

0. Life on the Reservation - Story Preface

1. A Bit of Indian History

2. Life on the Reservation

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4. The Need for Water

5. The Legacy of Wilma Mankiller



By the time Wilma Mankiller was born, the Cherokees had been on the Oklahoma reservation for over 100 years. The Cherokees were among the poorest population in America, living off the barren Oklahoma countryside--barely able to grow enough food to survive. Often, they had been taken advantage of by the racist culture that surrounded them.

The Native Americans fell into not only crushing poverty, but also had high incidents of alcoholism, depression, suicide, illiteracy and disease. The pride and power of the Cherokee culture was being dismantled bit by bit by the government who outlawed the practice of their native religion as well as their language.

Even though she was surrounded by misery, Wilma grew up happy. She later commented:

What the reservation lacked in material wealth, they made up for in a rich community life.

Wilma and her brothers and sisters loved the tribal ceremonies and dances where they had plenty of children to play with. The Cherokee just celebrated the fact that they were surviving--if only barely.

The Bureau of Indian Affairs regulated their lives and manipulated them often. The government ignored much of the plight of the tribe and when oil began to be discovered on Indian land, the land was often taken away from them.

Wilma's family did the best they could, but times were very hard. Wilma only got new shoes once a year. Her clothes were made from the sacks in which they received their flour.

Wilma did not know she was so poor, however, when she started school she learned how different she really was. The white children made fun of her clothes, her complexion, and her name. White mothers would look at her with sad expressions.

She had come face-to-face with racial prejudice.

Footnotes:

1) Wilma Mankiller & Michael Wallis, Mankiller: A Chief and Her People, Amazon, Aug/03/1993, Aug/03/2015, http://www.amazon.com/s/ref=nb_sb_ss_i_2_9?url=search-alias%3Dstripbooks&field-keywords=mankiller+a+chief+and+her+people&prefix=mankiller%2Caps%2C159

See Alignments to State and Common Core standards for this story online at:

<http://www.awesomestories.com/asset/AcademicAlignment/Life-on-the-Reservation-Wilma-Mankiller-Cherokee-Chief>

See Learning Tasks for this story online at:

<http://www.awesomestories.com/asset/AcademicActivities/Life-on-the-Reservation-Wilma-Mankiller-Cherokee-Chief>

Questions 2 Ponder

What Was It Like to Wear Clothes Made from Flour Sacks?

Today, even the poorest Americans do not wear flour sacks for clothes. During the Great Depression, however, that's exactly what people had to do.

Native Americans, living on reservations, also had to wear clothes made from flour sacks. Wilma Mankiller, who would lead the Cherokee Nation, was one of those individuals. How do you think Wilma felt about that?



Cherokee Reservation

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