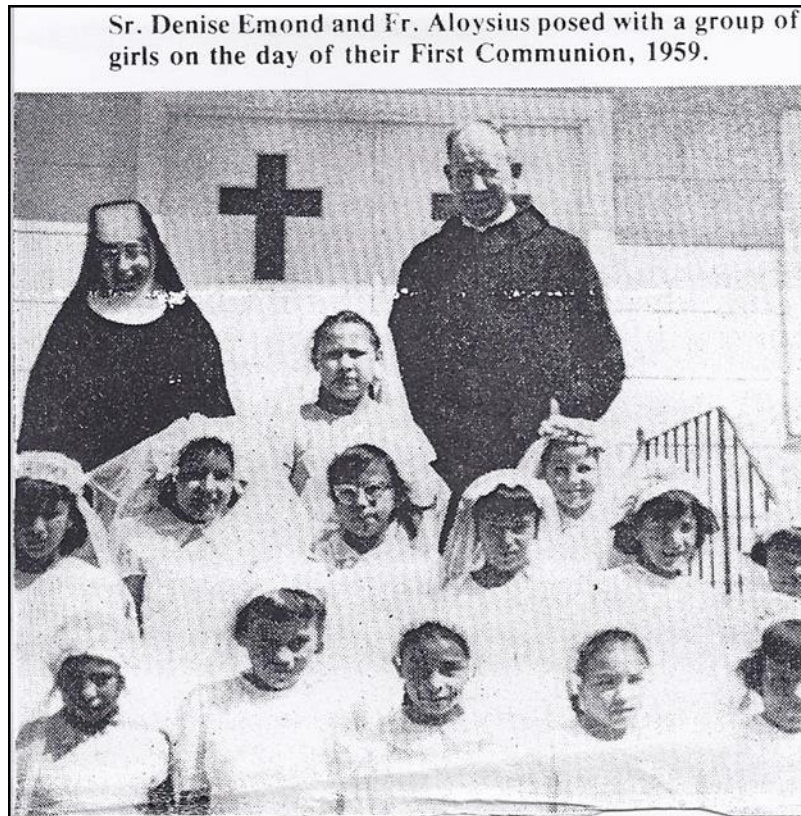
**Table 7. Similarities Between Catholicism and Stomp Ground Ceremony**

Examples	Catholic Church	Stomp Ground
Use of Fire	The use of candles, lighting and extinguishing of candles	The fire in the center of the grounds
Hierarchy	Pope, Cardinals, Bishops, Priests, etc.	Fire Keeper, Grounds chief, etc.
Smoke	Use of incense	Use of cedar and tobacco
Communion	Taking of the host/drinking the wine	Passing of the tobacco pipe/drinking the black drink or medicine
Ashes	Using the Ashes on Ash Wednesday	Using ashes on the head and chest

While interviewing my parents, religion seemed to be present in a number of ways. The Catholic religion influenced my mother's education. Her parents wanted her to have a religious foundation in her life, which became a main reason for sending her to Catholic boarding school. My mother made her choice to attend a Catholic high school based on the structured environment found at Catholic schools. She continued her education at a Catholic college.

When looking through photos, my mother shared with me her photo of her First Communion (see Figure 36). This photo helped her recall the summer activities of her two-week Catholic summer camp in Mandaree, North Dakota, at St. Anthony's Mission. When she was old enough, during summer break, she attended the reservation-wide Catholic Congress where the Bishop confirmed her. People would come from all over the reservation and camp out so they could attend the meetings during the Catholic Congress.





**Figure 32. My mother, second from the left on the bottom row.**

When I converted to the Lutheran religion after my marriage, they supported my decision and let me make my choice. Religion and spirituality are an important aspect of my parents' lives and they instilled its importance and gave me the foundation to lead me through life. No matter what religion I am, I will not forget what they have taught me.

My siblings are Catholic. I asked my sister Donita what her views on her spirituality were and she replied that she is very happy being Catholic. Her faith gives her a spiritual base that she is able to call upon in times of need while also offering a connection to our parents and grandmother. She continued by telling me that she had no

problems when I converted to the Lutheran religion as she could also see the similarities between the two religions. She also understood that I converted for my marriage and my future family which is what she believes religion and spiritualism should be based within. For our family, spirituality is important. Our family and our spirituality are tied to our cultures. Spirituality is expressed in other beliefs we practiced growing up. These will be discussed in the next chapter.

## CHAPTER VII

### CULTURE AND ART

Hearing my father speak about learning English is interesting to me. During our interview, he shared the story of when he thought the word Jane meant girl, Dick meant boy, and Spot meant dog. His class used the classic *Dick and Jane* books and, as he learned to read, he associated the words with the pictures. I found this interesting because this shows how languages help us understand the world. It gives a glimpse into the many challenges one faces when learning not only words, but also the view of the world through another language.

My father has always told me there are some Cherokee words that are not translatable. Even if there were a way to translate these words, the words would lose their meaning. During my grandmother's funeral, the preacher spoke in Cherokee. He then followed in English, speaking about how he could not translate because there were no English words that could express the depth of his words. As my dad spoke about his elementary school years, I thought about how his views of the world changed during this time and how hard those years must have been growing up with one language worldview, then to be taught a new language and perspective while still young and not really understanding why, would have been confusing and even scary.

