

It's a Mad, Mad, Mad, Mad World. What's Your World Like?

An Essay by Janet Francis
September 2011

I sat pondering this question on Monday after the Mid American Indian Fellowships Gathering. Actually, I think it started Sunday night. Sometimes when I am tired, my brain refuses to shut down and will wake me up in the middle of the night and things happen. And, this question popped into my head: What is my world like? Am I happy? Am I where I want to be? Am I doing everything I can to make it so? After all, it is ultimately *my* life.

On Sunday morning at the gathering, it was stated in our talking circle, "I have to go back to the real world. Three hundred and sixty two days from now I will be here again. I wish I didn't have to go back there."

What would it be like if we had three days back there in the supposed "real world" and 362 days of gathering? I don't know. What do you think? What would it take to make that a reality for you? Or, is it already your reality?

What is our gathering about? What are some of the aspects of our gathering? We share ourselves. We take time to listen to others, from the youngest child to our oldest elders. They have wisdom to share for each of us; they teach us things we need to know in order to survive. We share our problems, worries, concerns and joys with others. We share food; what we have, we give to others, so we all may be nourished, so no one goes hungry. We make things to bring joy into our lives and sometimes give them away to watch someone else's face light up. We play stickball and sometimes Cherokee marbles to keep us active and moving. Who doesn't enjoy a good game?

We pray; we wake up in the morning thankful to be alive. With a pinch of tobacco, we thank Creator for the sacrifices that will be made in this day. We ask Creator's help to give everything that we can, thankful for the wisdom that we will learn and ask Creator's help to look at our life and see what we need to change to make us better. We are thankful for all our ancestors who have gone on before us, for our parents, grandparents, aunties and uncles, for we carry within us their wisdom, and without them we would not be. And, they are with us each and every day. We give thanks for life and the joy of just living. We give thanks for Creator, remembering Creator has made every aspect of who we are, and that's all we need to know; we don't need to know everything. We give thanks for Mother Earth who lets us live and walk upon her and feeds us and provides all the beauty we see around us. And lastly, we give thanks also for ourselves, that we are alive and able to help others. Then we offer a pinch of tobacco to the Fire, because the Fire was given to us as a people from Creator, and that is who we are.

We dance, sing, pray, drum, share, give, love and laugh and laugh and laugh and are so very thankful to be together. This is the gathering, for we are a people.

The gathering is a ceremony or includes ceremony, but it's not all there is. There are other ceremonies for which we can come together and be together. How badly do you want it? Can you stop straddling the fence or just dabbling your feet and jump in, as my husband would say. Are you willing to swim to get to a more complete, fulfilled, happy eternity than you have now? What are you afraid of? First and foremost, eternity is 365 days a year. How do you make each day for yourself? Are you happy to be alive,

breathing, helping others, sharing? Are you willing to change your life, change your world? Sometimes we don't like where we are at, but we don't like change.

In our Chickamauga ceremonies, we are thankful to Creator for all things. We dance, eat, share, love, help each other, give and strive to achieve balance in our lives. We come together, so we may have a little more of what we have at the gathering throughout the year. Or, you may say, there is just a little bit of our ceremonies at the gathering. This is our world, our reality, our *real* world. This is how it should be. At both the gathering and the Chickamauga ceremonies we are with our family. We look for ways to stay in touch, talking on the phone, writing or visiting in between times. It does not have to be just three days a year. We can have as much of this world as we want. We do have to go out in that other world to try to live and work among people who are not like us. It's hard. It's not easy. Somehow we have to survive it. We have to go to school or work with people who just don't understand us, but if we would come together more regularly and surround ourselves with our family, they will help us get through.

We have the ability to make choices in our lives; others can't do that for us. Are you willing to seek out other opportunities to participate in ceremonies? Sometimes fear keeps us from trying, sometimes ingrained superstitions. You can start out small, aside from what's offered at the gathering, perhaps one more ceremony in your year.

So, there you have it. What are you willing to do? How do you see yourself? What do you want? Can I share a little of my world with you. Would you be willing to come and spend some time with me and others? It's a mad, mad, mad, mad world, but it doesn't have to be. How complete do you want your life? How much of eternity do you want right now?