



# Signals

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## Cherokee Marbles

by Robert Francis

[First published in the Fall 1998 edition of "Morning Star," newsletter of the White River Band Cherokees.]

At the Shotpouch Celebration, August 23, near Jay, Oklahoma, we saw some boys in the pasture playing the ancient game of Cherokee Marbles.

It was exciting and heart warming to watch this old game being played. These boys were having a good time much as our ancestors did, hundreds, even thousands of years ago. At the same time, it was sad to think that our White River Band people have forgotten this game. Why, when I was a boy, I didn't even know there was such a game as Cherokee Marbles. Now, all I could think of was learning and bringing this game back to our band.

While it's the Cherokee way to learn by quiet observation, I was afraid that method would prove futile in this case. When the boys finished their game, my son Peter and I approached them and asked how the game is played. I wrote down the instructions as best I could, asking questions about what I didn't understand. Peter and I were then graciously invited to play a game of marbles. We graciously accepted. Here is what we learned.

The ancient game of Cherokee Marbles may be played by two players (singles) or by two teams of two or more players each. There should be the same number of players on each team [If an uneven number is playing, an extra player is put on the first team.].

Equipment consists of one marble for each player. In the old days, a marble was made by grinding down a piece of freshly quarried limestone with a piece of sandstone until the desired size and shape was achieved. Now-a-days, good quality billiard balls are used – the more scratches and nicks, the better.

The field consists of four holes (marble sized depressions in the ground) in sequence. I am told that in and around Tahlequah, the custom is to make more permanent holes using short lengths of PVC pipe. The holes may be situated in a straight line, in a zigzag pattern, or in any other configuration, depending on the lay of the land. The second hole should be 16 steps (48 feet) from the first hole. The third hole is 16 steps from the second. The fourth hole is 16 steps from the third.

To begin play: All players stand behind the second hole and, in turn, throw their marbles (underhand) toward the first hole. If playing singles, the person whose marble falls closest to the first hole plays first. If playing teams, the proximity of the marbles to the first hole determines the makeup of the teams. For instance, if eight people are playing, the four players with marbles closest to the hole make up the first team, while the four with marbles farthest from the hole make up the second team.

After the initial throw from behind the second hole, marbles are thrown from where they lie.

The first team plays first, each player on the team throwing in turn, in no particular order, but rather, according to the best strategy for the play.

Marbles are thrown at the hole (to make the hole) or at opponents' marbles to knock them farther from the hole. [Marbles are always thrown underhanded.]

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# 17<sup>th</sup> Annual Mid American Indian Fellowships Gathering

Mid American Indian Fellowships' Gathering is **September 14, 15 and 16** at Linn County Park, on LaCygne Lake, near LaCygne, Kansas. It's just off U.S. Hwy. 69, in eastern Kansas, about 50 miles south of Kansas City, KS. From Hwy. 69, take the LaCygne Exit. Go East on E. 2200 Rd. and North on Valley Rd. Or, from Hwy. 71 in Missouri, take the Passaic Exit (four miles North of Butler) and go West on Hwy. F. At the end of Hwy. F, turn North on Hwy. J. Hwy. J will bend to the West and take you all the way to Kansas. In Kansas, Hwy. J becomes E. 2200 Rd. You will cross a dam and turn North on Valley Rd. **Watch for and follow the signs.**

Activities will include indigenous storytelling, indigenous crafts and games, ceremonies, dance and talking circle. Crafts this year will include most or all of the following: making corn-husk dolls, beading, making chokers, dream-catcher making (If you want a metal hoop, bring your own.), feather wrapping (bring feathers if you have them.) and rock painting. Games this year will include most or all of the following: Cherokee Marbles, Indian Bowl Game, stick ball (fish game), Alligator Game and Gatayusti. Cherokee language instruction will be incorporated throughout the Gathering.

Primary Speaker at the Gathering will be Debbie McSweeney. Debbie McSweeney also known as wadulisi, will speak on The Importance of Indigenous Heirloom Crops and the Braiding the Sacred Conference.

## Special Notes:

- \* **Be sure to bring lawn chairs.**
- \* **Be sure to pay for daily admission and/or camping at the Linn County Park marina.**
- \* **Hand drums will be used in the Sunday talking circle this year, so there is no need to bring the big drums.**

\* **Food Decolonization:** Rather than Food Coordinators, we have a Food Team in place this year who will be preparing simple, indigenous meals on site. Most foods (meat, hominy, corn flour, beans, squash, greens, etc.) will be grown and donated and/or procured with MAIF Gathering funds by members of the Food Team.