Growing up in the home, my parents taught us some cultural beliefs, which we continue to believe and practice as much as possible. Of course as children we always asked why, which was answered with, "That's what we were taught by our parents," or a family member. I remember my parent's bed faced west because my father said when

Cherokees pass away, they are buried facing East with the feet pointed East, towards the Sun. Both of my parents learned to close the windows at night and not eat in the dark where the spirits could see. My mother's Indian grandmas taught her that the curtains had to close at night because the spirits are out at night. My father learned from his parents not to eat near an open window when it was dark. His father would tell the story about when he was eating dinner late one night and the curtains were open, when all of a sudden, it was as if someone started throwing small rocks at the window.

My mother learned most of her cultural beliefs from her Hidatsa and Arikara grandmother. From them she learned not to whistle in the dark or at night because it would attract spirits. She told us that one time she was walking around the yard of her Grandmother Martha's home while on a weekend visit during the school year. It was dark and she was eating an apple. All of a sudden from the house, her grandmother yelled, "Don't eat that apple!" My mother dropped the apple and quickly walked away from it.

Her grandmother also taught her how to smudge the house with sweet grass and sage when she and our family needed to. She said to smudge yourself when you need a cleansing, or you can smudge the home when you first move to a new location, after a funeral, or during a tough time in life. My father also learned to smudge the home after someone died to give us comfort or if he feels negative vibes. He uses sage and sweet grass and sage, too, but also cedar. Smudging purifies and cleanses the house from spirits and negativity. He takes the sage, sweet grass, or cedar and burns it in a large shell. Sometimes, he has to continue to relight the bundle in order to create more smoke and

then carries the shell around the house. My father would go around four or seven times in each room when he smudged the home because these two numbers are sacred numbers for the Cherokees. Other times, my mother has also prayed and blessed our home with holy water. The times when we were scared, maybe because of a thunderstorm, or after someone has passed away, or if the front door opens by itself, my parents blessed and smudged the home.

During our interviews, my father also mentioned that he was taught to cover up the mirrors when there is lightning and also to not wear red when it is lightning or the lightning might strike you. He also mentioned about not going in to a garden until after the fourth day of planting, otherwise the garden will not produce. He knew he had not taught us these, and when I asked him why not, he replied that he had no idea.

My mother also learned that if a bird got into your house, this was a bad sign, as it meant someone might die. As my mother discussed these beliefs, she continued to tell me that these are things she was taught and that she is not an “expert” on these beliefs. My mother said her Grandmother Martha was a devout Catholic and she told them never to be scared of anything. She wanted them to know these beliefs but that they could place their trust and faith in God.

As I interviewed my parents, I realized that they taught us these beliefs but only after we were old enough to understand and they would tell us only enough so we would not be scared. In addition, there is another belief I had not heard about until this interview from my father, probably because none of my siblings are expecting. Women are not to stand in a doorway when expecting a baby because if they do, they will have a

difficult and a more intense labor. My parents have taught us to be respectful of our beliefs so this is why I probably have not heard of this. They have not had someone expecting in their home for over ten years and they would not make someone uncomfortable by flat-out telling a visitor this information. They might be subtle about the situation but this situation has not happened that I can recall so I did not even think to ask about this subject.

In a previous chapter, I shared a story about the tooth fairy and what really happened to our teeth after the “fairy” took them. I appreciate the fact that our parents did not make a choice for us, in terms of not choosing one belief or the other. There was no choice or validation on either belief, nor was there any problem resulting from contradictions. My parents allowed us to believe in the tooth fairy as the majority of kids at young ages do, and it was years later when they told us what really happened

There have been times when we are eating out or driving home in the dark when we do eat, but my parents said simply to be respectful. My husband understands the importance of these beliefs for us. He will help to close the curtains at night in our home and he does as much as possible to help me continue these beliefs. My maternal grandmother learned some of these beliefs and taught me. Her mother-in-law, Rose, scolded her if she used a knife, or even placed a knife, on the stovetop. My grandmother quickly learned not to and taught us not to either. She shared with me her story of getting into trouble when she did. My mother and Auntie Amy both remembered how their Grandmother Rose would get on to their mother, but their other Grandmother Martha would protect their mother and tell Rose to leave her alone because she was not Indian.

These practices are directly tied to my family. These beliefs are only part of Mandan, Hidatsa, Arikara and Cherokee beliefs and are not fully one or the other. Instead of choosing one culture, they integrated their beliefs into one united system for us and did so in a respectful manner. When it comes to beliefs, they are respectful of each other's cultures and never made us choose a side or said theirs was better. They have always been equally reverent and wanted us to learn these beliefs when the time was right.

My dad and I took numerous Cherokee classes together taught by Cherokee Nation out in the community: language, history, and basket making to name a few. These basket classes (along with a special class or two in school) are where I learned to make Cherokee Doubled Walled baskets. My mother even took Cherokee language classes with me. As I've said before, we were not raised speaking the language. We would ask to learn but he used to tell us there is a certain way to teach the language, and he did not have the time for it. Now he says that he should have taught us whatever way he could. I do not fault him for not teaching us. He has more than made it up to me when he took the time to take all the numerous classes with me over the years.

His aunts, his father's three sisters, all sew beautiful quilts and while I was in high school and college, he would arrange for me to go over on Saturdays and learn how to hand-stitch quilts. I would help my grandmother Kanoi (his aunt) with her quilts in progress and we would sit in her living room with the large quilting frame that took up most of the space, listening to Cherokee or Gospel music on the radio. She also taught

me to make her raisin pie. I knew back then how fortunate I was to spend those days with her.

On one side of our house is my parent's garden. The first few years my parents gardened, they planted the plants in the "floodplain" of the creek. My mother thought the location would be good because the water runs through there every so often allowing her to utilize the rainfall. She also chose to plant potatoes and corn, which is what she was used to planting in North Dakota. Unfortunately, with the location and the weather, the gardens turned out not to be as successful as they wanted. She also tried to plant strawberries but that was not successful either.

