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Australian Horseman Carlos Tabernaberry Invited by Native Americans to Ride Trail of Tears on Mustangs

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By Mae Lee Sun

Cultures from around the world, from the Mayans to the Greeks, predicted epic change taking place in 2012 that would alter life as we know it- not in an Armageddon sort of way and rather in ways that would stimulate a rising of human consciousness. Certainly, [Grandmother Margaret Behan](#) sees it that way, especially as it relates to the welfare of both people and wild horses.



Grandmother Margaret Behan, an Arapaho/Cheyenne elder and member of the International Council of Thirteen Indigenous Grandmothers
Photo: International Council of Thirteen Indigenous Grandmothers

An elder of the Arapaho/Cheyenne Nation in Northern Montana and a member of the global women's alliance known as [The International Council of Thirteen Indigenous Grandmothers](#), [Grandmother Margaret](#) was guided by her own vision and that of [Noqah Elisi](#), Cherokee, a mental health professional with over 20 years experience working for Native corporations in Alaska and the Rosebud Indian Reservation in South Dakota, to invite noted Australian horseman, [Carlos Tabernaberry](#) to ride the combined trails of the [Cheyenne exodus from Oklahoma and the Cherokee Trail of Tears](#). What is epic is that they will be doing so on rescued and gentled Mustangs provided through the combined efforts of [Lifesavers Wild Horse Rescue](#), renowned Native American horse trainer [Rod Rondeaux](#), Crow, and [Red Horse Nation Mustang Rescue](#), an Equine Assisted Therapy organization within Lifesavers which assists Native youth in developing self-esteem and Native identity through the Way of the Horse and guidance by tribal Elders.

“I believe the horse knowledge [Carlos](#) is bringing to America is for everybody. He is here to help us all remember and bring back the ancient way of the horse. He knows about horses and doesn't use force or a bit, which is very unusual nowadays. As Plains people, horses were a big part of our lives. We traveled with and see them very much as our spiritual brothers. Carlos understands that there is something special in their spirit and that they have important lessons to teach us about ourselves,” says [Grandmother Margaret](#).



Newly rescued Australian 'Brumby' (wild horse) babies following Carlos Tabernaberry at liberty. Photo: Marty Schiel

And [Grandmother](#) should know. She's not only an accomplished, author, artist, playwright, poet and peacemaker; she grew up with horses from the time she was a young child. Even then she felt a responsibility to feed and care for life, fondly recalling her Paint pony that had a birthmark under his tongue. She and her siblings rode the pony without shoes or bit and never a saddle.

“He was patient with us. He would wait while I played with my friends until it was time to go home. He was my companion, innocent, like me as a child.”

Not so innocent however, is the dark era in American history and politics responsible for branding the [Trail of Tears](#) into the heart of Native America and its people. It refers to a grueling, six-month, 1200-mile journey mandated by President Andrew Jackson in 1838, which forcibly removed the Cherokee from their homelands east of the Mississippi to the West. From the inception of the [Indian Removal Act of 1830](#), thousands of Native Americans died from starvation, disease and exposure on the trek that passes through nine U.S. states, ending in present-day Oklahoma. As an act of remembrance to the ancestors, many Native Americans will 'Ride the Trail'.

The 2012 journey will take place in two parts. The first part, an additional 1200 miles, will commemorate the enduring ordeal faced by the Northern Cheyenne in 1878, who, under the leadership of Chiefs Dull Knife and Little Wolf, fled the disgraceful conditions of the Indian Territory reservation in Oklahoma.

“The act was a peaceful attempt to return to their homeland in the Tongue River country of Montana. This nonviolent resistance to colonization at a time when the official policy was eradication of all Native American Society was an act of perseverance and great courage.

Even though the U.S. Government had previously promised the Cheyenne they could leave the reservation by choice, they reneged, as had unfortunately become policy, and declared the Cheyenne renegades and pursued the small band consisting mostly of women and children. Caught and imprisoned at Fort Robinson, Nebraska they were told that they would be sent back south to Indian Territory. Deciding that they would rather die in their own land, they broke out of the heavily guarded prison and fled north. Making their way through blinding snowstorms and minus 30-degree temperatures, they were hunted by both the U.S. Army and civilians who killed all Cheyenne they came in contact with- including women and children. “

(Adapted from the book, [Holding Stone Hands: On the Trail of the Cheyenne Exodus](#) by Alan Boye, Bison Books, 2001)

According to [Elisi](#), the Cherokee and Cheyenne people share this relationship to the [Trail of Tears](#).

“This ride from Red Clay, Tennessee to Lame Deer, Montana following in the footsteps of the Cherokee people, and the Cheyenne led by Little Wolf and Dull Knife, is a ceremony honoring the perseverance, strength, courage, and love that enable our people to survive so that we may be here today.”

When asked what he makes of the invitation to ride the [Trail of Tears](#) alongside this group of Native Americans, [Tabernaberri](#) says, “It is a huge honor.” Having grown up around cultural conflict himself and witnessing how mistreated horses were in his native country of Argentina; he made a promise to himself to do things differently.

“Khalil Gibran said the day you are born, your work is placed in your heart. I see both training horses with a compassionate approach and being invited to ride the [Trail of Tears](#) as part of my own spiritual journey.”

It was [Tabernaberri's](#) gentle, compassionate approach that [Elisi](#) was drawn to, even prior to speaking to or meeting him. Her first contact with him came during a vision quest she had after a sweat lodge ceremony ten years ago.