Here is a list of **foods you may bring** to share at the Gathering:

1. Fresh Fruit
2. Fruit Salad
3. Homemade Fruit Cobbler or Pie
4. Homemade Squash or Pumpkin Pie
5. Homemade Fruit Breads: Squash Bread, Pumpkin Bread, Banana Bread

Please keep in mind we are looking for foods that are more indigenous to us as a people, wholesome foods that are homemade or have simple ingredients. If you can't bring anything from this list, don't worry, just bring yourself.

Here is a list of **foods not to bring** to share at the Gathering:

1. Little Debbie, Hostess or other snack cakes
2. Soda Pop / Soft Drinks
3. Bottled Drinking Water
4. Cookies
5. Chips
6. Dip
7. Salads or Salad Dressings
8. Luncheon Meats
9. Milk
10. Breakfast Cereal



Foods not-to-bring include those that are heavily processed with a mile-long list of ingredients (heavily colonized) and also foods such as salads and milk that will spoil quickly. Note: If you feel you must have snack cakes, chips or other foods from the not-to-bring list to get you through the weekend, please leave those foods in your cabin, tent or car. Also, if you have special food or dietary needs, be sure to attend to those yourself.

Also, please, no one should take it upon themselves to add ice to water coolers as this will inevitably also add dirt.

- \* **We have washable/reusable table service.**

**\* Please bring your own washable/reusable coffee cup and/or a washable/reusable bottle or container for drinking water. Filtered non-bottled drinking water will be available. We are trying to get away from the heavily-colonized bottled drinking water.**

\* Feel free to bring musical instruments indigenous to North America such as hand drums, Native flutes and shakers.

\* Regalia is optional.

### Mid American Indian Fellowships Auction

Please consider bringing crafts, culturally relevant books, handmade articles, etc. to donate for auction. Proceeds help defray Gathering and other MAIF expenses. The auction takes place Saturday evening, following dinner and before the dance.

### Gifting

Gifting is done individually and, for the most part, privately. There will be no "Gifting Table" nor will there be a giveaway at the Saturday evening dance. For those wishing to publicly honor people with gifts, appropriate times will be following talks made by speakers and in the gathering circle just prior to meals.

### More Information

**Linn County Park Fees:** Daily Admission: \$3 per vehicle. Tent camping without elec. hookup: \$9 per night (For one tent only. Daily Admission for one vehicle included) Tent or RV camping with elec. hookup: \$14 per night (Daily Admission for one vehicle included). RV camping with elec. and water: \$15 per night (Daily Admission for one vehicle included). **Linn County Park, RR 1 Box 141, LaCygne, KS 66040 (913) 757-6633. Pay at the marina upon arrival. Arrive after 2 p.m. Friday. The Gathering will last until noon Sunday. Upon arrival at the park, follow the signs to the park marina for registration. You must pay for daily admission and camping at the marina. There is no pre-registration for this Gathering.**

### Other Lodgings in the Area:

**Cabin Ridge**, 2200 & Valley Rd, LaCygne, KS (913) 757-3999 **(Make your reservation as soon as possible).**

**Leona's Mini Mart & Motel**, Hwy J & Benton, Amsterdam, MO (660) 267-3636

**Landmark Inn**, 304 Eastgate Dr, Osawatomie, KS (913) 755-3051

**Super 8 Motel**, 1114 W Ft Scott, Butler, MO (660) 679-6183

**Days Inn**, 100 S Fran Ave, Butler, MO (660) 679-4544

## Mid American Indian Fellowships Cookbook Update

Due to publishing complications, the Mid American Indian Fellowships Cookbook has been delayed. When it is finished and ready, we will let everyone know. Wado (Thanks) to all who sent recipes.

## Mid American Indian Fellowships Meeting Schedule, Etc.

**Please call or e-mail for exact meeting locations, dates & times. Please bring a covered dish & lawn chairs to all meetings.**

☐☐☐☐ **do'hi soquili Indian Fellowship: Rayville, MO.** Meets the fourth Wednesday of each month. For meeting location, times & other info contact Jan Owens [kcbodwork@gmail.com](mailto:kcbodwork@gmail.com) (816) 896-1044, Ron Owens [ronlowens@yahoo.com](mailto:ronlowens@yahoo.com) (816) 616-4360 or Robert Francis [maif77@hughes.net](mailto:maif77@hughes.net) (660) 464-1749.

☐☐☐☐☐ **aniyansa Indian Fellowship, Topeka, KS:** Meets the first Thursday of each month. For meeting location, times & other info, contact Robert Francis [maif77@hughes.net](mailto:maif77@hughes.net) (660) 464-1749.

**Indian Fellowship of Joplin: Joplin, MO.** Meets the last Sunday of each month. For meeting location, times & other info contact Bruce Redden [kannonkocker@yahoo.com](mailto:kannonkocker@yahoo.com) (417) 291-5848 or Jay Redden (417) 781-6791.