At this point, my mother decided to relocate the garden area to the left of the house. The house would protect the garden from the hot afternoon sun and the area would be easier to garden. My father and she worked to bring some of the dark nutrient-rich dirt from the back yard up to the garden area. She started to plant tomatoes, jalapeños, and green peppers. My family loves tomatoes so we always enjoyed waiting for the tomatoes to turn red and eating them right out of the garden while they were still warm from the sun. We also love fried green tomatoes, so growing tomatoes turned out to be a treat for us. The past few years, the garden has continued to flourish. They also discovered okra thrives in the area after Eric planted a few seeds in the garden. My mother has even started a honeysuckle patch for me to use to make Cherokee baskets.

In addition to the large oak and chokecherry trees (and a single dogwood) the yard came with, my father has planted red bud, maple, pine and black locust trees throughout the property. My father tried planting trees from the Arbor Day Society but



they did not make it. Our family friend, Marty, gave my mom a few small saplings of redbud trees a few years ago and those are still thriving today. Throughout the years, they have lost some of the original trees due to ice storms and removed other trees close to the house for safety issues. My dad continues to add a native tree here and there throughout the yard to make sure our yard continues to be full of trees and shade in the hot summer months. He grew up with trees all around him and wanted us to have that same experience of climbing them and seeing and hearing the animals that live within the trees.

Art has continued to be an important theme in our family. All of the pieces throughout the living room provided some sort of insight into my parent's lives and identities. During one of our interviews, my father shared an interesting story about how my parents acquired the Williams painting. My parents were good friends with Menicke or Menick, as they called him, and my father bought the painting before Menick had finished the piece. My parents had just moved to Tahlequah and lived in a home next to a small service station. Menick often purchased gasoline for his van at this station. One day, my father was visiting the man who ran the station when he saw Menick drive in and he asked him what he was up to that day. Menick was on his way to Tulsa to see some doctors that wanted to buy some of his paintings. By that time Menick was already a well-known Indian artist, even actor Vincent Price, who in his later years became an art buyer for Sears, had some of his paintings in his personal collection. During that time, Menick's painting were selling anywhere from a thousand dollars to several thousand depending on the size and subject of his piece.

My father looked in his van to see his paintings and saw several framed and ready for sale. However, there was one unfinished piece in the back so my father asked him how much he wanted for that one. Menick replied, “Four hundred dollars and you can have it and I will finished it.” My father had enough for a down payment on that day and he pulled it out of his pocket and said, “Here it is.” Menick, was shocked and told my father, “Wow! You got me!” Menick finished the painting and gave it to my father about a week later. My parents both enjoy this piece very much.

My mother’s cousin, Zig Jackson, uses photography to break down stereotypes of American Indians. His series of self-portraits in an urban setting places him in populated settings. He wears a headdress in these photos. What is interesting, particularly in the photo he gave my mother, is the fact that no one is looking directly at him, but they are all looking away, even though he is surrounded by people. Another one of his series, “Indian Photographing Tourist Photographing Indian,” is where he is photographing tourists at various cultural events and powwows. In the mid 2000’s, Jackson became the first contemporary American Indian photographer to be represented at the Library of Congress (Brathovde, 2005). My parents love this photo and enjoying displaying art created by their family member.

The artwork in the living room shows another community my parents connect with, the American Indian Art community. From the story of Menick, to the art given to them by friends and family members, to Zig Jackson’s photograph, to the art my father created, the objects all have a meaning of friendship, community, and pride in their

heritage. These pieces are not only considered art, but also a connection to that community.

My father's artwork, both paintings and carvings, is in private collections around the country and abroad. He has won awards throughout the United States over the years. On all of his pieces, he signs his art with his Cherokee name in Cherokee Syllabary (A-da-wi Dv-no-we-la-ni) followed below with his English name. His pieces reflect his culture, history, and stories he heard from his Elders through the traditional Cherokee perspective and their interpretation of the Cherokee way of life. My father wants his art to reflect his reflection of time and space: the past, present, and future. He says his pieces reflect who he is, who he has been, and where he is going. In every piece my father creates, whether painting or a sculpture, his art reflects his heritage.

My father has always loved drawing, even as a young child. He and his half-brother would compete throughout his time in elementary school, vying for first place. Art was not offered in his high school but he continued to draw and sketch during this time. At Bacone he was able to finally take formal art classes, one was taught by a well-known Southern Cheyenne artist Richard West and another taught by Choctaw painter "Chief" Terry Saul. Since then he has been learning and observing artist techniques and he continues to create award winning pieces.

I have many memories of watching him create his pieces or visiting other artists and hearing their conversations for instance, well-known Cherokee artist Cecil Dick, before he passed away. My father took us to Cecil Dick's studio in downtown Tahlequah where we spent the afternoon watching him paint and listening to their stories.

Some days my father would lay out old towels on the kitchen table, turn on the overhead light, pull out his paints and brushes, and set there for a few hours painting. He would also carve out on the front porch for hours at a time. He demonstrated the importance of art and his art community through the time he devoted to his pieces, his continued passion for the arts, and the sharing of his time and knowledge with his children. He began giving pieces of his work to people to show appreciation and now we ask him for some of his art so that we may do the same. My family and I know the importance of art and the work my father puts into each piece so to be able to share it with others . . . well, we hope they understand how much we appreciate them.

## CHAPTER VIII

### AN AMERICAN AND INDIAN FAMILY

Throughout this process, there were several smaller themes that must be mentioned. The following sections are areas that stood out during the interviews and other research methods. Each of these themes is important in creating or maintaining our family identity, an American and American Indian Family.

