

## The Grandmothers

In the old days of village life, before any man was considered for selection as a Chief or Headman, they were first discussed between the elder women of the Tribe, the Grandmothers. The sewing circles, hide tannings, laundry groups, and shade tree conversations were not just about affairs of the home. If their talks determined that a man considered for election had not exhibited compassion for women, babies, and the sick, or respect for elders, that word was passed quietly from family to family. If the man also did not show wisdom in his decisions, such as saving food and resources to preserve the village equally with supplies for going to war or commerce, he was no longer considered. His name was not put up for a vote and then rejected in Council. His name simply did not come up. This was an important power for elder women that gave equal weight for compassion and generosity with wisdom and courage in the selection of Chiefs and Headmen. Protection of the villages and its lodges was of particular concern since all lodges, bedding, and utensils belonged to the women. Men were invited to stay in the woman's lodge when they married.

This "testing of the quality of the man" tradition remained, although in more subtle form, as late as the 1980's, when we had a very small form of government but had grown into a very big tribe. Everything was done the at one or two tribal meetings per year. Having already heard who was going to run for office, or who should be encouraged to run, the "word" would get around. The Grandmothers were able to affect the vote of their children and grandchildren in General Council in several ways unique to that woman - by their silence, a quick look into the eyes of their family, or even their posture. There were a few older women who occasionally got up and orated about someone of whom they disapproved, but that was rare. Approval or disapproval had already been discussed between them. And **no one** in their right mind would want to make their Potawatomi Grandma mad at them. I remember well turning to look at my Grandmother, Ozetta Peltier, to read her eyes or look for some sign of her opinion in the old General Council meetings of the 1970's and 1980's. It was always a barely discernable nod or one slight shake of the head, but you knew.

The ability of the Grandmothers of today to directly affect the vote in open meetings has been changed by the form of election we now have, the secret ballot. But the tradition remains just as important. The Grandmothers still have this power and this responsibility. Now they have telephones, cell phones, e-mail and their own cars. They are set for a comeback. Their influence is needed.

I would ask the Grandmothers of the Citizen Potawatomi Nation to begin again make it their business to examine those who run for office and discuss them with your mothers, aunts, sisters, and cousins. Please then make your opinions known to the rest of your family. Make it simply out of the question that someone in your family does not vote. You possess the experience and women's instincts to evaluate those who run for tribal office for those leadership qualities that are

valuable to women. You have a powerful Grandmother in the Vice Chairman's position, Linda Capps, who wields tremendous authority and influence in the Executive Branch. Please use her as your resource. Five other women serve in the Tribal Legislature and have published contact information in the HowNiKan: Lisa Kraft, Bobbi Bowden, Eva Marie Carney, Theresa Adame, and Gene Lambert. Your opinion as a woman is important to them. Your opinion as a Grandmother is especially valuable because of your ability and power to influence your family.

When our government had to grow to provide equal representation for everyone our tribe, it added to the task of the Grandmothers to evaluate more people. Their merit as candidates requires the same kind of evaluation that those great and strong women before 1838 performed. It is still the search for the right balance between *compassion, generosity, courage, and wisdom*. In the old Mede' religion we had before we became Christians as a tribe, these are still the "Spirits of the Four Directions" that the Creator gave all humans so they were no longer like the animals. They continue to be the qualities that are essential to tribal leadership.

Thank you for the opportunity to serve as Tribal Chairman and for your support and encouragement. I welcome and respect your opinions. Please call, write, or e-mail: 405-275-3121 or [rocky@potawatomi.org](mailto:rocky@potawatomi.org).  
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