☐☐☐☐ **kanalusgv Indian Fellowship: Hermann & Holts Summit, MO.** Meets the first Saturday of each month. For meeting location, times & other info, contact Bud Moellinger budsheri@ktis.net (573) 252-4494 or Robert Francis maif77@hughes.net (660) 464-1749.

**Marais des Cygnes Indian Fellowship:** Not currently meeting.

☐☐☐ **walela Indian Fellowship: St. Joseph, MO.** Meets the fourth Friday. For meeting location, times & other info contact Kathy Whitley kathywhitley@ymail.com (816) 244-8942 or Randy Whitley (816) 676-8895.

**Traditional Chickamauga Cherokee Ceremonies are held at the Daksi Gatiyo ☐☐☐ ☐☐☐ in Bates County, Missouri.** Those *seriously* interested in attending and participating may contact Robert Francis at maif77@hughes.net (660) 464-1749.

**To help with Compassionate Veterinary Care,** serving indigenous people and their animal helpers in South Dakota and Missouri. Contact Sheri Moellinger, DVM (573) 252-4494 budsheri@ktis.net .

## **Meet wadulisi (Debbie McSweeney), Speaker for the 17<sup>th</sup> Annual MAIF Gathering:**

I was born in Tempe Arizona into a family of Cherokee/Irish identity. Though we lived in the city, my Cherokee grandfather gifted us all with a retreat in the northern Arizona forests of the Mogollon Rim country. It was here that our grandfather taught us how to respect the Earth and care for her. In the one room cabin, there was no plumbing, and I remember going to the river bottom to gather water for us to use for everything. That profoundly changed my life and helped to build the foundation of who I am today.

After a troubled, failed first marriage, I met my Irish husband and the love of my life. It was then that a love of food really took hold in my heart and I went to culinary school. After graduating and cooking as a line chef in different locations, I realized there was a problem with our food. I turned to Farmers' Markets, and then finally working with Native Elders, discovered the old varieties of corn, beans, and squash that you could not find in any catalog. I also studied Herbalism with Rosmary Gladstar who further enforced the belief in my heart that our food is our Medicine. I witnessed various tribes go back to a Native diet to reverse staggering amounts of Diabetes, heart disease and other colonized food side affects. My goal is to decolonize my diet and to help the people do the same, if they choose to. I would love for us to be able to come together and grow our own food and supply our own traditional seeds for the people and to educate on how powerful it is to have direct connection with food, to reestablish the Sacredness of it.



Wadulisi will speak on The importance of Indigenous Crops and the Braiding the Sacred Conference at the Gathering. She will also serve on the Cook Team.

## **Compassionate Veterinary Care News and Tribute to Byron Buffalo by Bud Moellinger**

On Sunday June 24 the CVC crew headed out for Bridger. Terry Rombauer followed in her trusty Jeep. The crew was small this year, just Dr. Sheri, Bud and Terry.

Early on Monday afternoon we arrived in Bridger. The addition to the fellowship hall had been completed. This meant that we could set up our beds and leave them set up for the whole week. This saved us a lot of time by not having to take

beds down and put back up daily. We set up the portable animal hospital, visited with some neighbors, got some calls for surgeries to be done on Tuesday and got to bed.

Sometime in the night, around 3 am, we heard the trailers unloading horses and realized that it was the SunWakan Agli Riders (SA), Byron Buffalo's youth group getting back from the ride into the Greasy Grass area where Custer met his defeat June 25, 1876.

Tuesday and Wednesday were small-animal surgery days. Byron arrived with some kids Wednesday afternoon, and in the early evening we watched the young people working with their horses, and Byron working with the infamous horse, "Ghost". It was great to see the horsemanship the young men and young ladies are developing and watch Byron's gentle way of guiding these young people.

Wednesday evening Byron and Toni Buffalo, Nathaniel Simone (one of the SA Riders) and his Grandma Mildred, joined us for supper and great conversation. It was great that Toni came to Bridger to have supper with us as she was in the middle of preparing to leave on a trip to Germany in the role of chaperon for some UCC youth working on a project there.

Thursday and Friday were horse days, with a trip to the Red Scaffold area and stops at Takini and Cherry Creek. We finished up Friday evening, completing a dental procedure on a horse in Bridger just as a big storm, with lots of wind and hail hit the Bridger area.

Saturday was loading up in the mud (unbelievably sticky mud). Byron came by for a final visit before we hit the road around noon. His conversation included his dreams for the future of the SunWakan Agli riders whom he lovingly called the Bad Ass Riders, because of the accomplishments they have made. Some of these young ladies and young men have had tragic previous life experiences they are recovering from with the help of the horses and Byron and Toni. Byron talked about the Greasy Grass ride and said that his group lived on cold sandwiches for the week of the ride, while other groups had support trucks with hot meals daily. He said that his group was proud of what they could accomplish with very little. He told them that they are the SunWakan Agli Riders, aka the Bad Ass Riders, who could do anything they set their minds to do.

