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# Individuals and Relatives

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## **“Individuals and Relatives”**

by

Robert Cooter

Robert K. Thomas

### INTRODUCTION

At the time his death, Bob Thomas and I were working on a book manuscript tentatively entitled The People and the Strangers, which I must now complete on my own. The manuscript contains eight paired chapters. The first chapter in each pair is a narrative describing some aspect of Indian life, and the second chapter in each pair analyzes the themes in the narrative. The first of the eight pairs is presented below.

The narrative is an account of childhood in eastern Oklahoma during the early part of the 19th century by an educated Cherokee, whom we call R.H. The analysis, which follows the narrative, describes the core of the book’s theory, which develops Robert Redfield’s static account of the “folk-urban continuum” into a dynamic theory of social development.<sup>1</sup> I have omitted a brief appendix at the end of the chapter, which records some details about dates and locations found in the biographical sketch. Bob Thomas is responsible for the narrative, and the analysis was written by both of us.

NARRATIVE OF A CHEROKEE CHILDHOOD

*I was raised in the eastern Oklahoma hill country, where the Ozarks lapped over into Oklahoma. This area was called Lapland by the people in neighboring Arkansas. It is a beautiful land of rough, timbered hills and sparkling streams, but with very poor soil, even in the river valleys. In many ways it was typical southern hill country - log houses with front porches, small farms, squirrel hunters, hound dogs, whiskey stills, mountain music, and nearly impassable roads. On the other hand, it was also very western - large cattle ranches, cowboys, "bad men," and Indians.*

*The town of Tahlequah was located in the center of this region. Tahlequah had been founded around 1840 by Cherokee Indians after they had been driven out of the southern Appalachians into what was then known as the Indian Territory. Tahlequah was the capital of the old Cherokee Nation. It was a large town of considerable history, different in this way from most other Oklahoma towns. There were many fine old homes in Tahlequah, as well as many former Cherokee governmental structures - the old Capital Building, Supreme Court, the National jail, and the female seminary, to name a few. There was even an old hotel dating from just after the Civil War. A large and beautiful old plantation house still stands south of town which pre-dates the Civil War. It is the only Cherokee plantation house still standing (most were burned down during the Civil War) and is now maintained by the state parks system.*

*There are a few other towns in this area, which tend to give one a feeling of "roots," but by and large a frontier quality predominated. Even today a frontier flavor permeates eastern Oklahoma, and when I was a boy the frontier seemed even closer. White settlers, primarily from Arkansas, started to move into the Cherokee Nation around 1900. They did this even before our area became part of the state of Oklahoma in 1907. All of the rural sections now occupied by whites were settled during that time, as well as most of the small towns.*

*When I reflect on eastern Oklahoma as it existed in the 1920s and '30s while I was a child, I feel as if I was raised in another epoch, although I suppose*

*that most Americans raised in the rural South and West before World War II must have similar feelings. However, for me these feelings were accentuated. If eastern Oklahoma was isolated from the rest of America and "backward" by American standards of the time, then the Cherokee community in which I was raised was isolated from the general eastern Oklahoma society and "backward" by the judgment of non-Indians in the region. But even if we were seen as poor and backward, our community lives were complete and whole. We never had any doubts about the world and our place in it. We were Cherokee Indians, period.*

*During the mid-1930s the drought and the dust almost devastated our community. We scattered like quail to places such as central Oklahoma, north Texas and California to seek a better material life. Some twelve years later, when I was in my middle twenties, I returned to eastern Oklahoma. My community no longer existed; my relatives were either all dead or living elsewhere. Of course, I still had kin (the Cherokees are all kin, to some degree), but they were not the beloved kin I remembered from my childhood. I had spent twelve very formative years, those of my teens and early twenties, away from the Cherokee area. I had virtually forgotten the Cherokee language. I began to feel a profound sense of unease about my life and being.*

*During this unsettled period I became acquainted with an old Indian lady who was the last living Natchez Indian. After the Natchez people had nearly been exterminated in Mississippi by the French in the early 1700s, the Natchez began to live as a small enclave among the Cherokees. However, during my friend's young womanhood the Natchez had begun to intermarry extensively with Cherokee and Creek Indians. Thus, the next generation did not speak the Natchez language, and grew up as Cherokee or Creeks. My friend had even married a Cherokee. She spoke, besides Natchez, fluent Cherokee, Creek, and some English.*

*I was interested in the Natchez language and would ask my friend to name different objects in Natchez. One time she could not remember several Natchez words for certain objects so I asked her if she was forgetting the*

*Natchez language. She said, "Yes, I don't have anybody to talk to since my brother died." I felt a chill run up my back. What must it be like to be the last one of your people and have no one left to speak with in your own language?!*

*Although that fact bothered me it did not seem to bother the last Natchez left on the earth. She was as solid and as tough as an old oak stump. As far as I could see, she never had a single doubt about the nature of the world and her place in it.*

*Over the years I have thought a lot about my friend, the last Natchez. As I have grown older I have come to the conclusion that it was the remembrance of her childhood within the Natchez community that sustained her. And thus I have come to reflect on my own childhood.*

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*I suppose that, like most people, the first memories of my childhood involve women. There were many important women in my young life during those days, all of them kinswomen, but I suppose the most important were the women in our household -- my grandmother and my mother's sister. Following the Cherokee convention, I addressed my mother's sister as "mother,"<sup>2</sup> and indeed she was my mother both in function and in the love we felt for one another. The family tells a story about my mother and her sister nursing me, which they did jointly because my mother's milk supply was limited. One time after my aunt had nursed me awhile she handed me over to my mother, but I would not take the breast and began to cry loudly. As my mother was fair skinned while my aunt's complexion was brown, my grandmother could see right away what the problem was, came over to my mother and simply cupped her brown hand around my mother's breast. I stopped crying and began to nurse contentedly. Perhaps I was beginning to notice color and had become frightened when I was passed from a brown to a white breast. I missed my mother when she went off to work in the city, but I still had one mother in the house and other mothers (who were my mother's first cousins) in nearby households.*

*I think that my aunt (my second mother) actually missed my mother more than I did. Cherokee sisters who are raised in the same household are extremely close. That tie must be the strongest bond in a Cherokee family. In the old days, it was common for two sisters to marry the same man. The old people said it was a good way for sisters to stay together as once the marriage had taken place the sisters couldn't be separated. There were still a few sisters married to one man when I was a boy. I was acquainted with one such family where two elderly sisters had married the same old man. (Of course, their marriage was not really legal by Oklahoma law, but the authorities just looked the other way.) One of those old ladies told me that a white lady once asked her how she could share her husband with her sister. That old Cherokee lady replied, "Do you think that I could love any man as much as I love my sister?"*

*Those sisters were jolly old ladies; they really liked to talk and tell stories. It seems that when they were young their husband didn't want to marry the younger sister, so they had to trick him into taking her for his second wife. They told me all about how they carried it off. It was a good story, funny and off-color, just the kind of story the Cherokees like, but it wasn't a story I can properly tell here. That old man used to joke that being married to two women was like carrying a bucket of water in each hand: one balanced off the other. I never said anything, but that old fellow never had a chance, the way those two women played him for a fool. I can still hear the old ladies laughing as they told their tale. I reckon their husband never did found out how he was tricked. I felt sorry for him.*

*We lived in a log house along a creek in the wooded Ozark hills of eastern Oklahoma. (Although the Cherokees had always lived in log houses, we stood the logs upright rather than laying them horizontally because, as an old man told me, we didn't have steel axes with which to notch the logs before the whites came.) My household consisted of my grandparents (my mother's parents), my second mother (my mother's sister), and myself. My father lived in a nearby town and often came to see me. I idolized him, and eagerly looked forward to his visits and to tagging along after him. He was predominantly of Indian blood, but I*

*think Cherokees considered him a part-Cherokee white man because he spoke little Cherokee and associated largely with town whites.*

*My father was the epitome of southern aristocratic male virtues, the same virtues which Cherokees grudgingly admired but which also exasperated them. He was a dedicated gambler, a superb horseman, and fine marksman. He was a hunter, he bred and fought game roosters, and he appreciated pretty women and good whiskey. He was a man of honor, generous to a fault, and he was a good citizen in the Jeffersonian tradition -- hospitable, charitable, community minded, and a hard worker. But if ever there was a wild southern boy, it was my father -- handsome, charming, gallant, but with the devil in his eye, a "man's man" who was liked by men and adored by women. Despite the fact that he was a little irresponsible and a "bad actor"<sup>3</sup> at times, everyone (including my mother's parents) forgave him and found excuses for him-- everyone, that is, except my mother.*

*When my father married my mother (who at that time was a local beauty) he took her with him to live in town. She became lonesome and homesick because my father liked to gamble and "drink around" with his friends. I think that she was left alone a lot. Cherokee women are very independent-minded, so after I was born she left my father and returned home with me. Then when I was about 15 months old she left to work in a distant city. Her rationale for this move was that she could help out the family financially, and she did send money home every month. But my grandparents thought that her real motive was the attraction of the city itself, with its freedom and excitement. They would have preferred that she stay home, but as the Cherokees say, "It was up to her." As it is the Cherokee custom for the grandparents to take a major part in the care of children, my grandparents didn't feel unduly put upon by my mother's absence.*

*When my grandmother would work in the garden or walk to the local country store, she usually carried me on her back in a sling-like arrangement, facing forward. Most Indian tribes carried their babies on their backs in cradleboards, facing backwards, but the Cherokee carried their children facing forward. I remember riding on her back until I was almost school age, my legs*

dangling down past her waist, jumping up and down at times like I was riding a horse. One time a white lady asked her, "Why is it that most Indians carry their babies facing backward but the Cherokees carry their babies facing forward?" My grandmother replied, "The Cherokees, we already know where we've been, we want to see where we are going."

My grandmother was quite a woman. She managed our household both socially and economically. My grandfather made a small wage as a constable in a nearby small town which he simply turned over to her. My grandmother, along with the help of other kinswomen, grew a huge garden. My grandfather would feed the hogs but never touched the garden. That garden was my grandmother's garden, and even though he wanted to he kept his hands off. But she spoiled him rotten in other ways. Sometimes when my grandfather was working as a constable he would wear a blue serge suit and a necktie. But he never could learn, perhaps by design, to tie his tie himself. I can't remember all the times my grandmother came in from the garden almost at a run to tie his tie for him. My grandmother thought that my grandfather was simply wonderful, and she thoroughly enjoyed spoiling him. She had married early, and had been only sixteen while my grandfather had been thirty-two. She told me that she could hardly remember a time when she wasn't married. I suppose that in turn both she and my grandfather spoiled me rotten.

