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# NUMU TEKWAPUHA NOMENEEKATU NEWSLETTER

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The Comanche Language & Cultural Preservation Committee

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## UPDATE FROM THE EDITOR

Here it is Spring, and we barely had a Winter this year! Does this mean we will pay for these beautiful 60, 70 and 80 degrees days in the middle of summer with 100+ days? Who knows, but we should enjoy them while we can.

Meanwhile, after a hiatus from language classes during the holidays, we are back at work on the revision and updating of our Comanche Dictionary. And time is of the essence.

When we began this journey almost 25 years ago we knew we had a dream and we had no idea of how long it would take to accomplish what we wanted to do, but here we are today.

We have worked with about 40 fluent speakers throughout the years, and this is their legacy for you and generations to come. But now we are down to five speakers who are still able to help as we continue this journey to get as many of our words into the Comanche Dictionary as possible.

As I have said many times before, the speakers of the Comanche language are the True Treasures of our Tribe. They can never be given the full recognition that they deserve as far as I and many others are concerned.

But as we continue to make the third revision to our Dictionary, I would like to recognize the speakers who continue to make the time and effort to help preserve our language.

**Rita Coosewoon** has been a distinguished judge for the Tribe, she has taught students in the Elgin School

System, she taught at the Comanche College, and she has been invaluable as a representative for our group at many tribal gatherings. We are always proud of her, and she has a passion to see our language live on.

**Rev. Videll Yackeschi** is retired from the ministry, and the Comanche College language program. He is not in the best of health but he makes the effort to attend as many meetings as he can, because he recognizes the importance of the work we all do.

**Virgie Kassanavoid** is a wonderful Christian lady who has participated in keeping our language alive even before our group came into existence, working with language students at Post Oak Church.

She has undergone serious health issues in the past year, but she is strong and resilient and her faith and love of the language does not waver.

**Jean Monetathchi**, retired as Director of Nursing from the Lawton Indian Hospital, also has health issues. She worked with many elder speakers during her nursing years and grew up with Comanche speakers. She remembers old words and like the others, knows the importance of keeping our language alive.

**Patricia Bread**, although relatively new with our program, has been working with the tribe's Early Childhood Development program. That program lays a foundation for the pre-schoolers and language re-vitalization. Growing

up in a Comanche speaking home, she is an asset to our efforts.

I want to ask each of you to keep the above named people in your prayers. As we all grow older we have health issues, but somehow we manage to carry on because we know the work we do is important – even critical. Ʋra.

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## WORDS TO REMEMBER

Ronald Red Elk, from Jan 2010:

Nʉmʉnʉ ʉse tʉasʉ taa Nʉmʉ Tekwapʉ?ha Nomʉnetinʉ.

Sitʉtsi Tʉbitsi Nʉmʉ Nai?tʉ ʉ watsikʉ, kewainahai sukʉ usʉ tʉbitsi Nʉmʉ wa?ipʉ. ʉse taa Nʉmʉ Tekwapʉ?a tsaaku nakʉ supanaitʉ, tsaaku suabitaitʉ, ʉse tʉasʉ taa Nʉmʉ Pu?e tsaaku ma suabitaitʉ. Hina tanʉ hanʉ?hutui?

Below is a quote I made for the opening of the Comanche National Museum:

“It is said that a language lives in the hearts and minds of the speakers of that language.”

Since becoming an advocate for the Comanche language, I have had the honor and privilege of studying under the knowledge and expertise of many of our speakers. Some of them being: Lucille McClung, Vincent Martinez, Margaret Poahway, Carney Saupitty Sr., Marie Haumpy, Albert Nahquaddy, Edith Gordon, Rosalie Attocknie, Ray Niedo and Marie Parton, just to name a few.

As you look at the list of names, count how many of them have gone on? Now! Answer this question – Is our language a living language? I say that our language is an endangered language. What are we to do?

If we are truly dedicated to continue our customs, and to preserving and protecting them, and if we are going to

make these statements, why is it we are not using our language? Where is that abounding pride? Where is that dedication to continue our traditions?

Hina tanʉ hanʉ?hutui ?

Ronald Red Elk, from April 2010:

Learning a second language is a very difficult task, one that takes time and effort. It has been my experience that only the truly dedicated learner continues to learn and understand the true importance of why our language must be kept alive and in use.

As language advocates we must continue to find ways for our language to remain with us. Taa Nʉmʉ Tekwapʉ is the glue that holds us together as a Nation, that defines us as a unique distinct people, and that will continue to teach us of our Nʉmʉ Pu?e.

