

Where Are We Going?

The Gap! Are you familiar with the term? I believe a significant number of Kiowa baby boomers have heard the term and know a little about what it means and how it came about. Let me tell you my version from a time in contemporary history. This version may reflect some differences among the older generation of Kiowa before the baby boom generation but it is representative of the change that occurs within cultures over time.

Saynday was coming along.....aye. The thoughts of the Gap and storytelling made me think of my grandparents back in my young days. Well, anyway, the Gap came about before the modern-day "highways" and used to be the route we took from the Carnegie area to get to Lawton and its surrounding area. It was a dirt road snaking through the foothills of the Wichita Mts., very scenic until you got used to traveling it, and then it got rather boring, especially for the young ones who rode in the backseat of our parents' 54 Plymouth. The Gap route, going south/southeast, ended up at the junction of the east Medicine Park road and the west Ft. Sill road, west of Mt. Scott about 8 miles. There, the two-lane highway started and took us south into Ft. Sill and the Lawton area. That unpaved road from our home 13 miles south of Carnegie through the route I just described was what was called "the Gap". Of course, we could have taken the paved road to Apache, then south to Porter Hill, Richard Spur, and into Lawton, but it was quicker to go through the Gap to Lawton and the surrounding area (churches, families, gas stations, grocery stores, etc.).

I heard many Kiowa stories and songs while sitting in the back seat of that 54 Plymouth mainly coming back from Lawton through the Gap at night. My Say Ghee was a great storyteller and many times would settle us down by telling what I called "Kiowa value stories" and scary tales about Kiowa episodes concerning contemporary beliefs/behaviors. He would almost always conclude his storytelling with a Kiowa song. This is when we knew we were almost home.

The Gap is not known that well among today's generation. It has been replaced with a modern, paved smooth highway through the northwest range of

the Wichita Mts. connecting with a four-lane into the Ft. Sill and Lawton area and further south, southwest via a turnpike route. My point with this “word adventure” story, and using metaphor, is related to Kiowa life today. Things change, even Kiowa ways, sometimes drastically, causing different life experiences for people accordingly. The old ways move out of the way for the new ways and sometimes people get a little confused as to who they are and where they are going in life. This sort of reminds me of our Kiowa culture and the changes that have occurred. The old road (like the Gap) still can take us to a destination but those who traveled it at one time are losing ground with life and moving on. The history, values, customs, language, etc. we learned during the many trips on the old road (i.e. the Gap) no longer contribute as much to learning and maintaining the old ways and are replaced with new, smoother, quicker, routes to related places. The important component of travel on these routes is to know how to get home. Where are we going in today’s and tomorrow’s world as a tribe? Do we still have a cultural home we can return to? Culturally speaking I am not for sure the generations behind us have a Kiowa home-based culture. To what extent did/do we as elders advocate for a culture home? The Relocation era took us away from our home cultural base in many cases. Some of us returned and some did not. Many of our District 7 tribal members, as a matter of circumstances, chose to remain away from their home cultural base until they became elders and the traditional way of life called them back in preparation for their final ceremony.

We must address the preservation of Kiowa-being by documenting episodes of experiencing and living Kiowa life uniqueness, once common but now dissipating at an alarming rate. Once this life uniqueness is lost, bringing back the integrity relevant to being Kiowa is not only diluted but as close as one can get to “gone forever”. Elders, especially the current baby boomers, are not only the most experienced with Kiowa's uniqueness but also the best teachers for preservation/perseverance's sake. The tribe needs to encourage and support today's Kiowa elders in more ways than just acknowledging them as "elders". The tribe needs to challenge them to become more engaging, active, and supportive in

guiding the tribe in producing productive means of maintaining what is left of our Kiowa uniqueness. How?

Once again, the tribe could/should establish an "institute" within the government organization that will develop a long-term plan (10 years+) for the preservation and perpetuation of Kiowa being. I know we have a Kiowa Museum but, to me, that is not enough to perpetuate our contemporary existence. We need active, productive engagement with our elders while they are still here. Various elders need to be identified and asked to serve on a commission for producing and integrating this long-term plan (culture institute) as part of Kiowa's presence in the contemporary and future lives of all citizens.

Where are we going as Kiowa people today? I like to think that our destination is like when our journey through the Gap was coming to an end and we knew we would/should be home. We need to make sure our current and future generations know where home is and continue to teach their children about the signs of getting close to home. Only our current elders know these signs and must take a step forward to help guide and make sure we get home. The days of the Gap are over.

Do we know where we are going as a tribe today? Tomorrow? Tribal elders, I believe, have the answer and are willing to serve as guides. Our tribal government needs to hold an elder's conference and ask the elders, along with other questions regarding their needs, which direction do we go to get home, metaphorically speaking?

Appoint a commission and let us direct the tribe on how to plan, implement, and set the stage for continuation during this era of anti-sovereignty and destructive reverse race strategies in our state and nation. The tribe has the power and elders have the vision.

In conclusion, today I was asked what makes an elder among your people. My response was "*A Kiowa elder is a person who has demonstrated strong foresight in their early years of life and meaningful hindsight as a result of these*

concepts. The foresight plus the hindsight equates to the concept of insight which is known and respected among all Kiowa people as one's **WISDOM**. The major factor in achieving the highest level of WISDOM is **AGING**".