I guess that I was an only child if you go by white standards. I can remember playing by myself out under a shade tree in the yard, or among some big rocks down the hill behind the house. I can also remember wandering around a lot with my dog Jack, whom I had named after a white man said by other whites to be as "crazy as a coot," and who was my local hero. This man Jack would stop by our house some days and eat with us. When his glass was empty he would pound it on the table as a signal for a refill. Sometimes he would jump to his feet, pop his fist against the palm of his other hand, and, in a loud voice, deliver a harangue against rich people, the government, churches, and the like. We would all stop eating and listen attentively to his speech; after he was through we would go back to eating quietly.

*My dog Jack got me in trouble only once in all the years he was with me. One time when I was staying with my grandmother's sister and her husband, I inadvertently left the smokehouse door open. Jack got in there during the night and ate a whole string of sausages. The next morning we discovered the loss and the open smokehouse door. I could see that my great uncle (my grandfather in Cherokee) was very angry, but being a real Indian in his ways he said nothing. I finally blurted out that I was sorry and that I hadn't meant to leave the smokehouse door open. My uncle looked at me a long time and said, "Grandson, that's not going to help me a bit when I want to eat some sausage this winter." The Cherokees aren't interested in intent or remorse; nor do they differentiate between a lie and an error. It is only the outcome of the action that is considered.*

*Besides my constant companion Jack the dog, most of the time I played with relatives my own age. In fact, nearly all the people I saw in my early life were relatives. Within a three or four mile radius of our house there were perhaps fifteen Indian households where all the people were either blood relatives or related by marriage. We were always traveling back and forth, visiting each other's houses. We also went on visits as often as possible to those relatives who lived nearby in other small Indian communities. I remember I had an uncle, my mother's brother (in the English terminology, my mother's first cousin), of whom I was very fond. My grandfather would take me some ten miles away on horseback to my uncle's home for extended visits. My grandmother had a mother and two sisters who lived some seven miles distant whom we would go to visit. For these visits the whole family would travel in a spring wagon, lurching over the rough country roads of eastern Oklahoma. We were always visiting someone, even within our community, mostly dropping in and out of relatives' houses, but sometimes making more formal calls.*

*My grandfather's older brother lived in a large, two-storied, old ranch house a mile away. He lived there with his wife and two daughters, their husbands and children, and his mother, who was my great-grandmother. Most Sundays we would walk over to their place for dinner. I remember they used to*

*feed as many as thirty people at two long tables on those visits. At other times my grandfather's youngest brother, who was somewhat of a gay blade and lived in a nearby town, would drive out in his horse and cart to pick me up and take me to that great, rambling, many-roomed house to visit my great-grandmother. It may have been old and run down, but it was quite a contrast to the small log and "box" houses in which the rest of us lived. It was originally build as a ranch house in the last century by my great-grandmother's husband, my great-grandfather. My great-grandfather, who had no education and spoke almost no English, was a traditional Cherokee of an older era, and still wore buckskin leggings when he died in the late 1800s. Born around 1812, he had been almost thirty years older than my great-grandmother when they married. In the 1830's he had been a war chief (a war captain as we called it) when the Cherokees were fighting the Plains Indian tribes. He was a very rich man -- before the Civil War he had owned a large cotton plantation with many slaves, and after the Civil War he had gone into ranching and had accumulated many cattle and fine horses.*

*My great-grandmother, on the other hand, spoke excellent English and had attended a female college in Virginia in the late 1850s. She was both a southern lady and a Cherokee matriarch. Since I was the first of her male great-grandchildren, she was very fond of me and let me do whatever I wanted. When she grew older she lived in an upstairs room facing the road. Her room contained an elaborate Persian rug and a large grandfather clock, the last remaining symbols of her former grandeur. I can still remember her smiling with pride at me one day as I hammered nails into the floor through that beautiful rug. When my great uncle came charging into the room to investigate the hammering, she dismissed him with a grand wave of the hand and the words, "Oh son, it's only a rug."*

*The Cherokees perceive their kinfolks differently than whites do. In English "mother" or "father" stands alone, as if denoting both a singular status and a specific role. In Cherokee there is a specific word for "my mother", another word for "his mother", and so on. Those Cherokee words encompass the entire*

*relationship in which those two people are involved, as if to make explicit that being a kinsman is a relationship between two specific people, rather than the simple fulfillment of an abstract societal role. Besides having more than one father and mother, those kin who would be our "cousins" in white terminology were "my brothers" and "my sisters" in Cherokee. When I was small, whites would ask a puzzling question: "Is he your real brother?" Well, they were all real brothers to me! Our language does not distinguish between "close" and "distant" kin, and our duties and feelings match our language. We have similar obligations to all our kin and feel the same about them no matter if we are from the same mother or not.<sup>4</sup>*

*Nearly everyone I played with or visited were relatives. These relationships created our world. Yet in our community there were several white families, and although we were not close, we would be neighborly and would help them out in times of crisis such as sickness or death. Sometimes during the year we traded labor with them.*

*Cherokees had been living in this area of eastern Oklahoma since we were driven out of our "old country" up in the mountain sections of Georgia and North Carolina into what was then known as the Indian Territory in the 1830's. The old people used to tell us stories of religious events which had taken place back in our old country. In these stories they would name mountains, rivers, and other places found in the southern mountains. Most of us longed to see that mysterious country and those holy places and to visit the small group of Cherokees who still lived in the Smoky Mountains. But our present homeland resembles our old country, and we had lived long enough in the region so that we had grown to love it as if we had been there from the beginning of time. My life unfolded in this familiar and beloved environment made up of my relatives and the land.*

*Besides playing, I worked and learned. My relatives taught me to be a good Cherokee simply by being who they were, and often they educated me without my realizing it. For instance, in the evening our house would be filled with older Indian men who would tell the stories of the creation of the world,*

*ponder their meanings, and discuss omens and prophecies of the future. I absorbed their knowledge indirectly while they sat around the kitchen table and I played on the floor. Other times they would sit around the fireplace discussing such subjects far into the night, and I can remember listening to their conversation as I dropped off to sleep.*

*Although my grandfather was not a Christian, he had a good friend who was both a prominent Cherokee Baptist preacher and an Indian style curer. He would visit my grandfather during spells of warm weather, and they would sit out on the porch or under the shade tree and discuss the Bible, the symbolism of the Cherokee wampum belts, the origin stories, prophecies, and medicine. I was always near my grandfather in those times and remember those conversations well. Other times my grandfather would take me on short trips for some horsetrading or to perform his duties as a constable in a small town nearby. He would saddle up his horse and put a pillow in back of his saddle for me. As we traveled the roads he would tell me of events that had happened along them when he was a child, or instead he would tell me a story that old men had told him when he was small. In this way the eastern Oklahoma landscape became alive with meaning and history and my roots sank deep in that soil.*

*My mentor and teacher of the ways of the wild was my uncle who lived in a community some 10 miles away. He taught me to hunt, fish, trap, shoot; to do all those things which a young Cherokee male must do well. Some of my first memories are of tagging along after him while he was hunting and later of carrying his gun. Other times I would hunt with older boys who were my relatives, as well as other teenage boys from around my home area.*

*Another father (an uncle in English thought) taught me to run. Since he was well known as a fine runner and I was interested in learning, I took him a cigar and asked him to teach me. He said the training was harsh and told me to think about it for four days and ask again, since he didn't want me to hold hard feelings toward him because of the rough treatment I would experience. I did ask again. The training proved difficult but was well worth the effort in the end.*

*Cherokees are very proud of our writing system, developed with God's help by our great genius, Sequoyah. Most Cherokees learned the system in their thirties when they decided they wanted to read the Bible, the old Cherokee laws, curing prayers, or older Cherokee literature. Some men would teach their younger children how to read in the Cherokee language, but most of us were not interested in reading Cherokee until we got older.*

*As you can see from reading through this narrative so far, I spent a lot of time outside of my immediate household. No one family "owned" a Cherokee child and to a large degree we simply floated from house to house, from relative to relative. As I mentioned earlier, I would go on extended visits to live with my uncle in a neighboring community, and in the summer I would stay for weeks with my grandmother's sister 7 miles away. In fact, most of the children of our community, instead of "belonging" to a single father and mother, belonged to the whole kin group.*

*Either as a child or as a teenager I can rarely remember being reprimanded by anyone, much less physically disciplined. I do remember as a small child that when I occasionally made a lot of noise, my grandmother would say to me rather disapprovingly, "The Cherokees don't make a lot of racket." By this she suggested that Cherokees by their nature do not make a lot of noise, and if I was noisy perhaps I was not truly a Cherokee -- a suggestion which was more than a little frightening. In this way I was taught how I ought to act by being told how nature had disposed me to act.*

*When I would play in bed late a night my grandmother say that I had better go to sleep or else I would draw the attention of some lurking spook, perhaps even "old raw head and bloody bones". (I was once shown his picture on an old iodine bottle!) My grandparents told me that "old raw-head and bloody bones" lived in the well, and they also told stories about different spirits who lived in the woods and in the darkness of night, presumably to discourage me from wandering off by myself in the woods or from wandering around at night. But they never directly forbid me to wander off at night or not to look in the well. I have had adults divert my attention instead of warning me when it looked as if I*

*was going to injure myself. These were all indirect pressures; I was seldom overtly forbidden to do something or overtly ordered to do something.*

