

## Chapter 01 – Introduction

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**Announcer:** Geoffrey Standing Bear is the Principal Chief of the Osage Nation. He is the great-grandson of Osage Principal Chief Fred Lookout.

Before his election, Chief Standing Bear practiced law for 34 years. He concentrated on federal Indian law receiving national recognition by Best Lawyers in America, Oklahoma Super Lawyers, and a listing with Chambers and Partners.

He served as Assistant Principal Chief of the Osage Tribe from 1990 through 1994 and was a Member of the Osage Nation Congress from 2010 to 2014. While a practicing lawyer, he was involved in the first Indian gaming cases in Oklahoma, representing the Muscogee Creek Nation, Seneca-Cayuga Tribe, and several other tribes. He also was General Counsel to the Oklahoma Indian Gaming Association.

The book *Killers of the Flower Moon* by David Grann has focused attention on the Osage Nation. In the 1920s, the richest people per capita in the world were members of the Osage Nation in Oklahoma. After oil was discovered beneath their land, they rode in chauffeured cars and lived in mansions. Then one by one, the Osage began to be killed.

As a young man, Chief Standing Bear heard his family talk about the Osage wealth and the fear of being killed. In his oral history interview, Chief Standing Bear talks about the filming of *Killers of the Flower Moon*.

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**Chapter 02 – 8:14**  
**Headright**

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**John Erling (JE):** My name is John Erling and today's date is April 7th, 2023. Chief Standing Bear, would you please state your full name, please.

**Chief Standing Bear (CSB):** Geoffrey Standing Bear. I'm Principal Chief of the Osage Nation.

**JE:** Your birth date.

**CSB:** May 11th, 1953.

**JE:** Your present age?

**CSB:** I am going to be 70 here on May 11th, 2023.

**JE:** Alright. And where are we recording this interview?

**CSB:** We are in Pawhuska, Oklahoma, which is right in the center of Osage County, Oklahoma.

**JE:** Alright. We have to talk to you about your last name, "Standing Bear." How does that come about?

**CSB:** Mhmm. Well, my great-grandfather was Luther Standing Bear and he was Chief up at Rosebud with the Lakota Nation. My grandfather was born in Porcupine on the Pine Ridge Reservation and he, during the 1920s — my grandfather, Eugene — went to Haskell Indian School in Kansas and became good friends with my Osage family and came down here.

And it turns out that my great-grandfather and great-grandmother of the Osage went to Carlisle Indian School in Pennsylvania as did my great-grandfather Luther when they were all children. So they all knew each other from those days, plus the Osage and Lakota languages are related languages.

We're southern — the anthropologists would say 'Siouan' — which would include the Omaha, Ponca, Caw, and Quapa with the Osage. And in those days, I was told, in the 1920s, the Lakotas and the Osage could understand each other much better.

So my grandpa told me, "I came down here during the 1920s a poor Souix boy and I ran into your Osage family," which was my family, "... and they had a lot of money because of the oil." And he married into the family and my father, George, was half Lakota and half Osage. And "Standing Bear" came with that — and get this:

So, one day in high school, I asked my grandpa, "Why does Dad have it 'Standingbear' — one word — you have it one word, but your father has it two words?"

He said, "Well, when I came to Pawhuska, I got an allowance from all of this oil money — your grandma. I went to the First National Bank in Pawhuska and I gave 'em my name: 'Standing Bear' — two words. And the banker said 'You can't do that. It has to be one word.' And so I changed it."

And I said, "Grandpa, are you telling me that you changed our last name because of a banker in Pawhuska, Oklahoma?"

And he goes "Yes."

And I said "Well, that's it. I'm going to go back to two words." So on my high school diploma and then on it's two words. (Chuckling)

**JE:** That's probably what he had to do to get a loan, though, right?

**CSB:** Well, he hadn't needed a loan. Back in those days, the statistics show that ever Osage man, woman, and child was receiving the equivalent of \$400,000 per year tax free. There was no loans going on and there was no financial education going on. There was none of that financial literacy that they talk about now, which we are now implementing through here. Can you imagine if we knew how to open bank accounts for ourselves instead of through the guardian system? Or if we knew how to get more than 1/8ths or 3/16ths royalties? If we did what a lot of companies do with a lot of

countries, joint ventures, 51-49? But, instead, Continental Oil Company — now Conoco, no “L” now — ConocoPhillips, Phillips Petroleum, Getty Oil — all these large companies started right here.

**JE:** The \$400,000 — where was that coming from?

**CSB:** Oil and gas royalties. But that’s what I was saying: Can you imagine? That’s based on 1/8ths to 3/16ths. And the royalty, which went to what we call a headright. And a headright was born out of federal legislation in 1906. We bought this reservation with our money from Kansas — our sale of our lands. And we bought this reservation, 1.5 million acres almost, from the Cherokee. And so when we bought it, it was subject — decades later — to what they call “the allotment process” where the lands of the native tribes were divided into individual parcels. And the Osage were no exception except for the minerals. And James Bigheart, our Chief, and the counsel negotiated a special and unique situation where we maintained ownership of the minerals communally of the minerals, oil, gas, coal — not coal; well, coal if you could ever find any — gravel. We used to do that.

When he did that they said, “Well, how are we going to distribute money from that mineral estate?” And so every one of the 2,229 Osages received what’s called a “headright,” which is the right to receive income from this mineral estate which was managed by the Bureau of Indian Affairs — a federal agency, which it is to this very day.

Nowadays, because of the history of the Osage, some of that in the “Killer of the Flower Moon,” a movie. The book is very well-researched and documented by David Grann. You will see why, today, of the 25,000 Osage people, only 5,100 have an interest in a headright. Some have two. Most have a very small fraction of that 5,100. But the other 20,000 have none. Zero.

And, John, let me tell you what was really crazy: Until 2006 — 100 years after the 1906 Allotment — our right to vote and hold office in our own government was determined by how much property, that being the headright, that you owned. So if you were 21 or older and had 3 headrights, you got 3 votes. If you had none, you got none. So 80% of the Osage people were disenfranchised because our political rights were melded with our

property rights. And, of course, the property rights were under terrible stress. You could imagine how it translates politically and vice-versa.

**JE:** Who determined that the voting was to be determined by how many headrights?

**CSB:** The Bureau of Indian Affairs, through federal regulation, using the 1906 Allotment Act as a legal basis.

### **Chapter 03 – 5:13**

#### **Third Term**

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**John Erling (JE):** You are now in your third term, right?

**Chief Standing Bear (CSB):** Yes.

**JE:** As the Osage Nation Principal Chief. You were reelected last year, last June, 2022. Can you continue to serve?

**CSB:** Under our system, we can run for 5 consecutive terms. I do not plan to run again. I've ran this third term to complete or initiate some projects which we need to keep pushing on. And that'd be primarily our primary — it's called a primary residential treatment program, facility and program, address the issues of alcoholism, diabetes, stress, anxiety. That is an area we are going to challenge head on. That takes the dedicated people we have. We're going to get more; we're recruiting.

We've got to grab hold of this issue and it's several generations of work ahead as it has been several generations of trauma to get this far. So we have a higher level of those activities that most of society — which is all suffering — but I can tell you studies by health experts, presented in this very room to me, showed 8 years ago that the life expectancy of an Osage here — living here — in Pawhuska, our tribal capitol, the life expectancy here is 10 years less than a similar-situated Osage in Tulsa. 60 miles away, because of stress, obesity — the whole list from the studies show your life expectancy is cut just living here.

And, so, not only are we going to do this primary residential treatment facility, we'll have a transitional facility related to it — adolescents, women, men. And then our big project we're heading into ... unfortunately, interest rates are getting higher every month. We've got to go ahead and move past this clinic that we have into a much larger facility and we've cleared out land and purchased land here in Pawhuska for that. That is really what we're looking at.

So that's why I ran for a third term and also to make sure that what we call our "Food Sovereignty Initiatives" are sustained. We have done some remarkable work on being able to feed ourselves after enduring the pandemic. In March of 2020, the food supply chain broke down completely here. So we have a 19,000 sq ft. butcher house. We have 2000 head of cattle. We have 250 bison. We've purchased 43,000 acres from Ted Turner; all of that was our casino moneys. And then it was boosted at just the right time by the CARES Act funds — federal moneys — and then the ARPA.

So working with my legislature, we thought, "Okay, we'll move the casino monies, the federal monies, food sovereignty, we've got to feed ourselves. We have beef..." We had cattle we couldn't use because we were not USDA-certified at the time; we are now. We have state and federal inspectors in our plant. We then moved with that same combination of funding to have greenhouses. We have 44,000 sq. ft. of greenhouses. And we have food processing — was it 9,000 sq ft? Aquaponics. And then what they're doing — "they" being the Osages and other employees that are working with us — they've worked the internet to where, step by step, you can get online and order your food from both harvest land and our greenhouses and from our butcher house, have a delivery point, pick it up; they're doing great work the younger people. I'm so impressed.

And I've got to thank, right now, Oklahoma State University, University of Arkansas, University of Missouri, Kansas State, Kansas, and my favorite federal agency now, the USDA. They — those guys are great. Now, the Bureau of Indian Affairs, that's a whole other story.

