

National Premiere of Standing Bear's Footsteps to Air Oct. 15 on NET1/NET-HD

"Standing Bear's Footsteps" tells the story of the Ponca Nation's exile from Nebraska to the malaria-infested plains of Indian Territory in present-day Oklahoma. To honor his dying son's last wish--to be buried in his homeland--Chief Standing Bear and his small clan set off on a frigid, 600-mile journey back to their former Nebraska home. En route, they were arrested and imprisoned at Fort Omaha for leaving the reservation. Standing Bear and his starving band were about to be sent back to "death country" when a remarkable series of events unfolded. "Standing Bear's Footsteps" airs Monday, Oct. 15, at 9 p.m. CT on NET1 and NET-HD and recounts the remarkable journey of legendary warrior Chief Standing Bear of the Ponca Nation, who fought injustice not with guns and arrows--but with words.

A reporter from the Omaha Daily Herald broke the story, and Standing Bear was suddenly at the center of a controversy. Though he spoke no English, the chief's eloquence attracted powerful allies-- including the army general who had arrested him. If he could prove he was a "person" in the eyes of the law, Standing Bear could return to his Nebraska home. In May of 1879, Standing Bear sued the U.S. government for his freedom. His courtroom trial ended with a plea directly to the judge: "My hand is not the same color as yours. If I pierce it, I shall feel pain. If you pierce your hand, you, too, will feel pain. The blood that flows will be the same color. I am a man. The same God made us both."

The trial of Standing Bear sparked a national debate. Who were the Indians? Were they savages or human beings? Did they have the same rights as any immigrant? "This story turns the classic western upside down," said Joe Starita, author of *I Am a Man: Chief Standing Bear's Journey for Justice*. "This is a man who personifies courage, perseverance, fortitude, love of family and love of homeland. The irony is, not only was he not considered an American, he wasn't even considered a person."

"Standing Bear's Footsteps" weaves storytelling, re-creations and present-day scenes to explore a little-known chapter in American history. "The film has much to say about present-day issues of human rights and what it means to be an American," says NET Television producer Christine Lesiak. "I was amazed to learn that the 14th Amendment to the U.S. Constitution granted citizenship to anyone born in the United States--except the Indians. And it wasn't until 1924 that Native Americans were actually granted citizenship. This whole debate started with a father who wanted only to keep a promise."

"Standing Bear's Footsteps" is a production of NET Television for Native American Public Telecommunications and PBS and is underwritten in part by Union Pacific Railroad. NET1 and NET-HD are part of NET Television, a service of NET. For a complete television program schedule, visit NET's Web site (netNebraska.org/television).

RELEASE WRITTEN BY: Ann Tillery, 402-470-6391, or atillery@netad.unl.edu