

April 8-16, 2008

"Grandfather says this: "Life can give you strength. Strength can come from facing the storms of life, from knowing loss, feeling sadness and heartache, from falling into the depths of grief. You must stand up in the storm. You must face the wind and the cold and darkness. When the storm blows hard you must stand firm, for it is not trying to knock you down, it is really trying to teach you to be strong. Being strong means taking one more step toward the top of the hill, no matter how weary you may be. Each step no matter how difficult, is one more step closer to the top of the hill. To keep hope alive for one more heart-beat at a time leads to the light of the next sunrise, and the promise of a new day. The weakest step toward the top of the hill, toward sunrise, toward hope, is stronger than the fiercest storm.." Grandfather says this: 'Keep Going.'"

Joseph Marshall II, "Keep Going"

These thoughts reflected the travels of all the people, Mission of Love Founder/Director, Kathleen Price, the volunteers, local volunteers, of helping to a commitment, aspiration, and hope to make a school honoring ancestry and heritage of people who gave their lives at the Wounded Knee Massacre of 1890; and for those who were able to survive the holocaust to start a new life. The school to be started to stem the loss of the Lakota language, and provide an identity which was gradually become lost by restoring the Lakota language, the foundation of the Lakota identity.

On April 9, 2008, I watched as a semi truck, and several cars traveling in a caravan turned off of U.S. highway 18, onto the gravel road leading to the site of Lakota Circle Village, and the school which has been named ***Cangleska Wakan Owayawa***, Sacred Circle School. As in the past four trips, beginning with the first group on June 5, 2007, the first one to get out of a van was Kathleen Price, Founder and Director, of the Mission of Love, with a big smile and a hearty hug. The group accompanying her included: Kate Jones, Renee Paar, Bob Elston, Tom Wilson, and Dr. Robert Kennedy. Also, arriving were local volunteers: Donnie Schockey, Tom Chief Eagle, and Turtle Chief Eagle.



The weather forecast for the coming days was for rain showers, turning to snow, with winter storm warning posted for the area, and as they arrived the wind was becoming increasing stronger. The driver was quite anxious to unload the cargo that included supplies, furniture, kitchen appliances, and building materials for the school. Despite high winds and light rain, the group was organized to began unloading immediately. But, before the work began, Leonard Little Finger, welcomed the group, and offered a prayer of thanksgiving to Creator, Tunkasila, for the safe arrival of the group and for the gifts of work and supplies to be used in completing the building. The unloading began immediately, and despite the weather and heavy objects, the volunteers quickly completed the task, to allow the driver to leave. He had another load to pick up in Denver, and wanted to beat the oncoming storm.

Despite the in-climate weather now arriving, Bob Elston and Dr. Robert Kennedy, began to work on a deck for the front entrance. All the furniture, and building materials were safely inside, and there was limited space to work. Tom Wilson and Donnie Shockely, along with Tom Chief Eagle and Turtle Chief Eagle began on inside work on preparing the hardwood floors for staining. Others began to work on completing the flooring in the apartment.



Around mid-afternoon, in the midst of blowing snow reducing the visibility, Dr. Todd Bolitan, Leonard Fisher, Chuck Scheetz, and Kirk Zabel, arrive, wind-driven by the strong north winds. Fortunately, they were ahead of the main storm, landing safely at the Rapid City Airport, and are ready to work. After introductions, they set to work to install the kitchen appliances, obtained from Kirk's business of selling restaurant equipment. He had agreed to oversee the installation of the equipment. Arriving also was Howard Boyle, electrician, who has installed all the electrical needs of the school, and is ready to assist in the installation. All continue to be busy at their tasks well into the evening. All are staying at the Prairie Wind Casino/hotel which is 12 miles from the school.



Today is Friday, April 11, the third day of work for the Mission of Love team. The storm continues without abatement, but the roads are open and travel is permitted, but with care. Despite the in-climate weather conditions, people are coming out to visit the site and Kathleen. A young lady who had come yesterday, suddenly reappeared needing medical help. She informed Kathleen that she had been involved in an auto accident approximately 5 miles from the school, and was aware that there was the presence of a medical doctor. She was examined by Dr. Bolitan, and an ambulance was requested to transport her the Pine Ridge Indian Health Service hospital located 12 miles from the school. Later report back informed Kathleen that she had not sustained any serious injuries, was treated and released. Work was steady all day, and by evening the apartment kitchen cabinets and flooring was installed. The front porch deck was near completion, as the workers continued their outside work despite the conditions of cold wind, blowing snow, and mud created by the moisture. The deck will always bring those memories to those who did the work. Again, another day comes to an end where much was accomplished amidst socializing, laughter, and hard work for both the local participants and the Mission of Love team.



