



Chief Geoffrey Standing Bear

Principal Chief of the Osage Nation

Chapter 1 – Introduction

Announcer: Osage Chief Geoffrey Standing Bear and a delegation from the Osage nation attended the world premiere of the film *Killers of the Flower Moon*, at the Cannes Film Festival May 20, 2023.

Voices of Oklahoma interviewed Chief Standing Bear when he returned.

He talked about viewing the film while sitting next to one of the film's stars, Robert DeNiro, the reaction from the audience, the reference to the 1921 race massacre and the menu for the festival dinner.

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Chapter 2 – 14:02 The Film Festival

John Erling (JE): Good morning, Chief.

Geoffrey Standing Bear (CSB): Good morning, John. How are you today?

JE: I am fine. I'm calling you from our offices here at Voices of Oklahoma, and I'm talking to you in your office there in Pawhuska by phone. Your experience with the *Killers of the Flower Moon* – The Cannes Festival, who was invited to the festival? I know your wife, Julie, was with you. Was there a bigger contingent of Osage?

CSB: Yes. Apple asked Scorsese, and he gave a list. On that list was Yancey Redcorn, and he was able to bring one guest – which is his sister, Maura. And Yancey plays Chief Boncastle and does a good job in the film.

Scorsese... he asked for another Redcorn – a cousin of Yancey – plays a medicine man to be there, and he brought his son. And then there was our newspaper editor, Shannon Shaw. But I think, I'm not sure if she was with Apple or the press group at Cannes. And then there was a few others. Of course, Chad Renfro is our ambassador, and we thought “ We could not have pulled this off without him.” And Chad brought a guest.

So it wasn't a large group – but there was a group, that's correct.

JE: You walked the red carpet, and that seemed to be a big thing.

CSB: I knew you were going to ask about that.

JE: (laughing) What is that all about?

CSB: Okay, well, so here's what happened: so here's the hotel, okay? This is like a five-star hotel. Thank you, Apple.

So the Apple handler for each group of us has Apple people who, like secret service agents, have earbuds, talking to each other. And you have to be at a certain place to catch this limo, because there are thousands of people outside. They're looking to get selfies or photos of their favorite stars, et cetera.

Well, most of the people at Cannes are not the stars, but everyone there is industry-connected or press, one way or another – or the movie. And so we're being shuttled in these long limos, and our limo pops up at a certain moment, and then get into the limo and it was just like in the movies. You had to push yourself through the crowd, because all the people are taking photographs thinking we must be somebody or why are we coming out of the hotel using the limo?

We get into the limo, and we go down – I didn't find all the different limos – to the theater, which is a couple blocks away. And there's the red carpet. And we all get out, and everyone's standing around, not quite sure what's going to happen next, but we are confident the Apple team will guide us through this.

And I am putting my blanket on – put on to symbolize what we do, our people. I look up, and my wife Julie is with Chad Rimfro and they're being told to walk down the red carpet, Julie dressed in her Osage clothes. And so there they go, and Chad is such an expert at this. He goes down there, he stops, turns, and a hundred cameras take their photo, then he walks down a little more and they both turn to the left, and there are more photos.

And then they just do this and go up the formidable staircase that goes up. And then they ask somebody else to take off, and I'm sitting there, and I'm just like, "Well," I say, "Yancy, if I get a little unsteady or anything, I want to reach out to one of you big guys, and hold your shoulder or something, because that looks pretty imposing." Next thing I know, someone said, "Chief, okay, just go."

I was, "Go, huh?" And so I started walking, and I thought: "Well, should I stop, and turn to the right, let everyone take a photo?" I said, "Well, they're not here to see me, they're here to see everybody else." So I just thought, "I should just keep it simple. I should not fall down. I should just keep my focus on the stairway that's up here, and just walk down the red carpet, and get up to that stairway."

And I really thought I was something really great to accomplish all that, until I saw Thelma Schoonover, she's the movie editor, and she's won several Academy Awards for editing. And Thelma's in her 80s, and she just comes walking down that red carpet, like she does this every week. And she's just happy as can be. And then she just pops her way up those steps. Thelma is just an incredible, incredible person, which is a great thrill – is getting to know people like her and Marty.