*I participated in activities as I saw fit and at my own pace, but if I chose to assume some responsibility and then began to become lax, I would get disapproving looks and a cold shoulder from my adult relatives. [theory interjection follows? me] Withdrawal is one of the major sanctions which Cherokees use when faced with behavior of which they disapprove. Indians are very responsive and sensitive to the moods of one another, so withdrawal of access on the part of a loved adult can be devastating to Indian children. In this respect, as in so many others, Cherokee adults relate to Cherokee children in the same manner as they do with other adults. They do not order, coerce, or intrude into another's privacy, and they expect the same behavior in return, so when they do not get it, they tend to disapprove and withdraw. [end of theory section?] I can only remember one time in my life when I was subjected to coercive discipline. One fall while we were butchering hogs I took an intestine and hid it down close to the fence by the road. When a group of young girls came by on their way to school dressed in their finery, I chased them and threw the hog intestine around their legs. That night my grandfather told me that he had heard that there was a wild boy loose in the woods who had chased some young Cherokee girls. He asked me if I had seen this wild boy. I replied that I hadn't and that I did not know anything about him. My grandfather then said that perhaps we should go see if we could find his tracks, but I countered by saying that such a wild boy had probably left the country by now. He then suggested that we ask my uncle to come over and see if he could track the wild boy. As I was very sensitive to my uncle's opinion, I was very much against this move, and then reasoned that the dew would likely wash out my tracks before my grandfather could get my uncle over to our house.*

*One night the next week we were cracking nuts on the hearthstone by the fireplace when I heard a moaning sound behind me. I looked around, and coming in the window was a creature dressed in rags, moaning, with hair hanging down over its ugly disfigured face. (The individual was actually wearing*

a gourd mask.) As the "critter" crawled in my direction, I became terrified. My grandfather asked it what it wanted and it replied in almost unintelligible Cherokee that it was "looking for bad boys." My grandfather said he knew of no bad boys near at hand, but the creature kept pointing at me. When I couldn't stand it any longer, I blurted out that I was the "wild boy" who had thrown the hog intestine on the young girls. Finally, my grandfather interceded, saying he was sure I wouldn't do such a thing again, and pleaded with the creature to depart. It did, very slowly, while moaning and gyrating backwards out through the window. I was in shock for the next two or three days, and needless to say I discontinued my career as a wild boy. I found out when I grew up that this creature had been my uncle from that community ten miles away. He was my mother's brother, the kinsman who had traditionally disciplined children in Cherokee society.

When I was young I heard of children who behaved so badly that it was thought that their minds must be sick. They would be taken through a curing rite, an experience which is very uncomfortable and which involves scratching the child's body all over with the teeth of a garfish. But I never actually saw such a rite or knew anyone who had gone through it. My only direct experience with coercive discipline was that time my uncle crawled through the window wearing rags and a gourd mask to frighten me into good behavior.

I never remember being struck by an adult. If children hit one another while fighting, older people would tell them that their behavior would bring sickness into the home. In this way only mild scaring or the diversion of attention is used to control children. For the most part children were treated with the same respect as adults.

In the face of this general attitude, about once a month my mother would come back from the city for a weekend visit. Although she loved me very much and was very proud of me, I always felt like she was practically a stranger. Her greatest delight was to clean and dress me up, and then to take me into town to show me off to her friends. Needless to say, this parade was not the highlight of the month for a small country boy. As the months passed, I began to get resentful about what I perceived to be rather off-hand and coercive treatment.

*One Saturday morning when she had filled the washtub to bathe me, I ran from her. She chased me down, finally cornering me, but when my dog Jack showed his teeth and growled at her, she abandoned her pursuit, going back to the house in defeat. The rest of my relatives disapproved of her actions and enlarged the stories of the incident so that I was portrayed as sicking my dog on my mother. They thought this was hilarious. My grandfather's final comment to my mother concerning the incident was, "It is too bad you're not a man. Then you could join the army and work your way up to be a general. That way you could really order everybody around." That comment ended my monthly trauma at the hands of my mother.*

*In those days the Cherokees lived off the land, and I was as much a part of the effort of wrestling a living from the land as was any adult. In the spring the ladies would put in large gardens and we would all come to help break the ground and plant. Everyone in the community would assemble at one home and help put in the garden, and the next day go to the next home and help put in the garden there. The women would cook sumptuous meals, each one trying to outdo the other. Cherokees, like most Indians, do not like to perform tedious tasks by themselves. They love to work together. So when we planted the gardens we made it a time of great enjoyment, almost as if we were at a party. At times, there would be so many one-horse plows in a single garden spot that they would nearly run into one another -- an example of our sociability hindering our efficiency.*

*For the rest of the summer the ladies in the household, or alternatively ladies who lived close to one another and were relatives, would work in the gardens together. Some of the older ladies didn't like men in their gardens when the plants were growing. It was thought proper that men should break the ground, but they weren't thought to be able to nourish growing things. Indeed, it is the case that Cherokee women are the givers of life and the nourishers of plants and children, while Cherokee men deal with death -- the hunting of animals and, in the old days, the killing of enemies. Cherokee men are "bloody", as one old lady put it. When I reached the age of eleven or twelve my*

*grandmother would look at me rather penetratingly when I would come into the garden where she was working. She never said anything, but I could tell that she was wondering whether or not I was coming into manhood. Another time I remember going into a garden to talk to an old lady. She said, "Boy, is your thing starting to stand up yet?", and would hold her hoe up menacingly. I tell you, I got out of there fast.*

*In the fall we would all assemble once again for the harvest, going from house to house harvesting the gardens' bounty. After the harvest, small groups of women would assemble at one another's house to help preserve the food. Later during the harvest we would have a "corn shucking," along with a square dance later the evening.*

*Another source of nourishment came from the surrounding land. Groups of younger children and women would gather wild foods from early spring to late fall -- wild greens in the springtime, berries in the summer, nuts and persimmons and wild grapes in the fall. A major source of meat for the table was wild game and fish. I was an accomplished hunter by the age of twelve. When I was given three shells for my rifle, I was expected to bring back three squirrels, or three birds, or three rabbits, or the like.*

*Sometimes we also hunted squirrels with a bow and arrow. We used a long, heavy arrow with a blunt point. We could knock a squirrel out of a tree in this way without spoiling any of the meat, and if we missed we could easily find that long arrow sticking up somewhere. When I was about ten years old I went squirrel hunting with a bow and squirrel arrow. I was looking up, and as I rounded a tree a squirrel arrow came out of the sky and hit me right in the eye. A cousin of mine, hunting on the other side of the woods, had shot at a squirrel, and his arrow had hit me in the eye. It was a freak accident. If the arrow had had a sharp point it would have pierced through to my brain and killed me. But ever since that accident my vision in my left eye hasn't been good. During the Second World War the air corps turned me down because of that bad eye, even though I had my heart set on being a fighter pilot.*

*Cherokee men, particularly young men, as well as teenagers and even children, would spend a great deal of time hunting, sometimes alone and other times in parties consisting of, for instance, several teenage brothers with their younger brothers tagging along. We hunted all through the year, but especially during the fall and winter. Fishing followed the same general pattern, although the major time for fishing was, of course, during warm weather.*

*Some of the things Cherokees liked to eat were frowned upon by our neighbors. We considered crayfish tails a delicacy, unlike Oklahoma whites. When I learned as an adult that the French in Louisiana also ate crayfish tails, I thought that the Cherokees might not be the only civilized people in the world. We also liked locusts fresh out of the cocoon; Oklahoma whites turned green at the very idea. I remember one Cherokee boy who brought a sack of locusts to school one day to eat at recess. The white kids almost got sick from watching him eat his locusts. The teacher forbade him from bringing any more locusts to school after that.*

*Everyone from the oldest to the youngest was involved in the process of making a living from the land, and to accomplish this goal we did much sharing of goods and labor. Gardening, hunting, and gathering were the mainstay of our life. A few Cherokees in other areas did "cash crop" farming by raising and selling corn or cotton, but that wasn't our style around my home. We hunted in order to eat, but not because we liked to kill. The old people told us it was God's plan that the Cherokees live off the wild game, but that we should always remember that everything had a right to exist unmolested. They told us it was God's plan that the living things in this world should both feed one another and respect one another. We killed animals and cut down trees because we needed to eat and to keep warm, we pulled up plants to eat or to use in curing, but we didn't force "landscaping" on our yards. Some Indian doctors even put a pinch of tobacco in the hole where they had pulled up an herb as a thanks and a replacement. Sometimes we prayed ("made medicine") for success before a hunt as well as for forgiveness afterwards. The old people said that animals had the power to make Cherokees sick if we did not recite the proper ritual prayers*

*before the hunt. In particular, deer are said to be able to bring rheumatism on disrespectful hunters.*

*I never saw my grandfather really angry except for one time. One day a little white boy from down the road came over to play one day and offered to show me a game. Under his direction we caught two terrapins (tortoises), brought them into our yard, and then raced them by holding lighted matches to their tails. My grandfather came out onto the porch, his eyes blazing, and said, "How would you boys like somebody to hold a fire to your ass to see how fast you could run?" I never did anything like that again. I have also seen older Cherokees look away when they saw little white kids playing with young fledgling birds in the spring. We were taught not only to act in a sacred manner toward animals by performing correct religious acts before and after the hunt, but we were also expected to be personally respectful toward animals and all living beings.*

*Nature was a book from which we could learn by paying careful attention. We knew when to plant by looking at the size of the oak leaves in the spring. The behavior of plants, animals, and clouds could be omens and signs of the future. Religion, our traditions, and our observation of the natural world guided us.*

*There were some state game laws in Oklahoma when I was a child, but they were poorly enforced. Even so, just the fact that they existed annoyed us, as did the laws which prohibited the burning off of woods and pasture land in the fall. These laws seemed a flagrant interference in the Cherokee relationship to the Creator and the Creation. Modern Cherokees feel equally violated by the building of artificial lakes, the killing of trees to improve grazing land, and the like.*

*Large game was not as plentiful in our areas as it once had been. Some years my grandfather and some of our family would go back to a particularly good hunting and fishing area of the Appalachians where we had distant relatives. (I was born there on one such trip.) We would live there in a hunting camp during November and part of December and return laden with meat. Others would go to the Kiamichi Mountains of southeastern Oklahoma, an area not too far away from where we were, for deer and bear.*

*My grandfather kept hogs which we killed in the fall, and my grandmother kept chickens which we used for eggs and frying chickens. I remember carefully watching each of the growing chicken all through May to see if it was big enough to fry. From the middle of June to the middle of July it seemed we ate nothing but frying chickens. In the old days of the Indian Territory many Cherokees had owned cattle, yet when I was growing up there were very few Indian cattlemen, possibly because by then we didn't have enough land to properly run cattle. Cherokees are fond of barbecued beef, and somehow we managed to get a cut or two for public gatherings, but usually we ate very little beef.*

