

Native American HERITAGE MONTH

*celebrating the diverse cultures, identities,
and heritage of Native people in America*

Community Voice: John

My Native American heritage is from my mother's side of the family: the Comanche Nation. I also have a Spanish Basque heritage from my mother. My father's side of the family is Irish. Each of these ethnicities possess deep tribal affiliations.

My identity as Native American was surrounded by tribal gatherings during my youth in Oklahoma, when I spent my summers with my grandmother in Chickasha, Oklahoma.

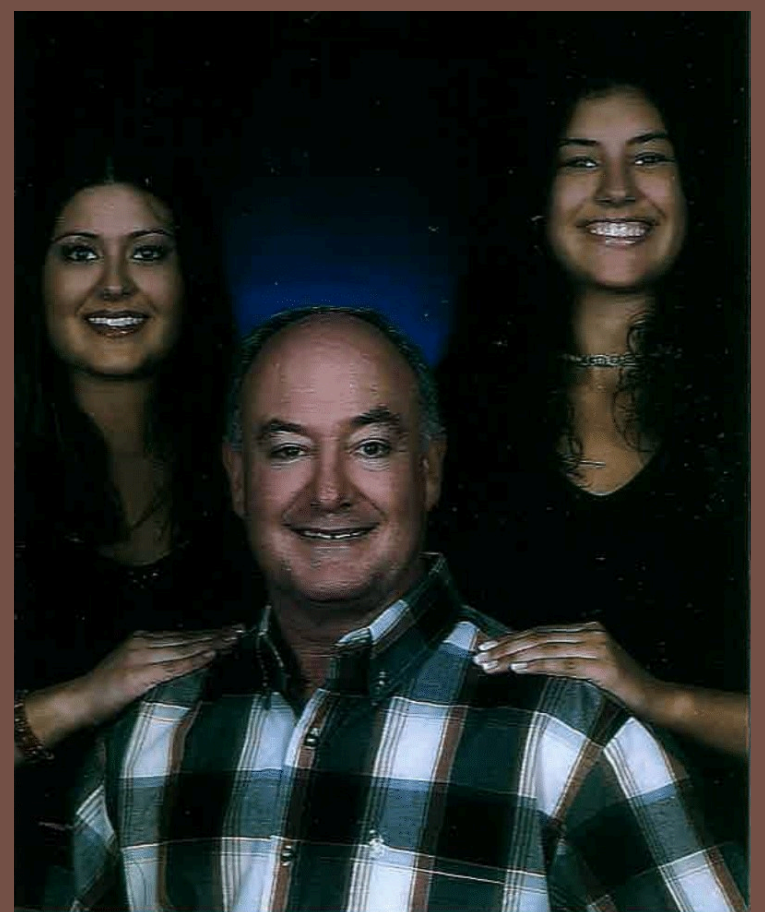


John's mother Juanita (Comanche and Basque) and his father John Sr. (Irish).



LEFT: John's Comanche heritage is descended from his great-grandmother Luisa (left), and great-great-grandmother Francisca (right).

RIGHT: John with his daughters Christi (left) and Caitlin (right), both members of the Walker River Paiute Tribe of Nevada.



The treasure of tribal traditions, history, and cultural heritage were gifted to me by my tribal elders, spiritual leaders, and keepers of our tribal way of life.



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What is significant to me is to witness firsthand and attest to the creative courage that our Comanche people have arrived intact into the 21st century. Our Comanche Nation today exists as a thriving sovereign nation within the United States. We number only 17,525 members, but we proudly announce in our slogan that we are "Comanche Strong - Stronger Together." The 2020 US Census revealed that the population of Native Americans is 9.7 million, which is a mere 2.9% of the total US population. Seemingly, we are still "invisible Americans."



Photos from the movie set "Gone to Texas," starring Sam Elliot. John played three parts as an "Indian."



I would wish, and have wished for most of my life, that Native American cultures would be more respected. Some progress has been made: the removal of offensive team mascots and implicitly racist place names (like "Squaw Valley"). But there's more work to be done: changing insensitive language used in textbooks, e.g., "Indians roamed over the land," instead of "seasonally migrated," or describing non-Indians as having "discovered" land instead of "explored" or "surveyed."

