

Amy Trice “Kootenai Woman Warrior”



Article by Amanda Turner “A Woman Making History”

It was 1974, and what was left of the Idaho Kootenai Tribe now existed in the small of Bonner’s Ferry, population barely 3000, on the panhandle of Idaho and Canada. While checking on the welfare of her people, Amy Trice discovered that one of the tribal elders, suffering perhaps from Dementia had frozen to death in his unheated HUD home. She went inside the man’s home to investigate, “you could look up to the ceiling and see the sky, where he had lit a fire as though still living in his teepee, it was heartbreaking,” she remembers, “he was just totally neglected.” She ventured further to visit a woman plagued by debilitating arthritis and found equally appalling conditions. “I thought somebody’s got to do something and sometimes, that “somebody ends up being you!”

Amy contacted the Bureau of Indian Affairs. “They said it wasn’t worthwhile trying to do anything for us. We were too small.” The once 5000 enrolled members of the Kootenai tribe had diminished to 67 members. Not knowing where to turn, Amy wrote to President Gerald Ford, asking for help. She received no response, but was far from giving up. “If you don’t like the way you’re living,” Amy says, “change it.” In an effort to raise money and improve the basic living conditions for her tribe, Amy rounded up a small group of teenagers, including her son. They stood by the road with signs that read, “Entering Kootenai Reservation, 10-cent toll.”

“We were asking for people to give whatever they could,” Amy says. In one week, they collected more than \$3,000 and made the national news. “I said, ‘We’re going to go to war over this.’” Talk of war, in conjunction with Amy’s letter to the president, garnered the attention the Kootenai’s needed. After three days of what is now considered a peaceful war in Idaho’s history, the United States deeded 12.5 acres to the Kootenai tribe. That was the turning point; the tribe went on to build a health clinic, roads, and eventually a casino and hotel. Today, the Idaho Kootenai’s have more than 2,500 acres and 142 members.

In 2010, filmmaker Sonya Rosario would complete Amy and the Kootenai Tribes story in “Idaho’s Forgotten War,” chronicling Amy Trice’s story, as the first woman in US History to declare “War” on the US Government and live to tell it, in a small town called, Bonner’s Ferry on in 1974. The quest to improve the conditions of the Kootenai tribe in the 1970s is not the only battle that Amy Trice has fought, and won. In the early years of her life, she survived life-threatening pneumonia, tuberculosis, and an accident that left her blind for two and a-half years, all at a time when medical care required traveling 180 miles to an “Indian Hospital.”

“I survived” Amy says, “There is always a plan and reason for your existence, and I know it was for me to get my people a Reservation and make sure that we would all have a home, once again.” Amy and David, her husband of 40 years and her six children from a previous marriage, are a living testament to the love for community can bring. “Keep moving and you’ll get there, I just kept going. One door would slam in my face and I’d just go to the next one. That’s what I tell people, “you can’t give up, your people need you, and they need you now!”