Both of my grandparents were veterans. My grandfather Andy was a WWII veteran (see Figure 37) and proud of the time he served the country. He learned enough English to pass the test to enter the Army and to get through his time in the service. He enlisted in 1943 in the Army Air Corps and served overseas. Among his veteran awards of the Silver Star, EAME Service Ribbon, Good Conduct Medal and a Distinguished Unit Badge from the 15<sup>th</sup> Air Force Headquarters, his high school diploma to me is just as significant.

During my senior year in high school, in fall of 2001, Tahlequah High school awarded him and some of the other WWII veteran's with high school diplomas (see Figure 38) because of their service to our country. I later asked if he would sign my yearbook, since technically, he was in my senior class. He kept that diploma hanging in his living room and now it hangs in our living room.

My maternal grandfather George Duane Charging was a veteran of World War II as well (see Figure 39). He seldom spoke about his experience overseas, but my mother distinctly remembers what he would say after he had a few drinks: "Do you know who I am? I am Duane Charging, and I was a Master Sergeant in WWII!"

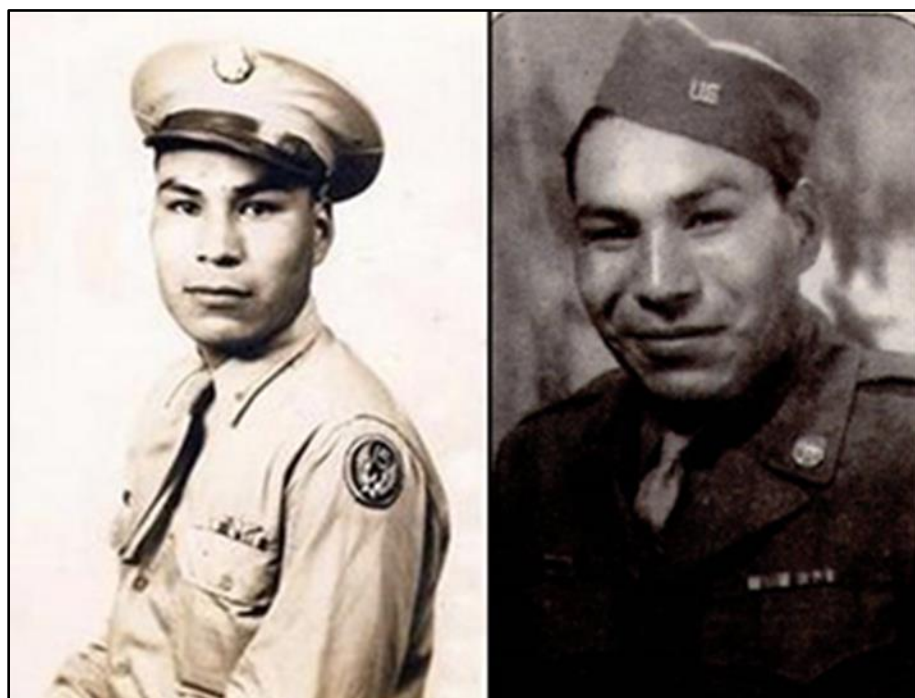


Figure 33. My grandfather Andy's military pictures.



Figure 37. My grandfather Andy and a friend receiving their high school diploma.



**Figure 38. My maternal grandfather George in his military picture.**

Although my maternal grandfather was a great man, he had many faults. He was an alcoholic and my mother has shared many stories of the times he came home drunk. However, I feel my mother has helped shape my perspectives on him. I do not look down on him and judge him for his past. I know he caused pain in my mother's life and in my grandmother's life but through the stories my mother has chosen to share, I cannot help but feel a love for him.

My mother believes that WWII affected my grandfather more than he realized. Some of the things he saw and went through, he never talked about those experiences or showed emotions about those times. For example, his brother Kenneth was a prisoner of war (POW) in Korea. After Kenneth's release, he came back to the States and stayed in a hospital for 6 months trying to recover from lack of nutrients. My mother heard rumors that while a POW, they fed him wood splinters in his rice. Kenneth never spoke about his time as a POW but started drinking heavily once he returned home.

Before he could graduate college, the United States Army drafted my father on April 7, 1970 (see Figure 40). He attended basic training at Fort Leonard Wood in Missouri and trained with Delta Company. He continued advanced individual training as a Personnel Specialist 71H20. My father refers to the place as "Ft. Lost in the Woods, in the state of Misery."

Originally, my father had orders to go to the Republic of Vietnam, (South Vietnam) after basic training. At the last minute, his orders changed to the Defense Language Institute West Coast Branch (DLIWC) at Presidio of Monterey in Monterey, California, where they taught classes in different languages from various cultures around the world. The army assigned him in the top company on base, the Headquarters and Headquarters Company (HHC) and he worked in the office of the East Slavic Department. My father thinks the reason for the change in orders occurred after the situation with his Drill Sergeant. The Drill Sergeant asked if anyone knew a foreign language during basic training. My father raised his hand, and although true, he replied



sarcastically, “English.” For that response, he got a very stern talk but he believes this lead him to the DLIWC. My father was correct though.

In 1971, my father applied for an early out program and received his end of term of service (ETS) on December 9, 1971. While in the army, he received a National Defense Service Medal, a Good Conduct Medal, a Sharpshooters Badge (Rifle) and several Accommodations. He also exited Active Service as an Honorable Discharged E-4 (Specialist 4th Class). He received financial assistance (GI Bill) from the military for college so he continued at Bacone College.