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**Chapter 04 – 15:34**  
**Million Dollar Elm**

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**John Erling (JE):** Pawhuska. This is where they had the million-dollar elm?

**Chief Standing Bear (CSB):** Right next door. It's gone, but there's a plaque sandstone built right there, right next door here.

**JE:** You should tell 'em why that was such an important tree.

**CSB:** Well, that's where the auctions were held for our oil and gas. And many a famous oil tycoon was there bidding for leases and paying a bonus to the federal government for the benefit of the Osage headright owners. And that continued throughout the 20s and into the 30s. That was a center of activity.

**JE:** Frank Phillips was one of 'em, wasn't he?

**CSB:** Oh, yes. Mr. Marlin was another one.

**JE:** E.W. Marlin?

**CSB:** Yeah. My great-grandfather Fred Lookout was Principal Chief for much of that time. And my grandmother, Mary Lookout Standing Bear, was his translator. So she lived with us and my family, so I got to hear a lot of her views from Mr. Marlin — by Mr. Marlin — the things he thought and said. But primarily Mr. Phillips. Mr. Phillips spent a lot of time here, I understand. He just spent a lot of time with the Osage one-on-one.

**JE:** So did that become the basis, then, of Phillips Petroleum?

**CSB:** Yes. Oh, yes.

**JE:** ... What he purchased here at this million-dollar tree?

**CSB:** Yes. And many other oil companies.

**JE:** Okay. Do you think that he really learned to appreciate the Osage and he liked them? He wasn't just doing it because he was buying? Or maybe it's not an important question.

**CSB:** Was he a friend to the Osage?

**JE:** Yeah.

**CSB:** I understand that he was a friend. And this is second-hand, but, of course, it was business.

**JE:** You're the great-grandson of the Osage Principal Chief Fred Lookout.

**CSB:** Yes.

**JE:** And your wife's name is Julie. Chief Lookout's wife —

**CSB:** Was Julia.

**JE:** Was Julia. And was the great-granddaughter of Chief Pawhuska for whom the Osage County seat was named.

**CSB:** Well, that's the way I understand it.

**JE:** Right, well, that's where I get it — off the internet.

**CSB:** (Laughing) I didn't write that, so...

**JE:** So it may not be true.

**CSB:** Well, who know? Well, except, I guess, you could genetically test all of us. I understand people are learning all kinds of things on the internet about who's related to who. But I take the face value of what they told me.

**JE:** Right. But your wife's name is Julie.

**CSB:** Yes.



**JE:** And how many children do you have?

**CSB:** 4.

**JE:** And you have grandchildren?

**CSB:** Yes. 8 of them.

## **Chapter 05 – 10:37**

### **Chief Lookout**

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**John Erling (JE):** I found it interesting about Chief Fred Lookout. Interesting person. You could probably tell us the story for only ... He was 10-years-old when he joined his family and tribe on the 150-mile walk to the new Osage mission?

**Chief Standing Bear (CSB):** That's a family story, I was told. He walked with certain young boys about his age. One of them later became assistant chief to him — Franklin Shaw. We've heard about that. Also I heard from those same sources — my great uncles and aunts and my grandparents — that last buffalo hunt we had right before we came here was not very successful. That was a big event back in the day I was told.

**JE:** So Principal Chief Lookout. He was Principal Chief 1913 - 14, re-elected 1916 - 18, and then from 1924 - 1949. So the thing that got my attention here was he was looking out for the oil leases of the Osage. And then, since I have read the book Killers of the Flower Moon by David Grann and that begins in 1921 and onto the 20s and all that. So would your great-grandfather have been around for what became known "The Reign of Terror?"

**CSB:** Oh, not only my great-grandfather but my grandparents and uncles and aunts.

**JE:** Your grandparents. What are their names again?

**CSB:** Well, Eugene. He's Standing Bear; he's Lakota. And my grandmother Mary Lookout Standing Bear.

**JE:** Let's follow up on Killers of the Flower Moon as long as we have introduced it.

**CSB:** Great book.

**JE:** Yes.

**CSB:** And you know why it's a great book? Because David Grann did his interviews with such respect for the families that were directly affected and he took his time in getting to know the community and then his research in the federal records and the records here was just spot-on — very reliable.

**JE:** It's the story of, I suppose, one of the biggest serial murder cases in American history.

**CSB:** Mhmm (in agreement).

**JE:** ... and was forgotten and, of course, the setting was here in the Osage Indian Nation in the 20s. And then, of course, we bring in J. Edgar Hoover's FBI and all of that. We can tell the whole story but we want people to read the book and eventually see the film which comes out in October.

**CSB:** John, if there's one thing I want to make clear: It's although those events were 100 years ago — and I wasn't there and I don't know anybody else that was there — there are a lot of family stories, yes. And that book is about the Gray Horse community which is near here about 25 miles, but there were other bad deeds done.

**JE:** How old were you when you were aware of this Reign of Terror that we talked about?

**CSB:** Well, when I was in high school, the way I got to drive was to drive grandma around to go visit her friends. And so I had my science fiction books; I like science fiction. And so I would go in with grandma to go visit

her schoolmates who were all full-blood ladies and spoke Osage to each other all morning. And we'd eat lunch with 'em in the afternoons. Why I didn't record any of this is — I never thought the language would disappear so fast. So during this time, they would talk about so-and-so family and so-and-so family and ... Oh, you know, I could mention names but I don't want to. There was so many of those families but they're all gone. And they say "Well, you know what happened to his father ..." So I heard them talking about it.

**JE:** Okay.

**CSB:** It wasn't me. I wasn't there.

**JE:** Nor did you put together that all these murders were taking place?

**CSB:** Oh, we knew the murders had taken place.

**JE:** You knew that?

**CSB:** Mhmm (in agreement).

**JE:** Like the 1921 Massacre. There were many generations who had never heard about it.

**CSB:** Well, I didn't hear about it even though I knew there were some troubles back then. But, gosh, I was raised in Tulsa, 60 miles from here, and I didn't hear about it. But if you're living there and your families were there, I'm sure you knew all about it. You know where I learned about the Tulsa Massacre there in 1921? It was in law school. My first year at Tulsa.

**JE:** At University of Tulsa?

**CSB:** Uh-huh (in agreement). And I can't remember which professor it was. But we were taught there about what happened to the property records in Tulsa County, which was relevant to the class in that subject, and we were told that a part of that whole tragedy were people — lawyers and landmen — going into the records and changing all the land records to the point where people that were doing the changing had to be pulled away from

the books because they were getting paid, you know, property by property as they changed legal titles at the Tulsa County records. We were taught that in my first year in law school.

**JE:** What year was that?

**CSB:** It was 1976.

**JE:** About this Reign of Terror, when they were killing your Osage people.

**CSB:** Assassinating.

**JE:** Assassinating them.

**CSB:** And cold-blooded murder. Putting — instead of insulin — putting poison into people. As David Grann said, “it was who was not complicit,” because you had the funeral directors, you had the doctors, you had the lawyers, you had the judges, the state judges, you had law enforcement, you had the Bureau of Indian Affairs — who was not complicit? And David researched this and he summed up his research in that book. Everybody, everybody, was part of this madness. And if you weren’t doing it, someone else was going to do it and you were losing out.

**JE:** Well, one of the masterminds was William Hale. Bill Hale.

**CSB:** Yup.

**JE:** He was really a middleman of all of this.

**CSB:** Well, let’s see. I’ll take you in the next room here and I’ve got that panoramic photo that David Grann references in his book that’s in the museum. And I asked some of the older folks: “Did you know him?”

And they said, “Oh, yeah. Oh, yeah. He was a nice guy!”

And I talked with different elders back there and they said, “Oh, we sat there and talked after he got out of prison. We sat there along that fenceline — that barbed wire fence line — and he pulled his vehicle up and

we talked. And he'd say, 'You guys are having a Native American church meeting?'"

And he would slaughter a cow for that Osage family. He was, among some of the Osage, considered a good guy, which that just shocked me.

**JE:** And tell us what he did.

**CSB:** What he did was, as the book reports, was a mastermind of one of — if not the largest — conspiracy to deprive an Osage family — extended family — of their headright and their money by intermarrying and using this system here of probate with the courts and the laws of Oklahoma and federal laws to make it legal — except for the murder part — to make the descendants pass and for the headright money to keep flowing to one survivor.

And in that book, and the movie, it's the surviving sister who was married to Bill Hale's nephew, Ernest Burkhart, which is another strange situation according to my view. I can't say everybody agrees with this. But he got out of prison and he was still over there. And my senior advisor, John Williams, who was an advisor on the movie ... he told me, he goes, "Oh, I knew Ernest Burkhart."

And he goes "We all knew him over there when we were younger."

So the relationships are complicated. That's best explained by people from the Gray Horse community.

**JE:** Right. Bill Hale directed people to be assassinated. He set people up to be killed.

**CSB:** That's what I have read and that's what I have heard. I wasn't there.

**JE:** Well, if we believe David Grann, like you do, and the research he did then that's a true story.

**CSB:** Well, remember, I spent 35 years in courtrooms. Trying to find the truth in any situation is what we do. You'll go look at a car accident and talk to the witnesses — 5 witnesses — you're going to get 5 little-bit-different views.

