Greetings From Mike

If it hadn’t been for an Indian medicine woman, I wouldn’t be alive today!

I t has been nine months since Father Emmett left us, but I think he would be proud that we are moving on with his plans. Just as you got to know Father through his stories of his childhood and family life on the farm, I would like you to get to know me and where I came from. If you ever said to yourself, “Who is this Mike Skaggs signing these letters?” I hope by telling you about my family background, you will get to know me a little better.

With that in mind, I’d like to tell you a true story about the Indian medicine woman referred to above that was handed down in my family. It all started with my Grandma Hattie and Grandpa Bill.

Hattie Young was from a church-goin family in Oklahoma. They didn’t have much, but their church was an old-fash-ioned community gathering place for socials, weddings, church services and special birthdays and wakes. The community revolved around their church activities.

It was on a humid, Sunday morning when the sound of church hymns and piano music filled the air. Hattie, then a pretty teenager, was playing the piano, when she noticed Bill Tingler, a tall, dark and handsome young lad, peeking through the window at her! Bill was no church-going boy. He wouldn’t come inside a church at all, but there he was at the window.

From then on, Bill courted Hattie,
even accompanying her to church. He was a strong, jovial man and Hattie must have fallen in love with his happy-go-lucky nature and his teasing ways with the children, who doted on him. The happy couple was soon married in the church where they first saw each other. But Bill wasn’t about to give up. “I told Bill, ‘I’m sorry. I’ve done all I can do for her.’ But Bill didn’t have time for modern society. He was a strong, jovial man and Hattie’s heart was in the church where they first saw each other. By the time it was near death when the doctor told Bill, ‘I’m sorry. I’ve done all I can do for her.’ But Bill wasn’t about to give up. He sent for an Indian medicine woman to treat Hattie. The Great Depression hit Oklahoma and Arkansas hard and people barely survived. As migrant workers, mom remem- bers her parents moving from state to state picking cotton and fruit of all kinds. The family slept together under sagging tarps and under trucks, choked in dust and existing on water biscuits.

That’s why I understand the suffering of the Cheyenne elders in Montana, who baled hay and went from farm to farm harvesting beets with their parents in the scorching summer heat. They slept on burlap sacks on the ground and drank river water. Like the Cheyenne, my family experienced the same hardships and back-breaking struggles to survive the 1920s and 30s.

Father Emmett grew up with the same work ethic as I did and he told me about the extreme poverty he had seen on the reservation. About two years ago, he told me that his own health was deteriorating and I asked him if he had any concerns about my continuing his mission. His response was, “I’m not worried Mike because I know you will carry on.”

Today, we care for 40 elders at the Heritage Living Center and we have a waiting list of others wanting to move in. The Cheyenne elders and I will continue to rely on your prayers and generosity. We respect the spiritual needs and customs of tribal elders and true to my word, with your continued help, I will provide for their medical, dietary and physical needs in the months and years to come. Please remember that we don’t accept government funds. May God bless you for your kindness and support, which demonstrates to the Cheyenne elders that you have not forgotten them.

And like I said, I wouldn’t be here today if it hadn’t been for an Indian woman who sacrificed nearly 60 years of his life to improve the quality of life of the Northern Cheyenne people.

With a grateful heart,
Nothing was more exciting and exhilarating for Cheyenne elders than taking part in a real buffalo hunt this past summer! Their tribe honored them with permission to experience the first-hand thrill of the chase, stalking the proud beast like their forefathers did for centuries in the distant past.

In the mid-19th Century there were 60 to 100 million buffalo on the Western Plains, but as the railroads moved across the areas where the buffalo lived, they hired buffalo hunters to exterminate the great animals to prevent train wrecks. In the areas where the buffalo lived, they hired buffalo hunters to exterminate the large animals over a high cliff. But they only took what they needed and no more.