Noqah Elisi, Cherokee, says she knew about Carlos Tabernaberri prior to meeting him. Photo: Noqah Elisi

“I saw this man with a black hat and large eyes. He was both fierce and kind, I understood him to be both horse and man in one body. He told me “you are to follow in the steps of your grandmothers, and you will do this walk with horse; it will be a long difficult journey but do not be afraid for you will receive much help, and my mother is going to come to you and teach you everything you need to know.” That was a long time ago. Then I discovered one of [Carlos's](#) DVDs in a large box of books; watching Carlos working with Spin (a rescued Australian brumby) I saw the love and healing that was happening between man and horse, I saw what was necessary. Riding the [Trail](#)

of Tears. It came to me that this ride (for us and Carlos) is also about healing the women, and helping the children grow hopeful and strong so they can carry the human race forward in a positive way. There are many wonderful men in this world who know how to be supportive, loving and protective so we can do that. It's what good men do," says Elisi.

The way of right relationship is essential to the beliefs of Native Americans and something Elisi and Grandmother Margaret feel Tabernaberry embodies. Elisi, who was practically born on the back of a horse (her mother rode while pregnant and was taken by her Father (Elisi's Grandfather) from the horse into his truck where Elisi was born), says if we truly believe we are connected to all forms of life, then using pain and violence to control a horse is not in alignment with right relationship, even if it occurs amongst her own people, many of whom she says still use a bit, whips and spurs- devices Tabernaberry advocates against and trains and rides without.



Native American horse trainer Rod Rondeaux working with student to gentle mustang colt. Photo: Red Horse Nation

“The traditional values of my Grandmother taught us to walk in the world in balance and harmony; to always be aware of how you move through the world. I ask myself how am I going behave when I leave this room? Just because a person may sit on the back of a horse and horses are part of our culture doesn't mean justify using pain and violence to control. People would bring my mother and Grandmother horses that were treated badly and they would take care of them, even sleeping in the barns with them and it was the only kindness that they knew. When I saw Carlos, I saw my Mother,” she says, adding that Grandmother Margaret has helped to take the meaning of this journey with the horses and Tabernaberry, to a whole other level.



Australian Horseman Carlos Tabernaberry with his rescued Brumby, 'Nankali' on his lap. Photo: Marty Schiel

Today, at age 63, [Grandmother Margaret](#) continues to ride and is not at all worried about doing so on Mustangs although [Tabernaberry](#) asserts it is *his* responsibility to make sure everyone is safe. He hopes to be working with [Rondeaux](#) to gentle the Mustangs prior to the ride. If [Tabernaberry](#) has any concerns, it is the bond he feels will be created with the Mustangs through such an undertaking, which is not out of character. He has regularly helped rescue and gentle Brumbies, Australia's wild horses, with the Save The Brumbies organization and has adopted one himself named 'Nankali', whom he has raised since she was captured at six-months of age during a government culling operation in the Northern Territory of Australia.

"I'll be pretty attached to these horses (the Mustangs) by the end of the ride. It will be hard to part with them. If I could, I would bring one home (to Australia) – that would be a dream, to have a Mustang. Although I wouldn't expect it to happen either."

According to [Suzi Landolphi](#), co-founder of [Red Horse Nation](#), Mustangs are the best horse for the journey and for the humans.



Red Horse Nation co-founder, Suzi Landolphi with Native American student gentling Mustang. Photo: Courtesy of Red Horse Nation

“Wild horses know how to survive and thrive and haven’t been weakened by us (humans), therefore they are healthier. Humans take horses, pen them, scar them emotionally and wonder why they get sick and have behavioral issues. I won’t even get into racehorses. Like kids, when you get back to the basics and stay connected to them, give them good food, they have a lot to teach us on how to stay strong.”

In addition to [Grandmother Margaret](#), [Elisi](#) and [Tabernaberi](#), [Rondeaux](#) and Landolphi, other riders and/or support persons will include [Juan Villarreal](#), Lipan Apache, founder of [Sacred Wind Earth Teachings](#), an outdoor awareness and wilderness education organization, [Rick Berry](#), Scott-Irish/Cherokee, founder of [Four Elements Earth Education](#), a nature-based education organization, and Kathleen McGary, an Equine Facilitated Learning instructor through [Epona Quest](#).

Some of the sites they will be visiting include Red Clay, Tennessee, ceremonial cave sites, Fort Reno, Oklahoma; Turkey Springs, Punished Woman’s Fork; Sand Creek, Colorado, Fort Robinson, Nebraska; the giving hill, Noaha’-vose; Greasy Grass (Little Big Horn) and Lame Deer, Montana. The Horses arrival, after Part I of the journey, at Lame Deer is scheduled for July 20, 2012, to join with [Grandmother Margaret](#) as she hosts the 11th gathering of the [International Council of Thirteen Indigenous Grandmothers](#).

[Elisi](#) and the horses after Part II, will join with [Villarreal](#) and [Sacred Wind Earth Teachings](#) in Alice, Texas, to collectively continue their healing work with families and youth through traditional values and the Way of the Horse. They hope to also establish this as a U.S. center from which [Tabernaberi](#) can share his knowledge and offer affordable equine training.

“If we want to see changes, first of all we need to be in peace inside ourselves, and then we need to be patient with the ones that have not yet arrived in that place of peace.”

- Grandmother Margaret Behan

Special thanks to Grandmother Margaret for the interview and Noqah Elisi for her superb effort in providing WHJ with historical facts and information.