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## **Chapter 06 – 7:56**

### **Killers of the Flower Moon**

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**John Erling (JE):** Martin Scorsese came here and visited with you, didn't he?

**Chief Standing Bear (CSB):** When we first heard that David had sold the rights, I believe, to the company "Imperative;" we watched it — what was going on — and Imperative started reaching out to people just to see what was going on here. It was very quiet.

As they became more and more committed to making a movie, the state film office and the Osage here entered into preliminary discussions: "How can we get this movie filmed in Oklahoma?"

It was up in the air about where this movie was going to be filmed and the film office, whatever they did, became separate from whatever we were doing and we had a couple of the Imperative folks come here. We took in the tour, set up interviews with some of the family members of the Gray Horse community, had a dinner for them — a traditional Osage dinner. And then the movie control moved from one company to another and I can't pretend to tell ya how all that worked.

But then it went to Apple, and then very quickly after that happened, we heard Martin Scorsese was going to be the director or even part of the production. And very quickly we started hearing more information so I had designated an Osage who knows that world — he goes to Sundance and all; he lives in Boca Raton, Florida; he knows that world — Chad Renfro. And I said, "Okay. You're appointed ambassador to work with Apple and Scorsese. I don't even know where to start."

So we started putting everything together. We went back down and started some conversations with the Oklahoma film office. And Scorsese

came in here quickly with, like, 48 hours notice — less than that and came into the room right across the way here. And we talked for about 2 and a half hours and told him about our concerns that it was not going to be filmed here because other states had these credits — economic tax credits, bonuses or whatever, however they were doing it.

He said, “We’re going to film here. I’m going to do that here.”

So the next part of it was, “Well, we’re concerned about how you’re going to portray the Osage because we just don’t want to be a bunch of dead bodies.” Imperative, the last two people we talked to from there — several years ago now — had said, finally, at the end, “We’re going to tell this story through the eyes of Mollie Burkhart, the Osage sister, and we’re going to make a movie the Osage will be proud of.”

Now then, of course, the movie control changed hands, changed hands — or shared hands. And we were concerned until Mr. Scorsese says, “I’m going to make a movie the Osage will be proud of.”

So as we went on and he committed to filming. I did — I gotta tell you this: I was so amazed by this man. And he’s a great storyteller, let me tell ya, of course. He’s easy to talk to. And I said, “How are you approaching this? David’s book has a lot of the FBI in it. Is this going to be a story about the FBI? With the Osage as the victims? How is DiCaprio going to fit in there?”

One of these meetings we had is where he said, “Well, I’m going to hire my ... bring ...” He didn’t say “hire.” He was going to, “... we’re going to bring in ...” “Bob. He calls him “Bob DeNiro.”

That was the first — I said, “Can we repeat that? Because nobody knows that.”

He goes, “Yeah, sure.”

So I said, “Wow, is he going to play Hale?”

And he goes, “Yeah. He’s already wearing the glasses and getting himself into this role.”

So I said, “But how is this going to be? Can you sum it up?” And I talked to him enough that I knew he could sum things up quickly.

He said, “This is going to be a story about trust and betrayal. It’s a story about the trust that the Osage people had with the society — western society — that came here and betrayed that trust. By this system that was set up. But it’s also, at another level, a story about the trust Mollie Burkhart had with Ernest and his family and the betrayal of that trust.”

And I was going to sum up how he described what he was creating. That’s it. You can see the FBI — it does have a role in the movie — but this is really is a story about the Osage and trust and betrayal. And I was honored, along with a few other Osage, to see a preview in New York City, in December, of those portions of the movie where the Osage culture is strongly represented. And all of our efforts to work with the production teams, the directors, the cinematographers, the script writers — all of that work that we did to have our language department coach these actors — is evident. There is just great detail put into how words are pronounced and proper respect for ceremonies. We only saw a portion of this movie, so I can’t tell you what it looks like, but I can tell you that those portions of the movie portraying the Osage people — those that sat and saw that will tell you that it’s very respectful, very accurate. You’ll not see an American movie more like it than this.

**JE:** You have reason to believe the entire film is going to be really something that you would approve of.

**CSB:** Absolutely. I have high hopes. Like I said, I haven’t seen the rest of the movie. I do know what the dedication of not only Mr. Scorsese and his cinematographers and his producers — the glimpses I had of watching Lily Gladstone and the other actors and Mr. DeNiro and Mr. DiCaprio and others — they are so serious, so hardworking about it, so ... it’s amazing.



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**Chapter 07 – 8:35**  
**Film Production**

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**Chief Standing Bear (CSB):** I got to watch some of these scenes being made. Not very many. Wow. I mean, it's, you're in another world when you're watching and we were in a — it was a recreation of a barber shop and pool hall.

**John Erling (JE):** Here in ... ?

**CSB:** Yeah, right downtown.

**JE:** Right.

**CSB:** I mean that they turned the streets into dirt, you know, and we provided the dirt from our farm and, you know, it was great. And then, but, you know, you're sitting in there, of course, I don't know if you've been around how they make these movies, but they, they have these shades that are as big as giant tents, but they're, they're all the lighting is so moved around and so outside and they have all these Osages and other folks — they're not Osages — taking their place in these old 1920s cars, everything stopped and then inside this room, you've got everybody sitting around and of course, and then, then you have in the, in the scenes I saw, DeNiro and Dicaprio sitting down and then Mr. Scorsese sits there and, and then his other, I guess he's assistant director. I don't know what it's actually called. But he's also incredibly talented and they go, you know, “Roll sound!”

And I'm watching this like, “Wow!” And everybody's in there and he goes, “Roll sound inside!” .. is what he said. And then they start and then he gives some other commands. And then so inside is one set of actions and movements and they roll sound outside and some other commands, and just like some magic, everybody out there starts moving according to this pre-arranged steps and scripts and movements.

And I'm telling you, you are there. you are 19-early-twenties; you are absolutely there. And then the color, as you'll see, they went after a certain color. You ever seen Gangs of New York?

**JE:** Yes.

**CSB:** Yeah. And, because, I went back and watched more of his movies.

**JE:** Right.

**CSB:** And I've noticed that he has a sort of like certain colors. I don't know how to say it — tones and I saw it. I saw how they did it. I mean, wow, these guys are so professional.

**JE:** Okay. So then you watch Leonardo Dicaprio. And what did he call him? Bobby? Bobby DeNiro.

**CSB:** Oh, the first time he said he was coming here.

**JE:** But you saw them work. Did they have to have many retakes?

**CSB:** I, you know, I'm under a non-disclosure agreement. So I gotta be careful, but I can tell you right now, I can tell you what the heck. I'll just tell you. The scene that I like best — from what I saw — the answer is no. They went in there, they did a few takes, they sat down, but the preparation to get to that point was unbelievable. The lighting inside, the lighting outside, the people's — where they started, where they sat — and then when those two actors sat down to talk to each other, that second when those directors said to do this, do that, do this, do that. It's just like a universe just moved. And you were there.

**JE:** Magic!

**CSB:** It was magic, it was magic. I saw it. Yeah.

**JE:** Because it would have been...

**CSB:** I heard it. Yeah.

**JE:** There would have been scenes, because Leonardo played the part of Ernest Burkhart, and DeNiro plays the part of our Bill Hale. And so those two would have naturally interacted.

**CSB:** Oh, yeah.

**JE:** Right. Right. And tell us Ernest Burkhart real quick who he was?

**CSB:** Well, this is just in real life. He was the husband of Mollie and Mollie's mother died suspiciously. And then Mollie's sisters, one by one died and their headrights passed to their surviving heirs. And so sister after sister. And this is how it, well, it's one way how it was done. They would accumulate the surviving heirs that would have more than one headright. And then people would marry into that family and then have the benefits. That's just historically what happened. How is that portrayed in the movie? You'll have to watch the movie or go read the book.

**JE:** Yeah; I was just gonna say that and read the book.

**CSB:** Yeah.

**JE:** Right. Did you meet Leonardo Dicaprio and Robert De Niro?

**CSB:** Yes.

**JE:** And they were ... did you get any time to talk about the movie or just "Hi, hello" And that was that?

**CSB:** Well, I did on the screening, the part that we saw, Mr Dicaprio. Leonardo Dicaprio was also there and we got to visit a little bit — all of us did — our language director Van Big Horse and well, several Osages, but as far as just talking to Robert DeNiro and, you know, here we didn't talk about the movie at all. I mean, we just "Nice to meet you. This is great. This is wonderful to meet you and welcome to Pawhuska." They had trailers out here and then got to go there and just visit a little bit.

