

While researching this book, however, I came across an intriguing photograph in the pages of *Indian Affairs*, the monthly newsletter of the Association on American Indian Affairs, which offers an alternative vision of reconciliation. The photo shows a gathering of people in a courtroom in the state of Michigan sometime in 1978 or 1979. Richard and Judith Nelson, a white couple, stand on the left with Edward Walksnice, a Northern Cheyenne boy they have just adopted through a special session of the Northern Cheyenne Tribal Court held in Escanaba, Michigan. Edward Walksnice holds the hand of his mother, Loretta Walksnice, who sits in a chair in the center of the picture. Terence Wallace Nelson, an older adopted Indian child, and Blake Walksnice, Edward's older brother, stand together on the other side of Ms. Walksnice. Northern Cheyenne social service providers and courtroom officials stand in the back behind the adoptee and his two families. The camera has frozen each participant in the moment, and we are left to wonder at their feelings. Edward, aged eight, smiles broadly, and his adoptive parents look relieved. Edward's brother Blake grins, but his new adoptive brother stares unflinchingly at the photographer. Is he thinking about his own path from his Indian family to the Nelsons, and how it differed from this unusual day in court? Ms. Walksnice clutches Edward's hand with both of hers. Her tentative smile conveys a deep sorrow but a resigned acceptance. Marie Sanchez, the chief judge of the tribal court, smiles warmly in the background, but the other tribal officials look on somberly.

The accompanying article explains that the Montana Department of Social Services had removed Edward and placed him with the Nelsons at their home in Michigan. The Nelsons filed to adopt Edward in a Michigan court, and the Northern Cheyennes challenged the jurisdiction of the state court, as the recently enacted ICWA now allowed them to do. The white adoptive couple then did something unexpected; they "voluntarily agreed that the Tribal Court was the proper forum for deciding the issue." A Michigan state court judge allowed the Northern Cheyenne Tribal Court the use of the courtroom for this special session. The Tribal Court heard testimony from all involved as well as from a child psychiatrist who examined the child and the adoptive family. "The Tribal Court decided," according to the article, "that the adoption should be allowed in accordance with Northern Cheyenne traditional custom and practice. Thus the adoption was granted, but there was no termination of parental



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Fig. 15. The Northern Cheyenne Tribal Court approves the adoption of Edward Walksnice, Escanaba, Michigan, ca. 1979. (Front, left to right): Richard Nelson, Judith Nelson, Edward Walksnice, Loretta Walksnice, Terence Wallace Nelson, and Blake Walksnice. (Back, left to right): Mike Bear Comes Out, probation counselor of the tribal court; Dolores Underwood, family counselor of the Cheyenne Home; Marie Sanches, chief judge of the tribal court; and Margaret Shoulderblade, juvenile clerk. From "Tribal Adoption Granted in Unique Court Session," *Indian Affairs* 98 (Fall-Winter 1978-79): 3. Courtesy and permission of the Association on American Indian Affairs.

rights of the natural family, as is done in non-Indian adoptions, and the Walksnice family will continue to have a relationship with Edward."<sup>1</sup> In a sense, the Northern Cheyennes adopted the Nelsons as part of Edward's extended family as much as the Nelsons adopted Edward.

Here was an American Indian vision of reconciliation. It was built on respect, not contempt, for Indian ways of life. It rested on recognition of Indian rights, not their abrogation. It sought to sustain rather than sever family connections. It furthered the survival and persistence of Indian peoples rather than their elimination. It was based on mutuality, not just the interests of white adoptive couples or a state power that wished to terminate Indians.