

A Song for the Asking
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and
EarthSong Photography Workshops: Walking in Beauty

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Hello to All:

Washita: As Long as the Grass Grows and the Wind Blows

You are not in Kansas anymore, perhaps you never were; so what happened there long ago is of no consequence to you. And yet it should be; it should haunt you like Morley's



Growing and Blowing

ghost; and if it does not, you should examine your concept of what it means to be a human being.

The memory of loss and defeat runs very deep. Victors do not understand this well, if at all, for they never have to live with the daily pain of what it means to lose, to have lost; nor are their lives constantly touched with reminders of what has been taken away, since they are the takers. There is a deep arrogance common to victors, and the arrogance remains as long as loss does

not find its way very far into a victor's life, as long as it remains on the surface, if it exists at all; as long as it is merely peripheral to the experience of victory.

Part of the arrogance of victory is a belief in destiny – manifest and otherwise: “It is God's will that we are victors. God has given us this day and all that we have won is ours by divine right. If you don't believe us, ask God.” I did: God can be fickle, just ask the

Israelites.

May I offer a kind word of advice to victors: Humility and conciliation are better ways to approach the matter. The cards of destiny have no memory, none at all. To borrow a few words from **Bob Zimmerman**, “...the first one now will later be last, for the times they are a changin’”. Indeed, the times are always changin’.

No, you are not in Kansas anymore; in fact, the place I want to tell you about is not in Kansas anymore, it fell out of the bottom of that land and is now in Oklahoma. To the



The Valley of the Washita Today

people who once lived there in numbers, the Tsitsistas, whom you call the Cheyenne, such names are largely irrelevant. To them it was simply home.

Don't misunderstand me. My heart does not bleed simply because I am talking about Native Peoples. There were/are good Cheyenne, just as there were/are bad. Human beings are all, regardless of ethnicity or affiliation, subject to the same shortcomings and foibles. Warfare and inhumanity are not strangers to tribal people. Nearly all are equal opportunity aggressors

when given the opportunity: part of the wonderful evolutionary baggage we carry.

Here is what really bothers me: the arrogance of the Caucasian belief in entitlement: “We don't care that people like the Tsitsistas have been living in this place for perhaps ten thousand years. They haven't done anything with it; they haven't made any improvements on it. They aren't using it to create surplus, to store up treasures on Earth. All they do is wander back and forth across it, hunting and gathering and fighting with each other. Never mind that warfare for them is more a matter of ritual than an act of finality. God wanted us to have the land and we have come to take it. Never mind that we'll rape it, pollute it, deplete it. Never mind that we will not honor it as sacred to the Creator. We want it and we intend to have it, and we will do everything it takes to get it: lie, steal, cheat, kill. Tsitsistas are savages, less than people; they don't even have souls. How can they deserve to have this land? They don't....”

Besides, not only do we have God on our side, we have three centuries of international law as well. That law, the Doctrine of Discovery, was integrated into American jurisprudence by the great jurist himself, Chief Justice **John Marshall**, in the landmark case of **Johnson v. M'Intosh** (1823) in which he set out that, under the law of nations, a European, i.e. Christian, power – and, by extension, the Government of the United States - gains “sovereignty” over the lands it “discovers,” and that it thus gains the exclusive right to extinguish the “right of occupancy” of the indigenous occupants. As **Church Lady** expressed it, “How convenient. Now that we've “discovered” the Great Plains, they belong to us and we can simply make all of the tribal people living

there just leave; or better yet, we'll make them sign treaties ceding to us most of their claims to what is really ours anyway.”



The Answer, My Friend...

In the story of the Tsitsistas this merger would also compel the evolution of a more ritualized, and thus centralized, society, which would eventually become the most structured such culture on the Great Plains. Throughout the 1700s pressures from primarily the Lakota pushed the Tsitsistas further westward and southward until by the dawn of the nineteenth century they were occupying the lands around the Black Hills, north into the Yellowstone River country, and south into the drainage of the Platte River, which is to say parts of southwestern South Dakota, eastern Wyoming, western Nebraska, and northeastern Colorado, and northwestern Kansas. Their increasing unification was, however, also fostering strength.

By the early 1800s they had become closely aligned with another Algonquian-speaking group, the Suhtais, who had come to the plains and the buffalo sooner than the Tsitsistas. The joining of the two groups finalized the abdication by the latter from any remnants of their agricultural past: they now were horse-herding, buffalo-hunting, plains-wandering human beings, true riders of the purple sage.

The basic unit of Tsitsista society was the band, a grouping of several families affiliated by kinship or common interest. By the beginning of the 1800s there were ten bands that comprised the totality of the Tsitsista tribe. As the nineteenth century gained its first quarter purchase, one of those bands, the Hevatanuis, drawn by the promise of the increased trade, with the Spanish and Anglos alike, blossoming around the Santa Fe Trail, settled further south below the drainage of the Platte River in what is now

southern Nebraska and northern Kansas. As this arrangement became more permanent, the Tsitsistas found themselves essentially divided into separate tribes – the Northern Cheyenne and the Southern Cheyenne – but separated only by distance and not by failed bonds of kinship or common interest.

After the separation, as before it, since the time the ten bands that comprised “The Like-Hearted People” had evolved from the tribal society created from the merging of the Suhtais and the Tsitsistas, the welfare of all had been guided by the Council of Forty-four: four leaders from each of the ten bands, plus four “old-man chiefs,” chosen on the basis of meritorious service from the previous Council of Forty-four.

