

Sacred Run 2006 (www.sacredrun.org)

Weekly Update – March 27 - April 2

Vol. 28, Week # 7

(With this issue of Sacred Journey, we thank Bill Arena, who wrote this newsletter during our first six weeks, and we welcome our new newsletter writer, Stephanie Manning, Sacred Runner/Walker from Berkeley, California.)

WEEK SEVEN:

With week 7 we passed out of the sad misery of the 9th Ward in New Orleans and onward to the northeast, into the land of the Choctaw Indians, a tribe of 9,000 with a living language, used to this day at Philadelphia, Mississippi. Here we commenced a five-day rest stop.

3/27 - Raceland, Louisiana - Wow! 2,780 miles down, 1,665 miles to go! We are almost there!

Our last day with the kind and generous Houma People brought us to Grand Isle where, thanks to the cohesion, hard work and love of the Houmas, much work was taking place to reconstruct or repair home damage wrought by last year's hurricanes. Trailers or mobile homes were everywhere to serve as temporary quarters while the construction was taking place. The new homes were being built on high 10 foot piers. Contractors, volunteers and homeowners themselves worked in the humid Spring heat on roofs, walls, painting and infrastructure. Many of our Sacred Runners and Walkers pitched in to repair a roof including Larry, Cyrille, Joel, Rogelio, Sean, Jerry and others. By day's end, we came to realize that the lack of government rescue had left the Houma people in a dire predicament and had it not been for their own sweat and the commitment to cling to their Bayou homeland of many centuries, there would have been little hope of recovery.

That night, we watched a video of Ed Bradley, "On Assignment," all about the Houmas' struggle to remove toxic air pollution caused by the dumping of oil field wastes in their region. One of our hosts in Raceland, Dr. Mike Robichaux, was a Louisiana State Senator at the time, and attempted to have the State Senate pass legislation to remediate such conditions. The Senate majority, beholden to the oil industry, voted Dr. Mike's bill down. Toxic emissions were eventually reduced, much to the relief of neighbors suffering from respiratory and other illnesses. But the problem is now growing again as the people suffer.

3/28 - Poplarville, Mississippi - We took our leave of the Houmas sadly, promising to visit again in two years during Sacred Run 2008. It was sad to say good-bye to the huge grassy lawn we camped on, the trees, nearby cattle and wildflowers, the many dozens of volunteers camped there in the relief effort, but especially to the people, their great Chief Brenda Dardar Robichaux, and their gregarious and warm-hearted Elder, MorningDove Verret. We are forever indebted to them and the Houma people.

Off we went into New Orleans, forewarned that the scene there was pretty grizzly, the destruction remarkably tragic. The walkers left from the infamous Super-Dome, which housed evacuees during the disaster, walked through the downtown area and on into the Ninth Ward. House after house, storefront after storefront lay abandoned for many blocks, a "ghost town." Each building was marked according to how many bodies had been found upon inspection and so on. Most Ninth Ward residents had left for other parts of the U.S. and not returned. Only a few houses were being repaired as we passed. One lone lost dog roamed the streets. And in front of every house lay piles of debris and garbage, including many personal effects – photo albums, clothes and baby toys, etc. Eventually, we came to Lake Pontchartrain, a huge body of water north of the City. We walked and ran our way to Poplarville, Mississippi, where the devastation was less but still many homes were damaged and countless large trees had blown down. Many thanks to the Rev. Toby Lofton and the First United Methodist Church for graciously providing us a place to spend the night. We gathered that night in a "Talking Circle" to process the many feelings of the day.

3/29 - Bay Springs, Mississippi - We left Poplarville early and were met by several police officers along the way, to whom we explained our message, "All Life is Sacred." Passing without incident, we arrived in Bay Springs, Mississippi, where we stayed in City Hall. Many thanks to Bay Springs Mayor Smith and Miss Rhonda in the city office for allowing us to stay in the City Hall building.

3/30 - Philadelphia, Mississippi - Arriving in Philadelphia, Mississippi, we have reached the 3,000 mile mark: 3,029, to be precise. Only 1,416 left to get to Washington, D.C. We are so grateful to the Choctaw people for allowing us to stay at their Hospitality House and on the grounds of tribal member Ron Alex. They fed us and treated us like royalty! They even sent runners of their own to accompany our runners on the last leg of the journey into Philadelphia.

3/31 - 4/1 Philadelphia, Mississippi - The Choctaws put on a lovely Pow-Wow in our honor. Much traditional dancing took place, led by our beloved Houma member MorningDove and others. Dove raffled off a shawl and a basket and donated the proceeds to Sacred Run 2006. Thank you Choctaw people and MorningDove. A sudden mid-day rain on 4/1 did not deter the luncheon planned for us at the Tribal Justice Department. Tables and chairs were folded quickly and carried to a building within a half-hour, where an awards ceremony was conducted, followed by much feasting.

4/2 - Philadelphia, Mississippi - How lucky we were to take part in Choctaw stickball, the oldest field game in North America. Each player holds two Lacrosse-type sticks and chases a small ball, the size of a golf ball. The two teams defend their goal and heave the little ball across the field to their comrades. Guards may tackle their opponents and we are proud of our leader, Dennis Banks, for his fine showing as goalie. A drum on either side of the field encourages each side to try hard, an outgrowth of the drums used during battle during the American Revolution of 1776. But Choctaw stickball has been played for centuries, and there are differing versions played by the other tribes, including the Cherokees, the Chickasaws, and the Seminoles.

After the stickball game, we went to Bök Čito (Bogue Chitto), visited the Nanih Wayia Mound. The earthen Mound was 1,000 years old, and was possibly the site of origin of the Choctaw people according to legend. Afterwards, we were treated to yet another feast.

Thanks to the Choctaw people for all their generosity to us on this day! The game, special Stickball / Sacred Run t-shirts, the visit to the Mound, an explanation of stick-making by the masters, the huge feast with many many dishes, and Bök Čito t-shirts ... we are overwhelmed with gratitude.

Finally that night, there came another amazing gift – this time from the Earth and Mother Nature: a tremendous thunder and lightening storm with hailstones pinging on the metal roof where we were staying, campers scurrying to get inside, a short breath-taking display of nature followed by a cool sunny morning. How many more adventures will we have as we "trudge the road of happy destiny?"

For the latest information and photos of Sacred Run 2006 as we move across the country, please visit www.sacredrun.org. To remove your name from this email list, please hit "reply" and type "remove" in the subject line. Thanks for supporting Sacred Run 2006.