

# Whose Freedom are We Celebrating?

By Bud Moellinger

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Johnnie was a Cherokee . His Father told him about the removal of the Cherokee in the 1830's. Johnnie's Father was 12 when the white solders forced his family to walk to the Indian Nations, which today is Oklahoma. Johnnie remembered the tears in his Fathers eyes as he told him about how the entire family, except for Johnnie's Father had died on the forced march.

His father had told him about the horrible march from the Cherokee Homelands to a strange new country. He told of the solders gathering around the Cherokee areas. Soon the solders called for a council with the people. The people knew that there had been a paper signed which stated that the Cherokee could remain in their homeland forever. But the solders told them that the words had changed on the paper. The Cherokee would have to move. Johnnie's grandmother was the first to die on the long walk. The solders would not let them take the time to bury her, or even have a very simple, short funeral. They told the people to put her in a wagon, and she would be buried later. Grandfather carried his wife's body all that day, and all the next day. Finally the solders allowed the family to have a short funeral and burry their beloved mother and grandmother.

And so, the people were forced on. This situation repeated in the family of Johnnie's father, until he was the only remaining survivor of his immediate family. Johnnie's father was the only one to make it to the new place.

And of course this happened in many other families, who were forcibly removed from their homes and forced to walk to the new place.

By 1844 Johnnie's father was 18. He married Johnnie's mother, and they farmed a small acreage in the Nations. In 1854, Johnnie was born. Johnnie listened to the Elders who had survived the Trail of Tears, as the forced march has come to be called. He also heard about how the Cherokee used to live. Johnnie longed for those days of the long ago past. Johnnie was restless on the small farm. The only thing that he really enjoyed doing was working with the family's horses. Johnnie had a way with the horses.

Soon others noticed how good Johnnie was with the horses. Here and there, a neighbor would ask Johnnie to break some new colts. His reputation grew as one who could gentle-break a horse, and turn it into a good ranch horse.

By the time Johnnie was in his 50's, he had left the Nations. He always had said there was no Nation there. He wound up in Hale County Texas near the town of Plainview, and was head horse wrangler on the Little S Ranch. His best friend on the ranch was Jack, a full blooded white man, who was about Johnnie's age. Jack came from a large family who had been whittled down to only two surviving brothers during the Civil War, who had escaped to Texas, after being on the "wrong" side during the war. Like Johnnie,

Jack was sort of a loner. The two friends were like brothers, and Johnnie really enjoyed going with Jack to visits at his brother's farm, where Johnnie demonstrated that he had a gift with children, as well as with the horses.

The last time Jack and his nieces and nephews saw Johnnie was at the July 4<sup>th</sup> Celebration in Hale County Texas in 1907.

### **Freedom Song**

Andy Wilkinson

Johnnie was a Cherokee Cowboy, long braids hangin' from his hat.  
He wrangled up on the Little S Ranch, an' he rode with my Uncle Jack.

He sat like a shadow in the saddle, wrote poetry with his rope.  
He had a light hand for the horses and a smile for us little folk.

Johnnie and Jack came a callin', took my brothers and my sisters and I  
To the Hale County Picnic, Ought Seven Fourth of July.

They had a big tent and a little brass band and box lunches on the lawn.  
When they raised Old Glory to the top of the pole, we all sang the Freedom Song.

Oh say can you see, Johnnie why aren't you singin'?  
Oh say can you see, Johnnie is there something wrong?  
Oh say can you see, Johnnie where are you go'in'?  
Johnnie won't you stay, and help us sing the Freedom Song?

The men all whipped their hats off, and they hollered and they whooped it up.  
But Johnnie just stood there silent, with a hurt and an angry look.

Then his face grew soft and he kneeled right down, and he sounded plumb wore out  
When he said "Little pardner it's not my freedom that they're singin' about".

He mounted his horse in a couple of strides, and I watched as he rode away  
Across the plains of the land of the free, 'till he vanished in the home of the brave.

Since then I've sung the Freedom Song a hundred times or more  
And every time I wonder, "Just whose freedom is it we're singin' for?"