The Council met every four years and one of its duties was to select the next Council – both the individual band representatives and the old-man representatives – who then served for ten-year periods. The Council members thus named their own replacements. Individual band chiefs led the day-to-day activities of their respective bands, but deferred to the Council on matters that affected the tribe as a whole.

The other primary tribal governing body consisted of the leadership of the various military societies – six in all – which served to maintain intertribal discipline, to oversee hunts and ceremonies at the tribal level, and to exercise military leadership in times of war and conflict. The Council rotated these responsibilities among each military society on a periodic basis. A Council chief might be chosen from the ranks of the military society leadership; but if so, he was required to give up his membership in the military society.

As the middle years of the nineteenth century dawned, it was becoming apparent that the entire fabric of Cheyenne society was about to be stretched to the tearing point and that a complete rending was very possible. Imagine, if you will, as **Rod Sterling** might suggest, opening your back door and looking across your yard to discover it covered with a sea of alien humanity. They tell you that they are only passing through in order to get to their land that lies beyond you, or that they are merely on their way to trade in New Mexico and places to the south. But then you notice the structure over in the corner that looks like a soldier fort and you see that many of your trees have been cut down. You observe that the wildlife you hunt – the buffalo, the antelope, the deer – and on whose lives you depend to sustain your own and those of your children seem to be so much fewer in number than they were only a short while ago. The aliens tell you they need these things in order survive their journeys. They say they have things to give you and to trade that will make your life better and easier, like whiskey.



Not Much Washita at This Point

At first you go along with all of this, but as time goes by the aliens only grow in number and increase their demand for greater access to your land and to your resources. One day your wife turns deathly ill; the next day your daughter; and then your son. Nothing you do seems to give relief; and then they die. Your brother and his family die soon thereafter, and right afterward your revered and aged father and mother. Other kinsmen and clanspeople suffer the same fate; it is as if suddenly, against your will and all of your power, you have come to dwell in a village of ghosts.

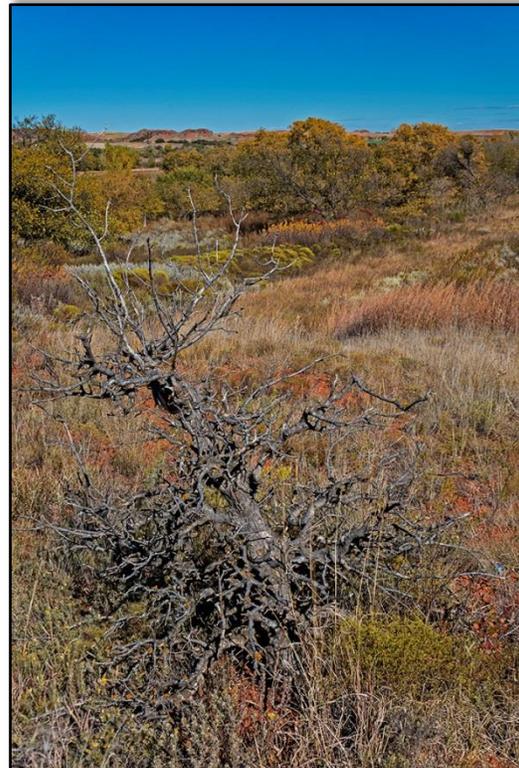
Now a few facts, if you will. In 1849 an epidemic of the disease cholera swept across the Great Plains. Perhaps emigrants brought it with them, or traders. The whites were ravaged by this killer to be sure, and it was a major cause of death among tramontanes; however, the Tsitsistas had no natural immunity at all and over 2000 Human Beings perished, upwards of half of the entire tribe. Two entire bands were so nearly wiped out that their survivors were forced to join other bands less impacted.

Beginning with the establishment of the Santa Fe Trail in 1821, westward movement of settlers and trading opportunities expanded rapidly with the creation, additionally, of the Emigrant Trails: the Oregon, the California, and the Mormon, all of which crossed some portion of lands claimed by the Tsitsistas.

From 1843-1869 it is estimated that 250,000-650,000 people followed **Horace Greeley's** advice, even though it was not given until 1871, and went west following one of the above routes. They went to find land, to find gold, to find opportunity, to look for God; but no matter the motivation, they were, at some point, trespassers, notwithstanding the Treaty of 1825, which allowed for friendship and trade between the Americans and the Tsitsistas, and in the minds of the American treaty negotiators, at least, acknowledged the "supremacy" of the United States.

To give you some sense of the magnitude of the situation, imagine you are on, say, the Oregon Trail in mid-summer of, say, 1855. It will be necessary to stop early in the day to find a sufficient campsite before the mass of other emigrants arrives looking for the same. As you move during a day's travel, it will likely be necessary to wear a mask to breathe without inhaling the dust stirred by all the other movement around you.

If you are Tsitsista, there are only two roads down which you can travel, and the prospects along both seem pretty grim: peace at all costs, or war as inevitable. For most of the Council of Forty-four the peace road seemed to offer the better outcome; however to the various military societies, especially the Dog Soldiers, the cost of peace was more



George A. Custer was here

than they could tolerate.

After the mid-1830s, the Dog Soldiers had begun to transform from merely one of the six Tsitsista military societies into a separate, even more militaristic, band. Following the cholera epidemic of 1849 in which nearly all of the Masikota band perished, many of the survivors merged with the Dog Soldiers. The new band took its territory in the lands between the Northern and Southern Cheyenne, at the head of the Republican and Smoky Hill Rivers in northwestern Kansas and southwestern Nebraska. A growing rift between that society and the Council of Forty-four continued to grow even wider.



