



Canku Ota

(Many Paths)

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"Once Again Mission of Love Foundation Makes Dreams Come True on Pine Ridge"

by Richie Plass

credits: [Mission of Love Foundation](#)

Greetings,

My name is Richie Plass. I am a Menominee, Stockbridge/Munsee Indian from the Menominee Indian Reservation in Wisconsin. I have lived in Warren, Ohio since May of 2000. On May 15, 2002 I was honored to be part of "The Mission of Love Foundation" group of volunteers who went to the Pine Ridge Indian Reservation in South Dakota to build an addition onto an existing home and build another home from the



ground up for two families. What follows are my observations, words and feelings of this trip/project. Normally pictures would accompany an article like this, but I have chosen to try and "paint images in thought and words" for everyone. I will do this with poems I wrote while I was on this trip.

Our plane landed in Rapid City, South Dakota, at 10am, on May 15. I flew out there from Cleveland with two gentleman named Bob and a kind gentleman named Dick. I am not using their last names because I don't know them, but because once I got there, we wound up with four Bob's, three Rich's, a couple of Jim's and so forth. One of the running jokes over the next five days was prefacing each person with the same name with descriptions. For instance... "Roofing Bob," "Dr. Bob," just "Plain ole Bob," and so on. One thing I discovered real quick was the acceptance, laughter and dedication to hard work everyone possessed to get the job done. This would be a common thread the bound the whole group over the next seven days.

The first site we went to was the home of Mary Fast Wolf. Her home is on Pine Ridge and it was over 60 miles to her place from Rapid City. The first thing that made an impression on me was the land. You see, our reservation is in the northern woods of Wisconsin. To travel the plains of South Dakota almost automatically turned me into a tourist! The land was an awesome, beautiful, breathtaking site for me. As we were driving down the road, all of a sudden I thought to myself, "Why does this place look

so familiar to me?" Then it hit me... this is where the movie "Thunderheart" was filmed. I immediately felt at home for two reasons. One, "Thunderheart" is one of my favorite movies of all time and two, my cousin Sheila Tousey played "Maggie" in the movie, so I felt an inner connection. Just as the elders have taught us, no matter where you travel, no matter how far from home, "home" is really never far away. When we got to Mary's house, work had already begun. Our goal was to build an addition onto Mary's house. Posts were in the ground along with sills on two sides. The addition was to be two bedrooms. Mary and her husband Varden, whose nickname is "Herb," have been taking in and adopting Lakota children for over twenty six years. They presently have fourteen children living there, but Mary told me that she and Herb have taken in over 40 children during the past twenty five years. Some of the children have been with them from infancy, others have come at various ages. But the one major factor I discovered right off was their love, care and desire to give each child a better chance at life that they may have had before they got there. I found it refreshing to hear, "Hey MOM ..." from toddlers to grown-ups. One thing that house does not lack is love.

"MARY FAST WOLF"

I kind of expected a grand old lady
Weathered face, gray hair and all
What I met was the grandest of ladies
Smiling face, loving eyes, standing tall
Warmth in her heart like every Mom I know back home
Laughing openly at the day's passing time
No questions were asked, just arms open wide
Placing peace like no other kind
Puppy dogs and kids running around
While a "Mission of Love" built new dreams
Tears in her heart as the first wall went up
No payment, no worries, no schemes
I hope to come back to Red Shirt Table
I know Mary would never turn me away
A new friend I have made, a new family I have found
A new land steeped deep in old, sacred ways
5-16-02
Richie

A project like this can never be problem-free. This one started out with some major barriers. The truck with ALL of the building material was two days late leaving Cleveland. Then, even before it got out of Ohio, it was stopped for being over weight. So, it had to unload a lot of the material on board, so Katheleen Price, the Director of the Mission of Love Foundation went into Rapid City and purchased the materials needed to begin. She did this with money out of her own pocket. I was to find out later that she has done this many, many times before, and it was no different on this trip. The truck was supposed to be there on Monday, but through the delays never arrived until Thursday morning. No problem! The crew carried on. One of Mary's sons, Darrell, became a favorite of mine. Darrell was so full of energy, desire, motivation and friendship that it had a great affect on everyone. But I think the one thing that impressed me most about Darrell was his connection to his heritage and culture. Darrell would sing at the drop of a hat. And he is a great singer. He sang honor songs for the beginning the building of the addition, an honor and healing song

for Daynetta Bald Eagle, an honor song for everyone there and a closing and traveling song when it came time for us to leave. I had some great conversations with Darrell, but in every reservation Mother's knowledge, Mary would tell me, "Don't let him spoof ya, Rich... he's a REAL good storyteller!" Then she'd wink and walk away. Ah yes, Indian humor ... alive and well on Pine Ridge.