**Figure 34. My father in his military pictures.**

### Tribal Enrollment

Our parents had a choice to enroll us in the Mandan, Hidatsa, Arikara (MHA) Nation or one of the Cherokee Nations. My maternal grandfather often told my mother that she should “enroll her kids in the MHA nation.” He wanted all his grandchildren to enroll in the MHA Nation. My mother believes he told them this because of the strong tradition within the tribes of taking care of each other, especially elders and children. All four of us enrolled with the MHA Nation. I find their enrollment choice made sense within a historical context, too. Cherokees, Mandan, Hidatsa, and Arikara are all matrilineal societies so members receive their clan from their mother. My maternal great-great grandfather, George Charging, Sr., was a member of the Waterbuster clan. However, since my mother’s mother is Norwegian, she does not have a clan. My father is part of the Wolf Clan but since my mother is not Cherokee, I am not officially part of any clan.

During one of my father’s interviews, he also mentioned another factor in their decision on where to enroll us. He said they considered education as a major reason too. My parents realized that their children would receive more educational funding within the MHA as opposed to Cherokee Nation of Oklahoma (CNO) because at that time, CNO contracted the BIA for a higher education grant program, creating limited funding as opposed to the MHA Nation. In addition, there were fewer people enrolled in the MHA. This difference also would allow more funding for higher education in MHA.

## Names and Family History

Another interesting result of my research involves names. During the course of researching the family history and genealogy, my mother discovered her Great Grandmother Anna's full name. Everyone always called her or referred to her as Ann, but her full name was actually Anastasia. This surprised my mother because she never expected to find this result, to have the name Anastasia in our history. To learn her full first name fascinated me because of an early conversation I once had with my husband.

When my husband and I first met, I shared my paternal grandparents' names, Andy and Becky, and he asked me what they were short for. With a confused look on my face, I asked, "what?" He replied that Andy is often short for the name Andrew and Becky is short for Rebecca. The thought had never occurred to me. My father's siblings also have short names: James, Terry, Larry, Willard, Andy, Dessie, and Carolyn. My mother thinks that the simple form of these names might have been easier for Cherokee speakers and she thought the sibling's names were unique because of the use of Harry, Terry, and Larry all rhyming but all born years apart. They used names from a different culture from their own but they did not use the same terms of address and reference for English names.

## Holidays

Although my mother spent most of her childhood holidays away from home, she still had some family members surround her during these times. Her Grandmother Martha, who worked as a matron at Wahpeton, served as a connection between their family on the reservation and at school. She looked after all the children from the

reservation. Throughout the year, specifically Easter and Christmas my mother's grandmother bought new dresses and accessories for my mother and her siblings. My mother could still feel like a part of her family, even while she was away from home.

My mother said she never really was sad about not being home because she thought no one went home for the holidays. The schools had events planned for the holiday. She really enjoyed the carnival the BIA school put on for Halloween since they did not even know of the concept of trick-or-treating. There were too many children to dress up for the carnival but the decorated room made up for it. The children would get lots of confetti and candy and the games were fun.

Thanksgiving was a family style meal. The children would sit at the long tables and pass the food around. This differed from the everyday routine of going through the lines with their metal trays and getting dished their food or as she explained, similar to the way soldiers are given their food in the movies.

During Christmas, she stayed at school, except for her high school years. Fortunately, she usually had a member or two of her family to share the holiday. Figure 41 shows my Aunt Janice with my mother on the right posing in the "Rumpus Room" by the school Christmas tree in 1958, at Wahpeton with their new dolls. Their Grandmother Martha bought the dresses. My mother still remembers how much she liked that dress.

Growing up my father experienced holidays at home with his family and in his community. His elementary and high school offered hot lunches, which he enjoyed. In the fall, the elementary school had Pie Dinners to auction off pies in order to raise money for the annual Christmas Program for the community.



**Figure 40. My Aunt Janice and my mother, Christmas 1958.**

For Christmas, my father's family would have a tree, "pitiful" trees, as he recalled, because they did not have too many decorations. To decorate, he remembers drawing pictures for the tree and stealing the shiny stringy icicle decorations from his school's trees. He would also ask the teachers if they had any extra icicles they could have for their tree at home. Every year, they would place the icicles in a bag and save them for next year as they slowly added to their collection. His family was not well off, but they still managed to make Christmas a special time for the children by believing in "Ripped Pants" or "The Man with White Beard." (My father has no idea why they called him Ripped Pants.)

Our parent's experiences guided them into creating memorable holidays for us. We celebrated all the major holidays and my mother would decorate the house for each one. They wanted us to have happy cherished memories and give us the experiences they never got. For Valentine's Day, my father has drawn a family Valentine for us for many years. I look forward to see the new design each year.

Easter involved going to church but also participating in our family Easter hunts. We would dye eggs the days before Easter and Easter morning our father would hide them in the backyard for us. Even to this day, whoever is home for Easter will dye eggs and hunt for them. There was also the Oosahwee family Easter egg hunts out by my grandparent's home. After the hunts, we would partake in the delicious potluck meal.

For Christmas, we would all go out to the tree farm down the road from Grand View and pick a tree while eating candy canes and sipping on apple cider. We would come back to the house, decorate the tree with the ornaments we had made over the years and would attend mass on Christmas Eve. Our stockings were always full with fun trinkets and candy and on Christmas morning we would unwrap our gifts while listening to Christmas music. Of course, each holiday included a large meal with all the side dishes and desserts.

