LaDonna Harris : A Comanche Life -

She got her first chance to tell stories of her own when he pointed at the photographs in the Life magazine spread across his lap. Long ago, she learned how to wrap a new concept in the warm blanket of her Comanche values. She learned how to visualize a world where selfies and Snookie co-exist with the sun and stars.
LaDonna was lost at 25, when she sat beside her husband Fred Harris at the Oklahoma State Senate, clutching her purse next to the youngest senator in LaDonna Harris A Comanche Life 1st edition room. They went to lunches and dinners with the gray-haired senators, accepting advice over white tablecloths and fingerbowls. Long ago, LaDonna had learned to sit quietly and listen. Little LaDonna, a stoic child with dark, quiet eyes and undiagnosed dyslexia, soon developed a knack for reading people.

She carried it with her to the senate, where she was the only wife in the room. She poured drinks, emptied ashtrays and played hostess, but she also campaigned for her husband, toured schools, hospitals and mental institutions and even served on committees in his place.

In she founded Oklahomans for Indian Opportunity in an effort to correct the socio-economic issues that plagued her home state, and she worked with President Lyndon B. LaDonna Harris A Comanche Life 1st edition to funnel War on Poverty funds to struggling tribes. The esteemed positions were beginning to pile up. By this time, she had established herself as a political figure. That turning point manifested itself when she ran as vice president alongside Barry Commoner in the Citizens Party, an attempt to weld the efforts of several smaller parties and break into the two-party system.

But no one was treating her like a candidate. Quickly, she devoted herself to AIO, traveling the country as a middleman between government agencies and tribes and eventually launching the American Indian Ambassadors Program to empower indigenous and tribal leaders — to teach them how to exercise rights they never knew they had.

The goal was to help tribes reform their governments, ditching old constitutions for systems more in line with their values. We need it to reflect our culture so we can retain our history. Cell phones have fallen into the pocket of every man, woman and child. The Internet has spread through the world like a firework in the sky. The Tea Party was born. And tribes continue to struggle for their sovereignty. When LaDonna thinks about the decades past, she feels a bit lost LaDonna Harris A Comanche Life 1st edition — lost in the expanding labyrinth of American culture, a maze that seems to leave each generation behind as a new one is born.

She finds her footing in her relationships. It gives a sense of belonging. Her daughter Laura, 52, and now the executive director of AIO, realized just how connected LaDonna was when she was working at the National Museum of American Indians, tasked with making cold calls to get funding. In her career, LaDonna learned that the best way to enact change in an institution is from within, by working with the people who run the machine rather than destroying the mechanism.

Like when LaDonna Harris A Comanche Life 1st edition met with restaurant owners in Lawton, Okla. When she reminisces, she likes to think she used the power of relationships to bring about racial integration, form political partnerships and foster hope for tribes. To make her feel less lost in a complex world. The whole universe. Part of our DNA is stardust. Sometimes, LaDonna Harris gets lost in a sentence.

But the dates, the names, the fruitless search for the perfect word — they trip her up. So yes, she gets lost. So, newly single, she went her own way. She had no other choice.

LaDonna Harris - Wikipedia

Date of birth : Date of death : - Birthplace : Temple, Oklahoma. Nationality : American Category : Politics Last modified : Credited as : outspoken advocate, social activist, Native Americans.

Since the s, activist LaDonna Harris had been an outspoken advocate on issues of concern to Native Americans, women, children, and the mentally ill. In she founded Americans for Indian Opportunity AIO and continued to lead that organization nearly two decades later. As a member of the Comanche tribe whose father and husband of many years were non-Native Americans, LaDonna Harris has the benefit of experience in several different cultures.

During LaDonna Harris A Comanche Life 1st edition s and s, her work as an activist took her around the world, and she gained an even wider perspective. Her chief interest, however, has remained with her own people—not just the Comanche tribe, but all native peoples of the Americas.

In a profile of Harris, New Mexico Business Journal quoted her sardonic reference to the difficulties she repeatedly encountered in explaining the painful situation of Native Americans to white politicians in Washington. The article mentioned the "endless explanations of Indian history" which she has been required to give, explanations which Harris refers to as "Indian Not long after Harris's birth in Temple, Oklahoma, on February 15, her father left her mother, in part because of the constant hostility they faced as a racially mixed couple.

Harris's grandparents raised her, and through their influence she grew up educated in both white and Indian culture. Her grandmother was a Christian, whereas her grandfather—a former Indian scout at Fort Sill, Oklahoma—was a tribal medicine man. But the two showed by their example of mutual respect for each other's beliefs that two cultures could exist side by side in harmony. Harris's education, LaDonna Harris A Comanche Life 1st edition in the larger American culture and in her own Native American one, continued when she entered elementary school.

Until the age of six she spoke only the Comanche language, but when she entered public school she had to learn English. Meanwhile, in her home the primary influence remained the Comanche tradition.

Years later, in LaDonna Harris A Comanche Life 1st edition school, she met the young man who would become her husband. Fred Harris was not a Native American, but like her, he had experienced poverty and hardship as the son of a sharecropper.

He wanted to go to law school and run for public office, and after they were married, she helped put him through college and law school. The Harrises had three children: Kathryn, Byron, and Laura. Fred was elected first to the Oklahoma state senate, then to the U. With Fred's election...
in the Harrises began to divide their time between Washington, D. Perhaps this experience helped to expand Harris's vision to encompass national issues, because in she began an effort that mirrored the civil rights movement then guiding the strides on behalf of African Americans in the Southeast.

