

# It Can Be Done

By Dennis Ogan

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I am a convincing example of the possibilities in life. I believe that if you set your heart and mind to do the best you can, you can become a success and make life more pleasurable and happy. Perhaps my life can be better described as coming from extreme poverty to having a comfortable and successful life.

I am three-quarters Cherokee Native American and one-quarter Irish. I am one of ten children...seven boys and three girls that were born to my mother, Nancy Gritts Groundhog and Joe Loren Groundhog. My mother was one-half Cherokee and one-half Irish. My father was full blood Cherokee. My father's enrollment number is 26091 and Mother's Number is 29265. These numbers were important for children to enroll in school. I was born on November 7, 1915 about five miles north of Stillwell, Oklahoma where my parents had a tribal allotment from the U.S.A. The allotment consisted of a house with a water pump by the front porch, a barn and about six acres of land. There was a water stream adjoining the farm.

In my family there were two sets of twin boys, and a single boy born between the twins. The first set of twins and the single boy died during the influenza epidemic in the early years of 1900. The second set of twins were born premature and died shortly after birth, possibly because they lived in a rural area near Stilwell, Oklahoma and no medical care was available. I do not remember the names of these five boys. They all died before I was born. I am the seventh boy and eighth child in the family, and am the only child alive at the present time (January, 2007).

When I went to first grade they used my English name for my name, Dennis Groundhog. I went all the way through college with that name. When I finished college, the person who anonymously financed my college career talked to one of the staff members at the college about changing my name back to the Cherokee translation, Ogan. Legally the name was changed in Spokane, Washington during my military service, about 1942.

I remember some incidents that occurred when I was young that I think I should share. One that I am not able to understand to this day occurred on a day when my mother and others went Huckleberry Picking in a wooded area in the hills. I was left under the care of my father. During that day, I sneaked away from my father. I crossed a country wagon road and went into the hills looking for my mother. I showed up where the berry pickers were and they must have been in awe to see me after an extended period. My mother asked how I had located them, and I am told that I said in Cherokee that God had brought me to them. I was about three years of age at the time, and I still treasure this story.

Another story involves my two cousins who came from near Welling, Oklahoma to visit. They took me to the stream that was near our property and tried to

teach me how to swim. They stood apart in the stream and tossed me one to the other until I was able to swim.

We moved from this location when I was about five years old. We moved to a rural area between Welling and Eldon, Oklahoma. This was about eight miles east of Tahlequah, Oklahoma. We were near my mother's relatives. It was at this location that my father left, not to return to our household. My mother divorced him and he later re-married. My mother was left alone to support five children alone. That is when we hit rock bottom economically. We fished and hunted for our food. We also had a small garden where we raised food products. We had four horses, two for riding and two for pulling the wagon. We sold the riding horses and the wagon horses drowned in a flooded river while my mother was in the wagon. Mother nearly drowned also. The horses and wagon were found some three miles down stream.

A man and his wife in Tahlequah heard of our dire situation. They brought clothes and other necessities for us to survive. At that time, we had moved to a log cabin with one room for sleeping and living. We had a pot-bellied wood stove for heating. During cold nights mother heated an iron (for ironing clothes), and large stones on the pot bellied stove, wrapped them in heavy clothes to keep from burning us, and put them in bed with us to help keep us warm.

This same good hearted couple apparently notified Mr. Jack Brown, Superintendent of Sequoyah Orphans Training School. This school was under the Federal Bureau of Indian Affairs. He contacted my mother and apparently was able to convince the "powers that be" to classify us as orphans so that we could attend his school. He came to our house and took us to the school, four miles southwest of Tahlequah.

I didn't have shoes to wear and the Superintendent said he would have the school provide the shoes, clothing, room, meals, education and health care. This was the turning point for my entire life. I was ten years of age at the time and was placed in the first grade. To this day, I do not know how I was promoted to the second and third grade in this first year. I still say it was because of my age and size physically. But they told me that I made great progress in school.

