

Chapter 1: Questions of Identity and Background

1. Who are you; who are your people?

I am Chickamauga Cherokee, enrolled with the White River Band of Cherokees of Missouri and Arkansas. Chickamauga Cherokees are descendants of those Cherokees who continued on the path of resistance to colonization and of the refugees from many other tribes and races who joined in this resistance. Most of the many federally non-recognized tribes, bands and groups of Cherokees located between North Carolina and Oklahoma, especially in Missouri and Arkansas, are primarily populated by Chickamauga Cherokees. I was born in Missouri, grew up in Missouri and have lived most of my life in Missouri.



My mother is and my father was Chickamauga Cherokee, both enrolled with the Northern Cherokee Tribe of Missouri and Arkansas with White River Band Designation.

My wife Janet is originally from Ohio and is of Shawnee, Mingo (Ohio Iroquois) and several other tribal ancestries. She strongly identifies with her Shawnee ancestry but is also Cherokee by adoption. Janet and I live on a small subsistence farm in Bates County, Missouri. The family farm also serves as the site of the Daksi Grounds, a traditional Chickamauga Cherokee grounds established in the spring of 2010 with the coming of the Sacred Fire. A traditional medicine society member, I serve as Fire Keeper for the Daksi Grounds. Janet and I have four offspring: Peter, born in 1985; Sarah, born in 1986; John, born in 1989; and Luke, born in 1993. They all follow Chickamauga Cherokee spirituality.

I serve as consultant/helper for Mid American Indian Fellowships, a network of American Indian spiritual groups in Missouri, Kansas and Arkansas. Although not a Christian organization, MAIF uses the slogan "following Jesus in the context of our Native cultures". With Jesus life and teachings understood in the context of resistance to imperial colonization, the MAIF organizational focus is on decolonization of previously Christianized American Indian people and restoration of indigenous cultures. While the Daksi Grounds is not a function of Mid American Indian Fellowships, in keeping with these stated foci, MAIF is supportive of the Daksi Grounds.

A graduate of Ohio University, Athens, Ohio and Midwestern Baptist Theological Seminary, Kansas City, Missouri, I served as a Baptist pastor for 13 years prior to my work with Mid American Indian Fellowships, beginning with the birthing of the first Indian Fellowship in 1999. I mentored and apprenticed with traditional Cherokee and Chickamauga Cherokee spiritual helpers and culture bearers for many years prior to my induction into a traditional medicine society. I continue to mentor.

2. Which is the more proper designation: Native American or American Indian?

While I can't say which designation is more proper, I think the term "American Indian" or simply "Indian" is more preferred or more commonly used among Indian people.

Most people agree that the designation "Indian" started with Christopher Columbus in 1492. What many do not understand is the context under which Columbus first used the designation. It happened like this: On Christmas Eve, 1492, Columbus wrecked his flagship, the Santa Maria, just off the Island of Bohio (Present location of Haiti and the Dominican Republic.) I suppose the admiral had perhaps overindulged a bit insofar as Christmas cheer is concerned. Immediately after the shipwreck, Columbus was in a panic, thinking everything of value on board the Santa Maria would surely be lost. However, the people of Bohio, at least those living in the city near which the shipwreck occurred, witnessed the difficulty and came out in canoes to rescue everything salvageable from the ship. Everything was safely stored, for Columbus, in a vacant house and Columbus and his crew were received with the most generous hospitality. Columbus was so awe-struck by all this that, writing to Isabella and Ferdinand back in Spain, he said, "So tractable, so peaceable are these people that I swear to your Majesties there is not in the world a better nation. They love their neighbors as themselves, and their discourse is ever sweet and gentle, and accompanied with a smile; and though it is true that they are naked (by European standards), yet their manners are decorous and praiseworthy." In view of these observations, Columbus made the famous declaration: "These people truly are 'Indio!'"

