



Dakota Indian Foundation

"Helping Native American people for more than 45 years"

February 26, 2019

Mike Peterson
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Rapid City, SD 57703

Hau Koda Mike (Hello Friend),

With tears rolling down his cheek, Frances Grey Cloud shared, "I haven't seen my children or family in over ten years. It's the price I have to pay for my mistakes. If I had only listened to my teachers, I probably wouldn't be in here right now."

The children were smiling through their tears as they held the light blue jerseys up to their chest. "Please don't make the same mistake that I did, stay in school and get good grades," Grey Cloud told the group of youngsters. Behind us you could hear a loud "clang" of steel doors opening or closing throughout the building as inmates were moved from one secure area to the next by armed guards.

The unique prisoner/student learning session was made possible by the warden of the state penitentiary. It was a rare opportunity for those who made mistakes to give something back.

The idea for the gathering came a month earlier while attending a gathering at the prison. A native brother gifted me with the most beautiful dream catcher I had ever seen! "It's for all that you do for our children."

My friends behind walls roared with laughter when I told them about my dilemma. I was a basketball coach at the time and shared that our kids used masking tape to create the numbers on our shirts. It really worked, but sometimes during a game we would have to stop play to fix the tape because our number was not readable by the referee!

"We got you bro!" The inmates who had so gratuitously presented me with a dream catcher agreed to make beaded items and sculpt beautiful art pieces that were raffled off until enough money was raised to purchase uniforms for my middle school basketball team.

When the day came for the student/inmate gathering, my ballplayers were only informed that we would have pizza in the prison. I had to fight back tears as they opened the gift presented by the humble prisoners.

Our ancestors rewarded good deeds by presenting an eagle feather to honor achievement. But is it possible for those who make bad choices to receive honor? Life is full of choices, we can walk the good “red road” or make poor choices and walk a dark path. The Circle of Hope can be realized when we help students seek a brighter future.

It was a week later when I painted the image which is enclosed in this mailing titled, “Circle of Hope” which commemorates the exchange between my basketball players and my brothers on the inside. The Circle of Hope teaches us “what goes around, comes back around.”

Please, help my people find a path to education so they can give something back to their families, our tribes and communities. A much needed gift of \$75 will help to purchase books and supplies. We don’t have funds to provide financial aid and must turn away over 80 students each semester who apply for assistance. For their future, can you perform a great deed of support with a full \$300 scholarship?

A second chance is often necessary as many of our students choose to hold off on immediately attending college. It’s not till they realize the difficulty of finding work, that they choose to go back to school. “We Got You” can be our response when a student chooses to return to school.

Pilamaya for helping my people!



Your Dakota Friend,

A handwritten signature in blue ink that reads "John Beheler".

John Beheler
Mahed Wayanka (*Sees Within*)

P.S. We'll need your contributions to help our people survive this long and treacherous winter.

