



# Footprints



We will be known forever by the tracks we leave

## Operation Turkey Dinner

**Thanksgiving** is a public holiday celebrated on the fourth Thursday of November every year. It originated as a harvest festival where pilgrims and Native Americans came together to share. Thanksgiving has been celebrated nationally since 1789 after Congress requested a proclamation by our First President George Washington.



It is a holiday about **giving** thanks. Originally it was both Native Americans and Pilgrims coming **together**. Today it has in some ways become a commercialized holiday about shopping the day after. We at NAVA are always giving thanks to our **Veterans** for sacrificing so much to defend this great nation. We want you to remember them too.

As you know, many of us at NAVA have worked serving the mission of good, helping people for many, many years. We have worked with hundreds of **programs** on dozens of reservations, all with the singular purpose of **helping**. We offer a hand-up. We help meet immediate needs with food and shelter. We provide energy assistance in the bitter cold. We distribute sleeping bags, blankets, and yes, a lot of food for Thanksgiving meals.

For many years I have been getting up very early on **Thanksgiving**. Not to prepare a meal for my family, but rather to drive sometimes 100+ miles one way to prepare a Thanksgiving meal for others on a remote reservation. I have lost count how many years I have done this. My trip takes me to a shelter or elderly nutrition center which would normally be closed, but we ask them to stay open to serve the less fortunate and first responders.

We have many stories about these trips. It is fun work. Then I have a long drive home smiling to enjoy an afternoon with my family. Some people do not understand why I do this. But I know the reason. I have been very fortunate in my life. I am an enrolled member of the Oglala Lakota Nation. I am a **Marine Officer**. I have been abundantly blessed in my life, and I want to give back. Those of us who give, know the pure, simple joy of helping others and asking for nothing in return.

I remembered one interesting **Thanksgiving Day**. I got up early. When I got out of bed my wife asked why I was going so early. I told her I had a long drive and would be back by 3 to help her fix dinner. She rolled over, and I ventured out into the cold brisk air that morning. There was snow on the ground as I warmed the pickup for the long drive.

A couple of times I had my children go with me to prepare the meal. It is important to teach compassion and caring. The world is a fast-moving place today. We must teach our children well.



*Major Ramsey preparing a feast last year on Thanksgiving.*

( over )

I had about 120 miles to drive. Now I must admit sometimes I am in a hurry and speed a bit too much. That morning I drove very fast with a million thoughts racing through my mind on all the things I had to do. Another person had put the turkeys in the oven several hours earlier and left the rest to me. Yes, I would recruit a few volunteers when I got there to help me. There were always people around to help.

After a nice drive through the badlands, I was back on the home reservation of my grandmother and mother. You might remember my grandmother was born in the village of Pine Ridge in 1899. Then she was taken away from her family to be raised and educated in a distant town. I still do not understand that. That is a story for another time. *RIP Unci Rena.*

I was on my reservation, speeding toward the town of Pine Ridge on the Pine Ridge Indian Reservation often referred to as the most impoverished county in America. I had just turned onto Highway 18 and was heading west. Up ahead about 1 mile a tribal police officer backed out of an approach in the side of the road and turned on his flashing police lights and pulled back off the road. I looked down, and I was going over 80 and the speed limit was 65. Dang it, who gets a speeding ticket on the REZ I thought to myself? Now I was going to be late, is what I thought.

I slowed down and inched forward to where he sat on the side of the road. I just pulled into the approach right beside him. I rolled my window down, he rolled his passenger side window down, and I was fully expecting him to say he was writing me a speeding ticket.

Then to my surprise, he quickly said, “hey look out there, there are **two mountain lions walking.**” I was shocked. I had stopped thinking I was in trouble, and instead he was sharing an amazing sight with me. There about 100 yards off the road in a barren field with a light layer of snow were two mountain lions just casually walking east. He was quiet, almost whispering. He was so excited. I told him I thought he caught me speeding. He said something like, “oh you were speeding.” Then he said he wanted someone else to see them because very few would believe him.



I thanked him for sharing that with me. I asked if he was working all day. He was. I told him I was fixing a **Thanksgiving Feast** at the Cohen Home that day, and all first responders were invited to come eat anytime in the afternoon. He smiled nodding his head. I backed onto the road and was heading west again. Only this time not so fast.

I was not there when the tribal police officer came to eat later, but he told everyone at the Cohen Home about the mountain lions and that story made their day extra special. I still smile when I remember that story.

**Godspeed and Always Faithful.**

**Clay Ramsey**

Oglala Sioux Tribal Member and Major USMCR