Sʉmʉ Oyetʉ Nʉmʉnʉ get involved in the use of our language!

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*(Reprinted with permission from Comanche Oral Narratives, a 1977 dissertation by Galen M. Buller.)*

## FISH TRIES TO SWELL UP BIG LIKE A TURTLE

story from Elliott Canonge

A long time ago, somewhere, some fish were living in a lake. Their father praised himself big. He was especially proud that he was big (or so he thought). One day, a big turtle swam beside the little fish. They said to their father, “Look at that big turtle.” Their father said to them, “I could be that big, too.” So he swallowed lots of water and he swelled up big. Then he said to his children, “Now I have become big like that turtle.”

“No,” they said, “Our father is foolish. He drinks lots of water.” Again he drank lots of water. “Now I am big,” he said. “No,” they said. “We would just rather

be small fish than to be crazy like our father. We don't want to become big."

**THE MAN WITH THE FORD:  
A TWENTIETH CENTURY VIEW  
OF MEDICINE**

**story from Elliott Canonge**

An Indian man who lives at Cache, Oklahoma, bought a new car. He went to town. After he was finished buying it, he went back to their house riding in his car. Their house was by a creek.

As he came near to it, many quail flew up in front of him. They frightened him and he ran off the road and fell into a big ditch.

He climbed out and went to the house. Arriving at the house, he told his wife, "That car acts like a horse. It gets scared. Carrying me, it ran into a ditch. A lot of quail scared it. We will watch it now."

**IN THE GIANT'S BAG**

**story from Elliott Canonge**

Somewhere, a long time ago, a Comanche man was hunting his horse. As he hunted his horse, the big giant met him. He put him in his sticky bag. The man cried loudly. Because he cried, the giant gave him some big rocks to play with. He put them in his sticky bag, and filled it up. Then the Comanche sat on top of the stones.

The giant went under a tree, and the Comanche climbed on the tree. The big giant, carrying only rocks, went on. His children said, "How nice, we are going to eat." But all the giant poured out was stones. "Hey! Our meat ran away from us. I am going to find him," he said.

So back he went to hunt for him. The Comanche man was there on the tree. The big giant went under him, but couldn't find him. Then the big giant went toward his home.

Getting down, the Comanche went on. He came back to his people.

Bragging, he said, "The big giant was nearly going to carry me off. But as I was crying, the big giant gave me some rocks to play with. We are going to move. Load your dogs. The giant lives near here." And so they moved.

**OLD LADY AND THE BUFFALO**

**story from Elliott Canonge  
(unpublished texts)**

A long time ago, Indians moved around from place to place. An old lady went about by herself. When it got cold, the men went out hunting. The old lady had no meat. "I will go look for some with them," she said.

They were gone for a long time. Getting on her horse, the old lady followed them. Trotting along, she saw a buffalo. It was lying asleep.

"I will butcher that one," she said. Getting down from her horse, she tied her bridle to the buffalo's tail. She took out her knife and ice pick. "How nice that I have found meat," she said.

Taking her ice pick and sharpening her knife on it, while the buffalo was sleeping, she stuck her ice pick into the buffalo's hip. The buffalo, being frightened, ran away.

Following behind, her horse ran away from her. She went after him, but couldn't catch him. She had no meat and came back to her home in the evening. After that she never saw her horse.

**FROG AND TURTLE**

**story from Elliott Canonge  
(unpublished texts)**

A long time ago, a Frog and a Turtle went on the warpath. They walked until it got dark. Then they came to a camp of soldiers. While the soldiers were asleep, they stole their horses. Then, driving them along, they ran away. They ran and ran until morning. The

Frog kept jumping up and jumping up. They kept watching. The Turtle didn't get any sleep until morning. For that reason, his eyes are red. For that reason the Frog jumps around now.

**TURTLE FALLS IN THE WATER**  
**from Elliott Canonge**  
**(unpublished texts)**

Somewhere, a long time ago, a little turtle was coming to a creek. As he came to it, a frog was sitting on the bank. This turtle said, "Brother, help me across this water." Frog said, "My brother, put a big louse in your mouth and then I will take you across." Then Turtle said, "Yes."

After he did this, Frog put out his leg to make a bridge for Turtle to cross on. But Turtle spit out the louse. Then Frog put his leg in the water. Turtle fell into the water head first and turned into a red shell. So Frog played with the red shell, and then he took it.

**GHOSTS ON THE MOUNTAIN**  
**from Elliott Canonge**  
**(unpublished texts)**

A long time ago, the Indians had their home on a big prairie. One day, their chief got them together and told them, "Get ready, we have to go off to hunt for our food." So they took their houses down and lead their pack horses from that place.