Historians generally agree that the reason Columbus used the word "Indio" to describe the Taino people of Bohio and elsewhere was because he thought he was in what the Europeans called "The Indies" (islands off the coast of Asia). That's true enough. Columbus didn't have a clue as to where he really was. The whole time he was in Cuba, for instance, he was asking everyone where he might meet the King of Japan! In that sense, Columbus thought it was obvious that these Taino people were "Indio". But wait. There is more to this word than meets the eye. In Latin, the word "In-Dio" means "In Deity" or "In God". Think about it; whether he knew it or not, Columbus was making a play on words. Columbus, the worst flesh-and-blood enemy we have ever known in the Earth,

was looking at the people he was planning to rob and rape and murder and from his mouth came this word, saying, "These people truly are in unity and in right relationship with the Creator!" From that word "Indio" came the modern word "Indian". So, you see, Indian is not such a bad word.

The designation "Native American" is actually a legal term, invented by the United States federal government as inclusive of American Indians, Alaskan Natives, Native Hawaiians and also, I think, Natives of Guam, Saipan and American Samoa. At some point, it was picked up by the popular culture as a supposedly more politically correct designation for American Indians. But is it really? Both designations "American Indian" and "Native American" contain the word "American," a term which gives homage to one Amerigo Vespucci, an explorer (or pirate) who, in his day, was considered the "discoverer" of the American continents (Or, was it just one continent back then?). There are also linguistic problems with using the word "Native" in this way. By definition, a native, after all, is simply someone, anyone, born in a particular country. Somehow capitalizing the word changes its meaning while conjuring up images of stuffed-shirted and stiff-lipped English colonials commenting, "The Natives are restless tonight."

In spite of these difficulties, I don't think that either "American Indian" or "Native American" is an offensive term to anyone I know. Most would probably rather be identified by proper, tribal designations while also understanding a need for these general or overarching terms of designation.

There are many other general terms of designation in use, including "*First Nations, Indigenous Peoples of America, Amerindians, Amerinds, Indigenous, and more.*" The term "First Nations" is in greatest use in Canada. The term "Amerindians" is used in Guyana. I use the term "Indigenous" quite a bit myself, in reference to peoples, American Indian and others, who live in close relationship with the land. However, I argue that just because a person is American Indian, that doesn't mean that person is indigenous. Many Indians have lost most of their indigenesness (relationship with the land) through the process of colonization.

3. What do you mean by "traditional" as pertaining to American Indian people?

There are many and varied opinions of what it means to be a "traditional person". Many years ago, white anthropologists and/or sociologists came up with a model of American Indian assimilation. They basically drew a straight line. On the far left end of the line were the words "fully traditional". On the far right of the line were the words "fully assimilated". A fully traditional person was defined as one who places great value on tribal traditional values or culture and no value on Western values or culture and speaks only the tribal language. The fully assimilated person was defined as one who places great value on Western

values or culture and no value on tribal traditional values or culture. The fully assimilated American Indian will no longer even call himself/herself Indian and may even deny having Indian ancestry. The line represented a continuum between these two extremes, but the flow was assumed always to be in the direction of assimilation. In recent decades, sociologists and anthropologists have been forced to rethink some of their assumptions, as American Indians born into what may be described as fully assimilated families or communities have begun redefining themselves as tribal people and working back in the direction of tribal traditionalism. My own model of this is a circle, with a point on one side labeled "fully colonized" and a point on the other side labeled "fully decolonized". This model acknowledges the fact that all people of the earth have already been affected by colonization with many still being pulled in the direction of colonization. At the same time, there are those who are not only resisting colonization but actively working to undo the effects of colonization and working toward the cultural restoration of their peoples. Assimilation or colonization is not a one-way street. Who do I think of as traditionalists? I would say traditionalists are those who are moving in the direction of indigenous cultural restoration, even if, in many ways and to greater or lesser extents they still exhibit the effects of colonization. Others have different ideas which may be no less valid.