"DARRELL SINGS"

Picture the Medicine Man in "Geronimo"
The build, the body, the voice
Honor songs at the drop of a hat
Traditions of nature's choice
I love his voice so crisp and clear
A rhythm not heard in a treasured tune
His tone, his volume, his chain of command
Brings an image of a full blown moon
Ask him to sing
Away he goes
Look in his eyes
His heart is aglow
His nervous stride was for his Mother's house
You'd think he could build it all alone
But once we leave and look back with pride
Our comfort will be in his new home
Yes, sing he will, for he loves this way
A young warrior full of pride and care
Songs of honor, songs of praise
A full house with open arms to share.

5-19-02

Richie

When the truck got there on Thursday, we all attacked to get it unloaded. A 53 foot semi loaded to the max with material for Mary's house and for the other project to be done, a new home for Delaine Stands in Oglala. If you've never seen organized chaos, you should have seen all of us unloading the truck at Mary's house and then driving over thirty miles to Oglala to unload everything for Delaine's house. But, just as all of the week's work was done, everyone jumped in to help.

Along with Darrell, Mary's other children helped out during our time there. Paul, Cheyenne, Lakota Breeze just to name a few. I was given the task of cooking two of the nights at Mary's. The first night we had hamburgers, hot dogs and snacks. The second night I cooked 80 pieces of chicken. Herb shared his B-B-Q sauce with us and it was great! That brought me to this question to Mary, "When you need another loaf of bread or some more bologna, where do you go?" She looked at me and said, "Rapid City." I said, "Rapid City!! That's 65 miles away!" Think of that for a moment... if you want a bag of chips, can of Coke or just any ole kind of snack to quench your taste, the farthest you may have to travel is three blocks, but 65 miles!! The land is some of the most beautiful I have seen in my short time here on Mother earth, but the way of living out there is unbelievable until you get there and see it. Add to that the racism, politics and general tribal way of life, it makes me more angry when I watch TV and see all the legislation passed to send money, food, clothing and other aid to countries who our government say, "Need our assistance." I say, "Why not take care of our own needy first? Why must the American Indian STILL be last on everyone's

list when it comes to aid, recognition and support? Why must we ALWAYS be last?" No one has yet to give me a good, positive or viable answer.

Once we were finished unloading the truck at Mary's, a group of us went to Oglala to complete unloading the truck at Delaine's site. This is where I took a turn for the "down side." I have some physical difficulties, so I won't be able to help as much at Delaine's as I had wanted. Plus, I was shown the level of "tenseness" at Delaine's that I wasn't prepared for. Someone made the comment, "I thought you were going to have some help unloading here?" Delaine said, "Well, when some people here found out I was getting a new house, they got kind of pissed and so no one's gonna help." I am sorry to say that that is the way it is "on the rez" at times. I have been through it and seen it on our reservation. Some people get frustrated, angry and outright jealous if someone else "gets ahead" even a little bit. But when everyone took a break from unloading, I called Delaine over to the truck I was sitting in to introduce myself. I then told him, "I'm truly sorry, man, but I'm not feeling too well right now and I can't do much at the moment. I've got some ailments and I need some rest." He looked at me and said, "That's ok, I'm young so you rest and let me do it. That's one thing that bothers me a lot... our men getting sick and can't do things they want, but thanks for being here and doing what you can." Those few words made the trip worth it for me.

