



Luther Standing Bear

Dakota Images

Luther Standing Bear grew up at a time when traditional Sioux life was being eroded by the influence of white culture. In his adult life as an author, actor, and lecturer, Standing Bear became an outspoken critic of federal Indian policy in an attempt to redress the injustices he had witnessed as a youth.

Standing Bear, or Plenty Kills, as he was originally named, was born in the mid-1860s to Wastewin ("Pretty Face") and Standing Bear, who was probably leader of a band of Brulé Sioux on the Rosebud reservation. The younger Standing Bear received a traditional Sioux upbringing, but in 1879, he left the reservation to become one of the first to attend the Carlisle Indian school in Pennsylvania. At school, where his name was changed to Luther, he proved to be an outstanding student during his three-year stay. Upon completing his training as a tinsmith, Luther Standing Bear worked as a department store clerk in Philadelphia until 1884, when he returned to the Rosebud agency as a teaching assistant.

Standing Bear married Nellie DeCory, and in 1891, he moved his family to the Pine Ridge reservation, where he worked as a teacher, rancher, agency clerk, and assistant minister. In 1902, he spent several months in England as an interpreter with Buffalo Bill's Wild West show. Standing Bear became chief of his father's band in 1905, but two years later, when he received his United States citizenship, he commented that he "had been raised higher than a chieftainship" in being freed from the "iron hand" of the reservation agent.

In 1912, Standing Bear moved to California and worked in motion pictures. Discouraged by the movie industry's inaccurate portrayal of American Indians, he began lecturing and writing on behalf of Indians. Through his books *My People the Sioux* (1928), *My Indian Boyhood* (1931), *The Land of the Spotted Eagle* (1933), and *Stories of the Sioux* (1934), Standing Bear became one of the first well-known Indian authors. He is acknowledged as having been ahead of his time in advocating bilingual education, the education of Indians in professions for employment on the reservations, and the teaching of American Indian history to both Indians and whites.

Luther Standing Bear died in Huntington Park, California, on 19 February 1939 while working on the film *Union Pacific*.

by JEANNE KILEN ODE

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