4. What are the major or most important differences between European American and American Indian cultures?

While the differences between European or European American cultures and American Indian cultures are undoubtedly not as clear-cut now as upon first contact, observable differences remain. For instance, while European American culture tends to compartmentalize life, American Indian cultures tend toward more holistic views. While European American culture may view the Earth in terms of inert resources, American Indian cultures view every aspect of creation as alive, spiritual and sentient. An often remarked upon difference between European American and American Indian cultures has to do with differing values placed on time. Within European American cultures, time is seen as a commodity which may be saved, spent, wasted, etc. Events start and end by the clock, with a conscious focus on what comes next. Within American Indian cultures, events start when the time is right and end when finished, with a conscious focus on the present moment. Also, while European American culture encourages children to ask many questions, American Indian cultures encourage children to learn through careful observation and patient listening. These are just a few of the differences.

To my way of thinking, the most major difference between European American and American Indian cultures, the greatest distinction that remains, has to do with attitudes toward control. Within European American cultures, control is seen as a virtue – not just self-control but also control of other human beings, control of animals and plants, control of the Earth in all her aspects, even control of the Moon, the planets, the entire Solar System if that were or ever becomes

possible. Within American Indian cultures, while self-control is seen as the highest virtue, control of others is seen as evil – the very nature and definition of evil. Whenever control of others is seen as necessary, as in control of one's children, the adage "less is more" comes into play. Relationships, within the human family as well as within the greater family of the Earth in all her aspects, are governed by the Harmony Ethic and the great principle of Non-Interference, as much as is possible. I think most, if not all the differences between European American and American Indian cultures spring from this one, most major difference of control as virtue versus control as evil. And, if there ever was an irreconcilable cultural difference, this would be it.

5. Your tribe is not federally recognized. Isn't federal recognition very important to American Indian tribes? How can you say you are really an Indian if your tribe is not federally recognized?

Federal recognition means that a particular Indian tribal entity, along with its citizens, is acknowledged by the United States and has a government-to-government relationship with the United States. From the very beginning, some groups of Indians in America have been granted federal recognition, while others have been denied federal recognition. The reasons were/are manifold but generally stem from the age-old colonizing strategy of "divide and conquer".

The main problem with being non-federally recognized is that the aboriginal rights and sovereignty of non-federally recognized tribes and tribal groups are denied or not acknowledged. Now understand this: Aboriginal rights and sovereignty are not granted by any government, nor may they be taken away by any government. Such rights are granted only by the Creator/Appportioner of the Universe and are both innate and inalienable. The most a government may do is either acknowledge or deny aboriginal rights.

There are also problems *with* federal recognition, the chief one being that the United States demands each federally recognized tribe to govern itself in accordance with United States, Bureau of Indian Affairs standards rather than by the traditional values or standards of the tribe. Therefore, even for federally recognized tribes, aboriginal rights and sovereignty are only partially acknowledged and are, to a great extent, denied by the United States Government.

The sad thing is that even most non-federally recognized Indian tribes govern themselves according to Bureau of Indian Affairs standards rather than by traditional standards. This is because most of these tribes are seeking federal recognition. There are very few tribes or tribal groups that govern themselves traditionally, by the consensus of the people.

6. There are no real Indians anymore, are there? I mean, no American Indians actually live as they did before European contact, do they?

Are there any Europeans who live today as Europeans lived before contact with American Indians? No? Does that mean that there are no real Europeans anymore? All cultures change and develop. No one lives exactly as they did 500+ years ago. It can be argued that, if anything, European cultures have changed more dramatically due to contact with American Indians than American Indian cultures have changed due to contact with Europeans.

7. How much Indian are you; are you full-blood?

As the late Michael Doris was fond of saying, I am all Indian, even though some of my ancestors were not. If that's not confusing enough, consider this: I am all man, even though exactly one half of my ancestors were women.

Actually, the "How much Indian are you?" question is racist. One way that European and European-American governments continue to work to eliminate Indians is through fragmentation of identity, dividing and conquering, as it were, not just between people but inside the person. Indian does not come in parts. Does one go to England and ask the people there, "How much English are you?" Imagine asking the Queen of England whether she is "full-blood."

8. Do Native Americans accept "mixed-bloods" as part of their family or group or do they discriminate and see "mixed-bloods" as "wannabe Native Americans" whose percentage of Native blood doesn't count?"