**JE:** Leonardo Dicaprio also stayed in Tulsa at a house.

**CSB:** Well, I don't know where they spent the night, but I know during the day I met him here.

**JE:** Lily Gladstone plays the part of Mollie Burkhart and we can say that it was Mollie's sister, Anna?

**CSB:** Mhmm (in agreement)

**JE:** ... who disappeared.

**CSB:** One of them.

**JE:** Right. And that's kind of the genesis of how this thing gets started.

**CSB:** Well, that's the book and the movie. I don't know. We didn't see them.

**JE:** I can only tell you what I read in the book.

**CSB:** Yeah.

**JE:** Right. And so then it was discovered that Anna's body was found and she'd been murdered.

**CSB:** Yes. There were several and that's over there at the Grey Horse District. That's where this whole story is located. And there are three districts among the Osage: the Grey Horse, Pawhuska, and Hominy.

**JE:** I think we think of greed. It was greed, greed, greed, greed, which could have easily played into maybe the name of it. The *Killers of the Flower Moon*. Why did he choose that name?

**CSB:** That was a poem. Elise Passion, who is a world-renowned poet, wrote a poem and it's toward the end of the book, it is quoted and that talks about a month. One month is the flower moon, I think we're in right — or coming into. And the killer of the flower moon is ... I believe that's June, Elise has an incredible poem. And, oh, by the way, she is the only child of Maria Tallchief of the Grey Horse District. And Maria, as you know, you're nodding your head, was the United States America's first world-class prima ballerina. And

she — the New York Ballet among others — her sister Marjorie was with the Ballet Roose in Paris. Anyway, Maria is buried over here at the cemetery in Grey Horse, well, in Fairfax. Because I was at her funeral. So she, Elise Passion, is an amazing woman. I never personally met her mother, Maria, but I've seen her when I was younger, but she's famous among the Osage.

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## **Chapter 08 – 10:00**

### **Victim's Families**

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**John Erling (JE):** This very story we're talking about has never gone away because descendants of these people, the Burkharts...

**Chief Standing Bear (CSB):** Oh, yeah...

**JE:** Marvin Stepson, the Bill Hale's and all they all living around here.

**CSB:** Or they live Talquah or they live in different parts of Oklahoma. I've got to tell you one thing that really struck me while this has been going on. I learned a lot myself not being from the Grey Horse District. But one of the people that are direct descendants of this situation and I can't remember if she said this at a meeting or if it was in David Grann's book, I can't remember, but I just thought of something that really impacted me is that she said: "When I look around at all the other Osages during the ceremonies..." We have dances in the summer or large gatherings.

She said, "I can't help but feel upset and sad that my family is not large, like many others, because my family should have been large like the others.

And I thought, "I never looked at it from that point of view!" But that's the suffering they do today.

**JE:** The uncle and the cousins they would have had...

**CSB:** Yeah, aunts and all, they're all, they were all killed, murdered. And to this day, when we go to ceremonies, we take pride in our extended family

systems. I never looked at it that way. I never heard of that before. That's powerful stuff.

**JE:** It is very powerful.

**CSB:** And half of our population doesn't even live in Oklahoma even. They've left.

**JE:** Florida, California...

**CSB:** California and Texas primarily. But in the 1920, a lot of people got out of here and then during the Great Depression, during the thirties, when everything fell flat, a lot of the families said, "Well, you know, Cousin Joe or Aunt Mary, they're living in San Diego..." or some place no one's ever heard of called Oceanside and at the time, or La Jolla at the time.

So they all moved as a result and the economic opportunity. So many of our people moved away. But they are Osage and they think, "I need to get a benefit from this casino money." So we put a health card together, we put scholarship programs together and that's where we, you know, right off the top — burial assistance. So we, we do that. So we have a balancing act that we have to do here. Because all of this that you see right here belongs to all 25,000 Osages.

We are building a relatively small casino compared to the other tribes. It has 40-some, almost 50, rooms. And it's here on the east side of town. Now, right now, our casino here in the tribal capital is a couple of double wide trailers. And it's been that way for many years because we didn't have the confidence in the stream of commerce coming through. But based on Ree Drummond's traffic on the pioneer woman down here, which has been a phenomena the last five years or so and this movie, we felt confident enough to invest a substantial amount into that hotel and the casino. And it's one small area where we can try to welcome people here. But they're gonna want to go to Grey Horse.

**JE:** Why? Tell us.

**CSB:** That's where the book and the movie you're gonna see. That's where all this — Great Horse and Fairfax — is taking place. I tell you, we had, a couple of years ago, more and more people from out of wherever visiting and going to the graveyards and especially the one at Gray Horse Village where Mollie and the sisters and others are buried.

And the community there made a, you know, a good decision and said, "We need new fencing and a gate, an automatic gate." And we did that from the Nation to that community and that community controls the gate. But it was becoming a tourist attraction and the community said, "This is a graveyard."

**JE:** Yeah.

**CSB:** Yeah. Mhmm (in agreement). So, you know, we're reacting now instead of planning short term. We have long term plans, but short term, for the Grey Horse Fairfax, when you travel over there, you'll see there's a lot we can do, like rebuilding that train station. We can do that, but it's got, it should be coordinated with other activities that the community needs to do.

**JE:** And how many miles are they from here?

**CSB:** It's about 25 miles, 30 miles because the communities are just a few miles apart.

**JE:** But Pawhuska will be hit, too — just as big.

**CSB:** It is now. And what we want to do is assist the town of Gray Horse and, well, it's not a town, it's a village — ceremonial area as well. And there's some people who live there, but we want just that community and the town which is just a few miles away, which is portrayed in the movie. This is Fairfax, that's the town, but it's filmed right here in Pawhuska.

**JE:** Yeah, but we should say some scenes were filmed in Tulsa.

**CSB:** Well, some scenes were filmed in Fairfax. Not very many.

**JE:** Yeah.

**CSB:** Yeah. That's correct. But we got most of the movie filmed here right downtown and then just west of here there's a house where some ceremonies take place, and then right east near Bartlesville, there's an area they filmed. And then one day they just all magically left. It was just — and some of the Osages that were involved day to day were a little bit dazed? I mean...

**JE:** These were walk-ons and a lot of people?

**CSB:** Extras for a lot of the film... a lot of people. A lot of the Osages were hired as costume makers. So we had all that going on. So that's another aspect, not only our language but our clothing is authentic and you'll see a lot of our people's work there. Makeup, the cinematography. There are some students. I know two young men in their twenties that graduated from, I guess, film school in different parts of the country, part of that 12,500 that moved away. They're here, they came back, and they got to work under world class cinematographers and get behind the, you know, the camera and just be there with the directors. I saw that happening. That's very happy moments for me to see all our Osage people as extras, working behind the scenes, all that.

But one day they were just gone and then my senior advisor was here and he was down there every day. He just passed away a couple of months ago.

**JE:** Who is this? Your senior ...

**CSB:** Advisor — John Williams. So we have so many people saying, “Oh yeah, you know, Osage do it this way, Osages do it that way.”

And which is true. We're diverse people. And so I asked John Williams, I said, “You know, you're a Vietnam veteran, a green beret, combat medic, plus you're a former drum keeper. You're a senior advisor nowadays at the Grey Horse ceremonies, you're the guy that needs to be sitting down there making sure things are gonna be authentic.”

So Chad Renfro dealt with Apple on the business side. John Williams, he went down there and dealt with, “Well, we don't really do that that way or



we do it this way.”

So he was down there every day and when they just left after months of shooting, he was a little bit dazed. He has an office right next to mine here, he did. I asked Marianne Bauer, the producer, I said, “You know, these Osages, let me walk around here. Where’s ...?”

There's some kind of like ... “What happened? Where did, where did that world go? That you all set up dirt streets and, you know, the facades and that — those buildings.”

One of the assistants said, “That is a pretty normal situation where all of a sudden it just is gone. It's normal for people to come out into this world a little bit ... ‘Where have I been for the last 8 — 7 or 8 months?’”

## **Chapter 09 – 9:02**

### **World Class**

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**Chief Standing Bear (CSB):** These extras and people who were working behind the cameras were doing is they had this whole areas of town and these big tents. They would start work at 6 in the morning or earlier and stand around and do things all day, waiting. Most of movie-making is waiting. And I saw that. For their moment to shine, be it in acting or movie-making, however it is, costumes, then they would work until 6:30, 7:30 at night. So I was talking to one of my nieces. I said, “Stormy, what is that like?”

And she goes, “Uncle Jeff, we all are living in that world and we get up...” And she lived in Ponca City, 45 minutes away from here, and she’s got kids and stuff so she and her husband figure things out. Then she gets ready, drives over here, was there all day, all night, this was very typical. And sometimes they were filming, just special at 2, 3 in the morning.

And so she goes, “We’re there, we’re all together.” She had a larger role than some others so she was more engaged with some of the top stars. “And we live in that world day in, day out, for months, after months, after

months and we're living back in those times." And she speaks very good Osage.

**John Erling (JE):** This is your niece, now, you're talking about?

**CSB:** Yeah. Yeah, yeah. Storm Brave. That's her name. So, and it's typical that I found out that they're so — the Osages in particular — were so dedicated and we had such great direction on what to do by world-class people. Some of 'em were still in the film business and have their Screen Actor's Guild cards. Yeah. Some got SAG cards. And there was Indians there — Native Americans there — everywhere up here. It was great. That world they were in ... and then one day — I mean, like, it's like that whole world — that in like 2 days it was gone. And it was ...