And I got to sit next to Robert De Niro for the movie, that was fun. And all the stars, they're people. And as soon as you get to know them as people, they have their personalities. And some of them are very reserved, and some are very outgoing. And it's just their personalities.

JE: Then you had dinners, you sat next to Robert De Niro, and he spoke Osage to you, did he? Was he pretty good?

CSB: Oh my gosh, well, during the movie, the Osage language is spoken throughout. And De Niro is one of the best. And he had some of our language teachers, of course, work with him, and they told me what a serious student he was, day in, day out. So we're watching the movie, and I was sitting right next to him. And there was this one scene, he goes in, and just talks in all this Osage, and it was so well said. It was just impressive. And I nudged him, and gave him a thumbs up. That was nice, I was really impressed. But they all did a really good job.

JE: Was it, at times, hard to watch?

CSB: No, well, I've seen it before, okay? And we've heard this story, although we don't really make it part of our conversation, you know, all our lives. It's something we just don't dwell on. But I can tell you, none of my direct descendants were murdered, but I couldn't help but think about those Osages who I know very well, and I see them sometimes every day, particularly because we're all here during our ceremonies, right now, during June.

How would it feel to see my grandfather or grandmother on the big screen, being shot like that? I just imagine I would be hurt, shocked, raged. I find, when I first saw it in New York, it was just depressing, that part. And what was shocking, of course, was by design, I think, is how in the movie it reflects actual events. Everyone just took it – everyone, the non-Osage, the undertakers, the people who had something to gain financially from it – regarding how they considered it normal, almost, to kill an Osage, and then through the legal process, or the anti-illegal process, both working in tandem to take the wealth of that Osage and to put it in their own hands or in the hands of someone they can control. That made me angry, of course, but we've known this forever.

But I don't have any direct ancestors that I can imagine for those that do, it would be very upsetting.

JE: The cast members, Leonardo DiCaprio, Lily Gladstone, and others were there. So when they viewed this, was this the first time they had seen it in its full final production?

CSB: Well, we saw it in New York, Leonardo DiCaprio sat with us in a screening room, so I know he's seen it. But as far as the other actors, I did not ask. I was told, though – as we were heading to the after party – that Jesse Plymouth, who does a great job as Tom Wise, the head of the FBI team, he had not seen it. And he cried for 10 minutes after it was over. That's what I was told by people I was waiting in line to get back in the limo, and no one said anything else about anybody else. So that's what I know.

JE: As I recall, you said your niece is in the film, is that true?

CSB: Well, a lot of our nieces and nephews are in the film. And I have more than one niece, relative, my wife, some of my wife's relatives are in there, some of our friends. I like to tell people, although you see Osages all through this as extras and other tribes, that there are a lot of Osages behind the camera, working with world-class costume makers, Academy Award winning costume makers, Academy Award winning cinematographers, having our people behind the scenes, people building sets, people learning how to, for lighting, and building the sets. There's only a lot of our people who are behind the camera.

JE: The whole story takes place in Fairfax, and since I talked to you last time – I was in Fairfax actually a week ago – and I talked to Joe and Carol Connor, publishers of the Fairfax Chief newspaper. And let me just tell you the impactful moment that I had.

I stood in front of the Tall Chief Theater, and of course, Joe and Carol have that memorial in there, with storyboards talking about it. And Carol took me out on the main street, and she says, points across the street to where Bill Hale worked in a bank, then pointed to the next corner building made of stone, upstairs where the Dr. Schoen brothers worked, and then the pool hall upstairs next to Bill Hale's place of work, the Cowboys, and then what is now an empty lot where the mortuary was Mathis Mortuary.

And she said “All he needed to do, Bill Hale, was to walk out of his place of business, walk over to the Schoen brothers and say, we're going to poison so-and-so, go up the pool hall steps and go find a cowboy if he wanted them to kill somebody, maybe give him \$500, and then walk across to the

mortuary and say, now to mutilate this body or whatever so that forensics won't know what happened to that body.”

She said he could do that within five minutes, and it just got me in my guts, the only way to say it.