To begin with, being of mixed ancestry myself, maybe I'm not qualified to answer your question to your own satisfaction. All I can say is, this is a question I also have to deal with, wonder about, live with, etc., and the answer is not always the same. There are many Indian communities in the U.S. where virtually everyone is of mixed ancestry. This is especially true from the east coast all the way through Missouri and Arkansas. If present trends continue, it will be true everywhere within another couple of generations. I've been all over this country. In some places and with some people I have encountered prejudice against those of mixed ancestry among a few of those who identify themselves as "full-blood Indians". However, overall, I have encountered much more warm-hearted acceptance than rejection.

To tell the truth, I have had my identity challenged more often by white people who are forever asking, "How much Indian are you?" Some non-Indians don't want to accept a person of mixed ancestry as being a real Indian, but some of these won't accept a person of mixed ancestry as a real white person either if they try to pass themselves off as such.

Recently, I've started answering those queries about my Indian identity by saying, "I'm all Indian, all Cherokee, although I do have non-Indian ancestors." Noting the deafening silence and the wrinkled brows, I quickly add, "In case

that's not confusing enough, get this: I'm all man, although exactly one-half of my ancestors were women." I've heard that the late Michael Doris, author of some wonderful novels, used to answer the same way.

Let it be known, I am not at all impressed by people saying they are "part Indian," or with someone saying her great-grandmother was full-blooded Cherokee. It's not that I disbelieve such claims. I really believe that most everyone who claims to be "part Indian" actually does have Indian ancestry, usually more than they think. It's not that I want to put anyone down or make anyone feel bad about who they are. Twenty years ago, I may have said the same thing. If a person is "part Indian" or has a great-grandmother who was Indian, that's fine and dandy, but I'm just not impressed. I'm not impressed, because in this country it doesn't cost anything to be "part Indian" so long as it isn't too big a part. It certainly doesn't cost anything to have a great-grandmother or even a grandmother who was Indian, so long as you don't start thinking that you yourself are Indian as well. Something else I'm not impressed with is people whipping out their billfolds and saying, "Hey, I'm a card-carrying Creek or Choctaw or Seminole or Cherokee." It doesn't matter whether it's a federally recognized card or a state recognized card or a totally unrecognized card; if that's *all* you've got or the best you've got, I'm not impressed. Having a card in your billfold doesn't cost anything either. I'm absolutely not impressed with those who "play Indian" one weekend a month or one week a year. Whether it's at Boy Scout camp or even at a powwow, I'm not impressed. Aside from the money sent to Crazy Crow Trading Post, playing Indian doesn't cost anything.

Nope, I'm not impressed with those who are proud of being "part Indian." I'm not impressed with those who are proud of having an Indian great-grandmother, even if she was a princess. I'm not even impressed with those who are proud to be carrying a card. I'm definitely not impressed with those who "play Indian". You want to know what impresses me? What impresses me is those who are not ashamed to *be* Indian, *all* Indian, even if they *do* have non-Indian ancestry. I'm impressed, because *being* Indian costs something.

Statement of Eskaqua [Bloody Fellow], Son of Chickamauga War Leader, Dragging Canoe: Around 1830 (+,-) many of the Chickamauga Cherokees having already gone to Missouri and Arkansas, General R.J. Meigs tried to persuade Eskaqua that it "might be for the best if he also were to lead his people to the west [Arkansas], since he appeared reluctant to adopt to white acculturation. Eskaqua replied that he had no inclination to leave the country of his birth.... 'Even should the habits and the customs of the Cherokee people give place to the habits and the customs of the whites, or even should they themselves become white by intermarriage, not a drop of Indian blood will be lost. It will only be spread more widely, but not lost.' He was for preserving them as a people regardless of their complexion!" [Bloody Fellow was soon also forced to go west.]

Source: "Annual Report of the Bureau of Ethnology" - Powell, 1881, by way of John Howard Paine Papers. Quoted in *Cherokee Ghost Dance*.