A River Runs Somewhere

European Caucasian hejira to the glittering fields saw thousands flooding across Tsitsista land, sweeping before them as they came the resources – game, timber, water – that were already becoming scarce and igniting conflict not only with the various tribes, but among those tribes with each other as well.

In response, the good officials of the Territory of Colorado (then actually part of Kansas) brought to bear all the influence they could on the government in Washington to redefine the boundaries of the treaty lands; and what they got in 1861 (two months before the first shots of the Civil War at Fort Sumter) was the Treaty of Fort Wise. The tribes “consented” to giving up nearly all of the lands they had retained in the 1851 treaty, the newly reserved area being one-thirteenth the land they had held under the old compact. Black Kettle was a signatory to this treaty. As a peace chief of the Southern Cheyenne, he believed that the best interest of his people lay in concession, that the power of the US military and the sheer volume of emigrants were overwhelming.

The Treaty of 1861 had been signed by only six of the ten bands (and four of the affiliated Arapaho bands). The Dog Soldiers and several of the military societies were furious at the signatory chiefs. They disavowed the treaty and refused to be constrained by it, alleging that the signers were not representative of the Tsitsistas as a whole and that they had not understood what they were conceding and had been bribed by many

gifts. They continued to live and to hunt in their old lands of eastern Colorado and western Kansas.

Following its Civil War action at Glorieta Pass, New Mexico, the First Regiment of Colorado Volunteers returned to Colorado Territory and reorganized under the command of Colonel

John Chivington as the 1st Colorado Cavalry and the 3rd Colorado Cavalry. Both Chivington, a Methodist minister, and Territorial Governor **John Evans** were adamant Indian-haters. It was Chivington who said, "Damn any man who sympathizes with Indians...I have come to kill Indians, and believe it is right and honorable to use any means under God's heaven to kill Indians...Kill and



Came up a Bad Cloud

scalp all, big and little; nits make lice." The two white leaders developed an implacably hard line toward all Indians in the territory.

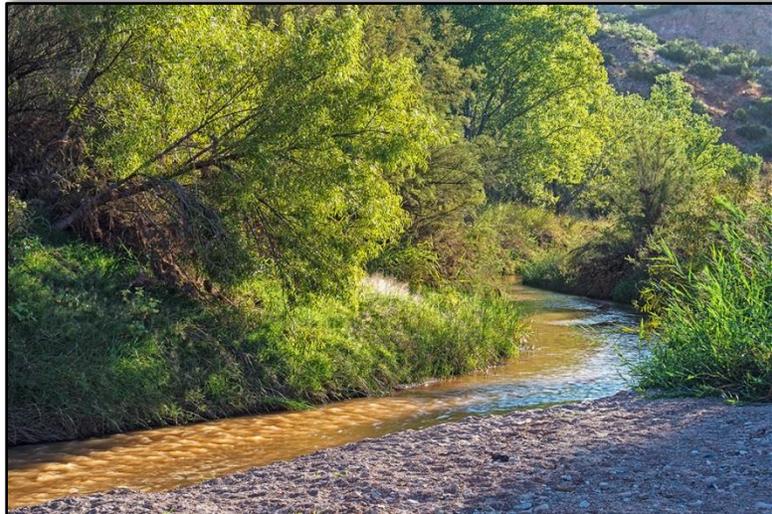
Over the course of the succeeding three years the settler-Tsitsista conflict escalated with incident and retaliation on both sides, primarily enflamed by cavalry attacks on peaceful Tsitsista villages and the murder of two Tsitsista leaders by troops that had crossed into Kansas and confronted a buffalo-hunting party there.

In July 1864, Governor Evans broadcast a circular to the Plains Indians that those who desired to remain on peaceful terms could go to Fort Lyon (the re-named Fort Wise), located in southeastern Colorado Territory and would there receive protection and provisions. Following talks in Denver in September 1864, Black Kettle had led his band along with a group of Arapahos to Fort Lyon. Soon thereafter the Tsitsistas were told to relocate to the area of Big Sandy Creek about forty miles from the fort. History asserts that there were no Dog Soldiers among that group of lodges.

With most of the men away hunting buffalo, there remained about seventy-five mostly old and fairly young men in the village with Black Kettle, who, as directed by the commanding officer at Fort Lyon, flew an American flag and a white flag over his lodge as a sign of his intentions.

On the morning of November 29, 1864, one hundred and fifty-one years ago tomorrow as I write this, Chivington and his cavalry of some eight hundred strong attacked the village. Estimates range from 70-163 as to the number of Tsitsistas and Arapahos killed, mostly women and children. Following the slaughter, the soldiers scalped and mutilated many of the bodies. For weeks afterward the soldiers proudly displayed the desecration on their uniforms back in Denver. This event has become known as the Sand Creek Massacre. The immensity of this blow to the Tsitsistas is

almost immeasurable. Two bands lost half of their members, dealing a fatal stroke to the traditional clan system; the Council of Forty-four lost nearly 20% of its leaders, eight chiefs in all. Leaders who had previously sought peace turned toward the Dog Soldier's position and the Dog Soldiers became even more militaristic and hardline. Although many of the survivors sought to join the militants camped along the Smoky Hill and Republican Rivers to the north, and the war pipe went around to all the Tsitsista and Arapaho villages, as well as the Lakota Sioux, Black Kettle remained in the south and continued to advocate for peace.



Against the backdrop of these events, the United States Government sent a highly respected group of peace commissioners to the region to negotiate with the

When the Washita Becomes Another, It's Red

Plains tribes. The result was the Treaty of the Little Arkansas of 1865. It guaranteed free access to the lands south of the Arkansas River, excluded the Indians from lands north of the Arkansas to the Platte River, and promised both land and cash reparations to the survivors of Sand Creek. Within two years it had been completely abrogated, replaced by the Treaty of Medicine Lodge (October 1867) which reduced the previous reservation lands by 90%, and located those in less-than-desirable parts of Indian Territory (Oklahoma).