### Meal Times

Meals have always been a special time for our family. My sisters and I were very active in sports growing up. We had softball games and practices throughout the week, and tournaments on the weekend. I played basketball throughout the year in school, on leagues, or on a traveling team. There were always practices or games one of us had and

with my father working evenings, having us all sit around the table became difficult. My mother would still try to cook meals after work for us. Other times, eating out was easier for her if we had games or practices: less dishes and cleaning to do while she got us ready for bed.

On our birthdays, we chose what we wanted our mother to cook. We loved the food our mother cooked, from her pizza, to her tacos, to her spaghetti sauce. She would often make runzas, a dough pocket filled with cabbage, meat and cheese, and lefsa from her Norwegian side, a flatbread, which she made from leftover mashed potatoes. We would eat those as fast as she cooked them with butter and sugar rolled up in the lefsa. Whatever our mother cooked, we ate because we loved, and still love, her food.

Some of my other fond memories revolve around eating out with my family. We had our favorite places throughout the area, from our favorite barbeque place in Fayetteville, to our favorite Tex-Mex in Muskogee, a 30 minute drive. After Donita went to college, and Sedelta was in the high school marching band, every Friday while she was at a football game, my mom would take my brother and me to Subway where we would eat and talk. There were also many times when my parents needed to run to Muskogee to pick up something from the mall and we would all go and eat at our favorite restaurant on a school night.

While my husband's family packed lunches and snacks whenever they left home, my family would stop at a gas station and buy snack or drinks and eat out whenever we had the chance. There were many laughs around the table; joking and silly things happened, which we still talk about today. For example, the time I was playing with a

triangular sour cream packet. I was slowly watching the sour cream curl out from the small opening I made, when I squeezed too hard and it exploded everywhere. That is the one thing I really remembered, the laughter from our meals. We always managed to have a fun time and enjoy each other's company during our meals. Growing up, I felt so blessed when we ate out or ran to Muskogee on a school night because many of my friends did not have those memories or chances to leave town as we did.

Our family is an example of an American and Indian Family. Our grandfathers have fought for this country but they were also proud of their heritage and their culture. Our parents and grandparents have shown that we do not need to choose whether we are American or American Indian. We can merge our beliefs to create a whole new world to live in.



## CHAPTER IX

### CONCLUSION

The one thing that I am able to witness time, and time again is the love my parents have for their family. Living in our home, we would have family birthday parties with our driveway filled with cars. They fulfilled their hopes of their children spending time with their parents as much as possible, which was one of the main reasons they chose to live in Oklahoma in that home. We would go out and visit my father's parents every weekend, and eat the best meals of fried chicken, biscuits, Cherokee potato salad, and we would always leave with a treat from our grandfather. One weekend, it might be a Little Debbie snack, the next, some tootsie roll pops. (You can imagine the joy we would feel if we got the Indian on the wrapper.) If he forgot, we would usually walk slowly down the hill until he came out the back door and hollered at us.

After my grandmother passed away in 1999, we continued to go out to help my grandfather on the weekend. My mother would clean parts of the home, while my father would take out all the trash and burn it for him. My father would then come in and join us in a few games of dominos with my grandfather. My grandfather was able to teach us some skills to help us understand the game and appreciate the game on a different level. At my grandfather's funeral, we bought a set of dominoes, selected a domino, wrote a note to him, and placed the pieces with him. We were fortunate enough to share time with my grandfather with my husband Eric. Eric even got a special nickname by my grandfather, "Domino Guy." Even though my grandparents did not speak English as well

as they spoke Cherokee, and we did not speak Cherokee, there is no denying the love we all have for each other.

We also spent a lot of time with our maternal grandmother. I spent the night with her on the weekends whenever I could. She let me be a child for as long as I wanted to be. Our parents showed us how much they loved their parents by letting them into our lives. To this day, my maternal grandmother lives with my parents. My mother and she have a special bond and although it seems like the daughter is now her mother, my grandmother still tries to take care of my mother because she sees how much my mother takes care of her.

The interviews, genealogy and history solidified the importance of family. Listening to my parents discuss their parents and their siblings, and the way they shared stories and information about their ancestors, often displayed pride and fondness for their family. The inventory also showed the importance of family. Family members gave many of the objects to them, and the photos and prints of the family reflect the significance of surrounding themselves with loved ones.

Throughout the year, we participated in a number of annual events as a family. Every Labor Day weekend, Cherokee Nation holds their annual Cherokee Holidays, where there are a number of activities that take place all over the community, from a parade on Saturday morning, to a road race for runners, a softball tournament, rodeo, art shows, traditional games, an arts and craft fair, and a pow wow. There are no shortages of activities that weekend and there are plenty of times to reconnect with friends and family during these events.

My parents helped with the Symposium on the American Indian at Northeastern State University (NSU) every April. In March, my parents would help with the Annual Wild Onion Dinner. Wild Onions are similar to the green onions in the stores except these are wild and found along creeks and riverbeds. The time to gather these onions is early March, before they bloom their white flowers. The whole plant is dug up, bulb and all. Some years we even gathered them in our back yard for our own dinner. These onions look very similar to the wild garlic that grows in the area but wild onions are a brighter green than the garlic. To prepare the onions, rinse, chop into small pieces, and cook onions until tender, about twenty minutes. Then add eggs and cook like scrambled eggs. The Wild Onion Dinner serves as the kickoff for the symposium, which also served as a fundraiser for the week's events. A few weeks before, my dad and I would go out to his parent's area and dig for sassafras roots for tea for the dinner.