Statement of Comanche Chief Quanna Parker: "When asked by a reporter from the *Midland City Cryer* [year 1910] what the Chief [Quanna Parker] felt about how light-skinned and scholarly his grandchildren had become - 'that they hardly appeared to be Indian' - he replied, in effect: "[Neither] I, nor my people, are in the habit of disowning our grandbabies [regardless of blood amount]. Only an evil man would throw away or turn his back on any child of any shade." [Quanna Parker himself was half white through his mother, an adopted war captive.]

Source: *Indian Notes*, January 1972.

Statement of Chief Louis Downing, Cherokee Nation, Serving 1867-1869: "The American Indians of mixed-blood will eventually be the salvation of Native American civilization, when it comes times for reclamation.... There are a surprising number of mixed-blood, chartered, systemic groups throughout the western hemisphere. These collective bodies consist of from one sixty-fourth to full-bloods.... I believe that anyone who knowingly has a reasonable amount of Indian blood should work at it [the culture, language, etc.] and be vain-glorious of being a part of Indian civilization!.... There will come a time when these various organizations will merge into a gigantic confederacy and take on a violent surge of revival from Point Barrow to Cape Horn! No, this shall not be a formal military campaign, but the American Indian will go on the 'warpath' with words of power equal to that of the great Caesars!.... and they shall all be united under one flag."

Source: *Myths and Sacred Formulas of the Cherokees* by James Mooney

Statement of Rosebud Sioux Chief Robert Bennett [From a statement in the "Congressional Record" as a witness to a hearing of the 93rd Congress]: "The United States ought to recognize that a person who says he is an Indian and who acts like an Indian and is recognized [in his area] as Indian, is an Indian!.... We have people who are one thirty-second degree of Indian blood, and they act more like being full-blooded!"

Much of this response was taken from a paper entitled "Everything You Always Wanted to Know About American Indians but were Afraid to Ask" edited by Robert Francis and presented in a breakout session of the Cooperative Baptist Fellowship of Missouri General Assembly, April 23, 2005.

9. Do you speak your language fluently or partly? What is your "mother tongue"?

I consider my mother tongue to be Cherokee, although the first language I learned and the only language I speak fluently is English. I sing many songs in

Cherokee and speak just a little Cherokee. I use the Cherokee language mostly in a ceremonial way.

10. Doesn't an American Indian person have to be fluent in their language in order to call themselves "traditional"?

I agree that the maintenance or restoration of tribal language is of the utmost importance in the maintenance or restoration of tribal tradition. Back in 2006, in a paper entitled "Restoring Indigenous Culture," I wrote

These four: Language, Oral Tradition, Ceremonies and Agriculture are aspects of indigenous culture. They are not parts, they are aspects, each integrated so completely within all the others that if one is damaged or taken away, everything goes out of balance and spins crazily toward destruction.

Without our Language we cannot maintain our Oral Traditions with anything close to accuracy. Without our Oral Traditions we cannot understand and maintain our Ceremonies. Without our Ceremonies we cannot maintain our Agriculture in the way it was intended. Without our Agriculture, we cannot fully comprehend our Language. In all of these, we relate to both Land and Creator. All of these aspects make us who we are as an indigenous People.

As I see it, no one of these aspects is more important or less important than the others, as all are intimately connected. But, can I pick one aspect and say, "If you are not fully proficient in this aspect, you have no right to call yourself traditional?" Far from it. I would not attempt to take away a person's right to call himself or herself traditional, even if they lacked proficiency in three or even in all four aspects. As I see it, "traditional" is a path, not a proficiency. It is a path in the direction away from colonization and in the direction of the restoration of indigenous tribal culture, which includes, of course, all aspects of that tribal culture.

As I understand it, tradition is living, not static. Tradition meets each new generation where that generation lives, addressing each new crisis in meaningful ways. When it fails to do that, the tradition is either asleep or dead, and maybe the people are dead, as a people in the earth.