The first year on school was the first time I had seen the sport of football, and basketball. These were the only sports that they had at the school at the time. We stayed in group dormitories and ate in a large dining area. There were about 300 students at the school. It was a para-military school. We went to sleep and arose in the morning by the sound of a bugle. We marched to our classrooms and to the dining area. Once each month we had dress parades on the football field in our military uniforms.

We had Sunday Church services in the auditorium with a minister from Tahlequah providing the service. This is where I professed Jesus Christ as my Savior. I was baptized in a stream that was a short distance from the school. At that time, we identified location by using 1<sup>st</sup>, 2<sup>nd</sup>, and 3<sup>rd</sup> corner, based on the turns the property fence made. I think it was the 2<sup>nd</sup> corner where I was baptized.

Sequoyah Indian School exposed each student to all aspects of life that students will face in the society after completing formal education. We went to school classes one half day each school day and to some of many vocational classes the other half day. We had experience in auto mechanics, machine shop, wood shop, shoe repair, drafting, laundry, warehouse, farming, hog-raising, cooking, butchering, meat cutting, bakery, boiler, heating, gardening, etc. While I was there I took machine shop, cobbler work (shoe repair), drafting, baking, boiler room, and heating.

I also treasure my membership in the Boy Scouts of America. I acquired the Bronze Palm, Eagle Scout Rank. Bronze Pal is five merit badges beyond Eagle Scout requirements. In my sophomore year in High School, I was selected by the National Office of the Boy Scouts of American to be a counselor and crafts instructor for the Norwela Council of Boy Scouts in Shreveport, Louisiana. The summer camp was by Caddo Lake, a short distance from Mooringsport, Louisiana. I worked there during summer months for three summers. One year when I returned to Sequoyah, I had to be hospitalized for about a month because of Malaria that I had gotten in Louisiana.

The Norwela Council of Boy Scouts called me every year to return to the camp.

I shall forever be indebted to the school Superintendent Jack Brown and his entire staff. They were so supportive of me and all of their other students. They encouraged each of us to do our best in all endeavors. Aside from other social activities, I enjoyed playing football, baseball and basketball. Playing "marbles" was right in the middle. I got pretty good with playing with "doogies" and "steelies".

The paramilitary activity was later stopped. But during its' existence I thought it was an excellent way to learn to be a disciplined person. Accepting a legitimate authority was a good learning process. While I was at the school, I was in the school band. I played clarinet and saxophone. I was also a member of the school choir, and a baritone in the quartet.

During my senior year at Sequoyah, I was in a quandary as to how I could financially afford a college education. I graduated as the Salutatorian of my class. The football coach at Tahlequah High School came to see me while I was in high school. He wanted to see if I would join his team and he would help me to enter Northeastern State College after graduation. But the coach at Sequoyah, Peter Paul Pitchlynn, evaluated the matter and he suggested that I would be very limited on funds for college if I made this change. I turned down the offer and am very glad I did. I was able to get a singing, scholastic, and football scholarship at Bacone Junior College in Muskogee, Oklahoma. When I graduated from high school, I had a very proud moment. I was considered an alternate to the U.S. Naval Academy at Annapolis Indiana. This opportunity never materialized because the prime candidate accepted the offer.

My first two years of college, I attended Bacone College in Muskogee, Oklahoma. At Bacone College, I had my room, board, tuition, and books provided by the school. For extra spending money, I worked in the kitchen and

later in the Post Office. This helped to pay for school supplies and snacks. I participated in football, and Glee Club. The Glee Club went on a tour of California and participated in the D.A.R. Convention in Washington D.C. during the summer of 1937. In the fall of 1937, I was elected as the President of the Student Body, which was an honor for me. I was told that if I continued my progress, I would receive the same financial assistance for the last two years of my college career. I graduated from Bacone College in the Spring of 1938.

When I finished college, with encouragement from staff members at the college, I changed my name back to the Cherokee translation of Ogan. Legally the name was changed in Spokane, Washington during my military service, about 1942.

