

## Acculturation Through Education

If you can take I-90, west, most people think you'd be downright crazy taking Highway 18, a meandering two-lane-r that slows through small towns you'd never otherwise notice. Highway 18 barely deserves the word *highway*.

But if you're crazy enough to wander and you have the time, you could do worse than score a big sky sunset some late afternoon over Hwy. 18. It'll take you through endless reservation lands, two of them—the Rosebud and Pine Ridge—side by side in the lower echelon of west river South Dakota counties.

The town of Mission may be the heart of the Rosebud, a town where you can't miss signs for Sinte Gleska University, a four-year tribal college enrolling somewhere close to a thousand students.

Sinte Gleska is the Lakota name of the man considered a tribal George Washington, a long-gone chief whose name translates as "Spotted Tail." If you know anything about him, you can't help but think memorializing Spotted Tail is a good choice—a wise one—for the Rosebud school.

And, a ton of stories here, but one is a story about education.

In 1878, just two years after Little Big Horn, Spotted Tail listened to a spirited sales job by Col. Richard Henry Pratt, a Civil War and Indian wars veteran, who devised a plan for Native education. Pratt's school would "Kill the Indian to save the man," or so he promised, which made the Carlisle Indian School, among other things, an institute of acculturation.

Col. Pratt told Spotted Tail that what Native people suffered could have been avoided if the Lakota could read the treaties they signed. Send your kids to Carlisle, he told Sinte Gleska, and they'll learn to read and write the English language.

Pratt's recruiting trip down Hwy 18 that summer was less successful at Pine Ridge than it was on the Rosebud, where Spotted Tail surprised everyone by sending five of his kids way out east to Pennsylvania.

But "out east" wasn't a foreign land to Spotted Tail. He'd spent a couple years imprisoned out east, because he'd sacrificed his freedom for a kid who'd murdered someone, gave himself to the law instead of turning in the guilty. Spotted Tail was, by all accounts, that kind of good man—and an easy man to like. He was trusted while incarcerated, not even under lock and key.

"Out east" he couldn't help note how many white people lived in endless stream of cities and towns. Their sheer numbers convinced him it was fruitless for Lakota warriors to fight. In a difficult season of change every Native man and woman faced, Spotted Tail determined that if his children learned to read and write English, life would get easier.

So, the kids got on the train and went out east. When, later, he was told that way out there in Pennsylvania, his children got themselves baptized, Sinte Gleska was furious. Induction into the

white man's religion wasn't in the contract. He had no intention of turning his children into imitation white kids.

Because he'd been one of the first to signal his participation in Pratt's Carlisle School, Spotted Tail was an instant celebrity when he got off the train in Pennsylvania for a visit. Pratt fawned over him, and a cotillion of sweet and well-meaning Quaker ladies insisted on having their pictures taken with the great pagan Lakota war chief.

But that adulation played short-term. Once Spotted Tail saw what was happening and talked with miserable and homesick kids in short-cropped hair and tight shoes beneath white man's clothes, he blew up. The handsome headman, known for his congenial nature, blasted Pratt right there in front of everyone, the Quaker ladies, Carlisle's well-heeled donors, and most of the student body. Then Red Cloud, Two Strike, Red Dog, and American Horse, who'd come with, all let Pratt have it too. Besides, Sinte Gleska said, none of the kids had learned much English.

It must have been really ugly.

Or beautiful. You choose.

Spotted Tail corralled his kids right then and there, and let them know they were leaving, post-haste—as did that council of chiefs who were with him. He wanted his kids to learn English, not become English. He wanted his kids to be Lakota.

Go ahead and take Hwy. 18 west someday and spot those signs along the road, get out somewhere in the country and think of a strong Lakota headman shepherding his kids onto a train and taking them back to where they came from—all of that on the very earth beneath your feet.