



~This presentation for students dramatizes a story from our history. On December 11 in 1890, former Lieutenant John G. Burnett celebrated his 80th birthday with a story to his children and grandchildren about The Trail of Tears – a fateful journey of some 1500 miles that was consecrated with 4,500 graves, mostly unmarked. As a young lieutenant, John Burnett accompanied the last group of Cherokees to travel westward and his narrative includes a description of the night of November 17 in 1838 when the Cherokees met with a blinding snowstorm and the Christian wife of the Cherokee Chief gave away her only blanket to a little girl suffering from pneumonia. The little girl survived according to his account while Mrs. Quatie Ross died from exposure before dawn and was buried in a shallow, unmarked grave “far from her Native home.” Lieutenant Burnett laments that the children of his day were “*denied the facts*” about the Cherokee Removal and he calls on the Anglo Saxon race to commemorate Quatie’s noble act of compassion with a “*towering monument.*”

~Simply put, it is our privilege to *respond to Lieutenant Burnett’s request* with a dramatization of his own story and an act of remembrance for an unsung American hero. His eye-witness account of this harrowing journey is read to the school children of our day so that the children in our time will not be “*denied the facts*” thanks to him. To enhance this educational narrative for middle school children, we read aloud excerpts from the heartbreaking but forceful letter that was written by Chief John Ross on the eve of the Cherokee Removal and addressed to the U.S. Senate. Additionally, Dianne has written praise poems or *walking songs* that recall the many trails of tears of our Native people, and in praise of Mrs. Ross she recites her “Song to the November Moon” as she enacts the giving of her life saving blanket to the little girl who miraculously survived the ordeal. She has also created visual translations of her walking songs with natural elements, and with this alphabet from the natural world created figures that evoke the trails of tears and the ongoing journeys to peace and freedom that continue in our own time. In place of the “*towering monument*” that the former U.S. soldier called for, she has responded with a very *small* one.

~As a project of The Arete Fund, the purpose of this storytelling is to bring home a very American story to its people. Until such a time as a towering monument stands for one of America's heroes of compassion, it is appropriate that we who are Anglo-Saxons rekindle Burnett's story symbolically that it may call forward to others for similar acts that however ignored or forgotten, remain central to the expression of our humanity and the pursuit of peace in our own time. We recall Quatie's gift at present because we insist that her heroism will not go unmarked and because it is the obligation of every generation define the hero for the next. Moreover, The Trail of Tears marks a painful period in our history that resonates with those who endure the birth pangs of democracy at present. It is therefore important when presenting to high school students that emphasis is given less to the sins of our democracy in its becoming, and more to the remembrance of its long road and its trials so that we acknowledge our own good struggles in making it to where we are and others may take heart when embarking on its course. The promise we make in telling this story on behalf of an old soldier is to move forward always and to introduce Mrs. Ross into the ranks of American heroes both for her courage in the face of injustice and for the touch of compassion that now begs for articulation in our time. (SEE WOODSIDE PRIORY)

