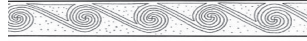


## Iti Fabussa



# Chahta Amptoba: Choctaw Traditional Pottery (Part 4)

It sometimes seems as though Choctaw people are fighting an uphill battle to maintain a unique Choctaw identity and way of doing things in the 21st century. Sadly, we all too often lose elders and with them, traditional knowledge, but there are also success stories.

The Choctaw Nation of Oklahoma began major efforts to revitalize Choctaw traditional pottery in 2009. Over the last three years, through literally hundreds of classes, as well as demonstrations, presentations, and

more, a number of Choctaw people have learned the entire Choctaw traditional pottery process, from digging the clay by hand, to making traditional pottery forms, to firing it on a wood bon fire, to eating out of the finished pieces. Today, on a weekly basis, these Choctaw potters are digging and experimenting with new clays, trying different firing woods, and teaching other tribal members about Choctaw traditional pottery.

A renaissance is under way with these

dedicated Choctaw artisans bringing more life to Choctaw pottery that it has had in 150 years. In so doing, they are adding their own legacy to a sacred Choctaw tradition that is 3,000 years old...and counting.

This month's edition of Iti Fabussa includes pictures and statements from some of these Choctaw potters (and friends), from all walks of life, who are front-line warriors in keeping Choctaw traditional culture vibrant.



**DAN BERNIER:**

"I'm a traditional Choctaw potter. My whole emphasis is on that – making it, learning about it, showing it, promoting it. Bringing back the old ways is important. My grandmother always passed down the stories to us, so we started learning about our heritage from a young age. Heritage is important. Doing the ancestral pottery is very gratifying. It allows me to experience things the way they did. To understand how they did it."



**NANCY PETERS:**

"I love to make my pottery. I have seen my ancestors use them in cooking long ago, and maybe my grandchildren would soon see what their ancestors did long ago. I do hope that they would learn to do this as much as I have enjoyed making it. I appreciate the way of the Choctaws of way back when. I do hope the generation after us will appreciate the Choctaw pottery as well as I have enjoyed making and firing. I think it's very cool."



**CAROL AYERS:**

"I want to preserve the skills my ancestors possessed. Every time I hold a piece of clay in my hand, I think of my ancestors doing the same thing thousands of years ago. I admire their skill and creativity. It makes me feel closer to them. It makes me wonder who they were, what they were like, what they believed in. What they did shaped who I am today, and it must be continued."



**VANGIE ROBINSON:**

"I am grateful to God every day to be a part of the earth that lets me create. I have done a lot of experimentation, trials and error, and I am now able to fire pottery on my own. I create pottery with functional purpose. What I lack in talent, I make up for in passion. As I reflect on things, I am amazed at the work valiant Choctaw people did to keep family alive. I find making pottery most inspiring and it gives me joy."



**MARY FRAZIER:**

“Choctaw pottery is a way for me to learn and appreciate the way of the Chahtas of long ago, and it’s time for our generation and the generations after us to follow in the footsteps of our Chahtas of the past and to appreciate what we have.”



**YVONNE WALKER:**

“Learning the traditional making of Choctaw pottery has instilled a true appreciation of the art. I feel that I share the knowledge now and can help keep alive this part of the Choctaw culture. I have enjoyed the process of Choctaw traditional pottery making because of the true spirit I feel during the process. There is creative thought that flows through me, which brings me great joy.”



**SUE MESHAYA:**

“The pottery class is not just making pottery, because we enjoy good fellowship, ‘impa achukma’ and we find out the latest news. We like talking ‘Chahta’ and educating our non-Choctaw potters, who are catching on pretty quickly, to some of the words. What better place to go and have fun creating something that goes back to our grandparents, back on the Trail of Tears...I want to say YAKOKE to Chief Pyle and Assistant Chief Batton for keeping cultural programs like these alive and going.”



**DESSIE MORELAND:**

“I like making pottery because it is cool and you can have fun. Pottery is easy and I like it, and you can enjoy it too.”



**LISA PETERS:**

“I enjoy working with the Choctaw pottery. When times get rough it helps me relax a lot and it makes me feel better. I enjoy the fellowship I have with the friends I made while I’m in class. I also enjoy my teacher because he is very nice to everyone and he loves to help new people who come to class. He’s not only my teacher, he’s also my friend.”



**DON AYERS:**

“I enjoy the hands-on experience of making pottery and thinking about all the things that have gone on since the beginning of time. I look forward to our next meeting like a football fan waits for the next game.”



**LAURA PICKENS:**

“I just like doing it.”



**ED PERKINS:**

“I’ve wanted to do Choctaw pottery forever. It really means something to me; learning about the ancestors and how they did it, getting closer to them. When you build a pot and you’re having trouble, you know they had the same problems. You have to work through them like they did.”



**LISA HARRIS:**

“Traditional pottery makes me feel closer to the heritage of my ancestors. I like the knowledge that I have learned to do something my ancestors have done for thousands of years.”