

No Heart of the loway

Had I gone to school in Iowa, perhaps, I'd have known a headman, a chief, named No Heart; after all, his people left their name behind when they travelled west and south. We're Iowans because of him--and them. They left their name behind, but little more we design to remember.

Nonetheless, you should know that No Heart's descendants are a proud people who live in Oklahoma and have for years, despite their name. They call home just outside the town where my son's family lives, just across the Cimarron.

When most white folks think of Native Americans, they see a string of Lakota warriors in feathered headdresses, here and there a bear tooth necklace maybe, a gang of tough guys wielding bows or a Winchester maybe, a fur shawl thrown over a shoulder, all of them aboard paint ponies up atop the next grassy hill, in silhouette.

White folks think of fights and raids and fierce, devilish screaming, somebody butchering somebody else. The frontier is now more than a century behind us now, and what's left of the story--the detritus of all of that history--is a museum of images that may well belong more identifiably to Hollywood than history.

Our namesakes, the loways, as a people, don't fit that mold. No Heart may have distinguished himself for bravery, as the sign beneath his impressive statue maintains, but he did all his fighting against ageless foes, the Sauk and the Fox from the east, and the Dakota from the west, tribes who almost always outnumbered his. Oh, yes, this too: a host of illegal and undocumented immigrants, the Euro-Americans who simply pushed the loways out of the way—in Iowa!

Historically, the Iowa people were farmers until Europeans pushed them west into a semi-nomadic way of life more typical of traditional plains Indians. Their artifacts show up first in the Great Lakes region, but they move to Siouland, along the Big Sioux and

out to Okoboji, even up to Pipestone's red stone quarries. In 1804, Lewis and Clark parleyed with them; but for most of the 18th century and on into the 19th, what we call Iowa was their home, stretching to all four corners.

The land was ceded to the government in 1824, then again in 1836 and 1838, and the tribe was given a reservation, a strip of land in Kansas, just ten miles wide and twenty miles long. That's called cutting back.

If there was a "long walk" for the Ioways, a "Trail of Tears," it's not recorded, perhaps because their ranks had been so depleted (less than a thousand already when Lewis and Clark met them) that they were too often too easily raided and thus eventually looked toward Kansas and even Oklahoma reservations as safe zones.

But to say the Ioways *wanted to go* to Indian Territory, to Oklahoma, is dead wrong. For them, as with other smaller, less war-like tribes especially, Indian Territory appeared to be at least something of a safe haven.

All of which means that Chief No Heart's bravery--as the sign says--may well have less to do with outright, bloody warfare with Euro-Americans than with the kind of negotiations he did for his people with the white folks whose ever-increasing presence made traditional tribal life impossible. There are, after all, more ways to maim a people than bloody warfare.

Anyway, not long ago, I just happened to run into No Heart--a strikingly proud sculpture, I might add--while I was being jerked along by a rambunctious five-pound Pomeranian. Let me assure you: No Heart's presence is daunting, but his story--and the story of his people who left their name across an entire state--is far more complex and difficult than Hollywood--or most of us--can handle.