On the next morning, the skies have cleared, and the temperature warms back up to near normal and average temperature. Workers continue with the unfinished details including the installation of a red school bell that is posted at the steps of the newly created deck. Also, a new steel handicapped ramp was attached to the front deck, completing access for guests and visitors, particularly for easy access by elders, who will be integral to the functions of providing Lakota knowledge to the children who will be attending the school. Workers found that the upright freezer had a problem that could not be corrected, and would have to be replaced, with several options available. All the appliances, were put into place, but that some additional parts would have to be brought in before they could be placed into use. A trip was taken at the end of the day to visit the Wounded Knee Creek Massacre mass grave site to provide an opportunity for Dr. Bolitan, Leonard Fisher, Chuck Scheetz, and Kirk Zabel have the opportunity to pay their respects for the people who were killed there.



I accompanied the group and shared my family's account and experiences of the massacre. The day closed with a birthday party for my grandson, and a meal with ice cream and cake was provided by the parents. Everyone enjoyed the meal. Following the party the group gathered to acknowledge words of appreciation, and to accept gifts presented to Dr. Todd B., Leonard F., Chuck S., and Kirk Z., who were scheduled to depart home on the next day.

On Sunday, April 13, the vans left for the airport taking the route through the Black Hills to provide a short tour of the area including a visit to the Crazy Horse Memorial which is the site where a whole mountain is being carved to depict the image of Tasunke Witco, or Crazy Horse. He was a famous leader of the Lakota, noted for his bravery as a warrior who fought the intrusion of whites, and the military onto the land of the Lakota in the late 1800's. After the group boarded for home, a visit was made to the local Sam's Club, to purchase office equipment for the school. In addition, Kathleen Price, purchased food supplies for a wake which happened unexpectedly to a family in Manderson, SD after the death of a young man. It was donated to help out the family's need to feed those who would be attending a wake service for the deceased. Later in the evening, the family was waiting at the school to receive the food brought back. After all the supplies and materials were loaded, a visit was made to view a building being donated to the school. This home was for sale, but there was no one interested, perhaps due to the current housing situation across the country. Kathleen had discussed the possibility of donating the building as a tax write-off, which the owner agreed to consider. We viewed the building, and found it suitable for use in conjunction with the school, especially, for added services to the community, along with the opportunity to take more students into the program. We all agreed to continue to work at getting this building moved in its entirety back to Lakota Circle Village.



Monday, April 14, marked the 6th day of work. Rusty Puckett, returned to help work on various items that needed completion. An organization, Trees and Water, from Colorado stopped by the offer some trees for wind shelter purposes. I met with them stating that their offer was greatly appreciated, as there are 13 native trees that are integral to Lakota life, each serving a specific purpose, and it was the to establish the trees on site for use by the students, learning the identification by a Lakota name. In addition, learning the significance of the tree; and also, to provide shade. I was able to obtain red cedar and cotton wood trees which will be planted sometime in May. Finishing work continued all day with some of the projects completed including the flooring and cabinetry in the apartment.

Tuesday, April 15, was the last working day for the Mission of Love team. Another deck was completed providing entry to the second of three entry ways. Tom Wilson, myself, and my sons, John and Tyler, prepared the site where the hair-lock of my great-great grandfather, Chief Big Foot, Sitanka, was returned back to Unci Maka, Grandmother Earth in August, 2000. The hair-lock was repatriated from a library/museum located in Barre, MA., after local contractors has taken it along with other items from the site of the Wounded Knee Creek Massacre of 1890. The site prepared would be the location of a monument commemorating the event. Tom Wilson, offered to have the monument prepared and brought to the site at the end of April. Everyone gathered together at the school, to say their goodbye's and prayers were offered in thanksgiving and prayed to Tunkasila, Creator for a safe journey for all. Departure for home. Wopila!