The night before the dinner, my parents would go to the community center and help prepare the wild green onions by washing and cutting them. While parents prepared the onions, children would run around and play while listening to our parents joke and laugh with each other. The other parents and adults there were great people and amazing role models for us and respected throughout Indian country. My mother would wake up early the next day and cook grape dumplings for the dinner while my dad would head over early and start the brown beans. Most of the time, our parents would let us miss school if we helped them serve dinner or dessert, so we often chose to help.

My parents also planned the annual 10k and 5k run which happened the week before the symposium. They would let us miss school one day before the race to help

pick up trash from the side of the roads along the racecourse. This was the road we took every day to school but seeing it from a close up standpoint and having ownership of that area and having to pick up all the litter you could see from that angle affected us to this day. Weeks after, I remember watching the road from the school bus, looking at the new litter and thinking people need to stop littering.

All these activities created a sense of belonging to the community. By participating and creating traditions we were able to maintain and cultivate our identity as a family. We spent time with each other and we saw our parents being positive role models in our community. They made picking up trash along the road fun while creating a sense of pride in the work we were doing.

In Chapter One, I mentioned that part of my methods included my parents reading the chapters and the various full drafts. During the first draft review, my mother had two comments after reading the first few chapters. The first, she mentioned I had written *heads of cattle* and she remarked that she always heard *head of cattle*. The week before that, she and I reminisced about the time I called her, while in my twenties, asking her about chickens, eggs, and roosters. She understands I did not grow up on a farm, but we found humor in my utter lack of knowledge in the ranching area.

Her next question surprised me. She asked, “Did you get your perspective of the reservation from me?” I asked her what she meant and she replied, “I hope I did not give you the negative perspective of the reservation when you wrote about discovering the location of the ranch.” I felt sad that she thought that, so I quickly told her she did not and if there was a negative tone to that, I picked up that perspective from school (the poverty

and alcoholism aspect). Going back to that section, I did not realize that my sentences portrayed a negative perspective on reservations but when I went back and reread the section, I understood what she meant.

After thinking more about where I learned the negative aspects of life on the reservation, I realized my views did not come from school because my classes barely covered American Indian history. At that time, my views originated from the media and news sources. I linked reservations to poverty, alcoholism, and the history of assimilation. My views on reservations are different now. Just like tribes, not all reservations are the same. They all have their different histories, problems, but also positive aspects such as communities and families being there for each other.

My mother also had minor corrections to her chapter. There were so many additional stories I included after speaking with her about some changes. For example, I always said my parents lived in Elbowoods, but during my mother's review, she mentioned they actually lived in a small community fifteen miles outside of Elbowoods called Lucky Mound. She also found out new information from her mother. She learned that there were two homes her family used, a summer and winter home. She also did not realize her parents collected water directly from the Missouri River when they lived in Lucky Mound.

For my father, he also had corrections. For his military, I only wrote Headquarters Company, instead of Headquarters and Headquarters Company. My father also brought up an extremely important element of why this method, my parent's review of the paper, was important to the paper. In Chapter 1, I also mentioned that this method

was important because I did not want to overlook some information and assume people knew. He mentioned that I should include our Cherokee family name, Dv-no-we-la-ni, meaning “They are going to write.” That is exactly what I did for this project and this name means even more to me since I am fulfilling our name.

There were some stories I chose not to include based on personal beliefs. I did not feel comfortable sharing a few of the stories I heard based on the cultural significance behind the stories. My parents were honest, upfront, and willing to share the stories but there was one story my mother asked me leave out in this discussion. I understand why she asked this of me because of the sensitive nature in terms of cultural beliefs. My father was extremely honest with me on all topics but I intentionally left out the name of the family my father believes to be the keeper of the Wampum belt for their protection.

I have learned so much about my family and I admire them and all those who have passed before us to make us who we are today. As I was learning about the struggles with just our tribes, through smallpox and diseases, specifically the 1837 smallpox epidemic that killed 90% of the Mandan population, leaving only 150 tribal members left, through the removals from our homelands, all those obstacles and here I stand today. There are only three other people in the world that share my blood “quantum.” That degree of blood is just that, a percentage. We are much more than what our quantum says. I do not want my literal blood to define me but rather *my family* blood.

This project is important for those who want to learn about themselves or others. Much of this knowledge is lost when people pass on from this life. This is why these

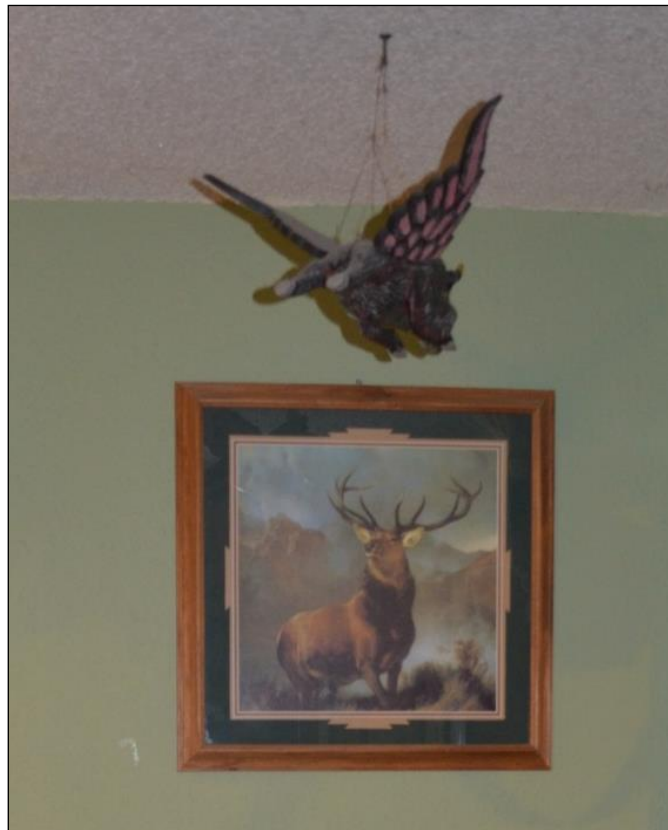
types of interviews and inventories are important. This project has strengthened the idea that I am much more than my physical appearances and features. I do not have to wear two long braids or regalia and native influenced dress to be American Indian. I also do not have to live a “traditional” lifestyle to be Native American. When my father creates a sculpture, he will often use a power tool during the process. In his words, “Our ancestors would have used this technology if they had it!”