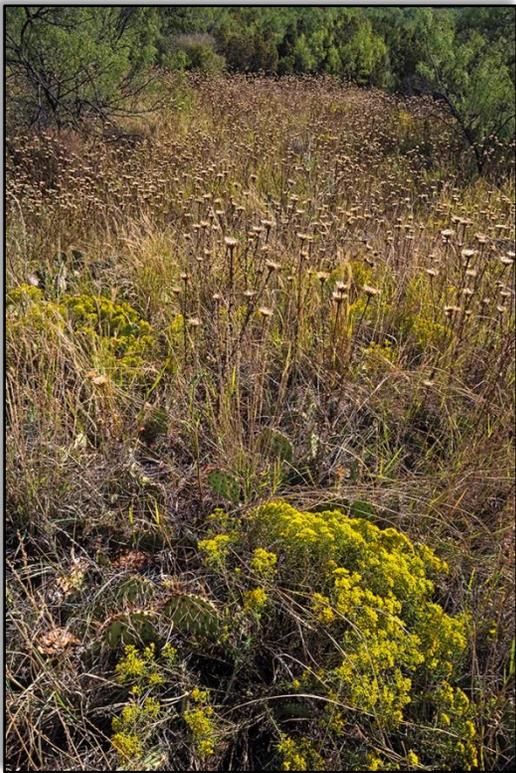
Everything that I have written so far has been but a prelude to the story I indicated at the outset; so if you are still having trouble putting your feet in Tsitsista moccasins, walk with me just a little further.

The Treaty of Medicine Lodge was intended to bring peace by relocating the tribes to "Indian Territory" and away from settler encroachment, which is to say to put them somewhere else and give their land to whites. If nothing else, the effect of this was to take from them the land in which they had made their living hunting buffalo for generations beyond memory. To the Dog Soldiers, and warriors in other bands who agreed with them, this was simply the last straw. During the summer of 1868 bands of war parties, not only of Southern Cheyenne and Arapaho, but also Kiowa, Kiowa-Comanche, Northern Cheyenne, and Brulé and Oglala Lakota attacked white settlers across the region, but especially in Kansas between the Solomon and Saline Rivers.

Against his wishes, but beyond his power to prohibit, young warriors from Black Kettle's band were occasionally among those war parties. In an effort to show good faith, **Little Rock**, a chief in Black Kettle's band, revealed this truth to the Indian Agent at Fort Lyon, Colonel **Edward Wynkoop**, whom the Southern Cheyenne and Arapaho trusted. Little Rock promised to try to have them turned over to white authorities.

By the beginning of November, Black Kettle's band had relocated farther southeast in concert with a number of other bands of Tsitsista and affiliated tribes along the upper reaches of the Washita River in what is now northwestern Oklahoma's **Roger Mills** County. The Washita is not a great river by any stretch of the imagination. It arises on the northeastern flank of the Llano Estacado on the edge of the Texas Panhandle's Roberts County and flows due east across Hemphill County into Oklahoma before turning southeast into the Red River on the Texas-Oklahoma border. For 295 miles it winds through the sedimented strata of the southern plains. In many places it is more mud-choked than motile, giving rise to periodic self-relocations of the streambed in which it flows.

In November of 1868, of the considerable bands of tribal people who had settled into the Washita's floodplain to ride out the winter storms for which the plains are known,



Summer Come and Gone

Black Kettle's band was located western-most of all, which is to say furthest upstream, by a distance of several miles. This was not by accident. In the months and years since Sand Creek, Black Kettle's star had dimmed considerably in brightness and he was not highly celebrated among his people primarily because of the controversy still surrounding the Treaty of Fort Wise and the increasing influence of the Dog Soldiers and their allies among the other Tsitsista bands. He was nonetheless a respected elder of his tribe.

The chain of events leading from November 21 at Fort Cobb, a hundred miles downstream on the river, to the pre-dawn hours of November 27, 1868, along the Washita valley where Black Kettle had led his band, is easy enough to follow. Technically a formal state of hostilities was known to exist with the whites; however the old peace chief, in his own mind, surely thought he had done everything within his power to communicate and exhibit his peaceful intentions. Besides, it was winter on the Plains; soldiers did not initiate major campaigns during the dead of the season; but there they were.

The US Seventh Cavalry had been created on July 28, 1866, and organized on September 21, 1866, at Fort Riley, Kansas. Although its commanding officer was Colonel **Andrew J. Smith**, its second-in-command and the officer who led the regiment in the field was Lt. Colonel **George Armstrong Custer**. During the summer of 1867, the Seventh was heavily engaged in what became known as Hancock's War, the actions and engagements surrounding General **Winfield S. Hancock**'s ineffectual command of the Department of the Missouri and his efforts to gain the submission of the various Plains Tribes.

Custer's actions as the commander at the "siege" of Fort Wallace in western Kansas, in July 1867, had led to his court martial on eleven charges and specifications, of which he had been found guilty of five. He had received a one year's suspension from rank and command without pay. His behavior, while admittedly aimed toward a noble result, had been brash and "prejudicial to good order and discipline," but his troops on the whole still idolized him; and the current commander of the Department of the Missouri, General **Philip Sheridan**, had wanted Custer, the reigning boy-wonder of the army's cavalry, back with the Seventh for the campaign he had in mind. He would mount a winter operation that would locate and harass the Tsitsistas and Arapahos, disrupt their camps, and keep them on the move until spring, when having only tired ponies to carry them, the army could focus all of its resources and bring them to bay.