*A few households in our community kept cows, although by and large Indians are not fond of milk. Some households did not even keep chickens or hogs, which before had been allowed to just run wild, but instead tended to eat the meat of wild game exclusively. (Cherokees in other areas did not hunt as extensively as our community nor did they travel as far on hunting trips.)*

*We had little money because we had little need of it. There was a small country store in the vicinity, but we bought little more than needles and thread, salt, coffee, spices, sometimes sugar. Rarely we would treat ourselves to a pop or a can of sardines or a little candy for the younger children. Although in the past Cherokees had made their own cloth (for instance, when I was a child Cherokee homes usually had an old loom and spinning wheel in the loft of the house), we now bought most of our clothes. Most of the money that we had in those days went to buy cloth for dresses or alternatively was spent on "ready-made" clothes which were soon much darned and mended, plus that rarest and most cherished of commodities, shoes. (I learned about moccasins in school, but I had never seen anyone wearing them as Cherokees had been wearing shoes and boots for generations.) We bought our shoes in town and a relative who was a part-time cobbler would repair them. To save wear we carried them more than we wore them; children would only wear their shoes during the winter time or on special occasions. Most Cherokee women in that era wore a red bandanna around their heads, but all self-respecting Cherokee men wore Stetson hats. After a man had well used a Stetson hat he would pass it on to a*

*younger teenage relative. I remember that one of the proudest times of my life was when, as a teenager, I was able to buy my own new Stetson hat and a new pair of boots.*

*My grandfather had a small income from his job as a constable. This brought in regular money every month, but others in our community amassed what little money they had by selling their labor on the farms or ranches of the rich whites in the general area, or by cutting and selling railroad cross-ties. There was, of course, no welfare, no social security, and no pensions, nor were there old age homes. I think we would have been shocked at the very suggestion that we separate ourselves from our cherished elderly by putting them in some building far away from us under the care of strangers.*

*In fact, we saw so few strangers in our community that when they did arrive they were somewhat frightening, not only to the children, but to most of the grown people as well. For instance, I remember my grandmother was particularly afraid of strange whites, and if one approached our house, especially if he were well dressed with fountain pens in his pocket, she would hide in the house and not answer the door. I was simply stunned silent by the appearance of strangers. Although my grandfather was a Cherokee to the very core in his attitudes and outlook, and was so in every way, he spoke several languages and had traveled all over the world, although he had little formal education. He was a very sophisticated man, but most of the rest of us were simple, country people - "full bloods," as whites would call us.*

*Sometimes we saw Creek Indians traveling through our area, strung out in a line as was their custom while going to visit relatives who lived to the east of our settlement. Often they would stop to visit a while with my grandfather. They were a strange and exotic people to me, even though I liked their laughing and friendly manner. I also knew I had relatives who were black people. (Many Cherokees were slave holders in the old days.) My grandfather would visit with them on the occasions when we ran into them in town, and once in a while they would drop by the house if they were in need. They seemed kind and gentle, but I didn't consider them part of my world.*

*Except for large religious gatherings held outside our small community, we rarely needed to leave, as most of our wants were taken care of by our relatives. We made our living within our community; we had our own doctors there, and our main religious life took place among our relatives. There were older women in our communities who knew herbs and who could cure most of our childhood diseases. My grandmother was one such person, and her sister who lived in another community was also a well known herb doctor. Women, particularly older women, delivered the children. If we needed someone to deal with a serious illness we went to a renowned Indian doctor living in a neighboring community who, although he was a distant relative, still felt like somewhat of a stranger and was a little awe-inspiring because of his spiritual power. If all else failed, there were old-fashioned white country doctors in the area who could be relied upon for help and who would be willing to either wait great lengths of time for the payment of their fees or to take produce in lieu of money. When people were sick we all took care of them; we cut their wood, and did their farm work. And if they died we laid them in the earth ourselves.*

*We had many religious ceremonies in our homes -- birth ceremonies, curing rites, funerals, purification of the house, herb medicine before eating "green" corn, herb medicine at the Cherokee New Year in October, hunting rituals at the fireplace, planting ceremonies at the garden, rituals to insure plant growth at the garden in June, rituals to protect the house and garden from the fierce Oklahoma storms, religious purification at the spring before dawn many mornings, and so many more I can't remember them all. I also knew that my grandfather used the old Cherokee war medicine (prayers and charms) in his work as a constable.*

*Every act and every object held sacred meaning. But while religion permeated our lives, I don't want to give the impression that in those days Cherokees were some kind of a religious commune. Your beliefs were your own business; you were only required to behave in the right way. I remember one old man who was second chief of a ceremonial ground and was considered a good chief. He was a noted herb doctor, he was generous and always willing to help*

out people, and he followed the Cherokee Law. He always claimed that he didn't believe in God, which shocked everyone, but he was still a good man in the view of Cherokees.

There were old style Cherokee ceremonial grounds, called "stomp grounds" in Oklahoma English, scattered around throughout the Cherokee area. I'd say there were probably ten or so altogether. There were monthly ceremonies held at these grounds, all night worship dances that were both fun and holy at the same time. In past years there had been a stomp ground in our area, but it had been closed down (the "Fire had gone out," as Cherokees say) before I was born. Sometimes we would travel many miles to a stomp ground in another area for the local community's monthly dance. When Cherokees worshipped at their local ceremonial grounds it was with immediate relatives. Of course, most of the elders who were chiefs and priests of the ceremonial grounds were also the fathers and grandfathers of the worshippers.

When our family journeyed to the large ceremonial grounds for more tribal-wide ceremonies, it was an even more festive and joyous occasion. It would take us several days by horseback and wagon to make the trip. We would camp under the trees and visit relatives and friends from far away that we had not seen since the last year. The local ceremonial grounds would strengthen local kin ties through celebrating those kin ties and would strengthen the Cherokee relationship with the land and God; our ceremonies at the larger stomp grounds did the same for the whole tribe.

Cherokees don't like to tell others what to do, or interfere in other people's business. They try to keep their judgments to themselves. Although Cherokees like to give you a lot of rope, if you raise a fuss in public or violate a sacred prohibition at a ceremony you may find yourself in big trouble. Cherokees can come down hard. For instance, no drinking or drunks are allowed on a Cherokee stomp ground, because most Cherokees are bone-mean when drinking (me included) and can get violent. If you are drinking and slip past the guards and get onto the dance ground in that state, you will be tied to a post nearby, where you stay until the middle of the next morning, nursing a hang-over in the hot

*Oklahoma sun and feeling like the ass of the year until the guards cut you down. That will be the last time you come onto a stomp ground drinking.*

*Cherokees are very tolerant unless a person makes social trouble. We usually just accept others as they are. We value our old people because they are wise. If they are forgetful we overlook it as something which can't be helped. If they are slow, we simply wait for them. One of our playmates was a boy who was "afflicted, not quite right" as they say in Oklahoma. We knew that he didn't understand what teasing was and would get upset, so we didn't tease him. I remember one time he became very angry and ran me up a tree. He kept me treed there nearly all afternoon. When he got in the way in games, we just made extra room for him. He would stand all day sweating like a pig in the middle of a field in the hot sun, saying hello to each of us every time we hoed past him. If someone is eccentric, that is his way; perhaps the spiritual world has told him something that we don't know about. If a boy is "sissified" and would rather be around women, that's up to him. It is his business. Who are we to say? We are all relatives, and God decreed that we should live together in harmony. But don't willfully and irresponsibly destroy that harmony, or you may get tied to that post in the stomp ground. I learned that lesson at Cherokee stomp grounds when I was very small.*

*Although Cherokees universally condemned drinking, this was because drinking was usually associated with violence. However, if a person drank without causing trouble or making their family suffer, Cherokees were hard put to be critical. My father was such a person. He drank a lot, but he was always a gentleman, drunk or sober.*

*In another community not too far away there was a small Cherokee Baptist church. Sometimes some of our family would journey to that community to attend their church. (Although I have to say that I never saw my grandparents in a church in their lives.) The sermon was in the Cherokee language, the hymns were sung in the Cherokee language, and the Bible was written in Cherokee. We would enjoy the service, the singing, the visiting, the worship, the fellowship, and being "honored" guests, so to speak. At times there would be what were*

called "singings" at this church which were attended by all the Cherokee Baptist churches in our area, and of course we would attend those as well as the grave decorating ceremonies in May. In the fall all the Cherokee Baptists came together at a permanent camp ground for a week of worshipping together. This gathering was as festive and as renewing an occasion as the large native ceremonies would be.

Besides religious ceremonies we enjoyed other entertainments, including playing cards. My second mother (my aunt), who was lucky in cards, enjoyed beating my grandfather, who was an avid card player as well as a bad loser. She would laugh like a maniac when she beat him, and he would sulk. If he was a poor loser, she was a poor winner. Some of my fathers were great gamblers as well. We didn't have many public games in our settlement, but in other Cherokee areas Indians played and bet on bow and arrow contests and on a unique marble game from the ancient days. We also enjoyed music, and since there were many musicians and singers living along our creek, there were always musicians playing and singing on someone's porch on summer evenings. "Little Brown Jug" was my grandfather's favorite song, but my grandmother and I liked "Red Wing." I had one uncle who played a fine French harp (harmonica) and two sisters who could sing like the angels. In the 1930's we became dedicated country music fans when my mother brought us a radio from the city. Square dances, held nearly every month at one of the houses on the creek, were one of those rare activities that brought Indians and whites together. Many talented Cherokee fiddlers in the Oklahoma Ozarks played at them. Since my grandfather always attended the square dances, there was very little gun play or other illegal acts, even though the fruit jars of home brew and white liquor were passed around out back of the house.