President B.D.Weeks of Bacone College told me that they wanted me to be the Business Officer at Bacone College. So, I went to Barnes School of Business in Denver, Colorado for the entire summer of 1938. Dr. Weeks called me and said that they had decided I would never get my college degree if I didn't go on to school. I received three scholarships. One scholarship each from Buckness College, Grinnell College, and Kalamazoo College in Kalamazoo, Michigan. I went to Kalamazoo College because the Registrar at Kalamazoo was an acquaintance of Dr. Weeks.

At Kalamazoo College, I had all my expenses paid. However, I worked at odd jobs on the campus for extra spending money. The two years were routine and I enjoyed my experience there. I received my Bachelors of Arts degree in the spring of 1940 when there was fear of war if Adolph Hitler continued taking over European Countries.

The Norwela Council of Boy Scouts called me every year to return to the summer camp. When I graduated from college I agreed to return to the camp. The Council paid my transportation and meals from Michigan to Louisiana with a one week delay en-route in order for me to visit my mother in Oklahoma. On weekends and after the camp closed for the summer, I stayed in Shreveport with the sister of the notable Governor of Louisiana, Huey Long. One of her sons was the doctor at the Scout Camp. After the end of the summer camp, I worked in Shreveport for about two weeks when Jack Brown of Sequoyah and Mr. Kelly of the Department of Education in the Bureau of Indian Affairs in Muskogee, Oklahoma called me at the home of the sister of Huey Long. To this day, I do not know how they located me. Anyway, they offered me a one year temporary job as Boys Advisor (150 boys) and all sports coach. This was temporary because the person who was to hold the position was on his second year of a two year apprenticeship at Albuquerque, New Mexico. This was a shocker for me because I would return to the school that I had attended, and work with employees who had been my superiors. It was a successful year for me. The football team scored 200 points to opponents 12. My year's appointment ended about October 15, 1941.

I went to Oklahoma City to seek employment, but could only get odd jobs because I was classified 1-A in the military draft system. No employer would hire

me because I could be called into military service at anytime. I worked as a tar carrier for two tile layers in the basement of Sears-Roebuck Store. Then I packed turkeys in a freezer during Thanksgiving rush. I caught cold while packing turkeys and had to quit. I also worked as an assistant at the Driver's License Bureau. I applied for a job with the Oklahoma State Highway Patrol and was accepted, but was told to come to them after my time with the military service. Because I was classified 1-A in the military draft, they would not be assured of my staying long if I was drafted.

The most important thing that happened in Oklahoma City was I met my most wonderful loving and flawless future wife, Kathryn Horton just shortly before going into military service. I was staying at the Y.M.C.A. where Kathryn worked on the telephone switchboard.

I read in the paper that the U.S. Navy was giving tests for special service to be given in Dallas, Texas. It was called the V-6 Division. I went to Dallas and I got there the second day of a two day test and I was late. I then went to the Draft Board in Dallas and enlisted. I stayed in Dallas for about one week with room and meals furnished by the military service. They gave me a written examination and as a result, I could choose either the Army or the Air Force. I chose the Air Force. I did not have to take basic training because I had 4 ½ years in the Oklahoma National Guard, but I had to train all the new recruits.

This was done at the "tent city" air base in Albuquerque, New Mexico. I will not elaborate on my activities in the different activities in the different locations when I was stationed in the US, only to say that I went from Albuquerque to Roswell, New Mexico, and then to Spokane, Washington. In Spokane I played football under coach "Izzy" Weinstock. Weinstock had been an All American football player at the University of Pittsburgh and was a close friend of boxer, Max Bayer. Bayer visited us during one of our games. The football team was a Special Service team organized to entertain the troops. We played practically all the West Coast teams, a total of 9 seasons of football.

From there I went to Pendleton, Oregon; San Antonio, Texas; and then Fort Meyers, Florida. I had just returned to Fort Meyers after two weeks of furlough to see Kay, and got an OK from her father to marry her. I tried to get a financial allotment for her when I returned from my furlough, but I could not unless I was married to her. I got on the phone and arranged to have her come to Fort Myers so we could get married. In Fort Meyers, my precious girlfriend and I got married on November 18<sup>th</sup>, 1944. She came by train and stayed about 10 days after marriage. What an occasion!!!