CSB: Well, and don't forget how the court system at the time, the state court system, and the Federal Bureau of Indian Affairs had to approve the transfer of those properties, those oil and gas royalties, headright interest, and land to the people selected by Hale and people like Hale. And so as David Graham points out in his incredible, excellent book, it was a matter of who was not complicit, and the role of the federal government and the state cannot be ignored in this.

And Squintezzi did not spend a lot of time on that, but I'm sitting right now in the building that was built in 1922 for the Bureau of Indian Affairs. And in this very building, a lot of these bad deeds were carried out to assist those who were murdered by people in this very building.

JE: Yeah, and of course I was with you in that building.

Chapter 3 – 8:23

A Standing Ovation

John Erling (JE): So the film is three and a half hours long. For some – and we've all been talking about this of course – and by the way, I've got to tell you, I can't believe all the people who have read the book.

It'll come up in my conversation, or I'll ask people, “Have you read the book?” Lots of people have read this book, and I'm telling them to read the second time, because I am right now, and you now have the full story in your head. But the film is three and a half hours long, and so some people are wondering, “Wow, is that too long?” How did you feel about that?

Chief Standing Bear (CSB): It didn't seem like that long at all. Interestingly, he, Scorsese, and Thelma Spinola, the editor, have wound other bits of that

history into this film that are not so much in the book. Primarily the Tulsa race massacre is discussed in the film, but showing some of the news reports – that isn't something that the book does not emphasize, but I thought it was a nice touch.

JE: Yes.

CSB: He downplays the investigation part a bit just to save time, because if he did increase the time for Jesse Plymouth and other really great actors that were on the FBI story here, we would have had two films. Yeah, easily. Another hour, maybe. And at the end, he uses a technique to sum up what happened after the arrest of Ernest Burkhardt and Hale.

He uses a recreation of a radio show to sum up the results of that. And then something about Molly Burkhardt at the end. So you can see how this could have easily been another hour or more, and that means two films. The movie is not a fast movie. It's more involved in the relationship between Ernest, the nephew of Hale, married to Molly, the full-blooded Osage.

So it's a more introspective film to me. Although there is violence, violence is not the theme of this. The theme is the relationship between Ernest and Molly. And also, as Scorsese previewed for us, his approach is to show the relationship between the outside world and the Osage and how that relationship developed into one of trust and betrayal of the trust.

Same description at a different level with Molly, with her trust of her husband, Ernest, the son of DiCaprio, and the horrible betrayal of that trust. I mean, they have children. Were they going to be next? Her? Was she going to be next? Deprived of the children of their mother? That is a deeper emotional movie, I believe, than it is previously.

JE: They talked about this nine-minute standing ovation. What was that feeling like and had to bring an emotion to you?

CSB: Well, it could have been longer. The head of the festival came up to Scorsese and handed him the – he started talking into the microphone, and then handed Scorsese the microphone. That's when the crowd

stopped. When the film ended, they were in the credits, there was the ovation.

But the way he had chosen to end the film, the last scene, were Osages dancing in a traditional dress and with a traditional song. So as they went into the credits, the music was continuing. Some of our current singers had composed. Some of the crowd started clapping in beat with the music. The traditional – not traditional – the traditional style. The new song, but a traditional style – which was really great. But that's after nine minutes ahead of the film festival. And of course, Scorsese, the mic, and then he started talking. And that's when they stopped. It would have continued, I know that.

JE: And rave reviews, Rolling Stone said, Scorsese takes on David Grahn's bestseller about a murder epidemic among the Osage, turns it into a masterpiece. Vanity Fair review said, as *Killers of the Flower Moon* seeps in, it shocks, resounds, and haunts. That great word – a choice of words. And so the reviews go on and on about this.

CSB: It'll make you think. When I ask people, "What do you think? Osages and non-Osages. What do you think of that?" They say, you know, "Can't get it off my mind." It's not, well I wouldn't say shocking, unless you could never imagine that people are capable of such things. You know, I practiced law for almost 35 years before I became chief some years ago. People ask me when I stepped back from that practice, what did I learn in three and a half decades? And I tell them, I learned that people are capable of doing anything.

