



Comanche Nation Fair "The Camp"

ture, in Lawton, Oklahoma. She reached an educational milestone, graduating with honors from the University of Oklahoma with a Bachelor's of Business Administration in May 2000. Marla won the coveted "Outstanding Senior — American Indian Award" and landed a job in the Tulsa corporate world with a lucrative salary. At that point in her life, she was independent, had her own car and apartment in an upscale area, and worked an ideal job — on top of the world by anyone's standards! But on July 13, 2000, she stopped at a car wash on the way home from work, stepped out of her car, and a gun was pointed in her face. She was told to hand over her keys, run and not look back or she would be shot. She did!



A Buffalo in the Wichita Mountains Wildlife Refuge.

"In one instant my life was changed." It was this event that caused her to realize that, although the same corporate opportunities might not exist in her own hometown, the shelter of her family did. Almost immediately, she moved back home to regroup, heal, and assess her situation. And more importantly, "be back home where the family and culture is," she describes. Almost three years later, she is months away from earning her Masters of Business Administration degree and her goals are the same: to reassure kids that, "we come from a beautiful place." Too often, we fail to recognize the beauty of our own natural surroundings or what American Indians refer to as the "sacredness of place." For Native people the true test of living is being able to live in harmony with nature; to see it as a source of life and livelihood but also, "as a source of our essential spiritual being." (Cajete, 2000)

The Wichita Mountains are in the backyard of present day Comanche culture and the location of the Comanche Nation headquarters. The Wichita Mountains Wildlife Refuge was established in 1901 and managed by the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service and stretches

across 59,020 acres of the last remnant of untilled "mixed grass prairie." There is an open range of buffalo, elk, deer and Texas longhorn cattle. Marla's 2003 calendar shows the beauty, wildlife, and American Indian culture that still exists in our everyday surroundings. For example, images from her calendar include the Comanche mustang herd, prairie dogs, an inquisitive doe, and a herd of buffalo grazing in the prairie grasses and wildflowers.

"Giftedness" in the arts seems almost second nature for American Indians. It is evident in dance or performing arts, visual arts, poetry, photography, or cultural lifestyles. There seems to be a natural assumption that art-making exists as an integral part of the culture. And art can certainly be a healing therapy. The events of Marla's life shaped her willingness to explore her creative side. A close relationship with her Comanche



A former Comanche Nation Princess.

grandmother, Rose Nauni continues to be her creative inspiration. Rose Nauni camps at Walters, Oklahoma,