

Wilma Mankiller, Principal Chief of the Cherokee Nation, is leaving office this year. She has held the position for ten years. She was elected Deputy Chief in 1983 and took over for Chief Ross Swimmer in 1985, then was elected to two four-year terms. She was elected as Alpha Delta Kappa's International Woman of Distinction for 1989 and will give the keynote address at this year's International Convention in San Francisco.

Mankiller first went to work for the Cherokee Nation in 1977, and has held jobs in several areas, including economic and community development. She has been Chief during three United States presidential administrations. During her time in office, the tribe has added three health centers, nine youth programs, and a new Job Corps Center ~~is soon due for completion~~. "I've had such a large variety of experiences," she said. The Chief has been so busy for so long, she says, that there has been no time to reflect. Throughout her full career and life stages, she has known several outstanding teachers and recognized their worth.

*Still well* When Wilma Mankiller was a child, living near where she lives now on Mankiller Flats, near Tahlequah, Oklahoma, her favorite teacher was a young woman named Christie, who was married to a Cherokee. Like many rural communities, there was a one-room school house at that time, where Christie taught all of the subjects. Christie had a television, Mankiller remembers, and she and her brothers loved to walk to her house to watch. "That was the first time I saw television," Mankiller said. *mys.*

*dyt 13* For Mankiller and for all of us, "teacher" can mean teachers in school and non-institutional teachers in life. Teacher can mean counselor, instructor and friend. There were several teachers Mankiller encountered in San Francisco, among them storytellers, educators, militants and keepers of medicine who made a profound impression on her. One of the reasons they were so effective, she said, is that they were "part of the community." She recalled Simon, a poet who taught English and writing ~~and~~ would play drums and music for the students. A stellar teacher with whom Mankiller worked ~~is~~ Bill Wahpepah. Together, they founded the American Indian Community School in Oakland. With Bill, she said, it was "all about love. He was always there for the kids and had unconditional love for them."

Education in the Cherokee Nation has changed in many ways since Wilma Mankiller was born. In many ways, she said, it is much the same. Her childhood, one-room school is now K-8 with about 125 students and a bus service. There are more teachers and more Cherokees teaching in the school system. A Cherokee woman is principal of a school in neighboring Stilwell. "There is more sensitivity to Cherokee history and culture," Mankiller said.

"There is a greater use of technology" in the schools, Mankiller said. Students are able to connect to the world through computers. "The world is much larger for the students," she said. Computers are introduced at an early age in Head Start.

The award-winning Head Start program in Tahlequah is directed by Verna Thompson, recently named National Head Start Director. Thompson is a stellar and innovative educator Mankiller has enjoyed working with during her term. A circular group of houses makes up the ~~Head Start~~ Children's Village. Different age levels participate, so children do not have to leave the village until they are older. The village, which opened about four years ago, has its own garden. The Cherokee syllabary, the phonetic alphabet of the Cherokee language, is introduced in Head Start. Children start using computers very early. At first they tend to start out just "banging them on and off" and writing out their names, Mankiller said. Soon, though, it becomes second hand and they have the skills for which the program was named. Mankiller said the Head Start Program and the Children's Village have attracted visitors from far and wide, who are always impressed.