From Fort Meyers, I went to Macon, Georgia then to Orlando, Florida for jungle training. I then headed back to Fort Meyers where I was shipped overseas by way of San Francisco, California. On my train ride to San Francisco, I made a crazy remark that I was going to leave the train when we got near Oklahoma. I later learned that word had passed on to others and a watch was placed on me without my knowledge. I was told about it when we arrived at our destination. We left the port of departure, and the first land we saw after crossing the equator

and back was New Guinea. We picked up a convoy of about thirty ships of all types and landed in Leyte, Philippines. We were periodically bombed and shelled, but were never hit.

I don't know why, but every time we advanced, I was on the small advanced echelon. Could be because I looked like one of the natives! I was in Manila and attended by invitation, the mayor's banquet and ball. From Leyte, we moved to Laog, Illocos Norte Province behind the Japanese line, but we were safe. From Laog, we went to Le Shima, next to Okinawa. Le Shima is where Ernie Pyle, news reported, was killed.

I was on Le Shima when Japan was bombed and the war ended. En-route to the signing of the Peace Treaty, the Japanese flew in a white airplane. We escorted them to Le Shima by several night fighters. They left the airplane there and they proceeded to sign the Peace Treaty in one of our C-54 planes.

We were to invade Japan, but the bombing happened 15 days before we were to invade. Troops returned to the U.S. on a point system. I lacked two points, so they sent me to Chitose Naval Station at Hokkaido. I flew over the total devastation caused by the atomic bomb, and I could not believe what I saw. My house boy (man) was a Harvard Graduate and was on a visit there where he was detained. I do not remember his name. He just wanted to visit with a person who spoke English. (Uncle Den, can you explain this a little more?) During most of my tenure in the service, I was an Administrative and Technical Inspector. I had a staff that inspected different installations and made reports to the 5<sup>th</sup> Air Force Headquarters in Manila.

I returned to the U.S.A. and was discharged honorably. That was the day when my glorious and happy days started! My precious wife was working for the Federal Internal Revenue Office in Oklahoma City. I went to work for the Oklahoma Employment Security Commission as unemployment compensation Claims Examiner. We bought a home there. Soon we were blessed with our first son, Dennis Randal Ogan, born November 15, 1948. Eventually, I got a promotion with a transfer to Ardmore, Oklahoma, where our next blessed son, Gary Scott Ogan was born on January 24, 1952. My salary was not sufficient to provide for a family of four. I worked at the U.S. Post Office at nights during Christmas rush in order to get funds for Christmas presents. I do not regret this opportunity and it helped us through a rough time.

We were in Ardmore, where we had purchased another home, for 6 ½ years. A man who worked for the U.S. Bureau of Indian Affairs asked me what I did in my current job. After explaining my duties, he asked me to go to work for the B.I.A. I gave him my resume, which he mailed to the main office. The main office sent two representatives to interview me. After the interview, I applied for a direct commission as a Captain in the Army Reserves. The officer, who interviewed me, took me out for lunch. On our way back to my office, I asked him where he wanted to interview me. He told me he had already decided that I passed the interview and would send my papers to the main office. I received a reply that said that I had qualified, but that I was too old for the grade of Captain.

While I am on the subject of the military...While I was in the Phillipiens, I applied for a commission as 1<sup>st</sup> Lieutenant as Clinical Psychologist. I passed all interviews, but about that time the war in Europe was over and I was advised that they had decided not to fill the position (Another "no go"...) Things like the two above, I believe has helped me to accept any outcome so long as you do the best in all things regardless of the outcome.

The interview with the two B.I.A. representatives went well and before much time had passed, I was hired. I could accept a position in Belknap, North Dakota or at Bemidji, Minnesota. I took the Bemidji Position at grade GS-9, which was a salary that was three times more than I was receiving from the State of Oklahoma. It was a staggering change for the entire family.

