



Cherokee National Treasures: In Their Own Words

From Cherokee Nation

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“The legend says that a long time ago we lived on land surrounded by water that we couldn’t drink . . .” —Traditional beginning to Cherokee stories

Cherokee origin stories have been handed down over thousands of years. They intertwine to form a rich history of oral and artistic traditions that tell the Cherokee story. The vast array of art objects unearthed from prehistoric mounds throughout the southeastern United States evidence the antiquity of this rich cultural history. To some, these may be artifacts, but to the Cherokee people, they are tribal history: objects that were touched by ancestors, ancestors who have continued to teach their skills through gifts they left behind to be discovered.

Stories in this book reflect how history has woven itself into the fabric of the present. The stories are intimate and told by the artists, by family members, by friends in their own words. The telling will make you feel as though you are fortunate enough to sit in the presence of the Cherokee artists, who intimately share the story of themselves, of their art, who their family was, how they came to be artists, who and what influenced them, and how their art reflects who they are as Cherokee people. They are the Cherokee National Treasures.

The Cherokee National Treasure Award was established in 1988 by the Cherokee Nation and the Cherokee National Historical Society. Currently, there are ninety-four individuals who have been designated Cherokee National Treasures. They have all been recognized not only for their roles as artisans, but also for their roles as teachers, mentors, and advocates. The award recipients have preserved and perpetuated traditional and contemporary artistic methods and practices, ensuring that their arts and skills are not lost. These powerful stories of Cherokee National Treasures are captivating and leave lasting impressions of Cherokee life, values, and artistic traditions—cultural treasures that continue into the twenty-first century.

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Editorial Review

About the Author

Shawna Morton Cain is a direct descendant of Frog Town, Georgia Cherokees forcibly removed to Indian Territory in the early 1800's. A life-time resident of Cherokee Nation's Trail of Tears District in Adair County, Shawna and her husband, Roger, have chosen to continue traditional Cherokee art traditions closely tied to their natural woodland environment. A doctoral candidate at the University of Arkansas in Anthropology, Shawna stresses, "*My Cherokee teachers from our home communities are just as integral to my graduate studies as my university teachers. Each provides me with a strong foundation to better understand our people's history, traditional knowledge systems and forms of artistic expression.*" Awarded the title of "Cherokee National Living Treasure" for her work in traditional basketry by the Cherokee Nation in 2006, Cain continues to represent the Cherokee Nation as a master basket weaver and teacher.

Pamela Jumper Thurman, is the granddaughter of three original Dawes Commission enrollees and has spent a good part of her life living and working in the Cherokee Nation. This work, dating back to the late 1970's, included taking some of the artists featured in this book out to the smaller Cherokee communities to teach others their traditional artistry and perpetuate this valuable knowledge. Pamela holds a Ph.D. in Clinical Psychology and is a published author of over eighty articles, book chapters, manuals and curricula on various cultural and health topics. She has co-produced an educational DVD and has also produced numerous health focused Public Service Announcements targeting a national audience. She is an award winning artist in both painting and jewelry and has exhibited at various museums and galleries throughout the United States. She was honored and humbled to be a part of gathering the stories of these gifted artists for this very important project.

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