

## Wear the Red



The Lakota Indians were known as great warriors. The warriors were expected to provide for and defend the family. The Lakota men took great pride in becoming warriors, for that is how they gained prestige and family honor. In order to become a warrior, a young Lakota boy had to pass a series of challenges. The physical challenges were difficult and not all those invited were able to pass. The first challenges allowed the young warriors to demonstrate the skills of battle such as horsemanship and marksmanship. But the last challenge truly tested the elite and was the most difficult test of endurance. The challenge had a time limit of four days and was done during the hottest part of the year. Each young warrior was sent out by himself, without food or water and only had a knife for protection and was told to follow a well-known path to a high cliff. Once the warrior reached the cliff, they were instructed to climb to the top of the cliff and recover a red sash that had been tied to a stone at the top of the mountain. The goal was to recover the sash from the top of the cliff and return it to the camp within the four-day time period.

The endurance challenge was very difficult, and because of the great distances they would have to travel, the young warriors would usually get back by sunset of the fourth day, exhausted, thirsty, and hungry. As soon as they arrived in camp, they were asked to present the sash they had recovered. The sash was held tightly in their hands. The young warrior held one end of the sash at head height and let it unfurl toward the ground. If it extended all the way to the ground, the young man was considered a Red Shirt Warrior. If it did not reach the ground, he was not a Red Shirt Warrior and would never again be allowed another opportunity to join the elite group. No explanation was given to the ones denied and no explanation was ever needed, because it wasn't just a test of endurance, but more importantly a test of honor.

To be a Red Shirt Warrior, not only did one need to meet the physical challenge, but more importantly, to meet the moral challenge of honor. At the cliff, one sash was tied to a stone at the top and when it was unfurled from the man's head, it easily reached the ground. Another sash was tied to a tree located half way up the cliff, at a place where the young man could stop and rest in the shade. That sash was the shorter of two and when it was unfurled in front of the elders of the Red Shirt Warriors, it told the story that the young man being tested had taken a short cut. He had not gone the full distance. He had not completed the challenge.

**Affirmation:** I am a person of honor.

**To think about:**

1. What does it mean to "wear the red?"
2. Would you pass the endurance test to be Red Shirt Warrior?
3. In a list of important facts about you, where would honor be on the list?

***No person was ever honored for what he received. Honor has been the reward for what he gave. -Calvin Coolidge***