All in all, it was a great trip. The number of veterinary procedures and the animals we helped were reduced this year because of the mud. We enjoyed seeing the success of the SA Riders and the size of the horse herd at the Bridger Church. We vowed to continue to support Byron and Toni in helping the youth of the area. This ministry of Byron and Toni began in 2010 and has continued to gain support and looks like it will become a success. We will never know the number of youth suicides (which happen in high numbers on most reservations.) Byron and Toni prevented by giving these young people an identity, purpose and challenge, all the while extending the hand of friendship and not absolute authority.

We had some very meaningful conversations with Byron and Toni that we will fondly remember for the rest of our lives. We got to see firsthand, the gentle way in which Byron helped the youth and the enthusiasm of the youth towards the riding program. This helped renew our commitment of CVC to continue to help the people in the Bridger area, by helping their animals.

Sadly, all of what everyone has been working for in the Bridger area may be in jeopardy. On Tuesday evening July 17<sup>th</sup> we received a request from Toni that prayers were needed for Byron. Later that evening Toni, on her way home from her trip to Germany, phoned to say Byron had crossed over that evening, from an apparent heart attack, while preparing for another ride with the youth. The kids performed CPR for a while waiting for the ambulance, but Byron did not make it.

To quote from his obituary notice: *"Byron Buffalo was a man of few words but amazing action."*

We do not know the effect Byron's passing will have on future CVC trips to the Bridger area. But we are going to begin raising funds to make a trip in 2019 which will be dedicated to the memory of Byron Buffalo. Our hearts are broken right now, but we want to get hard at work to do what we can to help keep Byron and Toni's dreams alive. As a supporter of what CVC has been doing in the past in the Bridger area, you can help.

If you have donated in the past, please consider donating for next year's trip. We will begin in January with our fund-raising effort. and the earlier we reach our goal, the sooner we can plan the trip.

If you are a member of a church or group that is interested in supporting CVC's mission to Bridger South Dakota, we would be pleased to meet with your group and explain what we do.

For right now we ask that you please join us in daily prayers for Byron's family, for the SunWakan Agli Riders, and all the friends who will miss Byron. We have been blessed over the past 13 years by Toni and Byron's friendship and inspired by their dedication to the people of the Cheyenne River Reservation.

We offer our thanks to all who help keep the CVC trips going to the Bridger area including Darla and James Gavin, Carol Boaz, Karen & Brian Prince, Patti Ryan, Barbara Mueller, Sue Crawshaw, Doreen Kane, Rev. Dr. Jim Houge, Old Stone Church- New Haven Missouri, Sharla Sartin, Nancy Jacobson, Second Baptist Church-Liberty, Missouri, Mid American Indian Fellowships, and countless others who have asked to not be thanked publicly. Thank you all. CVC could not continue without your help.

### Cherokee Marbles continued from Page 1

When playing the first hole, each player is restricted to one hit on any one opponent's marble. When playing all subsequent holes, two hits are allowed on any one opponent's marble. A player continues to throw so long as he [or she] hits what he [or she is] aiming for (Shots are called.). Note: If an opponent's marble is down in the grass, it may be "set up" - moved, up to about six inches maximum, to where it is out of the grass or at least more visible before throwing at it. Many players will carry a plastic pop bottle cap on which to set-up an opponent's marble. Use of such a device is considered legal. According to best strategy, a player may throw to make the hole first or throw at an opponent's marble first. If a player's marble is lying within one foot of the hole, he [or she] may simply place the marble into the hole at the beginning of his next turn to make the hole.

Once the first hole is made, a player may throw his [or her] marble toward the second hole, or he [or she] may opt to stay at the first hole, using his [or her] turns to throw at opponents' marbles, until more of his [or her] teammates have made the hole. Holes are played in sequence: first, second, third, fourth, back to third, back to second, and finally back to first. In all, seven holes are made. No player may advance without first making the hole.

In team play, a game is won when each member of a team has made the first hole the second time. This is really the seventh hole played.

In order to win when playing singles, a player must also make the first hole the second time. That player then becomes "poison." When a poison player then hits his [or her] opponent's marble, his opponent is "dead," and the game is won.

Now, I claim no expertise at Cherokee Marbles. I'm only attempting to share my very limited knowledge of the game. If there are any Cherokee Marble players reading this, please write in with any corrections that need to be made or any additional information you may have.

Wado Brandon and Kip for showing us how to play, to the Shotpouch family for hosting the celebration, and to Elmer Kingfisher for extending the invitation.

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