Mark Round Stone, tribal caretaker of the herd, gave the elders at the Heritage Living Center the permission to harvest a two year old buffalo cow. He knew this was probably the last chance any of them would ever have to experience a hunt and what a wild time they had! But if you think chasing a buffalo is easy, even with pickup trucks, think again. In the old days the Cheyenne knew how risky it was to hunt the buffalo on foot. They had to cover themselves in buffalo hides and crawl up with bows and arrows near enough to a herd to kill an animal. Later, they devised plans to herd the huge animals using fire and blankets to chase the large animals over a high cliff. But they only took what they needed and no more.

Mark Round Stone figured they would be at a watering springs but the buffalo were hiding in thick brush. They already knew they were being hunted. Mark gave the elders an interesting speech telling of the importance of the herd to the Cheyenne and answered questions about the care of the huge, dangerous, animals. The elders then began what became a bumpy, exciting chase, but not before having to cross old logging roads, through rough, timbered ravines and many rolling hills. The challenging, often treacherous terrain made it almost impossible to catch even a glimpse of the wily animals. But when it seemed the hunters were getting closer to their prey, the elders watched respectfully while Hubert Black Wolf, a Resident Attendant at the Center, took sage and blessed the rifle, running the sage over the entire rifle and whispering prayers over the weapon, asking, “Maheo, Creator God,” for a successful hunt.

This done, they suddenly spotted the buffalo again and gave chase. At one point hunters had the herd on top of a hill and scouts were dispatched on foot to make sure the herd was closed in on the herd, a dangerous undertaking. When cornered, male buffalo surround the female cows and the young calves. This is when they are the most dangerous, rushing around and around, the dust rising above them. But the buffalo changed direction and came down in force off a nearby hill and ran over and down into another valley. The elders watched from below and the excitement kept growing. But the herd was too smart for them.

They ran up another steep hill, prompting one tribal sharpshooter to go around and up the other side in order to get the shot he needed to bring down the buffalo with his first bullet. Although everyone was exhausted over the four hour hunt, it was very important to the Cheyenne that proper care and respect for the buffalo be maintained, even after death. Hubert Black Wolf thanked the buffalo for sacrificing her life so that the elders could use her rich meat to stay strong and healthy. He prayed to God for giving life to the Cheyenne people and for giving the elders the life-sustaining buffalo meat, full of the protein so necessary for their good health and stamina.

The Heritage Living Center would like to thank Hubert Black Wolf and the staff of the Heritage Living Center, as well as Mark Round Stone for his careful instructions and control of the hunt. We would also like to thank the Northern Cheyenne tribe for giving the elders the life-sustaining buffalo meat, full of the protein so necessary for their good health and stamina.

A Thrilling Buffalo Hunt

Acknowledgements

A delicious buffalo steak dinner.
This summer marked one year since the Ash Creek Fire devastated the Northern Cheyenne Reservation and forced the evacuation of the elders from HLC. We also remembered that July 27th would have been Father Emmett’s 87th birthday.
Berry Picking

Late summer is berry and plum picking time on the Northern Cheyenne Reservation. Staff members enjoy taking the ladies out together to pick the ripe fruit and the results are delicious chokecherry jam, pudding and syrup. When the elders were girls, their mothers taught them to make pemmican from dried deer meat and crushed chokecherries formed into patties and dried.

Today, this custom is a lot of fun but in ancient times dried berries, prairie turnips and buffalo meat jerky kept the Cheyenne alive through harsh Montana winters. If a summer berry crop was poor, hunger was the result. In that case, they harvested rose hips, the small red berries that last all winter on the rose bushes.

The Northern Cheyenne Reservation

The elders would dry the rose hips and crush them. The parent or guardians would then teach them to make pemmican from dried deer meat and crushed chokecherries. The result is delicious chokecherry jam, pudding and syrup. When the elders were girls, their mothers taught them to make pemmican from dried deer meat and crushed chokecherries formed into patties and dried.

What is Planned Giving?