Throughout this entire project, one of the reoccurring strategies for dealing with adversity, challenges, and tensions large and small that have prevailed through each method is humor. Whether funny stories of the past told during the interviews, or stories behind photos and teasing while looking at the older photos, to humor being expressed through objects in my parent’s living room, laughter has been a part of each step. Even for moments that might have been sad in someone else’s perspective, humor found a way to present itself in those moments. For example, when my Aunt Amy and mother would speak about some of the history with their father, they often laughed at how crazy those situations would get. When they shared stories about him leaving the house dressed up, and coming home looking like he had been in a fight, they told the story in a way that made it humorous. Many times, humor is a coping method, when things and times get so bad; the only relief is to laugh at the situation.

Historically, humor and joking were found within the kinship system. Close ties are highly valued (Parks, 1996). Even today, these traits continue. Although we did not grow up in North Dakota, our family and extended family treat us as if we are home, as if we had always been there. Our aunts and uncles joke with us even if we have not seen

them for years. They will do whatever they can to make us feel welcome, whether it is taking us around and introducing us to people, having a dinner, or giving us gifts and blankets for coming to visit.

While working on the inventory, I quickly realized the objects outwardly reflected some of my parent's humor. For example, my parents hung a flying buffalo and a frog on this side of the room (see Figure 42 and 43), and hung a miniature fake mounted deer head (see Figure 44) on the wall because they thought the pieces were fun. Other times, the stories behind the pieces were humorous too.



**Figure 41. A flying bison.**





**Figure 35. A flying frog.**



**Figure 43. Zig Jackson's photography next to a fake deer head.**

My parents have a number of trees spaced throughout the two-acre lot. The front of the yard slopes down to the house so my father has been working on getting grass to grow there to help slow the water down. My mother enjoys her rock garden, located between the driveway and the porch and in recent years, she has added a moss garden to her rocks to help slow the runoff from storms. Her newest addition to the moss garden is a Toad House. My parents and grandmother saw the house at an estate sale and thought it was so odd and funny they had to buy it. They never imagined a toad would decide to take up residency in the house (see Figure 45).

My parents are fun individuals. They have always been willing to play board games, charades, or kickball with us even to this day. Laughter has always been a part of their lives and they passed that trait on to their children.



**Figure 36. My mother's toad house with the resident.**

The objects my parents display at their home also show that, from the actual objects, for example the Toad House, the flying toad and bison, to the stories behind the objects. My siblings and I have all embraced this theme with some of our own objects. For example, Donita is a proud owner of a very large ceramic hamburger that can break apart into various coasters. Adam bought my sisters Spam earrings and a fake Spam tin. They love those gifts from him and display them fondly. Where someone might think these items are junk or meaningless, these items become priceless to us and bring smiles to our faces.

From my parents, I requested copies of marriage certificates they might have of our family. My father did not have any so he took a trip to the county courthouse to see what he could discover. He found copies of marriage certificates for his parents and grandparents. While reading his parents' copy, he told me he got a good laugh. The race portion of their license was marked "white" for both of them. He said he would have loved to know that sooner, so he could have teased his parents.

Each of the methods used was equally important. They provided an in depth approach to understanding and determining how a multi-ethnic family defines who they are. Identity is complex. However, there are ways to determine how individuals define their identity. These methods are a framework for others to use and discover how and why they choose to define themselves.

For example, while researching some of my family history, I began to learn the story of my family. While creating the diagram of my family lineage, I began to wonder how different members of my family ended up where they did. I became curious about

how and when my family immigrated to America. I wanted to know the trail of my family. How and why did we end up in these locations? The marriages and unions also were fascinating to me because of the various ceremonies mentioned in our history. Learning about family history is a continuous process and will take time to discover all the different aspects of family history.

By learning the history of my parents and family, when I started creating the history of the house, and the cultural inventory, areas stood out because there was an understanding of each of their backgrounds. The choices they made on raising us, from being religious, to our enrollment with the MHA Nation, stems from their family perspectives. They chose to raise us in Oklahoma, so we would get to know our grandparents, just as they did. Looking back on the stories they shared about the quality time with their grandparents, makes me feel fortunate that I have similar memories with my grandparents.

Their history also allowed for greater context in terms of understanding the importance of some of the objects in their home. For instance, the connection to Elbowoods and the pieces that came from there might not be as clear if my mother had not discussed the background story of her past to that area. Looking back, even though we grew up in Oklahoma, my parents did a great job of finding compromises to raising their children with both of their perspectives equally involved and instilled in us. I do not feel less of a part of my Northern family, or more a part of my Oklahoma family. They showed us that we are family no matter where we live and what we know.

Through this project, I have learned that identity, for me, is my family. The history of how I became who I am, that is my identity. The memories of growing up in my home and within our community, the memories of my family, our tribal history and history of our family, my ancestor's history, all of these work together to create my identity. I am a unique and diverse human being and my identity is my family.

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