How Long Does It Have To Blow?

Sheridan had arranged for the remission of the remainder of Custer's sentence and on October 11, 1868, Custer had reunited with his command at Bluff Creek in extreme south-central Kansas. He immediately began sending out scouts to locate the Tsitsistas.

On November 26, Black Kettle's band had reached its village on the Washita, having departed Fort Cobb on the 21st after a lengthy meeting with Colonel **William B. Hazen** to discuss the prospects for peace for his people. Unknown to the Tsitsistas who had left Fort Cobb, on the evening of the 25th, the day before their return, a party of about 150 warriors, who had been raiding north of the Arkansas River with the Dog Soldiers, returned to the Washita. Some of them had been from Black Kettle's band.

The same day that Black Kettle made the valley, Osage scouts and troops under Major **Joel Elliot**, one of Custer's subordinates, found the trail of the warriors and brought the Seventh into focus on the village in the floodplain (not knowing there were also others downstream). During the day Custer laid out his general blueprint of attack and the Seventh began to close on the Washita with the plan to strike the following dawn.

In the village, fifty-one lodges huddled against the freezing winds and the mounting accumulations of snow. Of these, two were visiting Lakota, two were Arapaho, and the remainder were Black Kettle and his Tsitsistas: perhaps some 250 Human Beings in all, including the family of Little Rock, the only Council chief remaining with the aged warrior, who at that moment was sixty-seven years old. The Custer's chief scout, **Ben Clark**, had reported that the warrior strength of the village appeared to be in the neighborhood of 150, about 20% of the Seventh's troop strength.

Custer had determined that in the pre-dawn hours his effort would be to surround the sleeping village as completely as possible and that at dawn the order to attack would be

given with the goal of killing the residents, capturing their horses, and destroying their property.

It must have been the first night prior to the full moon since two hours before dawn the silver orb disappeared, engulfing the valley in darkness until the first hint of nautical twilight began to lighten the frigid, inky gloom. The troops had closed to within so short a distance to the silent lodges that the officers of the Seventh began to fear the village had been abandoned; but in the moment “Charge” was sounded the ensuing melee made it obvious otherwise. It was four years almost exactly to the day (lacking a single day) since the soldiers had struck the Human Beings at Sand Creek and the memory of those horror-filled moments must have resurrected themselves in a nightmarish howl.

Pandemonium is perhaps an accurate term: men, women, and children running to all compass points trying to comprehend a direction called “safety;” what few warriors there were grabbing for any weapon they could, while mothers grabbed for every child they could in an attempt to enter a state called “flight.” Quickly, it became apparent that most of the weapons being fired belonged to soldiers, and most of the dying was being done by Indians.

Double Wolf, asleep at his guard post, awoke to the first noises of alarm, grabbed his gun and fired to alert the village. In the initial charge, he was among the first to die. Others tried to leave their lodges to find cover in the trees and drainages. Black Kettle and his wife, **Medicine Woman Later**, struggled to find a horse and attempted to cross the river to greater safety. The horse



The Canadian Divide

was shot from under them and they were both shot in the back, dying immediately face down in the icy water. Women and children scattered individually and in small groups only to be ridden down and killed by the soldiers and Osage scouts.

Following the first assault, which he had led through the center, Custer had galloped to the top of a small sandstone knoll just south of the village from where he directed the action as it unfolded. As the human destruction became obvious, he ordered that the troops take some precaution to avoid killing the women and children and to round up as many as possible as captives. Within a matter of not more than half-an-hour the village was secure; however, for some time thereafter there were mop-up actions to dislodge and neutralize those that had been holed up among the trees and along the riverbanks.

A number of survivors managed to escape by one of several routes, ultimately joining with those in the downstream villages. The carnage, however, was almost greater than

could be imagined. In a matter of minutes Black Kettle's band effectively ceased to exist.

The Seventh Cavalry officially claimed twenty officers and men killed and thirteen wounded. Among the dead were two fine young officers: Major Joel Elliot and Captain **Louis Hamilton**, the grandson of Alexander Hamilton.

No accurate battlefield count of the death toll among the Tsitsistas was attempted, and the figures that have come down to us vary almost wildly depending on the source. Custer's own figures of nearly three hundred killed, wounded, or captured are most



Cheyenne Autumn

certainly inflated, being based on interviews the day afterward with his officers, as well as "additional information" that the general never specified. Official numbers still found on "knowledgeable" websites claim as many as 16-140+ "warriors" killed with no attempt at assessing the wounded. These same sources indicate that some 75 women and children were killed as well.

Among the Tsitsistas themselves, the accounting says that 11-18 men died, as

well as 17-"many" women and children. In addition to whatever these numbers might have been, 53 women and children were captured by Custer's soldiers. Initially they were used as human shields to discourage a counter-attack by warriors from the downstream villages. In this way Custer covered his withdrawal from the area. These noncombatants were later transferred to Fort Hayes, Kansas and held.

As if to add insult to the injury already inflicted, Custer ordered his men to round up and kill all of the ponies they could, saving only those needed to transport the captives. By official count about 675 died. At the same time he commanded that all of the lodges and the possessions they contained be pulled down and burned, including all of the stored winter foodstuffs upon which the Tsitsistas immediate survival would depend.