Cherokees have always written things down. A few generations ago, the few traditional elders among the Chickamauga Cherokees in Missouri and Arkansas began translating the old stories, prophecies, admonitions, formulas, etc. into English. I'm sure it was a difficult process. By no means was all translated, but much was. Of course, even with what is translated, we still also have it in the original language, and of course, the translations were done by people who were fluent and literate in both languages; that helps a great deal. There are no

reservations in Missouri or Arkansas and no tribal jurisdictions. Our people scattered in order to survive, and under those conditions, it is next to impossible to maintain a living language. We are doing our best to turn that around now. It is a hard row to hoe, yet I can say that my sons have more proficiency with the language than I have. That is saying something. But, if those traditional elders of just a few generations ago had not translated much, we may not have had a beginning for our return path.

With the four aspects of indigenous culture: Oral Tradition, Ceremonies, Agriculture and Language, just as an attack on one or the destruction of one is an attack on or destruction of all, to begin the restoration of one of these aspects is to begin the restoration of all. There is communication that runs much deeper than any human language – at a much deeper level.

One could assert that a person has no right to call himself or herself Christian without being fluent in ancient Greek. Certainly, one cannot read the Christian scriptures, as they were written, without some ancient Greek proficiency. Without understanding ancient Greek, one is at the mercy of the biases of the translators. But, how many Christians would there be if one had to be fluent in ancient Greek in order to be a Christian? Islamic people certainly follow this logic, saying if one has not read the Koran in Arabic, one has not read the Koran. However, Islamic people have no right to say who is and who is not Christian. If a person is a recognized member of a Christian community or church, that person is Christian. The recognition is up to the community and no one else.

Ultimately, tribal traditions are tribal, which is to say, it is up to the traditional tribal group to decide what is traditional and what is not as well as who is traditional and who is not. People outside that particular tribal group have no more say in the matter than Islamic people deciding who is and who is not Christian or Christian people deciding who is and is not Islamic.

Of course, there are Christian groups who write off most other Christian groups as non-Christian, and there are Islamic groups who write off most other Islamic groups as non-Islamic. To me, that's a breach of respect. That's how I see it anyway.

11. What do you mean by “indigenous”?

Webster defines indigenous as 1: having originated in and being produced, growing or living naturally in a particular environment 2: INNATE, INBORN.

My working definition of indigenous is – connected in healthy or whole relationship or unity with Creator and Creation in the now or present place and time.

An indigenous people is connected with Land, Creator and together as a People through the essential cultural aspects of Language, Oral Tradition, Ceremonies and Agriculture. These four: Language, Oral Tradition, Ceremonies and Agriculture are aspects of indigenous culture. They are not parts, they are aspects, each integrated so completely within all the others that if one is damaged or taken away, everything goes out of balance and spins crazily toward destruction. Without our Language we cannot maintain our Oral Traditions with anything close to accuracy. Without our Oral Traditions we cannot understand and maintain our Ceremonies. Without our Ceremonies we cannot maintain our Agriculture in the way it was intended. Without our Agriculture, we cannot fully comprehend our Language.

In all of these, we relate to both Land and Creator. It is important to note that an indigenous people is of and connected with the land, where the people are at, not with some other land. All of these aspects make us who we are as an indigenous People.

12. Were you raised traditionally or following tribal traditions?

I didn't grow up speaking Cherokee. We didn't go to powwows; I didn't even know there still was such a thing until I was grown. The only formal ceremonies in which we participated were the ceremonies of the General Baptist Churches: Sunday School, Preaching, Altar-Call, Baptism, Communion and Foot-Washing. However, I was raised to value oral tradition. There were many stories. Most of these were family stories going back just two to four generations with only a couple of stories linking us back to a time before our world was torn apart. I was raised to pay close attention to significant dreams and visions. I was taught that all things made by Creator have life and personhood and awareness. In this way, I was taught the relatedness of all things and the value of respect. I was also raised with the land. We had a few cash crops, but by-and-large my family practiced subsistence agriculture. We raised what we ate and we ate what we raised: vegetables, fruits, poultry and livestock. We did the butchering ourselves, and we hunted and gathered wild foods. My family still lives this way. Janet and I have raised our children this way, to be in reciprocal community with the Earth and all living things. This is the root of indigenous culture and spirituality. We have lost much, but my family has not lost touch with our roots.