Although Cherokees did not have the good horses of past years, we still enjoyed watching a good horse race or a Sunday afternoon rodeo, often held at a neighboring white rancher's place. Cherokees were still very good horsemen and cowboys in those days, especially members of my own immediate family. In fact,

*my mother could have become a professional sulky race driver if she had been a man.*

*My father died, alcoholic and penniless, when I was seven.. Just before the depression he had loaned out over \$20,000 dollars to friends and business associates on their handshake alone. One of these friends was a member of a family which was considered disreputable, to say the least, by the more respectable people in the county. After my father's death this same friend came over to the house and presented me with a beautiful saddle pony. He may have been Arkansas white trash, but he was the only one of my father's associates who was a gentleman, even if he was a little rough-cut.*

*My new pony's sire was a stud pony and his mother was a five- gaited saddle mare. He inherited his mother's gaits, thus he was a great pleasure to ride. His coat was spotted, and he was flat over the back, as well as being short-coupled (short between the withers and the hindquarters). I named him Jack Riley - Jack after the trickster in Cherokee lore, Jack Skeena; and Riley after the legendary Irishman, Pat Riley. He was the best cutting horse I ever saw and could turn on a dime. I could even herd turkeys on him. He would have made a great polo pony.*

*Once in a while we used to let my pony graze in the front yard. One time a white man came by along the road and stopped to admire him. Shortly after stopping the white man called up to the house and my grandfather went out to talk to him. After some talk my grandfather called for me to come out to the yard fence and said to me in Cherokee, "This white man wants to buy your pony." But Jack Riley was my pride and joy; I don't think I could have sold him to my grandfather if he had asked. I told my grandfather, "Tell him I don't want to sell." My grandfather talked to the stranger for awhile and I could see he was getting annoyed; finally he just turned around and went back into the house. Later he told me, "That white man must not have any ears. He kept asking me to sell him that pony, and I kept telling him that the pony was yours and you didn't want to sell. I got tired of him!" The stranger thought that my grandfather had the final*

*say because, as I came to understand much later, most whites don't feel that a young boy should be able to make such a decision all on his own.*

*Although we mostly tried to settle our differences among ourselves, there were formal law enforcement agencies in the area. As I mentioned, my grandfather, who had been a Cherokee sheriff of one of the districts of the Cherokee Nation before the State of Oklahoma existed and later had been a United States marshal, was a constable in a small town nearby. The sheriff of our county was a Cherokee Indian, and even the county judge was a Cherokee who could conduct his court proceedings in the Cherokee language if need be. In spite of this, the "law" was a foreign agency to us. We tended not to need to resort to formal legal proceedings. During that time in Oklahoma there were some cattle rustlers and bank robbers, made up of both whites and a few Indians, but we never had enough cattle or money to be worthy of their attention. And if some of the Indian outlaws who were related to us showed up at our community, we welcomed them and hid them and never knew anything when the "law" inquired.*

*Things tended to be pretty quiet out in the country where we lived, but it was different in town. I remember once when my grandfather and I stayed over one Saturday night with a friend who lived at the edge of one of the small towns in our areas. His house was right off the main road, and we could hear drunk young Indians running their horses while whooping and shooting off their pistols far into the night.*

*Although the law was far from our lives, the government and schools were even further away. This had not always been the case. When I was growing up I heard the older people who had been raised before 1907 talk about the time when the Cherokee Indians had organized our own schools and government. During that time even Cherokees in the most isolated communities were involved in Cherokee government and schools. But our government and schools were dissolved after the state of Oklahoma came into the Union, so we simply decided to take no notice of such affairs. By unspoken mutual agreement with our new white neighbors, we took no part in government or formal*

education. . However, this non-participation in politics did not, at the time, seem to be a serious lack in our lives. My family had fought on the Union side during the Civil War and our sympathies were with the Republican party; so even if we had bothered to vote we would have been an island of Indian Republicans in a sea of white Democrats. Although we were exploited, to a degree, by formal government and by the illegal taking of Indian land when I was growing up, the local political "boss" of our country was a southern patron of the old school. He knew everyone by name, could speak a few words of bad Cherokee, always inquired about your loved ones, and was always willing to do you a favor, even though he knew that most Cherokees did not vote

When I was growing up the older people were very suspicious of what they called the "white man's schools," which had replaced the Cherokee schools of earlier days. The older people suspected that these schools, being entirely controlled by whites, might end up teaching their children to be whites instead of being good Cherokee Indians. Even so, we figured our white neighbors sat on the school board and would certainly intercede for us if need be. In spite of these suspicions, most of us ended up in the local one room school house, along with our older and younger relatives. On the playground, the Cherokee children usually played together mainly because of the language difference between the white kids and ourselves

In the lower grades teachers were always saying to me, "What are you going to be when you grow up?" This puzzled me. I thought the answer was self-evident -- "Like I am now, a Cherokee male, but bigger and older." Even when I figured out that they meant to ask how I was going to make a living, I didn't realize that the question actually went much deeper than a simple question about a job. For instance, in later grades one teacher said to me, "You are a bright boy. You could make something of yourself, but you'll have to get out of this part of the country first." Whoa! Did that mean that right now I was nothing,, that my family was nothing and that they were the ones making me nothing!?!?

Very early in my schooling I became suspicious of my teachers' "facts" about Indians, in terms of their presentation of the history of Indian-white

*relations, and their evaluation of American society. I remember once when our teacher told us that in the old days the Indians killed white women and children in the wars with the whites. I was shocked. I asked my grandfather about her report when I got home that evening and, when he said that such was indeed the case, I was even more shocked. I commented that Indians must have been very mean people in those days. He told me that whites had also killed Indian women and children in those wars. That was the nature of warfare when civilians, not armies, are fighting each other. I was puzzled. I asked him why our teacher didn't also say that whites had killed Indian women and children during those wars. He looked at me for a while with that flat Indian look, as if I had asked an incredibly stupid question. Then he said, "In the first place, whites like to think that they are purer and holier than any other nationality, so they kind of twist the facts around to support this perception. Several generations of whites have now passed on that lie, so that the younger ones have come to believe it is truth. The second thing is that more than half of those students are white kids, and no white lady is going to tell the truth about those wars to white kids, especially when there are Indian kids sitting there listening." At that moment I developed a critical attitude toward schooling. Yet school was not an unpleasant experience, except for being penned up all day in a classroom. It just seemed to be a boring requirement of getting through life. But we Indian kids missed a lot of school during hunting time in winter, as well as during the spring and fall when we were busy putting in gardens and then harvesting them.*

*If school and government seemed far away from us, the general white society was even farther away. Once every couple of weeks we would all hitch up the wagon and ride into the county seat, usually on Saturday but sometimes on court day, for a day in town. The day was exciting but frightening, and the combination made it thrilling. The day was noisy and full of people; it was a smorgasbord of pleasures and temptations. My grandfather's brother, the "gay blade" whom I mentioned earlier, lived in town and worked as a night guard in the local bank. He always had money, and when he met us in town on Saturday morning he would give me a dime to go to the picture show that afternoon, which*

was usually a cowboy show. My grandmother usually accompanied me, even though her English was too limited to understand the dialogue. Further, she thought the movie plots were immoral and would comment that "the meanest man always wins in those shows." But she liked horses and would sit enthralled through the whole movie watching the fine horses as they pranced across the screen.

One could stand on the street all day long and never get one's eyes full. We would see relatives and friends from far away; white friends of my grandfather would speak to me in a strange language and then frighten me by trying to pick me up. I usually held my grandmother tightly by the hand, ready to run behind her skirts at the slightest hint of danger. However, as I moved into my teens, I began to like to lean up against the building, tilt my Stetson hat forward over my eyes, and people-watch. Yet town was a strange and foreign place with whites a strange and foreign people. Town was interesting and exciting and thrilling, because I knew that at the end of the day we would go back home -- the place where my relatives lived and were buried, where things were familiar. Home was where I was loved, where the people, the land, and I were all of one piece.

I guess that I have painted a rather idyllic portrait of my childhood with these memories but there were some black spots. Cherokees were dirt poor at that time, and pickings at the table in late winter were pretty slim for all of us. Sometimes a winter meal was only cornbread, grease, and onion, so when the spring had arrived we almost drowned ourselves on the wild greens. But the old people could remember a time when it was the whites who were poor while we were rich. More than that, we knew that we were not a free people; we were like the Jews in Babylon, a captive nation. Our prophecies told us that in time we would once again become a free and prosperous people.

A lot of babies died in that time, children who at one or two years old who had become cherished, loved ones. That memory hurts! And digging those little holes in the cold winter ground is not a pleasant occupation. Cherokee babies had died before in calamities, but never had so many died from sickness as in

*that era, so the old people said. Old World diseases hit us hard -- T.B., typhoid fever, scarlet fever, etc. I guess we had little natural immunity to such diseases and, our poverty furthered weakened us. It seemed that in every Indian home you visited there was an old person lying in a back room, coughing his life away. And then the plagues used to sweep through the land, especially typhoid fever in the summer.*

*Our healers weren't good at curing those white man's diseases --we had to go to white doctors to be treated for those diseases -- but our healers were good at healing most other kinds of disease. They cured with ritual prayers, ceremonies, and herbs. They re-established good relations between the patient and the rest of the universe, appeased the offended party -- be they animals, humans, spirits -- or corrected for a mistake in ritual or the breaking of taboo. In fact, the word for disease in the Cherokee language has the same root as the word for resentment.*

*One black spot in our life we couldn't blame on the white man was the fear of ghosts, black magic, and witchcraft that permeated our lives.. Some nights I almost killed my pony running him toward home when I thought I had encountered a ghost or a witch. We took elaborate religious precautions to protect ourselves from the possible black magic ("bad medicine") of our fellow Cherokees, and we suspected almost every Cherokee over ninety of being a witch. I must say, however, that this fear tended to keep us outwardly very friendly and helpful to one another.*

*Someone once said that a person has to taste the bitter to appreciate the sweet. I think that this is true, for in spite of many hardships and fears, I remember my childhood as being sweet and full.*

*But when I was around twelve, our life began to change significantly. The Dust Bowl and the Depression hit eastern Oklahoma full blast. Gardens failed for four years straight; wild foods became almost non-existent and game was scarce. Because of these events, we had to have money to live. Some white Oklahomans and Indians as well (my family among them) moved away seeking work. Many of us began to work "out in the public." When I was twelve I worked*

*a year almost full time for a mission dairy farm while I went to school. In the summer I worked for white farmers "putting up" hay which paid 50 cents a day if you brought your own horse. In the cold weather I cut timber. One summer I went visiting in another state and worked in a mine. Life was hard in those years, but even so it was still full and rich in human terms.*

*Very few Indians in those days went as far as the eighth grade, and it was rare to have an Indian young person go to high school. I was one of the few; my main motivation stemmed from being a runner interested in sports. While in high school I enjoyed athletics and learning, but socially it was uncomfortable. There was one other Indian boy in my high school and we "hung together," although I did manage to make a few white friends.*