What we know is this: General Philip Sheridan, the driving force behind the actions of the entire Department of the Missouri, including the Seventh Cavalry, had issued these orders at the birth of the campaign against the Tsitsistas and Arapahos: "To destroy [Indian] villages and ponies, to kill or hang all warriors and to bring back all women and children [survivors]." It was a concept that was certainly not new to warfare; it was, indeed, the simple reality of "total war." It was designed to make every element of Indian society – women and children, the young and old, the healthy and the infirm – know the horror of strife as deeply and as fully as the warriors, the primary combatants, to make every member of the tribe suffer grievously until there was not sufficient energy or will remaining to resist. George Custer was just a willing emissary of destruction.

Sheridan had prior experience with the rudimentary concepts of this idea born from

his ordeals in the Shenandoah Valley during the Civil War. His “Burning” of the Confederate breadbasket in 1864 had rendered 400 square miles uninhabitable and presaged **William T. Sherman’s** March to the Sea through Georgia’s heartland.

Sheridan’s learning seems to have followed him west. Speaking to the conceptual basis of his philosophy, he once opined that, “If a village is attacked and women and children killed, the responsibility is not with the soldiers, but with the people whose crimes necessitated the attack.” The probability of a high mortality among noncombatants did not seem to bother him a great deal. Perhaps that stems from his view of Native Americans as something somewhat less than human, recalling his most famous epithet, “The only good Indian is a dead Indian.”

Words like “battle” and “massacre” are thrown around in an attempt to understand what happened on the

Washita in 1868. We bandy them about as if there is some balance point that can be achieved which will say that one is acceptable and the other is not, as if it might somehow be concluded that the killing of innocence under one of those banners justifies the result while under the other it does not. Wanton slaughter of human beings is wanton slaughter, no matter the word used to describe it; but to bring into that insanity the belief that if any have sinned, then all are guilty is to remove from moral life any plausible distinction between mankind and his fellow creatures.



As the Colors Fade

There were many losers in the valley of the Washita on that snowy November morning so long ago. For the Tsitsistas and their allies, it was the beginning of the end of a way of life that had, for them, become life itself: the freedom to move unencumbered across the open spaces of the land; the sheer joy of knowing the land and its elements and creatures as extensions of oneself; the awareness that one was always in concert with the natural world, always a part of it. The Spirit of the Ho-To-Wah was vanishing before their eyes, taking with it Black Kettle’s band and so many of their kinsmen: the mothers, the children – the future. To the tribe the loss of Human Being life was irreplaceable. The loss of their primary mode of transportation and all of their belongings in the face of an onrushing winter already bleak was nearly as insurmountable for the survivors as the deaths of their loved ones; and the destruction of their fellow creatures on such a scale was beyond comprehension.

There were victors on the Washita as well: the Dogs of War had a field day and then held a feast: They celebrated the birth of one more offspring of inhumanity, one more child of the dark angels, one more atrocity for the spreading culture of materialism to

enshrine as gospel. They told the story of how God had given them the victory and, with it, the land and all therein contained; but at the height of the victory parade they failed to notice the unobtrusive slave riding on the running board of Caesar's chariot, whispering into the conqueror's ear, "Sic transit gloria mundi, all glory is fleeting." And the times are always changing.

What's Now...?

In the Eye of the Beholder

One ship sails east and the other ship sails west while the very same breezes blow,
It's the set of the sail and not the gale that bids them where to go.
And like the ships of the sea is the way of our fate
Tho' the seas are getting stormy and the hour's getting mighty late.
If that ship starts seeping water, you know how to bail;
O' you can't change the weather, but you sure can change the sail;
And a harbor looks much better when you've made it through a gale;
So I guess I've gotta keep on keeping on.

Pozo Seco Singers
Keep On Keeping On (1968)
Lyrics by Len Chandler

When I began writing *A Song for the Asking* some dozen years ago it seemed appropriate at the time to say something in each issue of the newsletter about what was happening currently in my spiritual home, the Great Smoky Mountains. Over those years I hope that you have gleaned some useful and helpful knowledge from my postings in this section.

However, as time has passed, it has come to seem that much of what I write is cyclically repetitive and perhaps not as informative in real time, given that it is written every three months. I have thus decided that I am going to discontinue this section of the newsletter in favor of keeping the remaining three sections active.

As always, I welcome your thoughts and comments on this.

Don

A Tip is Worth...?

Deepening Connections: To Become Part of It

What is sure is this: whatever our idea of housekeeping, it isn't working. Our insistence as a species that we are entitled to all space and resources around our homes, regardless of the shape of that entitlement, is bringing us to the brink of disaster. If the greatest gift of our species is soaring imagination, as I think it may be, now is the time to begin imagining better ways to bring our hearts to bear on the greatest housekeeping project of all time. In short, how can we learn to fit in the world, rather than force things to fit around us?

H. Emerson Blake
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Every Tuesday the garbage trucks from the Asheville Sanitation Department roll through our neighborhood. In leaving, they take with them the week's accumulated tailings from every residence. I can't say what may be contained in the big green rolling plastic tubs that are emptied from other homes into the compressor trucks, but I have a fairly good idea what ours contains, particularly the perishable and non-recyclable items that are the hallmark of our society. I might not like to think about them as a part of me; but I am surely a part of them; and it is only after I acknowledge that "to become a part



A Cottonwood from Calf Creek

of everything" requires my assent to being both part of that which I would draw to me, as well as that which I would push away, that I can fully understand what being a part of the world around me is really about. Only then can I begin to comprehend what photographic creativity entails on an emotional and spiritual level; only then can my connections become "meaningful."