And that shows up in this movie, so I don't consider it shocking. I consider it very disappointing. You have to keep your head together and say this should never happen again. Or people will do this. And I know that, I hate to put this on the record, but I'm doing it. And I'm not being cynical, because it took me about two years though, in this job as principal chief, to really shake that out and put it into perspective. And to know that there are so many more good people than bad people.

And there's so many more good things in life than bad things. But I know when you're in the courtroom, doing that kind of work – be it law

enforcement or legal – you see that people can do terrible things to each other. But thank God there's good people.

JE: I interviewed Eva Unterman, a Holocaust survivor, and she survived Auschwitz. And she called what was going on there a killing machine, a killing business. And that could be applied to this story as well.

CSB: On a smaller scale, yes. Isn't that horrible? And that's where this kind of activity and thinking and feelings lead, is to these kinds of horrors. And it's happened all through human history. And it's happening now. And it will happen in the future. So I think we're all under a duty to work together to stop it.

JE: Yeah.

Chapter 4 – 5:33

Oscar Talk

John Erling (JE): And then there are Oscar talk and Oscar mentions – and you probably have heard that. And Lily Gladstone maybe getting an Oscar nomination. What have you heard?

Chief Standing Bear (CSB): Well, she's been here during our June ceremonies. We dance during June over – about half of June we're actually preparing and getting clothes on, dancing, or getting our grandkids ready. And then other times we're having family dinners. So that's a time for us. And she has – here at family dinners and having a good time.

And so we're glad to see her. But we do talk among ourselves about how wonderful it would be to have her at least nominated, winning would be outstanding. She stands with DiCaprio to stay on the same scene with that incredibly talented actor. DiCaprio, I think this is his best acting job. I saw Titanic and I've seen, you know, Gangs of New York, he did Revenant. I think that to me was my favorite, what he did in that movie.

And oh, by the way, some of the people that are the cameras that worked

on *Revenant* worked on this movie. I think this was Leo DiCaprio's best acting job. And Robert De Niro has a much larger role in this. He is very much involved throughout the movie. Those three should get some recognition at the Academy Awards.

JE: In our previous interview, you told me you were a 16-year-old boy when you drove your grandmother from luncheons with her friends and you felt that they had been telling stories about this. And I know you became chief, which is a major, major accomplishment, but then to think that this 16-year-old boy eventually walked the red carpet of the very story that your grandmother and her friends were talking about.

CSB: If you haven't had a chance, go check out – I think it's on the internet – the story of the Osages – there were six Osages that went from Ark Homes in Missouri to France in the late 1820s.

And they wandered around France for years until the good people of the city of Montauban took up a collection and paid their passage back to the Osage country. A good relationship with Southern France, Montauban and the surrounding areas.

And that was discussed when we were over there, how many of us carry French names or influence. My middle name is spelled M-O-N-G-R-A-I-N, but it's pronounced not mon-grain – some Osages, one branch does that, but my side of the family calls it mow-grain. We have Revolets, we have Chautauqua, well, I guess they're related to the Cherokee Chautauqua.

We have Bollingers, Terrians, Revolvers. We have a lot of explorer and trader families.

And so when I used to talk, and hopefully I'll talk again to the people of Missouri, I always say, "Well, you wanna know where the French explorers went? Well, that's us." I'd say, over half of our tribe is French in one way or another. That was discussed while we were hanging out in Southern France. And in fact, Colleen Redhorn, who plays the medicine man, he mentioned that when he was getting ready to pray for us all. Because he actually is a man of prayer in our tribe.

He mentioned how we returned to France. And now here we are after this period of, since 1830s when our people were here before. So I thought that was an interesting connection that they mentioned.

JE: Absolutely. I like what you said, hanging out in Southern France. You were hanging out in the French Riviera. Such a beautiful area.

CSB: Well, you know, John, I didn't even get to the beach because they had such a tight schedule. I saw it. It was like 50 yards away, the water. The yachts there were – I was told how much some of those cost. I don't know if it was true or not. It was unbelievable. The people that were participating and do participate, it's just, I'd say it's a different world.