"SITTIN' IN OGLALA"

Life on the rez is all around
Old cars, old ways, old trees
Squabbles out here just like back home
'bout the only thing left is an open breeze
I've tried and I've tried but the pain is too much
I feel like I'm not holding my end
It hurts to breathe, it hurts to move
It hurts as I try to bend
But as I sit here writing on this sacred land
My soul feels free and clear
I may not be home but it all looks the same
And the spirits keep holding me near

5-16-02

Richie

Bottom line this trip was a success. Mary's addition was completed inside and out. On May 19th at about 5pm, Mary put on the last piece of siding. The gentleman who was the "lead man" for the building was Louie Fostvedt from Vermillion, South Dakota. Louie did not lead us with a set of blueprints ... he did all the layout and measuring as we went. On Friday morning, Louie took over half of our crew and began working on Delaine's house. There was no electrical hookup there, so they had to use a portable generator. By the following Tuesday morning, Delaine's house was well on it's way. The floor, outside walls (with siding on two sides) and the roof were completed. That might not seem like much, but Louie and his crew had to fight the elements. High winds hindered much of their work. When we went to leave on Wednesday, the windows were put in and a few of the inside walls were up. Remember ... ALL of this work, material, labor, whatever needed is all FREE to Mary and Delaine. The only thing that the Mission of Love Foundation asks for is to have Mary and Delaine assist in future projects on Pine Ridge.

In closing I want to acknowledge the workers and volunteers. If I leave anyone out, I

deeply apologize. I tried to get everyone's name and take notes and write some poetry to capture my thoughts on this trip/project. Besides Louie there was Ron Turner, a licensed plumber. Bill Huber is a retired purchasing agent from the University of South Dakota. Dick Sunday is a State Farm Agent. Dean Spider is a professor at the University of South Dakota. Ken Wurtz is a retired school superintendent and Keith Joy is a professional siding installer and salesman with "Tri-State Windows and Insulation." Maurie Erickson is a retired farmer. Mick Dudash is a journeyman electrician from Youngstown, Ohio. Bob Whitehead works for the Pennsylvania Education Association.

Here are some quotes from some of the people who volunteered, worked and who had work done:

- **Mick Dudash:** "This is my third project with the Mission of Love. What made me feel best about this trip was the interaction-it was the best I've seen since I've been coming to Pine Ridge. I would like to see some type of project or program here to teach the children these various trades."
- **Delaine Stands:** "HUD should give money and funding to the Mission of Love Foundation. They build houses faster and better." There were some tribal leaders who came to delaine's site and wanted to "profile" his new house-he told them to leave and go to because they never lifted a hand to assist him.
- **Louie:** "The weather's been a bear here at Delaine's. The truck being late set us back a bit, but I feel good with the work we got done. Delaine is a very nice young man. He's a very hard worker and he slept here to protect the materials and tools. Also, people need to know that all the work is done by volunteers and all the money is raised by volunteers. It would be greatly appreciated if donations were made for future projects. This is our third project on Pine Ridge and it was great to have some young Indians come from Standing Rock to help us. They were excellent workers. It's fun to work with good people. Delaine's home is 28'X46' with three bedrooms. Part of our crew is retired and some are still working. But the biggest thing I want people to know is that when the home is completed, the owner owes NOTHING! They just move right in."
- **Lakota Breeze Fast Wolf:** "I 'm happy we built this house and all the people were friendly. It was fun meeting new people."
- **Cheyenne River Joan Fast Wolf:** "The people I met were nice. The rooms went up quick and were built very well. We accomplished a lot in less than a week."
- **Mary Fast Wolf:** "Thank you so very much to all the people who contributed to building our addition and Delaine's house. And a very special thank you to Kathleen Price for bringing all the people out here. And, we had fun doing all of this."

As a final note, I am richer for this experience. I too want to thank Kathleen and her staff and everyone involved with "The Mission of Love Foundation." When we all left, Delaine's house was not completed. Again, the truck being late, the weather and other "things" made it impossible to finish the job. But not to worry ... In July Kathleen, Louie and some of the crew went back out to continue work on his home. His house is now fully insulated, the flooring is in, door and screen door installed and all the trim was completed. A job well done.

In closing, my final thoughts.....

"NO CABLE"

Looking into the eyes of the little ones
I can't help but feel somewhat ashamed
How easy we have it - doing what we want
Watching sports, soap operas and games
Oh, there were movies and videos to pass the time
Colored pencils, old toys and clothes
Some came from broken homes and lives
Never knowing what their families had chose
Warm hugs, big smiles and "I love IOUs" came free
Dark skin on flesh colored lives
I'll miss them when I leave, but their pictures I'll
have
Great memories like dust covered chimes

5-20-02

Richie

May all your dreams come true. I know mine have.



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