Planned Giving is often overlooked as a way to give to favorite charities. It is particularly useful for older persons who may be concluding their working years with a regular income and transition to retirement with a more fixed income. Quite possibly a senior donor may not be able to give like they did when they were working. With careful planning, donors can continue their support during their retirement years and possibly well into the future with planned gifts.

Retirement Accounts

Retirement Accounts—An Overlooked Gift Option

Many Americans have been good savers through retirement plans, IRAs, and other qualified plans. For some, they need to protect what they have saved and use it for their retirement years. Others may come to a point where they find they have more than they will need and can enjoy giving away some of their savings while they are still living. Giving through a retirement account can work for either type of person. You retain control over the assets in your account to meet your needs and your gift can be revised if your needs or charitable interests change.

For those needing to protect their savings, they can name Soaring Eagle as a beneficiary or partial beneficiary to their retirement account, just in case there is anything left over. Family members can be provided for through other plans. Including charitable beneficiaries in your retirement plan can yield some tax-saving benefits.

An opportunity exists in 2013 for donors to give directly from their IRA accounts to qualified charities. Your IRA custodian will have detailed information on how this can be accomplished. Be sure to start early, as this kind of gift takes some time to execute, so don’t wait until December 30th or 31st. If you choose to donate to us, please let us know in advance so that we can be watching for your donation directly from your IRA. Sometimes, we don’t know that a donor is giving to us through their IRA.
We receive a check from the financial institution and it can take weeks to learn who the gift is from. Knowing who made the gift will be important for your tax return and you will need a special letter from us to file with your taxes.

Income Producing Gifts

Some donors find it is in their best interest to arrange a donation that can produce an income for them or loved ones and benefit their favorite charity. There are several ways to approach this using a Charitable Remainder Trust. Through this kind of trust the donor can arrange for a variable or fixed income. When the trust expires, usually at death, the remainder passes to charity. Relying on the advice of experienced legal and financial advisers can help set up a plan that benefits you and others later on.

Charitable Gift Annuity

A Charitable Gift Annuity is another way to generate a fixed income during one’s life and benefit their favorite charity. There are several ways to approach this and many misunderstandings about planned giving. For instance…

Gifts of Stocks & Bonds

As a charity, Soaring Eagle does not pay capital gains taxes when an appreciated asset is sold. For many donors, it becomes tax-wise to give an appreciated asset. There are certain rules for transferring, but they are not difficult. We can assist with a set of instructions to help make the transfer as easy as possible. As the end of the year approaches, now might be a good time to assess any appreciated assets that you own and your year-end giving plans.

 Planned Giving

There are many misunderstandings about planned giving. For instance…

Gifts of Life Insurance

Life insurance policies are assets that some of your loved ones may consider to be a valuable or liquid asset. Gifts of Life Insurance can be used in many ways to benefit charitable organizations.

Gift Annuities

Gift annuities can provide a donor with income for life. For many donors, it becomes tax-wise to give an appreciated asset. Gifts of Life Insurance to Soaring Eagle would be surrendered for its cash value.

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Rosie Eagle Feathers, (shown in the photo below) like so many other residents at the Center, lived through the darkest years of reservation life. The memory of lost loved ones who died fighting for freedom and justice only added to the misery and pain of their day-to-day survival. At the Heritage Living Center she has found comfort in her elder years. Knowing that loving donors built the center especially for Native American elders has brought healing of past wrongs committed against the tribe. Rosie’s son, Clifford, calls the Center “a reconciliation of the races. I breathe a lot easier knowing my mom is safe.”

Today, the best news I can share with you is that you are now an important part of the reconciliation. The Heritage Living Center has become more than a home for the elders; it’s healing wounds of the past. It’s a tremendous challenge to meet the daily expenses of the elders. Together we can do it.

Ten Years Ago...

Left to right: Cheyenne resident elders Frank Rowland, Chief Bisco Spotted Wolf, Al Ghost Bull, Rosie Eagle Feathers and Wally Cain arrive early for breakfast in the HLC dining room.