It's lovely. I mean, the bread there –bread baskets, and croissants, and butter. My gosh. And fruit plates. There's a lot of that going on. Really nice. But I was just there for a few days with my lovely wife. We saw a little bit of that world.

Chapter 5 – 6:20

Dinner is Served

John Erling (JE): Okay, one detail that might – people be interested in – when you had dinner. Like when you were with DeNiro and the others having dinner. What did they serve you?

Chief Standing Bear (CSB): Well, that's interesting. When we went to dinner, I need to also say that Lieutenant Governor Matt Pennell and some of his teams were participants in some of the festivities. And the way they handle that is plates are incredible food or salads first and they share off that plate and that's passed around and it goes all the way through the entrees and desserts.

After, while their people are having dessert, people at different tables start getting up and start going to other tables and I took it as something that they do that people that go to those kinds of dinners and they sit there, they visit, and people start just moving around table to table. But it's not

like they bring a plate and you just eat and a waitress comes by – or a waiter comes by – and picks it up. It's they pass around, everybody passes around the plate and you take what you want and then they eventually pick it up.

I don't know what to say about the food. I mean, the food was like I never had before. It was really good. Really good food.

JE: They serve beef or chicken or what?

CSB: Both. And if you wanted to be a vegan, they have that option too. So when they pass around these various plates, you have your choice. Take salad and that's it or you can eat vegetables. Vegetables were great.

JE: Well, I'm just pleased that you're talking to us about it and the wonderful experience and the attention that it will bring to the Osage Nation. And I'm sure you're happy about that because people probably didn't know about it, but there'll be curious minds.

CSB: I told – when I got back and said, okay, everybody in Southern France, they're all talking French. And I kept hearing the word Osage. Then I kept hearing Fairfax, Gray Horse, the folks. As we go through the award system – heading to the Academy Awards – everybody is looking at you.

And we need to find a way to fund your initiative. And I'm going to ask the Osage legislature, the Osage Congress, to put some money into our Osage Foundation so people here can apply for grants to develop this community. Because as you saw, John, the community has a need of development in an organized, cultural, historical way.

And also the Osage Nation, our government, has purchased, recently, a plot of land. And our intention is to reconstruct the train station that was during the filming here in Pahaska. And it says Fairfax on it. And when you see the movie, you will see that train station has an important role in the movie.

And so we want to rebuild it and reinforce it because it is built as a prop. Reinforce it and place it on this new property in Fairfax, assist the

community in their efforts. Osage Nation will not be creating an area or redoing the town, but we have that property and another where we can sit in – with what Joe Connors has called a theater and hopefully he'll get a grant. He's already got some because we also, away from the main street, are working with the children and family of

Maria and Marjorie Tallchief – great ballerinas – to acquire their old home up on a hill on the west side of town on a hill there – the Tallchief Mansion and renovate it.

People already coming to Fairfax. Lieutenant Governor Pinnell has been there and he wants to work with the community as well. So we have the state wanting to work with them, the people there want to work, the nation wants to work together.

They can really, really change for the better – that community and also make Oklahoma a better tourist destination because we have that and Redrummond over here in Pawhuska, 25 miles away. We're building a new casino, hotel, our museum, the oldest tribal museum in the country. We have that here. We want to expand that significantly. We have a lot of plans here. We're carrying them out.

JE: You said that you bought land in Fairfax to place the train station there?

CSB: Yeah, it's the train station that appears in the movie. And so Apple allowed us to work with them on taking it apart, but it's in storage.

JE: Great. That's great for Fairfax and for you. And I think it's honorable that you and Pawhuska will invest in Fairfax as well. So we should say the film will be released exclusively in theaters October 6th and then streaming globally on Apple TV+. And of course, all of us can hardly wait to see it, for sure. So, thank you, Chief. I appreciate your willingness to do this follow up after your great experience. And we obviously will let you know what we thought about the film.

CSB: Sure, John. Well, call any time. I really enjoy talking with you.

JE: Thank you, Chief. Appreciate it. Thank you.

CSB: Bye.

JE: All right. Well, see you.

CSB: Yep.

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