*Even before we moved away from Oklahoma, some aspects of my life were beginning to change. I began to take on more responsibility, which reflected my changing status as a youth rather than a child. Some of my relationships were changing as well. The sexes are socially separated among Cherokees beginning near the age of twelve. I began to associate a lot with boys my own age, and we were strictly separated from the girls. Although I was very shy and only vaguely interested in girls, some of my older male friends and kin were actually courting girls by visiting their homes or meeting them at social or religious gatherings.*

*Cherokee males between the ages of about fourteen and thirty are considered to be in the same age category - unmarried, young males. Therefore, although I was away from Oklahoma during my teenage years, when I returned to Oklahoma in my twenties I was simply plugged back into the same category in which I had been when I left: an unmarried young male. It was very exciting to go to the church singings and the great Cherokee ceremonies. There we could meet suitable girls who were not related to us, and who were unknown and exciting human beings. In past times it was preferred that one marry a member of the clan of either of your grandfathers, but marriage into your own clan was strictly forbidden. When I was young, however, this had changed and it was only required that you marry out of your clan and kin. The older people kept a careful*

*eye on us, just in case we might become inappropriately interested in a female relative, or to gauge how serious any acceptable affair was becoming. They never interfered openly in an ongoing relationship, but somehow at the right time the "right" pair would settle down together. If a "love child" was inadvertently produced from a casual affair, it was simply taken as a gift from the Creator, without stigma attached to either mother or child. But serious courting usually did not take place for Cherokee males until one was eighteen or twenty.*

*It was during this time in my life that I became aware of a world of women which was separate, distinct, and somewhat hidden from the world of men. I do not know how life went for girls my own age in those times, but I can tell you of some observations I made later, particularly from watching my daughter grow up. Cherokee society is very women oriented: Our family line is traced through the female; our most powerful gods are female; we call the Sun, the source of life and energy, "our grandmother"; Cherokee women "own" the land and the home. Most men, even today, live in their wife's community after marriage. The mother and her brothers guide the lives of children.*

*Since Cherokee women direct the household, they have a big impact on the broader Cherokee society. Older women prepare young teenage women to be managers and directors of Cherokee life. The oldest girl of a household already knows how to raise children and tend a house. During this teen age period they learn not only household skills and responsibilities, but also how to gently manage social relations in order to direct the kin-community. At the same time they are encouraged to enjoy fully the freedom of their youth, and, like most American Indian females, they like their suitors a little wild. (I sometimes feel that Cherokee men are kept around by the women just to make life a little more exciting.) But in my youth Indian women were simply beautiful, exciting, and mysterious creatures as far as I was concerned.*

*In 1942 I graduated from high school and prepared to serve during World War II. My uncle gave me a great gift before I left, he taught me an ancient Cherokee prayer-song which would protect me in battle, and he gave me a protective charm as well. When I left for the service I knew that no matter where*

*I was I still had a home where I was loved, and that even though I might feel lonely, I was never alone. I was coming to "realize something," as the Cherokees say; I guess I was becoming a young man.*

\* \* \* \* \*

*And so when I reflect on my own childhood I am certain that it was the childhood of my friend, the last Natchez Indian, which gave her strength and a sense of surety. Nothing could take away that childhood from her and nothing could make her less of a Natchez, even if she was the last one on God's earth.*

*In my middle years, when I had come to understand that important lesson, my unease about my life and being began to fade away. I realized then that God had made me a Cherokee Indian, not circumstance or condition; that I had been born a Cherokee and nurtured by Cherokees, and nothing could alter that fact. Even more than that I knew, as the old people had told me, that we were a chosen people and would last until the end of time. I knew that some part of me would live on the earth as long as the Cherokee Indians existed as a people.*

### **Postscript**

*This postscript offers some generalizations about the similarity between the narrator's childhood and that of other Indians. (The reader who wants more details on R.H.'s community and Cherokee history should see the appendix to this chapter.) The Cherokee childhood described above is similar in many ways to the lives of other Indians born in the 1920's, but in some respects the Cherokees in eastern Oklahoma are unique. First, Cherokees did not live on a reservation and were never reservation Indians. Before 1907, when Oklahoma became a state, the Cherokee people were citizens of a small independent republic called the Cherokee Nation and after the state of Oklahoma became a minority of the citizens of that state, the majority being recently immigrated whites from other states. Second, the Cherokees had been uprooted from their native land in Georgia and North Carolina and driven west in the late 1830's, whereas many other Indian peoples still reside in their aboriginal homeland. Third, in the narrative, Cherokees still made their living from the land, which was impossible for many other tribes. An example in the extreme were the Indians of the Great Plains who were buffalo hunters; with the extermination of the buffalo, they found themselves subsisting on government handouts.*

*There have been significant changes in Cherokee life since World War II which should be noted. First, the mainstay of Cherokee economic life is no longer subsistence gardening, which is carried on to a very limited extent today. There is still extensive hunting and the gathering of wild foods, but cash from wage labor or welfare payments have become more prominent and working together on the land less common. Second, Cherokees stay in school much longer than before and most Cherokees over 10 and under 50 now speak both English and Cherokee. In fact, in very recent years there has been massive language loss among Cherokee children. Presently, only about 10% of Cherokee children entering school are able to speak the Cherokee language, a widespread phenomenon among modern Indian tribes. Third, Cherokees adults have become more involved in schools and government. Some Cherokee adults are involved in Indian education programs and in recent years the federal*

*government has resurrected and promoted a Cherokee tribal government. Although it is controlled by local whites and its powers are limited, the tribal government actively promotes a great many social and economic programs for the Cherokee people. Cherokees are now involved to a much greater extent with white institutions, for good or ill.*

*A number of the older Cherokees of R.H.'s childhood had been educated in Cherokee schools and a few had then served as judges, sheriffs, and the like in the new institutions of the state of Oklahoma. When they died, the offices and positions which they occupied were filled by whites. Therefore, the gap in jobs and status between Cherokees and whites has probably widened in recent years and Cherokees have almost become a low ranked racial caste in eastern Oklahoma.*

*Finally, a major change is that Cherokee communities are not as physically or socially isolated as they once were. Paved roads run everywhere through the Cherokee country now and white society is closer both physically and emotionally to Cherokees today. There has also been a great deal of change in the land due to highways, man-made lakes, parks with tourist facilities, and a rapid increase in population. Cherokees perceive White society as intruding too quickly and too intensively, and, in Cherokee eyes, the land is being damaged and exploited. Most Cherokees are becoming more aware of how much they love their land as they see it being mistreated and damaged.*

*However, most Cherokees still live in small rural communities among their relatives as described in the narrative. One could make the same case for many other Indian tribes, in spite of massive social ills found today in some Indian groups and emigration to cities. Many Indian children and youth live, in broad outlines, the kind of life described in the narrative. The life described was hard but it was also rich life filled with love, respect, and freedom; perhaps many of today's Indian children will feel the same way when they grow up.*

## **THEORETICAL IMPLICATIONS OF A "CHEROKEE CHILDHOOD"**

"A Cherokee Childhood" paints a picture that is rich in color and subtle in form. Like an art critic, we seek insights into this portrait that will reveal unity beneath complexity and structure in variety. Personality is unified, according to the theory developed in this book, by self-conception. The unity in R.H.'s personality is his emerging self-conception, which will be contrasted with common patterns of identity formation among middle class Americans.

### **Kin and Strangers**

R.H. lived in a rural area of scattered households where the Cherokees considered themselves to be related to each other by common descent. The people who figure prominently in R.H.'s account of his childhood are his own kin. Although descent is traced differently in different societies (matrilineal versus patrilineal), and sometimes kinship terms are extended artificially ("fictive kin"), the core of kin relations, unlike some other kinds of human relations, are fixed in three senses: People are assigned to them by birth, they endure for the life of the parties, and they are regulated by social norms that are prescribed, not chosen. Thus the fact of birth established the relationship between R.H. and his grandmother, the relationship lasted until his grandmother's death, and neither of them chose the social norms that prescribe how they are supposed to act towards each other.

Social norms impose a standardized aspect to kin relationships, which we call the kin prescription. The prescription may be an affirmative guide or a prohibition. It may be consciously articulated or imbedded in unconscious practice. The prescription, however, is not all of the relationship's content. There is in addition a unique aspect to each relationship that depends upon the particular traits and characteristics of people. Proof of the unique element is that one person cannot be substituted for another in a kin relationship without loss. We describe relationships with this unique element as personal.

A kin relationship involves both prescribed and personal elements. To illustrate, R.H.'s biological mother and her sister, both of whom he called "mother," could each perform the tasks that a mother must do for a Cherokee boy, but there was a unique relationship between R.H. and each of them. When R.H.'s biological mother left for the

city, he missed her, although the tasks of mothering were apparently performed just as well as before she left. Indeed, the tasks were performed so well that the family's attitude towards her departure was much like a white family's attitude towards a grown son leaving home -- sad but not judgmental.

A member of a close kin group like R.H. does not distinguish sharply between who he is and how he acts towards his kin. Kin relations are "definitive" in the sense that they express attributes of a person's identity. To illustrate, one of R.H.'s mothers would have difficulty thinking of herself as a good person and a bad mother, because judging the goodness of a person who is a mother involves judging the quality of her relationship with her children. R.H. thought of himself as his mothers' boy, his grandfather's grandson, his uncle's nephew, and so forth.

The qualities of kin relations contrast with instrumental interactions, such as the customer and clerk in a shoe store. Instead of being given at birth, most instrumental interactions are chosen to satisfy specific ends. Instead of enduring for the life of the parties, instrumental interactions may last no longer than the time required to achieve their limited purpose. Some instrumental interactions, such as clerk and customer, are controlled by social norms specifying the role that each party is to play. Other instrumental interactions, however, are established by negotiation and contract, so they can be dissolved and reformed according to individual preferences. One party feels no loss when the other party in an instrumental relationship is replaced by someone else, so long as the replacement is equally competent at performing the task. Thus many customers are indifferent between equally competent clerks in a shoe store.

A complex economy requires coordination among many different people. Coordinating people who are acquaintances or strangers requires them to share expectations about each others' behavior. Shared expectations arise in part from understanding the roles that each person performs. In order for the general population to understand many roles, they must be relatively simple. In order to be relatively simple, roles must be limited to standardized aspects of the task being performed. A role can thus be defined as a general understanding of the standardized aspect of a specialized task, or, more simply, as the social unit in the division of labor.

