

cattle--unable to help ourselves and no help forthcoming. We were like cavalry troopers waiting for reinforcements in the face of an overwhelming Indian attack, and they never came. We could only take the worst that the white people could give us--mind-bending, mind-breaking routines of calisthenics, close and extended order drilling, military-like commands, hup-two-three-four, left-right, left-right. The mind of a six year old could not comprehend all this.

I remember eating soap. It wasn't the good, old Palmolive, Camay or some perfumed soap. It was that old time yellow, made of lye-water, foot-long government issue soap. Oh, we didn't have to swallow it--just chew it--clean our mouths out--chew it good--make a lot of suds and foam. There were about 4 or 5 of us. I don't remember who all shared this great honor with me, nor how many before or since. All we could do was sit there and chew like frothy-mouthed mad dogs, wide-eyed, tears streaming down our faces. The biggest boys in the school were given this odious chore of making us eat the soap. What I didn't like was the obvious glee and delight they seemed to take in meting out any or all of this type of punishment. They almost had to or risk punishment themselves, which could mean banishment from the ranks of the elite--those who bow and scrape at the feet of the Disciplinarian. Some people might call it "brown-nozing." Oh, I forgot to tell you why we were made to relish this soap--we were caught talking our own language (Ponca) and someone tattled on us. It seems ironic now that 40 years later, classes in the Ponca language are being held so as to perpetuate this classic tongue. They made me feel, in a way, personally responsible for the decline of the Ponca language. Today, I understand it 100% but I can't talk it, except with great difficulty.

Boys will be boys and we Indians were no exception. Gangs and cliques were formed and it was almost tribe against tribe. I recall to some extent that the Poncas, Kaws, Otoes, and Tonka-was banded together quite frequently and got along fine. The Pawnees, as a rule, were stand-offish and mostly kept to themselves. The Kickapoos, Sac and Fox, and Shawnees were seemingly of one mind. The Pottawatomis were strangers to all of us. The Pawnees always seemed to have money. I envied them. We Poncas