**How does healing happen?**

By Paula Palmer and Aya Medrud

The Restorative Justice movement teaches us that everyone involved in a crime or injustice – the victims, the perpetrators, and the community of people whose lives are touched and altered – are all in need of healing and must be involved in the healing process.

This year, the One Action One Boulder project has pointed to a gaping wound in the Boulder Valley, a wound that goes back a century and a half and echoes back even farther to the 15h century. We don’t want to think about it because it makes good people feel bad. Still, there’s no denying it: we all live on land stolen from the Arapaho and Cheyenne people, and we are all unconscious beneficiaries of the swindle. We have a need for healing and a role to play in it.

As Margaret Coel recounts in her book, Chief Left Hand (this year’s pick for the public library’s One Book One Boulder program), most of the Eastern Slope of Colorado Territory extending into Kansas and Wyoming was recognized as Cheyenne and Arapaho land in the 1851 Treaty of Ft. Laramie. Boulder Valley was the winter home of Chief Left Hand’s band of Arapahos. But when gold was discovered, white people invaded Colorado in the tens of thousands, the Ft. Laramie treaty was quickly forgotten, and the Arapaho and Cheyenne leaders realized that their small bands could never prevail over the astonishingly limitless white invasion. They sought peace and in November 1864 led their peoples to the banks of Sand Creek, under the protection of the First Colorado Cavalry stationed at Ft. Lyon in southeastern Colorado.

Today Sand Creek is a National Historic Site commemorating the horrific massacre there of 160 unarmed Cheyenne and Arapaho women, children, and elders, who frantically waved the U.S. flag and white flags as they were gunned down. The massacre was carried out by the First Colorado Cavalry and Col. John Chivington’s all-volunteer Third Colorado Cavalry, including a company from Boulder. Historian Tom Thomas told an audience at the Native American Rights Fund last week that the gruesome killing and depraved mutilation of people’s bodies that occurred at Sand Creek are unparalleled in US military history. Reports of the slaughter horrified the nation and a Congressional investigation condemned the massacre, but no one was punished. Colorado landmarks honor the perpetrators: Evans, Chivington, Downing, Nichols.

Cheyenne and Arapaho warriors who survived the Sand Creek Massacre fought back hard for more than a decade, but their peoples were eventually banished from Colorado. Today their descendants live in Montana (Northern Cheyenne), Wyoming (Northern Arapaho) and Oklahoma (Southern Cheyenne and Arapaho). Colorado is remembered as a place of betrayal, horror, loss, and grief.

How does healing happen? The Arapaho and Cheyenne people themselves initiated a healing process fourteen years ago, led by the beloved Northern Cheyenne elder, LaForce Lee Lonebear, "Aneohe Ohtamehnestse," who passed away in September of this year. Lonebear’s ancestor, Chief White Antelope, was one of the Cheyenne chiefs killed at Sand Creek. This month, over the Thanksgiving holiday, young Cheyenne and Arapaho runners will complete a 170-mile Spiritual Healing Run/Walk from the Sand Creek Massacre site to Denver, in honor of LaForce Lee Lonebear. This is how they describe the Run:

“The Sand Creek Massacre Spiritual Healing Run/Walk is a prayer. [It] is not a race. [It] is a commemoration for the victims and survivors of the massacre, and for healing ancestral homelands. [It] is led by an Eagle staff representing prayers of the spiritual leaders who had a vision of healing and reconciliation for the descendants of those killed at the Sand Creek Massacre site and for the future generations.“

Through ceremony, remembrance, prayer, honoring, and running, the Cheyenne and Arapaho peoples are healing. What does healing look like for those of us who have benefited from these historic injustices? It is for each of us to answer this question.

The roots of our privilege harken back to the time of the Crusades and the colonization of the New World, when Catholic popes Clement VI, Eugenius IV, Nicholas V, Alexander VI, and Leo X, among others, issued papal bulls authorizing the annihilation of non-Christian peoples and the appropriation of their lands. Their proclamations became known as the Doctrine of Discovery. Law professor Robert A. Williams (Lumbee) traces the origins of the Doctrine of Discovery to “a language of racism and religious and cultural intolerance which regards indigenous peoples as savage, backwards, and inferior, and therefore an obstacle to progress and development of a superior form of civilization.” The Doctrine of Discovery was embedded in our legal system during colonial times, and was used to justify the extermination of Native peoples. Attorney Walter Echo-Hawk (Pawnee) finds US court rulings as recent as 2005 that cite this Doctrine in order to deny Indian peoples’ land rights.

Healing may ask us to rout out every trace of the Doctrine of Discovery from our psyches and our institutions. This year, the World Council of Churches issued a call to all denominations to renounce the Doctrine of Discovery and advocate for Indigenous peoples’ rights.

And here in Colorado, the exiled Cheyenne and Arapaho peoples invite us to return with them for healing ceremonies at Sand Creek on Nov. 21, pray with them in spirit during their three-day Spiritual Healing Run, and honor their young runners when they arrive in Denver. There will be a candlelight vigil and an official welcoming by the Mayor’s office at the Capitol. More information is available at [www.one-action.org](http://www.one-action.org) and[www.facebook.com/sand.creek.90](http://www.facebook.com/sand.creek.90)

As one step toward healing, the Boulder Friends Meeting (Quakers) is asking for donations to help cover costs of transportation, lodging, and food for the Cheyenne and Arapaho runners and elders who will be coming from Montana, Wyoming, and Oklahoma. To contribute, please write a check to Boulder Friends Meeting. In the memo line, write Spiritual Healing Run. Mail to: Spiritual Healing Run, Boulder Friends Meeting, P.O. Box 4363, Boulder CO 80306. Donations must be received by Nov. 16.

We can’t change history, but we can seek healing and build honest, healthy relationships in our time, in this place.

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