

# Victim or Victor ?

By Robert Francis

From a talk given by the author September 21, 2013  
at the 12<sup>th</sup> Annual  
Mid American Indian Fellowships Gathering  
Linn County Park, Linn County, Kansas

Published for the People in Written Form July 2014

## **“Terrapin and the Wolves”** **From the Cherokee Oral Tradition**

According to the old ones, long ago, the great warrior Daksi (Terrapin) was captured by the Wolves and thrown off a high bluff into the river. The waters of the river were very shallow at this point, flowing over a riverbed of solid rock. There Daksi lay, his great shell smashed and shattered into many pieces, his blood flowing down the stream. He was in great pain and could have died there, but summoning all his strength, Daksi crawled up onto the opposite bank of the river and began to sing. “Gu-da ye-wu; Gu-da ye-wu; Gu-da ye-wu; Gu-da ye-wu,” Daksi sang. “Gu-da ye-wu; Gu-da ye-wu; Gu-da ye-wu; Gu-da ye-wu,” and as he sang, and as the Wolves watched from the high bluff on the opposite side of the river, the pieces of Daksi’s shell began to come together. “Gu-da ye-wu; Gu-da ye-wu; Gu-da ye-wu; Gu-da ye-wu; Gu-da ye-wu; Gu-da ye-wu.” When he finished singing, Daksi stood up and went on his way. He walked away that day much smaller and more humble than he had been before, and from that day to this, he has avoided the water. He will always bear the scars, but he walked away that day still Daksi, still the one Creator made him to be.

## **Where are You From?**

There was once a young man whose entire short life was lived to help his people as they struggled in the face of violent colonization by foreign invaders. Everything this selfless, young man did seemed miraculous. Finally, with the help of some of his own people, the invaders captured this young man and killed him. He suffered a long, agonizing death, but the people never forgot him. Even today, the people know the spirit of this man is still with them. You may think I’m talking about Jesus Christ? Actually I’m thinking of Lakota leader Tashunka Witco (Crazy Horse). There are many such stories.

Are you of American Indian Tribal descent? Evidence suggests that within a couple of centuries of Columbus' landing in the Caribbean islands, American Indian populations decreased by more than 90%. Introduced diseases contributed, but other factors included warfare, slave trade and other forced labor: basically a total disruption of culture and economy. Even today, American Indians generally have lower life expectancies than those



of other ethnic groups, are more apt than those of other ethnic groups to encounter discrimination and are far more likely than those of other ethnic groups to be on the receiving end of violent acts such as assault, rape and murder.



Are you of African American descent? Millions of Africans died on the African continent as a result of European and European American encouraged slaving. Millions more died in the Middle Passage, crossing the Atlantic. As if generations of slavery were not enough, emancipation was, in most cases, a sink or swim proposition. Less than 20 years after emancipation, an enforced American apartheid system pushed African Americans back into virtual slavery for another 80 years.

Are you of European American Descent with Ancestors Immigrating Before 1800? Most Europeans coming to America before 1800 were either lured with false promises or forced by rich men to come as indentured servants. Typically, over 50% died within their first year on this continent, mostly from disease. But wait, life in Europe prior to the invasion of the Americas was no piece of cake either. Christian Europe prior to 1500 was arguably the most violent and disease ridden place on Earth. Methods of warfare were horrendous, involving wholesale slaughter, scorched earth, rape, enslavement and even cannibalism. Few Europeans of that time ever saw their 40<sup>th</sup> birthday. Even so-called European nobles were stunted by malnutrition. Contrary to misconceptions commonly believed today, prior to the invasion of the Americas, Europe had a low population density compared with the Americas, Asia or Africa.



Do you descend from those who lived within the United States during the American Civil War? If you do, chances are some of your ancestors, irrespective of "racial" designation, were maimed or killed in that struggle.

No matter your descent, rest assured, you have ancestors who faced some very difficult situations. Have you ever paused to consider what your ancestors survived to get you here?

What have *you* faced in your own brief life in the Earth? What sort of trauma or diseases or catastrophes have you survived?

Much is said and written today about “Post Traumatic Stress” or “Post Traumatic Stress Disorder”. The term is used most often in reference to returning war veterans, yet any trauma we survive leaves its mark, visible or invisible or both. The effects of Post Traumatic Stress may be inherited or passed along from generation to generation. Unresolved grief may also be inherited or passed along to our children, our children’s children and so on. It is as simple as this: Anything that affects our health or balance physically/mentally/spiritually, also affects the balance or health of those our lives touch and most especially the balance and health of our children.

Those who are survivors of genocide or attempted genocide, even generations ago, may also find themselves dealing with Survivor’s Guilt. There may be a nagging question, often kept in subconscious repression, of “Why am I here when so many others are not?”

Did you know environment affects the genetic code? Did you know the experiences of your ancestors, especially the life-threatening experiences are written on your genes? Traumatic or catastrophic experiences you yourself have gone through affect your genes too. It all comes together to help make you who you are.

## **So, what do we do with this?**

There are at least two ways to take it. We can look at the hard time we have faced and the hard times our ancestors have faced and begin to see ourselves as victims. Or, we can look at all we have survived and all our ancestors have survived and come to understand ourselves as victors.

Now, being a victim is to always have a ready excuse or even a seemingly valid reason for shirking responsibility; for all sorts of irresponsible, unloving and basically selfish behavior; for alcohol abuse, drug abuse, food abuse or just plain laziness and yes, even for violent or abusive behavior toward those who love us

Conversely, being a victor means we acknowledge the strength it took just to get us to the place of being born into this life and the strength that shines in our own life day to day. Being a victor means knowing what doesn’t kill us makes us stronger; it is not just a saying. Being a victor means understanding it’s the hard times that build strength and bring positive change or evolution. Being a victor means valuing the times of testing as much as valuing the times of ease. Being a victor means mourning our losses while knowing that life goes on. Being a victor means taking the risk to love and be loved. And never forget that laughter is the victor’s gift

There can be no victory and therefore no victors without conflict. Of a truth, no story worth relating ever lacked conflict. Your life is a story in the making.

A victor is a winner, but please remember you do not have to defeat others to be a winner. The one who sets about defeating others is really defeating himself or herself. The only one I have to defeat is the simpering little victim me who wants to give up.

Victors often fail, but a victor offers no excuses. Often the greatest victories arise from failures. Despite defeats and failures, a victor remains strong, loving and responsible.

Did you know your ancestors are all still helping you, all still giving you strength? So, decide what you want to be, which path to follow – the path of a victim or the path of a victor. One of those may be the *harder* path and one may be the *easier* path. I hope you choose the *better* path.