I remember coming home from Bible School to tell my momma, "The teacher said, 'Animals don't have souls.'"

"You know better than that," Momma said, "But don't argue; you'll never convince them."

I remember hoeing watermelons with my daddy and hearing him talk about how even the little grass plants that we have to kill cry out when they are cut off from the roots.

I remember my grandma getting a far-off look in her eyes and saying, “In the old days, a hunter told the deer he was sorry.”

13. Did you grow up on a reservation or in an urban area off the reservation?

Well, this is a stereotype isn't it? “All Indians either live on a reservation or in the city.” On my father's side, my family has lived for seven generations in what is now demarcated as the State of Missouri. My mother's family has been in Arkansas for five generations. There are no Indian reservations in either of these states, although there was a Cherokee reservation in Arkansas at the time my mother's family began arriving there. I did not grow up on a reservation, nor did I grow up in an urban area. As with many, if not most Chickamauga Cherokees, I grew up in a rural non-reservation area. Well, due to financial problems caused by drought and injury, my family had moved temporarily to the St. Louis area before I was born. I was born there, and we lived in the city until I was seven years old. At that time, we moved back to rural Stoddard County, Missouri, near the town of Advance. I am neither a reservation Indian nor an urban Indian, and there are many, many thousands like me, descendants of those who scattered and yet remained on the land.

14. Have you self-identified as an American Indian all your life or only in recent years?

Up until I was a teenager, I may have told people I was “part Cherokee” or “part Indian.” As a small child, I didn't seriously think about it so much, but by the time I was 14 or 15 years old (1972-73), I thought of myself as Cherokee Indian, not as “part Cherokee,” and those who knew me well also knew I was Indian. Those who knew me less well recognized and often verbalized the recognition that I wasn't really “white.” This included not just other teenagers but even some of my teachers in the local public school. (The town in which I went to school was very “race conscious”, to put it kindly.) For all of this, I never identified myself as “American Indian” on any official paperwork until 1987, when I wrote down “American Indian” on a college registration form. I grew up being taught that it was dangerous to identify openly or officially as Indian. Frankly, I think it is still dangerous.

15. What are your thoughts on DNA mapping to determine degree of American Indian ancestry?

There are persons who have strong reasons to suspect they have American Indian ancestry but whose parents, grandparents and other older relatives are extremely reticent when questioned on the issue. For such persons, DNA mapping may provide some semblance of an answer to their questions. However, just as with the concept of “blood quantum” DNA mapping focuses on

only the physical aspect of identity. To the best of my knowledge on the subject, DNA mapping cannot even accurately measure “blood quantum” or ancestry, much less cultural/spiritual affinity and participation. DNA mapping only reveals known genetic markers, most usually in the mitochondrial DNA found in the direct female line and the Y chromosome found in the direct male line.

Long ago, I heard a blue-eyed, Ojibwe powwow MC say, “Look around you. Indian is not a color, and it’s not a race. It is who you are.” Within the present limits of the science, inherited physical genetics may be broken down through DNA mapping, but cultural/spiritual identity does not come in parts. As DNA mapping advances and becomes more common, I see a real danger that it will be used or abused as yet another tool for the fragmentation and minimization of American Indian tribal identities.

16. Who is the perceived audience for your writings?

My writings are directed primarily to the people who comprise or attend the various Indian Fellowships. Actually, most of my writings have emerged as talks shared and receiving feedback within Indian Fellowships talking circles. A secondary audience is comprised of people I know and who, although not necessarily members of Indian Fellowships, have interest in what Creator is doing in and through Mid American Indian Fellowships. Some of these are Indian people living all across the continent. However, others are non-Indians, of various ethnicities, living not only in North America but in other continents as well. I think of all these as I write and also of generations yet to come; I often imagine my great grandchildren or great-great grandchildren reading what I write.

I am also cognizant of the fact that my writings tend to get passed around a bit from one e-mail group to the next. Some of what I write even winds up on various discussion forums, perused by Indians, Christian Indians or even by non-Indian missionaries to the Indians. This final category I understand as those looking in from outside the community. I also keep them in mind as I write.