

Pass It On®...

Braids of Strength.

More than a cultural symbol, to the Lakota, hair braids are a connection to ancestors, to tradition, to the earth and to the soul.

At a young age, all Lakota children are taught to braid their hair. Braids are deeply sacred and symbolize the connection between body, spirit and the matriarch.

Men wear braids to honor women, who are revered as the life givers, the next best thing next to God. Each braid consists of three strands representing the body, the spirit and the higher power that governs all of us. Women weave two separate braids, hair parted in the middle. This distinctive style is representative of the cultural value of balance and equality, the middle part representing equilibrium.

As modern culture moves away from meaning and focuses only on appearance and social status, the enduring culture of the Lakota reminds us that the best guide into the future is the traditional values of the past. They believe that hair in braids holds strength and memories, the kind of memories that make us grateful for the sacrifices of our ancestors who made it possible for us to be here. This is powerfully taught when the first braid a child receives is performed by an elder in the community. Imagine the strength of character a young boy or girl would receive if the first social ritual welcoming them into a world of responsibility was performed by the oldest member of their community.

Rituals give our lives meaning. They teach us that life is bigger than the individual. That honor is for those who sacrifice for the good of all, and that selfishness is self-isolating. As the Lakota child grows, the ritual of braiding hair is repeated often, with specific patterns holding different meanings, a physical reminder of a lesson learned and a value gained.

Whatever our own traditions, we can teach children to make note of special occasions, adopt specific behaviors of respect and selfless service, and remind them of their obligation to make their ancestors proud. We all can carry symbols to remind us of the person we want to become. One father gave each of his children a coin that was

minted the day they were born to remind them that a price was paid for them to come into the world and that their life would endure forever if they spent their time wisely.

We can learn from the Lakota way. We can learn from all those around us and make room for others to do the same.

Build Character...PassItOn.com

By The Foundation for a Better Life®

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