But I'm not here at the moment to talk about garbage. In opening the discussion of what he calls "deepening connections" in his excellent work, *The Widening Stream*, **David Ulrich** says, "We open to the mystery – to a deepening connection with the current of a vast intelligence that pervades all things. This principle reflects a hierarchy in which we come into relationship with a larger whole, with forces greater than those found within our ordinary lives and mundane selves – but which are available to our experience. Here we are called to the search, to become more deeply related to the core of our being, with other human beings, with the living culture, and with life itself." These are fine words; I read them,

and I nod my head in agreement; "Yes, that is what I experience when I experience becoming a part of it – the 'it' that Ulrich describes." However, words that lead me into that state of connection, words that work for me, may not be words that work for you in the same way; and maybe I don't know the words that work for you. Maybe only you can discover those words for yourself; but maybe something I say will help you discover those words and will help you frame the experience that will lead you to become part of the great other, will help to create or deepen your connection.

For Ulrich, there are three phases of the process leading to connection: **1.** Creative courage, **2.** Right place, right time, and finally **3.** Deepening connection. But what is this "deepening connection" all about? How do you get there; how do you make it happen?

Somewhere along the journey, it dawns on you that there is nowhere to get to and nothing to make happen, but that is the New Age-cute answer and I'm not particularly enamored with New Age-cute, even if as in this instance it happens to be accurate. The deeper truth behind it is that it really is more about the journey, which is to say it's more

instructive, actually, to focus on deeply looking at the questions rather than searching for answers.

The questions become like beautiful stones in the hand; and as you turn them from one direction to another and look at what each new turning reveals, you realize that it isn't the solution that enlightens but a more complete understanding of what has been asked. And as we gain on-going understanding of each new aspect of each question that our continued probing uncovers, we realize – more and more – that our experience continuously becomes richer and our immersion into the stream of creativity becomes ever deeper and more profound. It takes place piece by piece over many years. Two stories – one from science, the other from art – might be helpful. Let your thinking mind be as calm as possible and focus on the pictures that arise.



Sort of Like a Dugway, More or Less

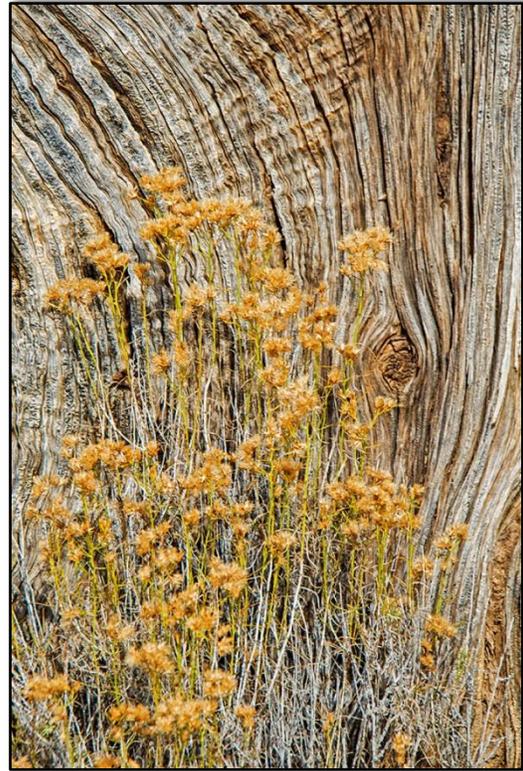
Imagine a seed placed in the ground. Any seed will do. Ground, as you remember, is soil; and soil is made of dirt, but in that dirt are all sorts of nutrients – minerals that are nothing more than combinations of chemicals – that the seed uses to undergo changes, to germinate and grow. Quite literally the soil – the dirt – becomes the seed. As the seed grows, it continues to take in dirt – nutrients – mostly through a process of those things being dissolved in water and water being taken into the seed, which becomes a plant. Now pick a plant, any plant you choose that you might like to eat. Watch the plant as it grows, taking in dirt and water, maturing, ripening, becoming ready to be picked and eaten. Yeah, go ahead, pick the plant and eat it. What it is, whatever it has become, once you chew and swallow it, will go through more changes; and somewhere in your small intestine the things that make up the plant will become absorbed into your bloodstream and will be delivered to your cells that will become new muscle tissue and other new parts of every part of you. You are literally the plant, and therefore, literally, the dirt as well. And if you follow the chain backward and build in all of the relationships that became the plant and all of the things that became the dirt, pretty soon you see that you are part of all of those things and they are part of you, not metaphorically, but rather quite literally; and it doesn't even take seven degrees of separation to get you there.

And now for the art.... When I was a boy of nine or ten, the kids in my neighborhood in Athens, Georgia loved to play hide-and-seek. We lived on the edge of urbanity and so there were lots of great wooded and creek-drained places to play in. Once, as a hider rather than a seeker, I found a small copse of trees – sweet gums, maybe – a perfect

spot in which to be unseen. The slender trunks were closely spaced and grew so thickly that from the outside it was impossible to see the small clearing in their midst, which was wide enough to lie in easily and open to the sky above. Once inside the clearing, I lay down on my back, put my hands behind my head for a pillow, and began to watch the small cirrus clouds pass overhead. I don't know when it happened, or how long it went on; I just remember when it was no longer happening, and I was aware of what had transpired and then had ceased. I was aware that at some moment and for some amount of time all sense of separation – all awareness of otherness – between the nine year-old boy who lived in my body and those small puffs of atmosphere in the blue dome ceased to exist: the boy on the ground and the clouds above him, and the sky in which they drifted were all one. I became a part of them, and they of me. I had not wished it to happen; I had not tried consciously to bring it about; it simply occurred, and I was a participant.

