

Wilma Mankiller
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Stillwell, OK 74960

February 21, 1994

Handwritten note:
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J. Mankiller
S. Mankiller
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Dear Wilma,

My name is Donna Jones Stapp and I was born in Bartlesville, OK in 1947, but mostly raised in Oaks, OK with my grandparents, Lee and Ada (Rusk) Jones. I started first grade at the Oaks Mission School in 1953 and like yourself roamed the woods and explored Spring Creek as much as I could. My best friends were Mary Jane and Joe Cummings, the children of Sampson Cummings. I think they are all dead now, but I still appreciate the Indian ways they taught me. I am only 1/4 Cherokee, but they accepted me as much as a full-blood. I was raised mostly white and didn't develop an Indian conscience until about 1982. My last child was born in 1981 and I began to realize that I had no one to teach them the ways that I had known as a child, so I began a family history search and was amazed at the roles that my ancestors had in the Cherokee Nation and th

From there, I got involved with the Title IV (at that time) program and soon became Chairperson and one of my favorite experiences was to attend the 1985 Annual Indian Education Conference held in Tulsa, OK. I met you and Charlie Soap at that conference and I took a picture of you to bring back to Marie Lego (Pit River).

From that time until now, I have been involved with Indian Education and I am presently the Chairperson of Local Indians For Education, Inc. We are an original chapter of the California Indian Education Association. At the time I met you, LIFE had just opened Indian Arts & Design, a shop designed to help Indian people sell their products, our shop is still thriving and we are in the process of opening a second shop, only this one is planned for serious basket-makers and beaders. We plan to focus on providing the best beads and other materials that we can find. We plan to provide Bear grasses and other materials needed for the fine California Indian baskets. Out here, the Indians were so degraded and no one ever regarded their fine skills and LIFE is working hard to change that notion that most non-Indians have about the Indians of California.

Most of my friends are Yuroks, Karuks, Pitt River, Pauite, Wintu, Klamath. I don't find many Cherokees that I can identify with. Most of them want to know about the Cherokees and I try as hard as I can to educate them. That can be a real chore because I have to tell them the truth and they have heard stories of Cherokee princess's and so on.

For Christmas, I received your autobiography that you had written and I am so proud that you wrote that book. That is one of the reasons that I want to write to you. Sometimes I had my own doubts of the Cherokee history that I was telling, but after reading your book, I was correct all along and after reading your book, I felt more confident.

Being raised in California, I am sure that you are aware of the difficulties that Cherokees out here face. And what is most maddening is that a lot of so-called Cherokees perpetuate myths about the Cherokee history. I was in Sacramento at a Cal-Transportation