Sociologists often describe the modern economy as a hierarchy of interdependent roles. Occupational roles can be so important that they become part of a person's identity, especially if the role is a career like attorney, rather than merely a job like typist. The very term "role," however, suggests that the person is distinct from the part being played. For this reason occupational roles, unlike kin relations among tribal Indians, can be secondary or incidental to identity. To illustrate, there is no contradiction in thinking of oneself as a good person and a bad electrician, whereas there is tension rising towards the level of a contradiction in thinking of oneself as a good person and a bad son.

There is an operational test for distinguishing a role from a relationship. The same person can, at any point in time, stand in different relations to different people. To illustrate, at Christmas dinner the same person can be father, son, uncle, and nephew to other people at the table, all at once, without one relation interfering with another. It is, however, difficult or impossible to play different roles at the same time, whether they be Othello and Iago, salesman and customer, or supervisor and line worker.

Kin prescriptions among tribal Indians involve the person so intimately that they should not be described as roles.<sup>5</sup> The Cherokee language provides one type of evidence that kin prescriptions for R.H. were not roles. In the Cherokee language there is no word for father; instead, one must say "my-father," "his-father," "their-father," and so on. Thus the Cherokee vocabulary builds into the kin term the parties on both sides of the relationship.

The interaction between a bank and its customer serves such a narrow purpose that bank tellers can be replaced by automated teller machines. Kin relationships can serve narrow purposes too, such as getting the gardens plowed, to cite an example from R.H.'s childhood, but the narrow purpose is seldom perceived by the people involved as the reason for the relationship. To illustrate, the purposes served by the relationship between an uncle and his niece, or between a mother and her child, are so manifold that it would be hard to identify any one as the purpose. Indeed, the purposes are so diffuse that we sometimes describe kin relations as ends in themselves.

In sum, instrumental relations are typically chosen, temporary, constructed, impersonal, and secondary to identity, whereas kin relations among tribal Indians are typically given, permanent, prescribed, personal, and definitive.

### **Home Grown Versus Self Made**

This hasty sketch of kin relations and instrumental relations can be filled in by details from R.H.'s life. The logical progression in types of relations from kin to friends, from friends to acquaintances, and from acquaintances to strangers, is a progression from ends to means. Movement along this dimension passes from enduring, fixed, and personal relations to temporary, malleable, and impersonal interactions. R.H., like most people, treated kin as ends, whereas acquaintances or strangers, in so far as he interacted with them at all, were treated more as means. The other Cherokee families living near R.H. were kin, but the nearby whites were not. The interactions between R.H.'s household and local whites were "neighborly" -- cordial but not close. There was reciprocity without commitment. Thus R.H. learned from his school teacher and from various whites in town, but there was no intimacy between them nor did he identify with them.

Small children who are raised in traditional families, whether Indians or middle class urban Americans, are immersed in kin relations. Interactions with outsiders are comparatively unimportant in the early stages of life. R.H. continued in this pattern into his teens when the narrative trails off. As middle class children mature, however, they spend less time with kin and more time with friends, acquaintances, and strangers, which has profound psychological effects. The fact that kin relations are ends implies that a person who lives among kin is treated as an end. R.H.'s family valued him for who he was, not what he did. In contrast, the fact that interactions with strangers are instrumental implies that, in so far as a person lives among strangers, he is treated as a means. A clerk in a shoe store is valued for what he does, not who he is.

Growing up was, for R.H., a matter of fitting himself into a kin network. Kin relations, as explained, have a standardized aspect that must be learned. To illustrate, Cherokee children are quiet around adults. When R.H. was too noisy, his grandmother brought him back into line by saying, "Cherokees don't make a racket". R.H. thought that people and things have a fixed nature that predisposes them to act in certain ways. R.H.'s grandmother disciplined him by describing the nature of people in the group with which he identified.

In addition to kin prescriptions, R.H. had to learn the skills that Cherokee men possess, such as riding and hunting. Most of these skills were learned by observing and emulating, not by explicit teaching. The esteem in which R.H. was held by the kin from whom he learned, the warmth of the relationship or its continuation, did not depend upon his performance. In this respect, the context of learning for R.H. was different from, say, a middle class child's piano lessons, where the teacher's admiration is proportional to the student's performance.

The standardized aspect of kinship impose some general constraints and goals, but these prescriptions are too limited and vague to give substance to relationships. Substance comes from the personal aspect of kinship. R.H. and his grandfather did not relate to each other according to a socially prescribed algorithm, but according to a mutual understanding that was intimate and emotional. The Cherokees in R.H.'s community knew each other intimately and responded to each other's unique qualities and traits.

A middle class person who must perform roles develops an internal life apart from them. To illustrate, a typist can perform his job effectively and still vest his real life in other activities. Even a lawyer or doctor, whose career engages much of a person, usually holds back part of himself from his work. In contrast, the tribal Indian's unfolding relationships with kin are his real life. He does not need to develop an internal life separate from his social life.

Through roles, middle class people become skillful at separating their internal state from the appearance given by their overt behavior. Lacking this practice, traditional Indians are not so skillful at manipulating appearances or creating images. Deception among Indians takes the form lies and tricks, not acting.

Being the same flesh and blood as the people who filled his life, R.H. could not fashion a separate conception of himself that was different from their conception of him. The identity of a child raised among kin is fixed in the network of personal relations in which he is immersed. When kinship is definitive, a person is likely to feel good about who he is when relations are harmonious, and bad about who he is when relations are troubled. It is better for there to be harmony on every level, as when kinsmen love one another, but in lieu of that, most tribal Indians will settle for overt harmony.

Certainly R.H. felt good about himself. There is a hint of disturbance in the network of kin relations in R.H.'s narrative, as evidenced by dark murmuring about witchcraft. Disharmony among kinsmen is psychologically destructive and tends to immobilize Indians. Kin relations can become so poisoned under some circumstances that a few people go over to the side of the devil, as it were, and seek the undoing of those with whom their ties are closest. Such people are usually called witches by Indians. On some modern Indian reservations, so much damage has been done to the kin network that people now relate negatively to one another, but still personally and definitively. A tribal kin network gone awry is a tragedy for the people caught in it.

Compared to R.H., far more of a middle class child's life is spent among friends, acquaintances, and strangers. These interactions have a narrower purpose than kin relations. The purpose is sometimes so narrow that the relationship is merely instrumental. To illustrate, a city child learns the specific skills that define urban culture, such as playing the piano, reading books, or dribbling a basketball, through interactions with specialists (teachers, tutors, librarians, coaches, etc.) that are limited in scope.

More important, the child finds that the esteem in which he is held by others in these interactions is proportional to performance. Teachers, coaches, tutors, and friends modulate affection and praise in proportion to effort and performance. Even parents adopt this practice to some extent for their child's own good. The aim of educating children is not just to impart skills, but to internalize values. By degrees the child takes values into himself and measures his performance against them. The dimensions on which a person measures his own worth are intimately conjoined to his conception of himself. The child comes to think of himself, not just as a son, nephew, cousin, etc., but also as, say, the person who is good at mathematics, poor at languages, and mediocre at sports.

The ultimate middle class skill is choosing a career. Internalization of values prepares the child to compare his potentialities to the opportunities presented by the labor market. There is, however, more to choosing a career than doing a job. Law, banking, teaching, medicine, these are not just occupational activities, they are distinct cultures. Socialization into an occupational culture affects who a person is, so choosing a career

involves choosing an identity. This is the dimension of personality development in which a middle class child can be said to create his own identity.

In contrast, career skills were not built into R.H.'s identity, which is why he was puzzled when his teacher asked, "What are you going to be when you grow up?" He was going to be a Cherokee Indian, as he already was, only bigger and older. In his mind, jobs were not linked closely with personality or self-worth. Personal identity for R.H., like kin relations, is permanent, fixed, and personal, whereas a job is temporary, chosen, and impersonal.

The differences in the process by which identity is acquired by a tribal Indian like R.H. and a middle class white American can be summarized by the contrast between socialization and individuation. R.H.'s identity was acquired through the process of socialization into a kin group. Becoming a better relative has two aspects: learning kin prescriptions and acquiring a sensibility towards particular persons. This process is experienced as the discovery and unfolding of oneself. Thus R.H.'s identity was substantially predetermined and he did not have to struggle to create it. R.H. accepted the conception of himself supplied by his kin, instead of struggling to create a separate identity. He did not learn to view himself objectively by connecting his character to ideals and purposes.

The middle class child's identity begins with primary relations similar to R.H. The primary relations that dominate the early years of an individual's life can provide a core of stability. Individuation requires bifurcating relations into private and public spheres. Primary relations are confined to the private sphere, and a public career is pursued. Individuation has two aspects: Taking oneself as an object, and constructing oneself in light of abstract values. A person who completes this process is called an "individual" because his identity acquires a significant dimension that is independent of personal relations.

An individual makes the ultimate choice -- the choice of who to be. Self-creation involves a struggle which is intimate and profound. The person is the stakes in this exhilarating gamble. Anxiety, which is built into the middle class child as the engine powering achievement, may peak in an "identity crisis" when the adolescent faces difficult career choices. Most youths who enter this stage pass through it and emerge as

individuals. A successful resolution of the identity crisis can release creative powers that are drawn upon in the stage following self-creation, which is the struggle for self-fulfillment. However, no child can develop a sound personality through instrumental relations alone. If a child is too deeply immersed in instrumental relations at too early an age, self-doubt can become crippling.

R.H.'s self-esteem, and the esteem in which he was held by the people whose opinions mattered to him, depended upon the quality of his kin relationships. His primary task of personal development, upon which a favorable conception of himself depended, was acquiring a sensibility towards kin that would enable him to live harmoniously with them. Self-doubt was not implanted in young R.H. as a goad to accomplishment. He was not anxious over what he would accomplish in life. He did not need to express himself by creating cultural objects. He did not suffer from the loneliness of self-creation as a teenager. Since he did not think of society as a vertical ordering, achievement for him could not have meant ascending the social scale.

### **Morality and Autonomy**

A person who lives among strangers and takes his identity through instrumental relations must maintain his self-conception as he moves among people who do not share his values. To illustrate, a college professor who moves among businessmen must remember that his main aim is not to get rich, and a businessman who moves among professors must remember that his main aim is not to increase knowledge. A middle class child must, consequently, internalize norms and maintain them against group pressures. This is facilitated by organizing norms into abstract principles with their own integrity and authenticity that is independent of the valuations of other people. A middle class child thus acquires an understanding of ethics as a body of principles at an early age.