It took many years for that experience to replicate itself, and during those years I tried to make it happen over and over without success. I tried by first seeking to understand what had taken place, by first trying to understand from every possible perspective the nature of the question. I read books, and more books, about Native Americans, about spiritual journeys, about physics and metaphysics. I talked with friends whom I believed would be open and would want to be helpful. I began to meditate regularly and to try to understand what was taking place during meditation. Sometimes, in brief and fleeting moments of awareness I would become conscious of a deeper connection taking place between myself and the natural world. Eventually, not by “thinking”, but rather by “being,” those moments began to stretch themselves in my experience, and I could “be a part of ...” by just being there. Once you can truly become part of something, you can become part of anything, even garbage. As Thích Nhất Han's beautiful calligraphic expression famously encourages: “Be still and see.” To “see” in this way is to join with, to become one with.

When we open ourselves to the experience of “becoming part of...” we open ourselves to deeper connections with all of the natural world; we become lenses through which nature expresses itself, and through us to all of those with whom we share our creative vision. We step beyond the documentation of nature, and even beyond the feeling and emotion that allow us to express the world of the 10,000 things. We enter into the experience of our selves becoming of a piece with that world; nothing forced, nothing contrived: we simply fit with what is there; and, in so doing, the connections that are forged are like a conversation where nature is talking to itself.



Rabbitbrush and Juniper

EarthSong Workshops: How You See the Land Really Matters **Walking in Beauty**

Man is the synthesis of nature. He is the rocks and the trees, the earth and the sky and the seas. A part of his being are the beasts of the field and the birds of the air. They are bone of his bone and flesh of his flesh. All are his kin. They are in him and he is in them.

Mary Crovatt Hambidge

Apprentice in Creation: The Way is Beauty

As I walk with Beauty
As I walk, as I walk
The universe is walking with me
In beauty it walks before me
In beauty it walks behind me
In beauty it walks below me
In beauty it walks above me
Beauty is on every side
As I walk I walk with beauty

Traditional Diné Prayer

For the past twenty-one years it has been my privilege to serve the cause of beauty and the creative path as a photographer. For the past dozen years that privilege has often taken the form of arranging and leading photography workshops around this beautiful country of ours. During that time I have had the opportunity to meet and guide some wonderful people, most of whom have remained in contact as friends.



Hint: You'll See This Again

For a teacher, I think there is no greater compliment to receive than for a student to say, "You have so inspired me that I want to be a photographer full time also; I want to pursue that path as a vocation." And over the years I have been blessed

on several occasions with students who have shared this decision with me.

So to make the decision I have made is far from easy; but I know that it is the right decision for my life at this time. The coming year, 2016, will be the last year that I offer weeklong workshops other than those offered and arranged by other sources, such as Arrowmont, John C. Campbell Folk School, The Intentional Growth Center, or other such institutions and organizations. Beginning in 2017 I will offer weekend workshops in Western North Carolina. These will include the Appalachian Barn Workshops; the Wildflowers, Waterfalls, and Western North Carolina Workshop; and perhaps a couple of others. I think it's known as "downsizing."

I want to make the last year of EarthSong Workshops as exciting and fun-filled as possible. I've put together a calendar of my very favorite locations, and I've created some of the most wonderful creative opportunities for you to experience. Some of the details are still being ironed out, but I want to share the schedule with you here. There will be no EarthSong Weeklong workshops after these.

March 31-April 3, 2016: Appalachian Barn Workshop Rite of Spring
Asheville/Madison County, NC
\$450; 8 Participants



April 9-15, 2016: Great Smoky Mountains NP Spring Workshop
Cherokee, NC
\$1295; 8 Participants; Deposit: \$250



June 15-21, 2016: Acadia NP-Mt. Desert Island Spring Tour
Southwest Harbor, ME
\$1350; 8 Participants; Deposit: \$250



September 17-23, 2016: Cape Cod Cusp of Autumn Workshop
North Truro, MA
\$1350; 8 Participants; Deposit: \$250



October 1-7, 2016: The Awesome Upper Peninsula of Michigan Fall Tour
Baraga and Munising, MI
\$1350; 8 Participants; Deposit: \$250



October 13-16, 2016: Appalachian Barn Workshop Full-on-Fall
Asheville/Madison County, NC
\$450; 8 Participants



October 29-November 4, 2016: The Canyon Country of Southeast Utah Tour
Moab, Utah
\$1500; 7 Participants; Deposit: \$250



In addition to these there is one more 2016 workshop that is brand new and is really going to be a treat. This workshop will be a weeklong event in the last two weeks of July and will be in the **La Plata Mountains** of **southwestern Colorado** and will involve **llama trekking**. I'll make a separate detailed announcement about this exciting opportunity right after the beginning of the New Year.

Over the years I have come to consider the locations on next year's schedule some of the greatest photographic opportunities this country has to offer. Not only are they iconic, but they offer an array of beautiful photographic possibilities that will stimulate your creative juices and make you happy that photography is your chosen medium of creative expression

If you are interested in sharing any of these extraordinary adventures with us call me at **(828) 788-0687**, or send me an email with your phone number to don@earthsonphotography.com.

Remember that for all of EarthSong's workshops, we arrange for the lodging (not included in tuition) and we scout all of the restaurant (meals not included) locations, so that all you have to do is show up ready to create, learn, and have fun.

Until next time, may the Spirit of Light guide your shutter release.

This newsletter is being sent only to those people who have expressed an interest in receiving it. If you no longer wish to receive it, you can be removed from the mailing list by sending an email requesting removal to don@EarthSongPhotography.com.



Sunset Light, Windows District, Arches National Park, Utah