**JE:** Back to real life.

**CSB:** Well, here we were, you know? Here I am up here. John comes up and he goes, it's like, "Oh, here comes Mary Ann and her assistants."

I said, "Yeah."

She goes, "That happens. You know? That's just part of that."

But if you ever get the chance to be a part of world-class movie making... Because other movies have been made here with great actors and great actresses. There was that kind of a town. I mean, I'm not going to mention any names. They're world-class actors and actresses. But you get something like a Martin Scorsese, which I learned, and you put him and his people together ... it is a very different experience than the other movies that have been made here. It is a whole 'nother time, a whole 'nother era, a whole 'nother world. What geniuses.

And he gets those geniuses together and they all collaborate and then they all go to their next project. They're just gone. (Imitates gunshot sound)

**JE:** When it was wrapping up and finished, did you have final words with Scorsese or near the end and how he felt good or you...?

**CSB:** Oh, no, no. I do know that Chad and Johnny — Chad Renfro and Johnny Williams — told me after we thought they'd wrapped up filming, which they did for the most part, that they wanted to come back and do ... just a dance up here, up here where we were, of those extras and others, just put on your Osage clothes and have a dance just to show. And I said, "What for?"

And they said, "Well, just to show the Osage are still here and that we're still doing what we do." Because, you know, our culture and language is really about everything. We all live in a modern world and have for a couple hundred years. But what's kept us separate, distinct, and unified is this language which we almost lost and our culture which is strong, our songs which are strong, our foods — our traditional foods which is strong.

We have so many things and the way we view the world religiously and the diversity we have. That is — that is the magic of the Osage. I think that money we had... we were able to keep things a little longer than other tribes.

**JE:** When the film was being made, pretty good economic impact on the community?

**CSB:** Well, if we were better prepared it would have been a lot more. Bartlesville and Ponca City — especially Bartlesville — was good for them. I mean, hotel rooms, apartments, all these people that worked ... and it was a boom here for the small town of Pawhuska.

**JE:** Bartlesville is how far from here?

**CSB:** About 25 miles.

**JE:** See, so that was an easy drive, right?

**CSB:** Yeah. And so every — they came here twice: Pre-COVID and they had all these places rented out over there, and then COVID hit. They stopped filming. They were just starting and they stopped everything. And all of that was changed — where people stayed and everything. So then they

came back, Post-COVID, and it all started up again. So, they had two shots at it.

**JE:** You know, you talked about in the 20s when this was going on there were families they just got out of here.

**CSB:** That's right.

**JE:** They were afraid they were going to be murdered.

**CSB:** And I know quite a few of those families and they still vote. And, you know, as a politician you've got to travel out there ... (Chuckling).

**JE:** Oh, to where they are?

**CSB:** That's right.

**JE:** Because they could be living in California and voting on ...

**CSB:** And they do.

**JE:** So you've had to campaign out in California.

**CSB:** More than once.

**JE:** Right. But what this community would have been like had this reign of terror not happened... The families that would have been here — kind of alluded to the aunts and uncles and so forth that wouldn't be here.

**CSB:** There are other — there are other things. Before you get back to what you're going to say... Did you know that I was told by these old folks that Mr. Marlin wanted to put his refinery here? And Mr. Phillips wanted to put a refinery here? But the real estate agents and others that controlled the land jacked the prices so much that both of those gentlemen were just made. And they said, "Okay, we'll just show you!"

Mr. Marlin built his refinery in Ponca City. Mr. Phillips put his world headquarters over there in Bartlesville. That's just another side notes.

**JE:** That's is ... right.

**CSB:** Can you imagine what this town would be like?

**JE:** Right.

**CSB:** Yeah.

**JE:** That had nothing to do with the... ?

**CSB:** And that wasn't the Osage. That was just greed.

**JE:** Right. But then I bring back the 1921 Race Massacre and I've talked in interviews with people who've said all the families who left — the wealthy blacks who left to Chicago and other areas — that would more than likely would have stayed in Tulsa and produced and been very productive citizens living in Tulsa and they lost all those families and their descendants. So there's a correlation here from Reign of Terror and the Race Massacre.

**CSB:** There was also, I was told, by the people who were there, that community members and victims of that massacre escaped up Bird Creek, went all the way up North Tulsa and all the way up to right here where Bird Creek is, and sought refuge. Many of them moved on to other places but many of the families are still here that were scattered — that's part of the massacre story that I haven't heard anybody talk about. But I heard it from the old folks who said, "Oh, yeah. We helped 'em out. They came up here. They were all running for their lives — their whole families. It was terrible."

**JE:** Yeah. Yeah.

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**Chapter 10 – 7:50**  
**Osage Wealth**

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**John Erling (JE):** Tell me how wealthy, in the 1920s, the Osages were. And, I think, the whites were jealous because these people were buying new cars but 2 cars, 3 cars ... they were living in the lap of luxury because they were living on an income far greater than the rest of the ...

**Chief Standing Bear (CSB):** Oh, yeah. Oh, yeah. My grandma I mentioned a couple of times and my grandpa, they had a house east of Pawhuska. A red brick house and it had a mahogany phone booth in it. And then in the basement it was the heat — central heat — was also able to convert to central air. And they had a “servant” they called ‘em in those days. He wasn’t black, but they had a servant and he would take blocks of ice and put it in this device to where they would have central air. And she had several cars like all the other Osages. She had a blue Duesenberg, which is pretty cool.

**JE:** Okay, this is your grand ...

**CSB:** This is my grandma. Yeah, she had a blue Duesenberg. Remember — 1922. She was, like, 24.

**JE:** And she had the headrights?

**CSB:** She had headrights.

**JE:** And how much money was she getting?

**CSB:** Well, at the time, let’s see... The top year they equivalent of every man, woman, and child that had a headright — they means you had to receive it at 1906 or 1907. There was a supplemental rule. About \$400,000 in today’s dollars. And she had a couple of those. So...

**JE:** So that’s nearly a million?

**CSB:** Tax free. But she — I asked, “What other cars did you have?” She goes, “Well, my favorite car was my Buick Roadster.” And then my grandpa, Gene, he told me, “Yeah! Me and your uncles, we had biplanes. And we’d get up there — over in that field over there — and we’d keep our planes there...” I’m not going to mention any names. He goes, “Your one uncle didn’t drink. But he sure liked to fly.” He goes, my grandpa Gene goes, “I just always took a bottle of whiskey with me and I’d get into that plane and we’d go up and fly up into Kansas 30 miles north of here and had dogfights.” This was during there 1920s. These guys were in their 20s. That’s the world they were living in — that’s what I was told.

**JE:** But then your families — were they nervous? That they could be attacked? Assassinated.

**CSB:** Well... I asked that question actually. I’d heard about this stuff. I said, “Did we lose anybody?”

They said, “No.” They said my dad and I were going down the road and somebody took a shot through the front window but we don’t know if it was reckless hunting or somebody, because no one chased him or anything, but it made him nervous enough.

She tells me he hired some bodyguards, basically, out of Chicago and brought them down. He was Chief at the time. He was off-and-on Chief during those decades.

**JE:** And, again, who?

**CSB:** Fred Lookout.

**JE:** Your...?

**CSB:** Great-grandfather.

**JE:** Great-grandfather.

**CSB:** Yeah, he hired some guys out of Chicago. She said, “One of ‘em said...” We were out the house east of town. She said, “... Chief, once these guys

around here find out me and my boys are hired by you to protect your family, you're going to have no trouble."

And so, basically, my great-grandfather hired some very tough outlaws — those were gangsters, basically, and we never had any problems.

**JE:** No!

**CSB** (Chuckling).

**JE:** All this money... you talked \$400,000 then got another allotment of \$400,000 in today's money...

**CSB:** That's what they tell us the adjusted is: \$400,000.

**JE:** Right. Did any of that money ... Was it all spent? Did it carry down to next generation?

**CSB:** Well, it did not. And for the most part, some did, and some didn't. But, again, these people did not have financial literacy training. People would — this is documented — buy a new car, top of the line, a Pierce Arrow or something and drive it. And it ran out of gas. They thought it was just dead — dead horse. And they would go buy another vehicle. And someone else would just take that vehicle and go away with it.

**JE:** Hmm! (In amazement)

**CSB:** I mean, that was documented. It wasn't anything that my family or others, any Osage I know, knew about. But I can tell you, when you go to the Gray Horse cemetery or some of these other cemeteries — Hominy, Pawhuska — look how many young people whose grave markers show "deceased: 1920 ... 1921... 1919... 1923...1925." Look at the ages of these people.

And, again ... I almost mentioned her name, I won't mention her name. I don't want to. Like she said, "My family should have been large like yours." That is what you'll see in these graveyards.



**JE:** Yeah. I know in the book ... was it, like, they documented about 28 people were murdered. But there were many, many more.

**CSB:** Oh, oh, yeah.

**JE:** Many more.

**CSB:** We, amongst ourselves here, some of the leadership over the years. I've been talking to some who've descended from those folks over there. The best estimate we can make is 5% of our tribe was assassinated.