But she was working in the Southwest, and she undertook her activities on behalf of Native Americans. Operating from a base in the Oklahoma town of Lawton, Harris sought to bring together the state's tribes to combat segregation. This period saw the birth of the Indian National Advisory Council, which was initially established in 1969 to address the needs of Native Americans. Harris and her colleagues worked to establish the council as a powerful voice for Native American rights.

Harris also became involved with the Office of Economic Opportunity (OEO), where she helped to develop programs aimed at improving economic opportunities for Native Americans. She played a key role in the creation of the National Council on Indian Opportunity, which was established to address the economic and social needs of Native Americans. Harris's work on this organization's behalf helped earn her recognition as "Outstanding Indian of the Year" for 1971.

Johnson's administration created the National Council on Indian Opportunity, and in the president appointed Harris to a position with the new commission. Clearly Harris had come a long way from her humble beginnings in Oklahoma, and the coming years would see the expansion of her vision from a national to a global one. Harris's appointment to the National Council for Indian Opportunity coincided with the end of Johnson's administration and the beginning of President Richard Nixon's administration.

In fact, the council did not actually meet for the first time until a year into Nixon's presidency in 1972. Harris began to believe that the council had lost its momentum and that it was time to leave Washington, D. While concentrating her efforts more fully on the OEO, Harris also maintained her vision for the future of Native Americans. She decided to leave the council during the early 1970s and became heavily involved in work both at home and abroad. A founding member of the National Women's Political Caucus, she also founded Americans for Indian Opportunity (AIO) and assisted women's and Native American grassroots organizations in their efforts on behalf of their constituency groups.

Another cause of interest to her was that of the mentally ill. Harris also became interested in the needs of native or indigenous peoples around the world, and travelled to Latin America, Africa, and the former Soviet Union as a representative of the Inter-American Indigenous Institute. In this capacity, she participated in a number of conferences on world peace. In President Gerald R. Ford named Harris to the U.S. Commission on the Observance of National Women's Year. But Harris's work with the AIO and the National Council on Indian Opportunity did not feel any great sense of urgency with regard to the issues it was intended to address.

Finally, she decided to leave the council. During the early 1970s Harris became heavily involved in work both at home and abroad. A founding member of the National Women's Political Caucus, she also founded Americans for Indian Opportunity (AIO) and assisted women's and Native American grassroots organizations in their efforts on behalf of their constituency groups.

While working with the Office of Economic Opportunity, Harris also introduced another initiative of interest specifically to Native Americans. LaDonna Harris A Comanche Life 1st edition The Peace Corps was an effective instrument to LaDonna Harris A Comanche Life 1st edition in local development for indigenous peoples around the world. When President Carter appointed her to serve as special advisor to Sargent Shriver, who directed the Office of Economic Opportunity, she was able to realize this vision.

The "Peace Pipe Project" trained Native Americans in skills necessary to assist in development of communities, then sent them to work in indigenous communities throughout the Western Hemisphere. The value of the Peace Pipe Project, which remained a limited effort, was that native peoples in other countries were more likely to trust the advice of another indigenous person than they were a white official.

While working with the Office of Economic Opportunity, Harris also introduced another initiative of interest specifically to Native Americans. LaDonna Harris A Comanche Life 1st edition The Council for Energy Resources Tribes, the program assisted tribes in acquiring the best possible monetary returns for the natural resources located on tribal lands. The council, which was not without its critics, also helped tribes protect those resources if the tribe chose not to exploit them.

In the s and s, Harris remained active with the AIO. Her home, owned by the reservation, also doubled as the main office of AIO. Divorced from her politician husband, Harris devoted most of her time to the organization.

Among the AIO's achievements in the s was its work to strengthen tribal organizations for groups located as far apart as Alabama, Wisconsin, and Nebraska. Concern for the environment continued, and the AIO hosted regional meetings on that subject. With the greatly increased traffic on the "information superhighway" in the early s, the AIO was quick to establish a significant Internet presence on behalf of Native Americans. Each year, advisors to the program choose some 30 young professional men and women from tribes throughout the United States.

Each of the selectees serves as "ambassador" for a year, during which time he or she goes to Washington, D. The selectees also tour reservations around the country, and visit a selected tribal group in Central or South America.

Commenting on gaming, the federal policy that allows Indian reservations to operate casinos as a means of economic development, Harris has remained cautious. But not angry, "I concluded the interviewer. Email Print. Read more. Latest headlines. Looking for someone? Please read our privacy policy. Page generated in 0.

Harris, LaDonna Vita Tabbytite | The Encyclopedia of Oklahoma History and
LaDonna Harris was born on a Comanche allotment in southern Oklahoma in the 1950s. From her earliest years, she was immersed in a world of resistance, reform, and political action.

As the wife of Senator Fred R. Harris, LaDonna was actively involved in political advising, campaigning, and networking. Johnson's appointee and working beside such notable political figures as Hubert Humphrey, Robert Kennedy, and Sargent Shriver. In she became the vice-presidential nominee for the environmentalist Citizen's Party. Her story provides a witty and valuable American Indian insider's view of modern national political scenes.