

Jill shares a few thoughts about our upcoming river journey and time in the canyon...

At the start of this year, I realized some of the things that were important to me several years ago, are no longer important. This past summer, I was present at the birth of my first grandchild, and at the beginning of this year, I lost my beloved father. Birth and death are monumental events and have changed my life in unimaginable ways.



I ask myself, *Who am I...?*

I identify strongly with my native self. I am mixed blood; Kiowa, Irish, German, and more. I feel fortunate that I am deeply rooted in my cultural heritage. I can trace back through generations of family, to my Kiowa forebears who migrated from the north, as far as Canada and the Black Hills in the 1700's. Their pilgrimage led them down through the central and southern plains of Oklahoma, to a small mountain that rises out of the landscape. They camped there and called this sacred place, Rainy Mountain.

This is a place that is close to my heart. I can feel my ancestors in the red earth there. My spirit is keenly alive when I am immersed in the landscapes that are meaningful to me. When I was 5 years old, my father took my sisters and me to Canyon de Chelly. We rode through the canyon in an open jeep, driven by a Navajo man. We stopped for lunch near a cluster of cottonwood trees, where the canyon walls loomed high in the near distance.

I remember jumping out of the jeep and feeling completely overcome by the beauty of the land, that I ran with my arms wide open to embrace the cliffs. My father later wrote a poem about it.

I have felt this kind of exuberance whenever I am deeply moved by nature. My nomadic spirit returns often to these sacred places. My documentary, *Return to Rainy Mountain*, gave me the opportunity to write about this journey in the format of film. I want to write what is in my heart and am now working on a short story and memoir.

I am inspired to write down the stories that I have been carrying around for a long time and I believe that time on the river will soothe and heal my heart, and that traveling through the ancient canyon with kindred spirits will inspire and renew my creative being.

Jill Momaday
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