**JE:** So how many would that be?

**CSB:** About 150.

**JE:** Yeah.

**CSB:** Yeah. Murdered. Which, you know, doesn't sound like a lot. But if that's your crew, and you're targeted, and 5% are being knocked off and the system is helping it... Some say and a former tribal leader, a Chief, has told me I — me and my people that had come up with that number; I've never really promoted that number — are grossly underestimating the amount.

**JE:** Mmm.

**CSB:** But his family's from Gray Horse, so I think more of it was there, Hominy. But here in Pawhuska, it happened. There's a book called The Deaths of Sybil Bolton about this guy's grandma. She lived right up the street here. She was one of those victims. It happened. But I think most of it was in the Gray Horse District. So when you take those folks and then take out the numbers, it's probably more impactful.

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**Chapter 11 – 6:30**  
**McGirt v. Oklahoma**

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**John Erling (JE):** McGirt versus Oklahoma.

**Chief Standing Bear (CSB):** Yeah. The McGirt case is based on criminal law and the way those statutes I mentioned in the late 1890s and early 1900 that me and my crew decided, “Let’s leave that alone for a future day.”

That’s a ... What we were concerned about was it leads from criminal law to eventually taxation and regulation. So let’s just go ahead and start with regulation and taxation and stay away from criminal. So we reversed it in 1984. 83, 84, 85, 86, 87.

But in McGirt, there was some predecessor cases to that but the Supreme Court of the United States, we all know, said, “Well, if you look at these criminal statutes and the treaties, the reservations were never disestablished for those purposes.” Not ownership; they didn’t talk about ownership, but for criminal jurisdiction.

I talked to some guys from another tribe yesterday — it was last night, yeah — and they’re the Lighthorse Police from Muscogee Creek. They were here to help our police set up a youth explorer program. We were talking about that, about the impact it’s had on Muscogee Creek and other tribes over there — 5 Civilized Tribes — the Quapaw on the cost of the administration of justice: police, public defenders, prosecutors, jail. For those tribes, it’s quite a expense. Most of them did not have that on their calendars to deal with. We have observed that at Osage and we have taken a, “Yeah, we wanted to go down that road as well...”

But we’re taking it in incremental steps by filing certain documents in other criminal cases that are not involved in the Osage Nation as friend of the court. Then in 2010 — this is 13 years later — the Nation lost a case, which I was not involved in, in the federal courts that said the Osage Reservation was disestablished. That was a tax case called the “Irby,” I-R-B-Y, Case.

So we're trying to show the courts here, our lawyers, that Irby should not control the broad language — that Irby should not control all aspects of the questions of tribal jurisdiction, state jurisdiction, federal jurisdiction. Because there's so many lawyers. I'll just say it. I'm on the record and that's alright. There's so many lawyers involved in this stuff; it's like a cottage industry. And I hadn't practiced law going on 10 years, but if I was, I'd have to jump in on this because... my gosh, that's billable hours, right? And it's — but here where I am? What I do? I'm thinking, "I gotta keep these legal costs down."

Because I've got pre-school. I've got 200-some kids in pre-schools. I've got elderly, elderly housing that we're trying to build. I've got food programs for the elderly. I've got over 1000 Osages in scholarships programs who we pay up to \$12,000 of your tuition and books. I've got almost 14,000 Osages on health cards. I've got 1,000 elders on a Medicare supplement we pay for. I mean, this is all money that goes to good purposes and I've been on that lawyer side and I know how to fill out a billing statement and a timesheet and I am suspicious, yes, of all lawyers who do work. If I see three lawyers billing us for a conference, they better have a darn good — they better be in front of a federal judge or a state judge or something if there's going to be three of 'em on the same damn case.

But if they're sitting around reading a book on Indians ... and I've actually seen bills that do that, where lawyers would bill the client — another tribe, not Osage, when I was practicing law — they would bill the client for reading books about Indians. I've seen some attorneys, big firms in Oklahoma and out of Colorado, send some of these tribes for one month's work a \$300,000 bill.

**JE:** Mmm.

**CSB:** Do you know what we could do right now if someone said, "Chief, here's \$300,000 cash. We decided you didn't have to spend it on lawyers." I've got a health clinic down here. Every time that interest rate — we're trying to finance it — goes up, it's costing us a fortune. So I'm not — that's why there's a blank space there. I've got to find a way to build that clinic within the resources we have. But I tell ya, lawyers? And accountants? And CPAs? God bless 'em; I worked with 'em; I love the professions. But there's a

serious greed problem going on in this country.

And the Osage, maybe as Rennard Strickland pointed out, he goes, “You need to look at Felix Cohen in the 1920s and 30s in Washington D.C.” He said, “Remember the Native Americans are the miner’s canary.”

**JE:** Mmmmm.

**CSB:** Felix Cohen said that.

**JE:** Wow.

**CSB:** Well, I have a front-row seat to this. I’m watching what happened to the Osage with greed. And, I tell ya, in business in this country, and the lawyers, and all the other professionals, and all the people, it’s not about issues too much. It’s not about productivity. It’s about greed.

**JE:** Yeah.

**CSB:** My observation. It’s not universal. But it’s way, way, way, way, way down that road.

**JE:** Yeah. We talked about greed in Killers of the Flower Moon. And now we’re talking about greed here today in 2023.

**CSB:** Just like the miner’s canary. We set the pace and whatever happened to us can happen to anybody.

## **Chapter 12 – 2:05**

### **These Ways Will Teach You**

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**John Erling (JE):** So what do you say to the young Osage about their heritage, culture, and advice for them?

**Chief Standing Bear (CSB):** Well, fortunately, I don’t have to say anything because here’s a teaching we have: You can’t really talk about our

teachings. I've got my own families that say, "Oh, you oughta right all this down or record it." Our old people say, "These ways will teach you." And what they meant is the only way you're going to learn it is to participate in it. And that is the truth. So my advice is: Just learn these ways by participating.

So, in the summer out here, you're gonna see — when I was 21, 22 — we had in that dance we do in the summer. We had 50 on a Saturday night; maybe on a Friday afternoon 10, 15 dancing. Now on a Friday night or Saturday night you'll have 300 men and 300 women and they're younger generations. And they all know what to do. They know when not to dance, when not to dance, when to dance, they know which songs are what, what parts. And we didn't have a class. Families brought 'em in, told 'em, "don't do this, don't do that." And, by gosh, and they went out there and they learned from each other.

So "these ways will teach you" — that's what I want to tell our young people. Take part in your tribal ways. And those ways will teach you.

**JE:** Very good. Well, I thank you.

**CSB:** Well, thank you.

**JE:** This was very, very interesting. Can you say anything in Osage to me here as we part?

**CSB:** (Phonetically transcribed) Ee-oh-gah-sheh-ah. That means "All I have to say." (Phonetically transcribed) Kah-koh-nah. That's "that's it."

**JE:** (Laughing) Very good. Thank you, Chief, I appreciate it very much.

**CSB:** Thank you.

**JE:** As we shake hands.

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**Chapter 13 – 0:32**  
**Introduction (After the Film Festival)**

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**Announcer:** Osage Chief Geoffrey Standing Bear and a delegation from the Osage nation attended the world premiere of the film *Killers of the Flower Moon*, at the Cannes Film Festival May 20, 2023.

Voices of Oklahoma interviewed Chief Standing Bear when he returned.

He talked about viewing the film while sitting next to one of the film's stars, Robert DeNiro, the reaction from the audience, the reference to the 1921 race massacre and the menu for the festival dinner.

Listen now on the oral history website [VoicesofOklahoma.com](https://VoicesofOklahoma.com)

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**Chapter 14 – 14:02**  
**The Film Festival**

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**John Erling (JE):** Good morning, Chief.

**Geoffrey Standing Bear (CSB):** Good morning, John. How are you today?

**JE:** I am fine. I'm calling you from our offices here at Voices of Oklahoma, and I'm talking to you in your office there in Pawhuska by phone. Your experience with the *Killers of the Flower Moon* – The Cannes Festival, who was invited to the festival? I know your wife, Julie, was with you. Was there a bigger contingent of Osage?

**CSB:** Yes. Apple asked Scorsese, and he gave a list. On that list was Yancey Redcorn, and he was able to bring one guest – which is his sister, Maura. And Yancey plays Chief Boncastle and does a good job in the film.

Scorsese... he asked for another Redcorn – a cousin of Yancey – plays a medicine man to be there, and he brought his son. And then there was our newspaper editor, Shannon Shaw. But I think, I'm not sure if she was with Apple or the press group at Cannes. And then there was a few others. Of

course, Chad Renfro is our ambassador, and we thought “ We could not have pulled this off without him.” And Chad brought a guest.

So it wasn't a large group – but there was a group, that's correct.

**JE:** You walked the red carpet, and that seemed to be a big thing.

**CSB:** I knew you were going to ask about that.

**JE:** (laughing) What is that all about?

**CSB:** Okay, well, so here's what happened: so here's the hotel, okay? This is like a five-star hotel. Thank you, Apple.

So the Apple handler for each group of us has Apple people who, like secret service agents, have earbuds, talking to each other. And you have to be at a certain place to catch this limo, because there are thousands of people outside. They're looking to get selfies or photos of their favorite stars, et cetera.

