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Chief Wilma Mankiller
Cherokee Nation of Oklahoma
PO Box 948
Tahlequah, OK 74465

June 15, 1994

Dearest Honorable Wilma,

My name is Shawn Karnes. I had met you a very long time ago and really do not think that you will remember me. I was twelve years old at the time and preparing to leave Oklahoma to return to Indiana. I believe it was in 1979. As a humble person of Cherokee blood I wish to take a few minutes of your time, if I may.

First of all, my very dear friend, Robin McBride-Scott, has encouraged me to take a few steps in my life to help, and maybe encourage other Cherokee brothers and sisters to learn about our traditional ways. She is a very sweet woman and I respect her very much.

I do not want anything except a little guidance. I should maybe tell you a little about my self before proceeding. I was born in Marion, Indiana in October of 1967 to Ronald Karnes and Stella Toulis. My father was of French, German/Polish, and Miami ancestry (he passed away last year). My mother is of only Irish and Cherokee background. I am the only child of this very short marriage. They divorced in 1969.

About this time I began to get very ill with Scarlet Fever and many other viruses such as Measles, Chicken Pox, and then later Scarletina. My mother took me to my Granny immediately, who, at that time lived with her brother near, I think, Tahlequah. Granny gave me her herbal remedies and traded for a goat so that I could have milk as I am allergic to cow's milk. I stayed there for a long time but very seldom went outside. I sat and watched Granny do beadwork for hours on end. We came and went between Oklahoma and Indiana until I was twelve when my father felt that I should be raised "correctly". I attended high school in Marion, became a major alcoholic and drug addict, and really hit bottom a year after I graduated high school. I was living in Indianapolis, Indiana at the time and voluntarily entered rehabilitation at St. Vincent's. I was diagnosed with Culture Shock, Clinic Depression, and Separation Anxiety. Basically, I was taken from my mother and her side of the family and I had no idea where she was for years.