

DANCES WITH WOLVES

"Dances With Wolves" is the title of a recent award winning movie and is the Indian name given to a white Union Army officer who befriends and later is adopted into their tribe.

But actually it tells much more than that. It vividly portrays the long and painful history of the American Indian as they face the westward migration of a nation who first destroys their food supplies and then displaces them from their own homes and lands where they have lived for centuries. It is indeed a tragedy of American History.

Now, little more than a century later, these same proud and noble people face another great tragedy; one equally as cruel and even more dangerous. Hopefully and prayerfully we will not again turn our backs on their plight.

Diabetes Mellitus is now rampant among our American Indians; afflicting 1/3 of the fullblood Indian population over the age 45. One of the grave dangers of Diabetes is **"Diabetic Retinopathy"**, along with cardiovascular disease and neurologic impairment. Diabetic retinopathy is a leading cause of blindness in our nation and in the American Indian it is now reaching epidemic proportion. Between 25% and 50% will develop advanced stages of the disease and unless treated, will eventually suffer blindness. Laser treatment is the most effective treatment available to halt the progression of this disease process with a success rate of over 80%.

With the increasing genetic pool and longer life expectancy, the American Indian now and in the next generations will indeed face a tragic epidemic if something is not done now to prevent it.

Oklahoma has the second largest Indian population in the nation and in order to meet these needs, the **Dean McGee Eye Institute** and the **Indian Health Service** are joining together in a unique program called **"Indian Diabetes - 2,000"** (I.D. - 2,000) in an attempt to halt this trend by the year 2000.

This program will provide a self-contained module of sophisticated diagnostic and therapeutic equipment which will be transportable from one regional hospital to another throughout Oklahoma. It will contain a digitized camera for diagnostic photography, a laser unit and computerized information storage and retrieval system. The total cost for this module is \$250,000 which becomes insignificant when we consider the alternative of continuing costs to support the blind not to mention the tragedy of blindness itself.

Through this ambitious project perhaps we will now be able to join hands with our Indian brothers to demonstrate our caring and compassionate feelings and one day deserve the same love and respect that they shared with **"Dances With Wolves"**.