Well, most of the people at Cannes are not the stars, but everyone there is industry-connected or press, one way or another – or the movie. And so we're being shuttled in these long limos, and our limo pops up at a certain moment, and then get into the limo and it was just like in the movies. You had to push yourself through the crowd, because all the people are taking photographs thinking we must be somebody or why are we coming out of the hotel using the limo?

We get into the limo, and we go down – I didn't find all the different limos – to the theater, which is a couple blocks away. And there's the red carpet. And we all get out, and everyone's standing around, not quite sure what's going to happen next, but we are confident the Apple team will guide us through this.

And I am putting my blanket on – put on to symbolize what we do, our people. I look up, and my wife Julie is with Chad Rimfro and they're being told to walk down the red carpet, Julie dressed in her Osage clothes. And so there they go, and Chad is such an expert at this. He goes down there,

he stops, turns, and a hundred cameras take their photo, then he walks down a little more and they both turn to the left, and there are more photos.

And then they just do this and go up the formidable staircase that goes up. And then they ask somebody else to take off, and I'm sitting there, and I'm just like, "Well," I say, "Yancy, if I get a little unsteady or anything, I want to reach out to one of you big guys, and hold your shoulder or something, because that looks pretty imposing." Next thing I know, someone said, "Chief, okay, just go."

I was, "Go, huh?" And so I started walking, and I thought: "Well, should I stop, and turn to the right, let everyone take a photo?" I said, "Well, they're not here to see me, they're here to see everybody else." So I just thought, "I should just keep it simple. I should not fall down. I should just keep my focus on the stairway that's up here, and just walk down the red carpet, and get up to that stairway."

And I really thought I was something really great to accomplish all that, until I saw Thelma Schoonover, she's the movie editor, and she's won several Academy Awards for editing. And Thelma's in her 80s, and she just comes walking down that red carpet, like she does this every week. And she's just happy as can be. And then she just pops her way up those steps. Thelma is just an incredible, incredible person, which is a great thrill – is getting to know people like her and Marty.

And I got to sit next to Robert De Niro for the movie, that was fun. And all the stars, they're people. And as soon as you get to know them as people, they have their personalities. And some of them are very reserved, and some are very outgoing. And it's just their personalities.

**JE:** Then you had dinners, you sat next to Robert De Niro, and he spoke Osage to you, did he? Was he pretty good?

**CSB:** Oh my gosh, well, during the movie, the Osage language is spoken throughout. And De Niro is one of the best. And he had some of our language teachers, of course, work with him, and they told me what a serious student he was, day in, day out. So we're watching the movie, and I



was sitting right next to him. And there was this one scene, he goes in, and just talks in all this Osage, and it was so well said. It was just impressive. And I nudged him, and gave him a thumbs up. That was nice, I was really impressed. But they all did a really good job.

**JE:** Was it, at times, hard to watch?

**CSB:** No, well, I've seen it before, okay? And we've heard this story, although we don't really make it part of our conversation, you know, all our lives. It's something we just don't dwell on. But I can tell you, none of my direct descendants were murdered, but I couldn't help but think about those Osages who I know very well, and I see them sometimes every day, particularly because we're all here during our ceremonies, right now, during June.

How would it feel to see my grandfather or grandmother on the big screen, being shot like that? I just imagine I would be hurt, shocked, raged. I find, when I first saw it in New York, it was just depressing, that part. And what was shocking, of course, was by design, I think, is how in the movie it reflects actual events. Everyone just took it – everyone, the non-Osage, the undertakers, the people who had something to gain financially from it – regarding how they considered it normal, almost, to kill an Osage, and then through the legal process, or the anti-illegal process, both working in tandem to take the wealth of that Osage and to put it in their own hands or in the hands of someone they can control. That made me angry, of course, but we've known this forever.

But I don't have any direct ancestors that I can imagine for those that do, it would be very upsetting.

**JE:** The cast members, Leonardo DiCaprio, Lily Gladstone, and others were there. So when they viewed this, was this the first time they had seen it in its full final production?

**CSB:** Well, we saw it in New York, Leonardo DiCaprio sat with us in a screening room, so I know he's seen it. But as far as the other actors, I did not ask. I was told, though – as we were heading to the after party – that Jesse Plymouth, who does a great job as Tom Wise, the head of the FBI team, he

had not seen it. And he cried for 10 minutes after it was over. That's what I was told by people I was waiting in line to get back in the limo, and no one said anything else about anybody else. So that's what I know.

**JE:** As I recall, you said your niece is in the film, is that true?

**CSB:** Well, a lot of our nieces and nephews are in the film. And I have more than one niece, relative, my wife, some of my wife's relatives are in there, some of our friends. I like to tell people, although you see Osages all through this as extras and other tribes, that there are a lot of Osages behind the camera, working with world-class costume makers, Academy Award winning costume makers, Academy Award winning cinematographers, having our people behind the scenes, people building sets, people learning how to, for lighting, and building the sets. There's only a lot of our people who are behind the camera.

**JE:** The whole story takes place in Fairfax, and since I talked to you last time – I was in Fairfax actually a week ago – and I talked to Joe and Carol Connor, publishers of the Fairfax Chief newspaper. And let me just tell you the impactful moment that I had.

I stood in front of the Tall Chief Theater, and of course, Joe and Carol have that memorial in there, with storyboards talking about it. And Carol took me out on the main street, and she says, points across the street to where Bill Hale worked in a bank, then pointed to the next corner building made of stone, upstairs where the Dr. Schoen brothers worked, and then the pool hall upstairs next to Bill Hale's place of work, the Cowboys, and then what is now an empty lot where the mortuary was Mathis Mortuary.

And she said “All he needed to do, Bill Hale, was to walk out of his place of business, walk over to the Schoen brothers and say, we're going to poison so-and-so, go up the pool hall steps and go find a cowboy if he wanted them to kill somebody, maybe give him \$500, and then walk across to the mortuary and say, now to mutilate this body or whatever so that forensics won't know what happened to that body.”

She said he could do that within five minutes, and it just got me in my guts, the only way to say it.

**CSB:** Well, and don't forget how the court system at the time, the state court system, and the Federal Bureau of Indian Affairs had to approve the transfer of those properties, those oil and gas royalties, headright interest, and land to the people selected by Hale and people like Hale. And so as David Graham points out in his incredible, excellent book, it was a matter of who was not complicit, and the role of the federal government and the state cannot be ignored in this.

And Squintezzi did not spend a lot of time on that, but I'm sitting right now in the building that was built in 1922 for the Bureau of Indian Affairs. And in this very building, a lot of these bad deeds were carried out to assist those who were murdered by people in this very building.

**JE:** Yeah, and of course I was with you in that building.

## **Chapter 15 – 8:23**

### **A Standing Ovation**

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**John Erling (JE):** So the film is three and a half hours long. For some – and we've all been talking about this of course – and by the way, I've got to tell you, I can't believe all the people who have read the book.

It'll come up in my conversation, or I'll ask people, "Have you read the book?" Lots of people have read this book, and I'm telling them to read the second time, because I am right now, and you now have the full story in your head. But the film is three and a half hours long, and so some people are wondering, "Wow, is that too long?" How did you feel about that?

**Chief Standing Bear (CSB):** It didn't seem like that long at all. Interestingly, he, Scorsese, and Thelma Spinola, the editor, have wound other bits of that history into this film that are not so much in the book. Primarily the Tulsa race massacre is discussed in the film, but showing some of the news reports – that isn't something that the book does not emphasize, but I thought it was a nice touch.

**JE:** Yes.

**CSB:** He downplays the investigation part a bit just to save time, because if he did increase the time for Jesse Plymouth and other really great actors that were on the FBI story here, we would have had two films. Yeah, easily. Another hour, maybe. And at the end, he uses a technique to sum up what happened after the arrest of Ernest Burkhardt and Hale.

He uses a recreation of a radio show to sum up the results of that. And then something about Molly Burkhardt at the end. So you can see how this could have easily been another hour or more, and that means two films. The movie is not a fast movie. It's more involved in the relationship between Ernest, the nephew of Hale, married to Molly, the full-blooded Osage.

So it's a more introspective film to me. Although there is violence, violence is not the theme of this. The theme is the relationship between Ernest and Molly. And also, as Scorsese previewed for us, his approach is to show the relationship between the outside world and the Osage and how that relationship developed into one of trust and betrayal of the trust.

Same description at a different level with Molly, with her trust of her husband, Ernest, the son of DiCaprio, and the horrible betrayal of that trust. I mean, they have children. Were they going to be next? Her? Was she going to be next? Deprived of the children of their mother? That is a deeper emotional movie, I believe, than it is previously.

**JE:** They talked about this nine-minute standing ovation. What was that feeling like and had to bring an emotion to you?

**CSB:** Well, it could have been longer. The head of the festival came up to Scorsese and handed him the – he started talking into the microphone, and then handed Scorsese the microphone. That's when the crowd stopped. When the film ended, they were in the credits, there was the ovation.

But the way he had chosen to end the film, the last scene, were Osages dancing in a traditional dress and with a traditional song. So as they went

into the credits, the music was continuing. Some of our current singers had composed. Some of the crowd started clapping in beat with the music. The traditional – not traditional – the traditional style. The new song, but a traditional style – which was really great. But that's after nine minutes ahead of the film festival. And of course, Scorsese, the mic, and then he started talking. And that's when they stopped. It would have continued, I know that.