**I too, wonder Just who's freedom it is we are singing for whenever I hear the "Star Spangled Banner."**

Standing Deer was a Comanche. He had seen many changes throughout his years. He remembered the times when the Comanche were a very powerful people. Then the whites began to arrive in the Comanche Country. There were fights, but in the end the

Comanche were reduced in numbers. The beloved Buffalo, who provided for all the Comanches' needs were being killed off rapidly by the whites. Soon all of his people were on the reservation. Here too, they experienced hunger: hunger for the way things used to be, hunger for the way in which they lived as True Humans and hunger that resulted from the slow starvation by the corrupt people who administered the reservations.

Many, including Standing Deer would leave the reservation. They would hunt or obtain work to earn money to provide for food for their families. Standing Deer would go out from the reservation for a few weeks at a time and then return with supplies for his people. But, as the range was fenced, this became harder and harder to do. He had to travel long detours to go a short distance, because of the new fences.

On this trip to hunt for meat for his people, Standing Deer had left the reservation via his long meandering rout around all the new barb wire fences that were springing up like weeds all across the Comanche area. After a "not so good" hunt, Standing Deer was returning to his people with the small amount of game that he was able to find.

He was getting close to home. It was a dark night. As he rode along on his horse, he was almost asleep. He was in that area between waking and sleeping, where you can just function, but are not completely with it. He was very tired, but comfortable in knowing that he was bringing some food home, and that he would be home well before Morning's light, and would be able to get some rest.

Suddenly his horse stopped abruptly. Standing Deer pitched forward, and was almost thrown off of his horse. Fully awake now, he picked up the reins, and urged the horse forward. The horse refused to take one step forward. He turned the horse around, and back-tracked 20 or 30 feet, then urged the horse forward again. Again the horse stopped.

Standing Deer dismounted, intending to lead the horse onward, when he walked into the barb wire fence. The fence had not been there on his last hunting trip. He mounted his horse and began a long walk to try to go around the fence. Soon he came to a new cross-fence, and could not continue in that direction any further. They turned and went in the other direction. Soon their journey in that direction was halted by another new fence.

Now the only thing Standing Deer could do was to turn around and go back towards the town of Clarendon and wait till morning to ask someone for directions in how to get around or through the fences to go home.

So, that was how he ended up at Charles Goodnight's house late one night. He had to talk to Goodnight about the fences that were making life so difficult for his people. He knew about the treaty between Goodnight and the Comanche people, and had confidence that this man would do something to help them

Charles Goodnight was a Rancher who developed the Goodnight-Loving trail, and was one of the first to trail cattle north from Texas to the railhead. He wound up in Texas

after serving the Confederacy in the Civil War. Eventually he established a ranch near the Palo Duro Canyon in the South Texas Panhandle. This became known as the JA Ranch, backed financially by John G. Adair.

Goodnight had made a personal treaty with the Comanche who had left the reservation and were hunting the few remaining Buffalo in the area. He agreed to let the Comanche take two beaves every other day, in exchange for the JA Ranch cattle to run in the Palo Duro area.

It's interesting that the man Goodnight made the treaty with was none other than Quanah Parker, whose mother Cynthia Parker, a white woman adopted by the Comanche, was stolen from the Comanche by a group led by Goodnight several years prior to the treaty.

The JA Ranch was financially backed by John G. Adair, who may have been an ancestor of William Penn Adair Rogers, the famous Cherokee contemporary political commentator, we know as Will Rogers.

Goodnight became the first person to fence large areas of the range with barb wire. Later in his life Goodnight talked about how the fences were the worst of the many mistakes that he had made in his life.