In contrast, a person who lives among kin interacts with people who share similar normative views. Instead of internalizing ethical principles, R.H. learned some kin prescriptions and he acquired a keen sensitivity to his relatives. His morality of sensibility to persons, whose aim is harmony among kin, contrasts sharply with a morality of ethical principles internalized by individuals and maintained against strangers.<sup>6</sup>

There is another distinct of R.H.'s moral vision. When R.H. left the smoke house door open and his dog ate the sausage, he told his uncle that he did not mean to do it, but

his uncle replied, "Grandson, that's not going to help me a bit when I want to eat some sausage this winter." The scope for excusing bad actions by good intentions seems narrower among Indians than among middle class Americans. Indians hold people responsible for more consequences of their actions than those that they intend. Even unintended acts can express who a person is. ("It's just like him to be clumsy!")

If Indians characteristically hold each other strictly accountable for their actions, they are not much concerned about beliefs. Judging from R.H.'s narrative, wrong beliefs that do not lead to wrong actions are harmless. Thus R.H. mentioned a neighbor who was regarded as an effective healer and a good man because he observed the Cherokee law, even though he proclaimed himself an atheist. For Cherokees, harmonious kin relations demand right action, but not correct beliefs. Respect for the autonomy of others requires leaving a person's mind to himself and attending to his behavior.

The same is true of another person's desires and feelings. Indians tend to respond to kin by observing their behavior, not by scrutinizing their motives. Behavior is taken at its face value. Discerning deep motives are not so important to responding to kinsmen. For example, sympathy is more important than empathy. When tribal Indians report on events in which they have participated, words and deeds are carefully noted, but feelings or unspoken thoughts are omitted. Indeed, some autobiographies of tribal Indians remain so near to the surface of interaction that they have the flat quality of third person narratives.

Respect involves treating another as an active agent, not as an effect. Among Indians, respect extends to children. Leaving big choices to small children is not unusual among tribal peoples. R.H.'s grandfather let the youth decide whether or not to sell his pony. The boy was put in the position of being the cause of his fate rather than its victim.

Sociologists assert that lower class Americans tend to discipline children by physical coercion, whereas middle class Americans tend to discipline by withholding affection and praise. Neither alternative describes R.H. He cannot recall being spanked, nor does he report that anyone was ever "deeply disappointed" in him. Spooks were used to scare children into good behavior. This device preserves the appearance that outside forces, not adults, are controlling children.

R.H.'s material and emotional dependency encompassed many kin. He had other relatives besides his immediate family with whom he lived for weeks at a time as the spirit moved him. In extended families, responsibilities for tasks and feelings can be spread across many people. The dispersion of dependency increases the scope for personal autonomy. The Cherokee sensibility towards kin allows for much personal autonomy, as illustrated by the reaction of R.H.'s family to the departure of his biological mother for a distant city.

### **The Clock and the Spook**

For R. H., nature was alive with spirits. Fire and thunder, springs and mountains, and the animals were active agents who could make you sick or bring you good fortune. How they treated you depended upon how you treated them. R.H. described the land as familiar and beloved, but also spooky and potentially threatening, much like older relatives. There is economy in the workings of the mind. R.H. projected his conception of the tribe upon the larger world.<sup>7</sup> He understood the natural world as inhabited by autonomous beings with their own dispositions, and he approached them like a kinsman, by forming a personal relationship.

In contrast, the middle class child separates himself from nature and views it objectively, like a stranger rather than a kinsman. Separating from nature has been variously described as the "demystification" of nature, the "disenchantment" of the natural world, or the "alienation" of man from his environment. The objective viewpoint prepares a person to treat nature as an instrument for pursuing narrow purposes. Nature becomes a "factor of production." Productivity requires knowledge of mechanical connections between a cause and the desired effect, rather than a sensibility towards complex interrelationships.

Indians are capable of understanding natural events as mechanical linkages, but they give less scope to such explanations. Similarly, urban people are incapable of understanding natural events as having spiritual causes, but they give less scope to such explanations. To put the contrast crudely but succinctly, nature can be viewed as a clock or a spook. Differences in identity and relationships lead Indians tend to explain more of the natural world by active agency, whereas urban people tend to explain more of it by mechanical causes.

R.H. saw the Cherokee economy of gardening and hunting as part of nature. He did not want to separate man from nature for the latter's preservation. If man were excluded, who would perform the required rituals? The idea of a wilderness area from which people are excluded was foreign to him.

Mechanism and agency involve different ways of knowing. Particular and holistic thinkers embody knowledge in stories and parables ("hypotheticals" in modern philosophical jargon). Parables instruct by retaining only the details relevant to the lesson and discarding the rest. This style of thought is pronounced among R.H.'s relatives, as illustrated in the narrative by the particularity of their discourse. Alternatively, mechanical connections are best expressed in abstract generalizations, from which predictions can be deduced.

The mechanical and agency views of nature have different implications for the connection between morality and fate. A middle class person regards injuries and sickness impersonally, as the consequence of mechanical causes (germs made him sick) or bad luck (it was an accident). Attributing agency to natural objects broadens the scope of personal responsibility to include events which middle class people typically explain by mechanical causes and luck. It is only a slight exaggeration to say that tribal Indians see no randomness, no accidents, and no mistakes in the world. Every event has a cause that is traceable to living beings, whether persons or spirits.

To illustrate, R.H. thought that sickness and misfortune resulted from breaking natural laws. If a person fell sick, perhaps someone's resentment had caused it, or perhaps a deer caused the illness because the person did not purify himself before hunting. If someone injured himself, perhaps he had offended a neighbor who retaliated by witchcraft. For example, H. D., who was probably the first Cherokee speaking Indian to graduate from college since the days of the old Cherokee nation, began drinking heavily during a crisis in his life in the 1960s. He had three car wrecks within two weeks. He said to Thomas, "You know, Bob, having three car wrecks in two weeks can't be any accident. There must be somebody conjuring me. I think I'll go see a medicine man in the morning."

### **Distinction Without Rank**

R.H. knew that his kin were one group among many Cherokees and the Cherokees were one group among many others in Oklahoma. He understood that his tribe was recently dispossessed of its land and its political institutions were dissolved by Americans. However, R.H. betrays no conception of his family's position in a social hierarchy. He does not say that Cherokee full bloods were perceived by whites as the bottom of a caste system.

Obliviousness to social class is consistent with projecting kinship on the larger world. In the society described by R.H., women garden (give life) and men hunt (take life); boys fish and old men heal; children are disciplined by their mother's brother. R.H. describes labor specialization in detail but remarks about social ranking are conspicuous by their absence. No one is described as being "above" anyone else.

Judging from R.H.'s report, rank among Cherokees is not sufficiently prominent to constitute a hierarchy of status. Among Cherokees, as among other American Indian tribes, there is horizontal distinction and relatively little vertical ranking. Even in those Indian tribes that acknowledge vertical ranking of persons on ceremonial occasions, the differences in rank are modest compared to the American city. No American Indian tribe had the middle class conception of society as a system of functionally interdependent roles arranged hierarchically.

### **Conclusion**

The analysis of "A Cherokee Childhood" proceeds from the assumption that self-conception unifies personality. R.H. identified with his kin. Kinship involves some general prescriptions and a sensibility to particular persons. Within the kin group, relationships were personal, he enjoyed autonomy, and he was treated as an end. He had little experience with instrumental relations in which his worth was measured by his performance. The larger world was understood by extension of kin relations -- nature as an older relative who is beloved but a bit spooky, and the general society as a large system of kin relations in which there is distinction without rank.

A middle class person, in contrast, spends his early years among kin, but as he matures he ventures into the larger world of strangers. Instrumental interactions teach the child to take an objective attitude towards himself and others, and to measure value by

performance. Performance gets built into identity as he prepares himself for the labor market. The end-product is a new kind of person, an individual, whose identity depends substantially upon performance relative to internalized values. For this new person, the larger world of nature and society are understood by extension of instrumental relations as, on the one hand, a system of mechanical causes, and, on the other hand, a hierarchy of interdependent roles.

The American political vision opposes individualism to a society of automatons controlled by a supreme dictator. Society must choose, according to this vision, between liberty and the beehive. Traditional Indian society, however, is anything but the beehive, and traditional chiefs are anything but dictators. The absence of individuation that we attribute to traditional Indians is fully consistent with personal autonomy and political liberty, although not with self creation and impersonal organization.

Does the contrast between relatives and individuals exemplify history? Is the transformation of the world from kin groups into mass society just the process of individuation? A life among kin exhibits the core of our humanity in its original form, whereas a life of instrumental roles is an extension of humanity in a novel direction. Large historical processes parallel to some extent the social dynamics of the American Indians encounter with the larger society.

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<sup>1</sup>Robert Redfield, The Primitive World and Its Transformations (1953).

<sup>2</sup>When addressing his mother's sister, R.H. called her "mother", but when referring to her in a conversation with someone else, he used the term meaning "second mother."

<sup>3</sup>"Bad actor" in Oklahoma parlance refers to a person whose behavior can be dangerous because it is unpredictable and sometimes causes trouble, but is not malicious.

<sup>4</sup>Cherokees usually count as kin all those who are descended from one's great-grandparents, the brothers and sisters of the great-grandparents, and, if known, the first cousins of the great-grandparents. In this body of kin almost everyone of your generation is addressed as brother or sister. Many Cherokees have hundreds of brothers and sisters, some of whom they may never meet, but if they do meet, they are expected to act towards each other as if they were born from the same woman.

<sup>5</sup>There were circumstances in which Cherokees have to play roles with respect to each other, as when a person who took charge of a war party had to give orders to his relatives. In this situation, the war chief would assume the ceremonial title of sister's brother, because, unlike fathers, he is the kinsman who is most entitled to give orders to a young man.

<sup>6</sup>Changes in personality among Americans was characterized in the 1950s as a transition from "inner-directed" persons to "outer-directed" persons. Indians are a third type: kin-directed persons

<sup>7</sup>Styles of thought are difficult to capture in a description, but doing so is very important. See Wolfgang Fikentscher, Modes of Thought: A Study in the Anthropology of Law and Religion (Tubingen: J.C.B. Mohr (Paul Siebeck), 1995).