**JE:** And rave reviews, Rolling Stone said, Scorsese takes on David Grahn's bestseller about a murder epidemic among the Osage, turns it into a masterpiece. Vanity Fair review said, as *Killers of the Flower Moon* seeps in, it shocks, resounds, and haunts. That great word – a choice of words. And so the reviews go on and on about this.

**CSB:** It'll make you think. When I ask people, "What do you think? Osages and non-Osages. What do you think of that?" They say, you know, "Can't get it off my mind." It's not, well I wouldn't say shocking, unless you could never imagine that people are capable of such things. You know, I practiced law for almost 35 years before I became chief some years ago. People ask me when I stepped back from that practice, what did I learn in three and a half decades? And I tell them, I learned that people are capable of doing anything.

And that shows up in this movie, so I don't consider it shocking. I consider it very disappointing. You have to keep your head together and say this should never happen again. Or people will do this. And I know that, I hate to put this on the record, but I'm doing it. And I'm not being cynical, because it took me about two years though, in this job as principal chief, to really shake that out and put it into perspective. And to know that there are so many more good people than bad people.

And there's so many more good things in life than bad things. But I know when you're in the courtroom, doing that kind of work – be it law enforcement or legal – you see that people can do terrible things to each other. But thank God there's good people.

**JE:** I interviewed Eva Unterman, a Holocaust survivor, and she survived Auschwitz. And she called what was going on there a killing machine, a killing business. And that could be applied to this story as well.

**CSB:** On a smaller scale, yes. Isn't that horrible? And that's where this kind of activity and thinking and feelings lead, is to these kinds of horrors. And it's happened all through human history. And it's happening now. And it will happen in the future. So I think we're all under a duty to work together to stop it.

**JE:** Yeah.

## **Chapter 16 – 5:33**

### **Oscar Talk**

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**John Erling (JE):** And then there are Oscar talk and Oscar mentions – and you probably have heard that. And Lily Gladstone maybe getting an Oscar nomination. What have you heard?

**Chief Standing Bear (CSB):** Well, she's been here during our June ceremonies. We dance during June over – about half of June we're actually preparing and getting clothes on, dancing, or getting our grandkids ready. And then other times we're having family dinners. So that's a time for us. And she has – here at family dinners and having a good time.

And so we're glad to see her. But we do talk among ourselves about how wonderful it would be to have her at least nominated, winning would be outstanding. She stands with DiCaprio to stay on the same scene with that incredibly talented actor. DiCaprio, I think this is his best acting job. I saw Titanic and I've seen, you know, Gangs of New York, he did Revenant. I think that to me was my favorite, what he did in that movie.

And oh, by the way, some of the people that are the cameras that worked on Revenant worked on this movie. I think this was Leo DiCaprio's best acting job. And Robert De Niro has a much larger role in this. He is very

much involved throughout the movie. Those three should get some recognition at the Academy Awards.

**JE:** In our previous interview, you told me you were a 16-year-old boy when you drove your grandmother from luncheons with her friends and you felt that they had been telling stories about this. And I know you became chief, which is a major, major accomplishment, but then to think that this 16-year-old boy eventually walked the red carpet of the very story that your grandmother and her friends were talking about.

**CSB:** If you haven't had a chance, go check out – I think it's on the internet – the story of the Osages – there were six Osages that went from Ark Homes in Missouri to France in the late 1820s.

And they wandered around France for years until the good people of the city of Montauban took up a collection and paid their passage back to the Osage country. A good relationship with Southern France, Montauban and the surrounding areas.

And that was discussed when we were over there, how many of us carry French names or influence. My middle name is spelled M-O-N-G-R-A-I-N, but it's pronounced not mon-grain – some Osages, one branch does that, but my side of the family calls it mow-grain. We have Revolets, we have Chautauqua, well, I guess they're related to the Cherokee Chautauqua.

We have Bollingers, Terrians, Revolvers. We have a lot of explorer and trader families.

And so when I used to talk, and hopefully I'll talk again to the people of Missouri, I always say, "Well, you wanna know where the French explorers went? Well, that's us." I'd say, over half of our tribe is French in one way or another. That was discussed while we were hanging out in Southern France. And in fact, Colleen Redhorn, who plays the medicine man, he mentioned that when he was getting ready to pray for us all. Because he actually is a man of prayer in our tribe.

He mentioned how we returned to France. And now here we are after this

period of, since 1830s when our people were here before. So I thought that was an interesting connection that they mentioned.

**JE:** Absolutely. I like what you said, hanging out in Southern France. You were hanging out in the French Riviera. Such a beautiful area.

**CSB:** Well, you know, John, I didn't even get to the beach because they had such a tight schedule. I saw it. It was like 50 yards away, the water. The yachts there were – I was told how much some of those cost. I don't know if it was true or not. It was unbelievable. The people that were participating and do participate, it's just, I'd say it's a different world.

It's lovely. I mean, the bread there – bread baskets, and croissants, and butter. My gosh. And fruit plates. There's a lot of that going on. Really nice. But I was just there for a few days with my lovely wife. We saw a little bit of that world.

## **Chapter 17 – 6:20**

### **Dinner is Served**

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**John Erling (JE):** Okay, one detail that might – people be interested in – when you had dinner. Like when you were with DeNiro and the others having dinner. What did they serve you?

**Chief Standing Bear (CSB):** Well, that's interesting. When we went to dinner, I need to also say that Lieutenant Governor Matt Pennell and some of his teams were participants in some of the festivities. And the way they handle that is plates are incredible food or salads first and they share off that plate and that's passed around and it goes all the way through the entrees and desserts.

After, while their people are having dessert, people at different tables start getting up and start going to other tables and I took it as something that they do that people that go to those kinds of dinners and they sit there, they visit, and people start just moving around table to table. But it's not like they bring a plate and you just eat and a waitress comes by – or a



waiter comes by – and picks it up. It's they pass around, everybody passes around the plate and you take what you want and then they eventually pick it up.

I don't know what to say about the food. I mean, the food was like I never had before. It was really good. Really good food.

**JE:** They serve beef or chicken or what?

**CSB:** Both. And if you wanted to be a vegan, they have that option too. So when they pass around these various plates, you have your choice. Take salad and that's it or you can eat vegetables. Vegetables were great.

**JE:** Well, I'm just pleased that you're talking to us about it and the wonderful experience and the attention that it will bring to the Osage Nation. And I'm sure you're happy about that because people probably didn't know about it, but there'll be curious minds.

**CSB:** I told – when I got back and said, okay, everybody in Southern France, they're all talking French. And I kept hearing the word Osage. Then I kept hearing Fairfax, Gray Horse, the folks. As we go through the award system – heading to the Academy Awards – everybody is looking at you.

And we need to find a way to fund your initiative. And I'm going to ask the Osage legislature, the Osage Congress, to put some money into our Osage Foundation so people here can apply for grants to develop this community. Because as you saw, John, the community has a need of development in an organized, cultural, historical way.

And also the Osage Nation, our government, has purchased, recently, a plot of land. And our intention is to reconstruct the train station that was during the filming here in Pahaska. And it says Fairfax on it. And when you see the movie, you will see that train station has an important role in the movie.

And so we want to rebuild it and reinforce it because it is built as a prop. Reinforce it and place it on this new property in Fairfax, assist the community in their efforts. Osage Nation will not be creating an area or

redoing the town, but we have that property and another where we can sit in – with what Joe Connors has called a theater and hopefully he'll get a grant. He's already got some because we also, away from the main street, are working with the children and family of

Maria and Marjorie Tallchief – great ballerinas – to acquire their old home up on a hill on the west side of town on a hill there – the Tallchief Mansion and renovate it.

People already coming to Fairfax. Lieutenant Governor Pinnell has been there and he wants to work with the community as well. So we have the state wanting to work with them, the people there want to work, the nation wants to work together.

They can really, really change for the better – that community and also make Oklahoma a better tourist destination because we have that and Redrummond over here in Pawhuska, 25 miles away. We're building a new casino, hotel, our museum, the oldest tribal museum in the country. We have that here. We want to expand that significantly. We have a lot of plans here. We're carrying them out.

**JE:** You said that you bought land in Fairfax to place the train station there?

**CSB:** Yeah, it's the train station that appears in the movie. And so Apple allowed us to work with them on taking it apart, but it's in storage.

**JE:** Great. That's great for Fairfax and for you. And I think it's honorable that you and Pawhuska will invest in Fairfax as well. So we should say the film will be released exclusively in theaters October 6th and then streaming globally on Apple TV+. And of course, all of us can hardly wait to see it, for sure. So, thank you, Chief. I appreciate your willingness to do this follow up after your great experience. And we obviously will let you know what we thought about the film.

**CSB:** Sure, John. Well, call any time. I really enjoy talking with you.

**JE:** Thank you, Chief. Appreciate it. Thank you.

**CSB:** Bye.

**JE:** All right. Well, see you.

**CSB:** Yep.

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