

German scholar lives among Navajos out of affinity for Indian life

GALLUP, N.M. (AP) - The sandy-haired boy sat in the public library in Berlin, swallowing whole every book he could find about America. The books he liked best told of Indians. Indians rode horses, raised animals, lived romantic, adventurous lives. The boy's life, on the other hand, was spare and lonely. His father had abandoned the family, and his mother and stepfather were strict as stone tablets. As he read, the boy dreamed that one day he might visit America, perhaps meet some Indians, maybe even ride a horse. In 1961, when he was 17, the boy left Germany and came to the United States - to live. When he got off the plane in New York City and saw no bows and arrows, he asked, "Where are all the Indians?" The boy, Peter Handeland, is now 60 years old and he is talking to a classroom of students. Handeland's students this evening are mostly Navajo, and

he is their German instructor at the Gallup branch of the University of New Mexico. If you wonder what a Navajo might gain from learning German, you've never been in a Peter Handeland class. He clearly is the center of attention, studied as closely as a list of vocabulary words. The boy who yearned to experience the mysteries of Indians today has become a part of Indians, and they a part of him. "It was my destiny," he likes to say. After English classes in Massachusetts, the German boy, now a young man, enrolled at Texas Lutheran College. Most Indians were out West, he quickly realized. In Texas he read an article in Life magazine about a blizzard in New Mexico that left hundreds of Navajos stranded in 6-foot drifts, their livestock lying in the snow like frozen logs. "That sealed things for me,"

says Handeland. "I would go to New Mexico to live with Navajos." He took a Greyhound bus from San Antonio and arrived in Gallup in August 1970. It was not easy being a stranger in a strange land. But Handeland's kindness, his strong work ethic and great curiosity quickly won him fans. Most important, Navajos detected from him a genuine interest in their lives. He didn't seem to want anything at all from them except to try to understand. One day a Gallup High School student, a Navajo, asked Handeland if he'd like to visit his home. Eyes widening, Handeland said yes. The Hudson Ranch is located in Tse Yah To, about 20 miles west of Gallup. "One look," says Handeland, "and I saw the land I had read about and dreamed of as a boy."

He returned the following weekend, and the one after that. The Hudsons - Tom and Dorothy and their nine kids - introduced him to herding sheep and cattle. They took him to a rodeo and fed him mutton stew and fry bread. They even put him atop a horse. After a while, the Hudson boys asked Handeland if he wanted to live with them on the ranch. He moved into a hogan that had no electricity or running water. Each morning he rose at 5:30 to haul water for the family. After classes in Gallup, he came back to ride, round up animals, chop wood. Late at night, he did his lesson plans by lantern in the hogan. "Being out there built up my stamina," he says. "It made me more sensitive to Navajos." After four years on the ranch, Handeland moved on. Anxious to teach on the reservation, he took a job at Tohatchi High

School, where he stayed two years. From there he went to the College of Ganado, in Arizona, then for 24 years he taught at Window Rock High School, introducing students to verb conjugation and German potato salad. Four years ago, he retired to Gallup, where he had started. He took an adjunct teaching post at Gallup-UNM. He became Herr Professor. One recent afternoon after class, Handeland traveled to the Hudson Ranch. He hadn't been to Tse Yah To in some time and he wanted to see old friends. "It still looks the same," he says as he peers into the log and mud hogan where he lived in the early '70s. The hogan is now a guest cottage, used mostly for storage. When Handeland lived here, he witnessed a Blessing Way, a spirit-lifting ceremony, and he learned the role of a medicine man. When the Hudsons told him of the Long Walk, he told

them of the Holocaust. "He was such an influence here," Anthony Hudson said. "He made me feel comfortable about the outside world. I hadn't spent much time around a white man. I was about to enter elementary school in Gallup and I was worried. He got me to stop worrying." If life on the Hudson Ranch gave him an education, the years he spent in Window Rock gave him purpose. So many young Navajo men there were without fathers, just as he had been as a boy. In response, Handeland became godfather to a dozen young Navajo males. In turn, his "sons" became devoted to him and remain so. When one of his sons asked Handeland to be godfather to his soon-to-be-born child, Handeland said, "When do I start?" Handeland was there soon after a tiny girl came into the world two years ago in Fort Defiance.

March for unity in Hawaii

HONOLULU (AP) - A unity march through Waikiki on Monday drew some 20,000 Native Hawaiians and their supporters, police said. The marchers - representing various groups and mostly dressed in red T-shirts - called attention to a number of issues they said threaten Native Hawaiian rights, entitlements and benefits. The areas of concern included forced leasehold conversions, a challenge to Kamehameha

Schools' Hawaiians-only admission policy and homelands issues. "Right out from under us, in our own homelands, our lands and our benefits are being stolen from us. And we say, 'No more,'" said Victoria Holt-Takamine, president of Ilio'ulaokalani, a cultural preservation coalition. The marchers set out from Fort DeRussy and walked along Kalakaua Avenue to the Waikiki Shell, where a rally was held.

Chickasaw Nation airing TV ads

ADA, Okla. (AP) - The Chickasaw Nation is airing a series of television ads across the state in an effort to strengthen the tribe's economic position. Although the ads are airing just months before a key vote on a state question on Indian gaming, tribal officials said the ads are designed to uplift tribal members and are not politically motivated. "This is unrelated to any state question," said tribal spokes-

woman Robyn Elliot. "We are looking at how we work with Oklahoma, and this is how we do that on a broad scale." Former Bureau of Indian Affairs head Neal McCaleb and tribal legislator Judy Goforth Parker are among those featured in the spots. Future ads will feature other well-known Chickasaws. McCaleb said the ads are intended to focus on the Ada-based tribe's economic growth and unity.

Tribe works to restore native oysters and culture

SQUAXIN ISLAND, Wash. (AP) - The mud sucks at Brian Allen's hip-boots as he walks across the beach, searching for the elusive Olympia oyster. The tiny, tasty oyster once covered south Puget Sound beaches like a white blanket, and played a starring role in local Indian tribes' diet and economy. But pollution drove the Olympias to the brink of extinction during the 20th century. Now the Squaxin Island Tribe is working to restore Olympias to their rightful dominance, both on the beaches and on their dinner tables. Allen, a tribal shellfish biologist, liked what he saw one morning this summer on the eastern shore of Squaxin Island. "They're all over the place. This is dynamite," he said. The Olympia oysters the tribe planted two years ago have spawned a successful wild oyster bed. But why the fragile, fickle Olympias thrive on one beach and wither on another remains a mystery. For biologists, it's a scientific puzzle. For tribal members, saving the Olympia oysters may be the key to preserving an important part of their culture. Salmon are the iconic animal for Puget Sound tribes. Tribes still celebrate the big yearly runs of salmon from the ocean to the

rivers with ceremonies and feasts. But if salmon are the special guest stars, oysters were the daily bread.



Trading at the River

A Gathering of Native American Businesses & Tribal Enterprises
 Hosted by ONABEN & ATNI-Economic Development Corporation
October 27th - 28th, 2004
 Embassy Suites Portland Airport, Portland, OR
 See www.ONABEN.org
 for registration forms and more information
 Trade Show hosted by the Oregon Native American Chamber of Commerce

Firebusters is coming

October 4th - 8th

Kids - be sure to watch Z21 News at 6 p.m. each night for answers to Buster's questions about fire safety in Central Oregon.