### **Standing Deer's Lament**

Andy Wilkinson

Mi compadre Buenos noches, Goodnight my old friend  
I am wandering in my own land, and I can't get home again  
We have lost the Buffalo, will we be lost like him?  
Mi compadre Buenos noches, Goodnight my old friend

I asked for help in Clarendon, I said I am Standing Deer  
But the trail to my pueblo, you've hidden in barb wire  
I cannot travel by the Sun, I cannot use the Stars  
For the trail to my pueblo, you've hidden in barb wire

There's only one Great Spirit, for all the Tribes of Men  
If he believed in hatred, we would not be friends  
If he believed in fences, we would not have the wind  
No, if God believed in fences, we would not have the wind

Mi compadre Buenos noches, Goodnight my old friend  
I am wondering in my own land, and I can't get home again  
We have lost the Buffalo; will we be lost like him?  
Mi compadre Buenos noches, Goodnight my old friend

**This weekend many** people celebrated Independence Day. Many people also did not celebrate Independence Day. Some people could understandably be offended by the

thought of Independence Day. Some like the two men in these two stories and songs, and their descendents.

The lines, “There’s only one Great Spirit For All The Tribes Of Men,” and “Just Who’s Freedom Is It That We’re Singing For?” help me remember that independence for some, came at a great cost of independence for others. So, I have mixed feelings about how to celebrate Independence Day.

This year on Independence Day. I was blessed with having to drive to Butler, Missouri to be ready for the MAIF council meeting the following day. The shortest route from Hermann to Butler, goes through some beautiful country. The biggest highway involved in the journey is about 5 miles along highway 65. The biggest town you go through is Clinton.

Driving through the rural countryside and through Midwestern small towns is a great way to celebrate Independence Day. You can see the diversity of this country in places like that.

Remember that this Land was not born on the 4<sup>th</sup> of July in 1776. Remember that the idea of Freedom and Liberty also was not born then. Remember that hundreds and even thousands of years ago this land was the home of hundreds of different nations of people.

Today this land and this Nation is made up of people from many different ethnic origins, from all around the world. With all the differences there are scuffles. There is racial tension. Yet for the most part many different people get along and live here together.

I think that that is the Spirit of this Land. It goes back many years that people of diverse cultures have always lived here. The Indigenous cultures of long ago first welcomed the European invaders. They wore out their welcome with greed and genocide. They tried to create the same thing they were fleeing from. But I think in the long run, the Spirit of the Land will come through.

The summer Olympics are coming soon to China. I think that it was during the opening ceremony of the Olympics in Australia that I first noted the difference between the United States teams and the teams from other nations. The United States team was made up of people of many different ethnic origins: Asian, Black, White, American Indian, and various mixtures of them all. The teams from most of the other nations all looked alike. They all could have been stamped out from a cookie cutter. All blonde and white or all dark haired and dark skinned. I’m not into sports, but rather watched the Olympics for the spectacle of the opening and closing ceremonies, and I was proud of the diversity of the United States teams.

So, this Independence Day, I celebrated and I mourned. I celebrated all the good of this country. I celebrated people like all of you: people who with one small voice can bring about good things.

I mourned for the past wrongs committed against many people. I mourned for wrongs that are still committed to this day.

And, I prayed for the future, for the return of harmony between the different races of people, and between humans and nature. And, I gave thanks for the opportunity to be here on this day, and for the strength to continue on.

Back to the stories: I also realize that reconciliation is very possible between those who fought each other in the past. Imagine..... Goodnight and Quanah became good friends later in their lives. Quanah forgave Goodnight for stealing his mother. Goodnight later realizing the devastation of the Buffalo that he helped happen, as a mistake, began a program of breeding and re-establishing the Buffalo in the Palo Duro area.

I hope that Johnnie found some way to find reconciliation. If he didn't, that's a sad ending. His best friend Jack would have had the opportunity at the July 4<sup>th</sup> Picnic to tell Johnnie, "I'm sorry for what my race did to your people. Is there something I can do to help you?" Sometimes reconciliation can begin with one person. It can begin with each of us. Then there can be happier endings to more stories.

**Andy Wilkinson** is a poet, singer/songwriter, and storyteller whose particular interest is the history and peoples of the Great Plains. Andy has recorded four albums of original music and has written two plays, "Charlie Goodnight's Last Night," and the musical drama, "My Cowboy's Gift." Through his poems and songs, he weaves images of people and places of the American West, both past and present. In addition to writing and performing live, Andy Wilkinson can be found at Texas Tech University as artist-in-residence at the Southwest Collection, visiting assistant professor in the School of Music, and teaching his course, "Art and Sense of Place."