They moved on for three "sleeps." They camped at a place where there was a big mountain to the west of them. The chief called to three young men, "Come on, we're going there to hunt."

On top of the mountain, sheep were grazing. As they climbed this mountain, on top of the mountain, Ram and (his) wives were grazing. Ram looked below him and saw these Indians. Ram told his wives, "Oh, run!" Ram was afraid

and was trying to decide what to do. He talked to himself as the Indians climbed and talked to each other.

One young man said, "Oh, this mountain has ghosts." It is dangerous." Their chief said it had bad medicine. Ram found a big rock on top of the mountain and he began butting his head against it. He rolled it down the mountain while those Indians were talking. It fell on them and since then there have been four ghosts walking around that mountain.

**TWINS ARE THROWN AWAY**  
**from Elliott Canonge**  
**(unpublished texts)**

A long time ago, far away, some Indians, other than Comanches, had a home somewhere in the midst of some mountains. They were good-looking Indians. There was a young woman dressed in red. When twins were born to these Indians, they would throw away both of them. To this young woman was born twins – one boy and one girl child. Her kinfolks said they would take them to the mountains and throw them away. So they went through the mountains to where a road lies and by the road they threw them away. After doing that, they came back home.

Meanwhile, on this road these baies were laying and crying. One woman was coming through there picking up firewood. She heard a baby crying really bad, and, when she went to look she saw two babies laying there. The woman turned over the boy and he was dead. The woman carried home the baby which wasn't dead. She grew big and the woman put her in school. She was beautiful and was named, "Flower." The missionaries taught her to be good.  
*\*Buller: This story may be either a story or a retold experience.*

## COYOTE AND RACCOON

story from Elliott Canonge

A long time ago, Raccoon was playing by himself by a creek. He took out his eye and threw it at the tree. He was hanging down on a tree as his eye fell. In this way he was playing.

Coyote came and asked him, "What are you playing?" "I am playing with my eye," he replied. Coyote said, "Show me how to do it." Raccoon said, "You won't do it right. You are tricky." Coyote answered, "I will show you how I do it." "Don't throw it onto the other tree," Raccoon said. Coyote said, "Yes."

Coyote pulled out his eye. "Now only throw it at a willow," Raccoon told Coyote. "Don't throw it at any other kind of tree." Coyote said, "Yes." So Coyote played with his eye, saying, "Eye fall, eye fall," and throwing the eye at the willow tree for about an hour.

Then Coyote found a hackberry tree standing. For some unexplained reason, Coyote decide to throw his eye at the hackberry tree. He said, "Eye fall, eye fall." But his eye got caught up there. He yelled and yelled.

Raccoon heard him yelling and came to see what was wrong. Coyote said, "I threw my eye on the hackberry tree." "I told you not to throw your eye on the hackberry tree," Raccoon said. The Raccoon said, "Eye fall, eye fall," and his eye fell down. Raccoon got mad and told Coyote, "Don't take your eye out next time. Go." He since then threw his friend away.

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## A BANNOCK CREATION STORY

*(Buller: Both the Bannock and the Comanche people are offshoots from the Shoshone tribe. Because no Comanche creation stories are available, the Bannock stories, which seem to be related, help in*

*developing an understanding of Comanche literature.)*

Gray Wolf had the power to change all animal and plant life into other forms...when animals were bad, he changed them into other, smaller beings, sometimes into fish, sometimes into plants. When they were very bad, he changed them into skunks. Some that were very good, he made into birds with beautiful feathers; to some of them he gave the power to sing. From the song birds with the most beautiful feathers, Gray Wolf created the first Bannock Indians, the first people.

At that time...all living things spoke the same language. When a person dies, he is taken to the Sun. On the Sun, there is no night, only day, and all people are happy.

*(Editor's Note: Next month we will publish another longer version of A Bannock Creation Story from Comanche Oral Narratives.)*

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## ON A LIGHTER SIDE...

### YAHNEE CORNER

#### Easy for you to say!

Grandpa went to the dentist's office at the Indian Hospital with his wife, Sadie. He told the dentist, "Look, I want you to pull this bad tooth, but we don't have much time, so no medicine! - you know, that Nau-vo-cane, and no laughing gas. Just pull it, 'cause we gotta go." The dentist said, "Man, you got guts, but I'll do it that way if you want to. Which tooth is it?"

Grandpa turned to Sadie and said, "Sadie, go ahead and show him which tooth it is!"

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## "Sumu Oyetu Tana Nananumunuu"

(We Are All Related)

Ronald Red Elk