We sold our house in Ardmore before I received the formal hire notice! But, I knew that if the Main Office decided not to hire me, we would go back to Kalamazoo, Michigan where I was sure I would find something through the faculty and college friends. We had called a motel in Bemidji for reservations and coincidentally the owners of the motel were from Oklahoma City. We had a wonderful reception. We arrived there on a Friday. On Saturday morning, I told the family I was going to locate the B.I.A. Office. When I parked in front of the office, the Administration Officer had come to do some work. He saw my Oklahoma license plate and came over and said, "You must be Dennis Ogan. Your final hire papers came yesterday." Was I ever relieved!!! I went back to the motel and gave my sweet wife the good news. We moved to an apartment in a downtown hotel for a while. We later rented a home and during our moving in, my youngest son, Gary, had a bad experience. The stairs to the basement had a railing but no guard between the stairs and the railing. In carrying my fishing tackle box, he slipped, fell and broke his arm. He was just trying to help. He was hospitalized and had the bone reset. It was a scary experience for us all. He later had coax-plan and was unable to walk. I wonder if the condition was the result of his fall. He started in pre-school and Kay had to take him in a four wheeled cart.

I covered every Indian Reservation in Minnesota and during winter months, I did a lot of praying. On one of my trips the temperature fell to -50! After two years, I was transferred to the Rosebud Reservation in South Dakota with a promotion to GS-11. It was quite a desolate location where we had to drive 45 miles to do our shopping. We were there two years, when we were transferred to Dallas, Texas with a promotion to GS-12. We were there when President Kennedy was assassinated. We were about two blocks from the site of the assassination. We bought a home in Richardson, Texas and I worked in Dallas six years.

While in Dallas, I performed in a stage production of "The Shadow of An Eagle", a story on the life of Sam Houston. This was done at the Theater in the Round designed by Architect Frank Lloyd Wright. I performed as the Chief Boles, a Cherokee character in the play. I still have the script of the play.

The Washington, D.C. office asked if I would operate an experimental program in Seattle, Washington, helping Indian high school drop-outs obtain their GED so that they could qualify for vocational training. The program lasted about two years, and I assisted the families of the students in housing, health care, family problems, etc. We rented a two level house in Bellevue, Washington and my office was in Seattle. I was promised a promotion to GS-14 with the agency office in Portland after the program in Seattle ended.

After the Seattle program, I moved my family to Portland, Oregon and was in charge of Employment Assistance Program at GS-14. I had jurisdiction over agency offices in Oregon, Washington and Idaho. I also worked with Alaska Natives during the building of the oil pipe line. The Natives were sent to Portland and I assisted them in heavy operations at Swan Island. I flew to Alaska several times and flew over the first bridge built on the Yukon River. I traveled extensively during my employment. My precious wife was always there to take care of our two boys and the home. I will never forget how much she meant to me and the boys. I retired from employment on January 4, 1980. Kay and I flew to Hawaii for our celebration and had an unforgettable time.

In May of 1997, we moved to Denton, Texas because Gary, a musician, had moved to Nashville, Tennessee. We wanted to be more accessible to our boys as Dennis R. (Randy) was in Gresham, Oregon. During the entire time we were in Denton, Kay was ill. She was a diabetic and while there she had one of her knees replaced, had a double by-pass due to heart problems, and developed a duodenum ulcer. She also had to wear a pace maker. She had periods of memory loss. She was always in high spirits and that just described her so well. Our boys wanted us to move back to Portland area, so they could help in caring for Kay. We finally agreed. We moved back to Portland on April 8, 2002. Our son, Dennis R., and his wife Terri insisted that Kay and I fly rather than drive. I was blessed that they were there to help because we had to put Kay in the hospital on April 12, 2002. She never came to live in the home we had bought because she died on May 10, 2002, after 58 years of marriage.

She made two requests of me in the event anything happened to her. One, that I would stay in the house we had bought, and two, that I continue going to the World War II Veterans reunion in Muskogee, Oklahoma. I went to the reunion in October 2002, and plan to continue going as long as I am able to ambulate. I am alone in my house and I miss Kay's companionship. I married her because I knew she truly loved me, and I truly loved her.

In reviewing the above, I see many set-backs and many happy events in my life. I repeat, "IT CAN BE DONE". If you set your mind, heart, and soul (with the help of our Savior), into every day of living, you can succeed whatever the odds. I am satisfied with the outcome