

University of Windsor

Scholarship at UWindor

Electronic Theses and Dissertations

Theses, Dissertations, and Major Papers

2002

A Warrior's Song (Original writing, Poetry, Fiction).

Sandra. Muse
University of Windsor

Follow this and additional works at: <https://scholar.uwindsor.ca/etd>

Recommended Citation

Muse, Sandra., "A Warrior's Song (Original writing, Poetry, Fiction)." (2002). *Electronic Theses and Dissertations*. 874.

<https://scholar.uwindsor.ca/etd/874>

This online database contains the full-text of PhD dissertations and Masters' theses of University of Windsor students from 1954 forward. These documents are made available for personal study and research purposes only, in accordance with the Canadian Copyright Act and the Creative Commons license—CC BY-NC-ND (Attribution, Non-Commercial, No Derivative Works). Under this license, works must always be attributed to the copyright holder (original author), cannot be used for any commercial purposes, and may not be altered. Any other use would require the permission of the copyright holder. Students may inquire about withdrawing their dissertation and/or thesis from this database. For additional inquiries, please contact the repository administrator via email (scholarship@uwindsor.ca) or by telephone at 519-253-3000ext. 3208.

INFORMATION TO USERS

This manuscript has been reproduced from the microfilm master. UMI films the text directly from the original or copy submitted. Thus, some thesis and dissertation copies are in typewriter face, while others may be from any type of computer printer.

The quality of this reproduction is dependent upon the quality of the copy submitted. Broken or indistinct print, colored or poor quality illustrations and photographs, print bleedthrough, substandard margins, and improper alignment can adversely affect reproduction.

In the unlikely event that the author did not send UMI a complete manuscript and there are missing pages, these will be noted. Also, if unauthorized copyright material had to be removed, a note will indicate the deletion.

Oversize materials (e.g., maps, drawings, charts) are reproduced by sectioning the original, beginning at the upper left-hand corner and continuing from left to right in equal sections with small overlaps.

ProQuest Information and Learning
300 North Zeeb Road, Ann Arbor, MI 48106-1346 USA
800-521-0600

UMI[®]

A WARRIOR'S SONG

by

Sandra Muse

A Creative Writing Project
Submitted to the Faculty of Graduate Studies and Research
through the Department of English Literature and Language
in Partial Fulfillment of the Requirements for
the Degree of Masters of Arts: Creative Writing at the
University of Windsor

Windsor, Ontario, Canada

2002

© 2002 Sandra Muse



National Library
of Canada

Bibliothèque nationale
du Canada

Acquisitions and
Bibliographic Services

Acquisitions et
services bibliographiques

395 Wellington Street
Ottawa ON K1A 0N4
Canada

395, rue Wellington
Ottawa ON K1A 0N4
Canada

Your file *Votre référence*

Our file *Notre référence*

The author has granted a non-exclusive licence allowing the National Library of Canada to reproduce, loan, distribute or sell copies of this thesis in microform, paper or electronic formats.

L'auteur a accordé une licence non exclusive permettant à la Bibliothèque nationale du Canada de reproduire, prêter, distribuer ou vendre des copies de cette thèse sous la forme de microfiche/film, de reproduction sur papier ou sur format électronique.

The author retains ownership of the copyright in this thesis. Neither the thesis nor substantial extracts from it may be printed or otherwise reproduced without the author's permission.

L'auteur conserve la propriété du droit d'auteur qui protège cette thèse. Ni la thèse ni des extraits substantiels de celle-ci ne doivent être imprimés ou autrement reproduits sans son autorisation.

0-612-75799-4

Canada

ABSTRACT

This creative writing project is a cross-genre collection of fiction and poetry. There are short stories, poems, and oral stories/anecdotes, which center on Native Canadians who served in the Vietnam War. This is not an historical work, but rather, looks at what has happened to these men because of their war experiences. It was a unique situation for any Canadian to join the U.S. military in their campaign in Vietnam, as it was essentially against the law for those men to enlist with the American military. However, the Canadian government did not interfere with its citizens enlisting, even while it was welcoming American draft-dodgers and sympathizers into the country. Meanwhile, the officers at American recruitment offices generally knew Canadians weren't legally allowed to sign up, but no one enforced that law across the border. It was an unusual time, and an unusual war.

There are many Native men here in southern Ontario who went to the jungles of Vietnam. Indeed, Natives of both Canada and the United States have served in every branch of the military in each country, and in every war or conflict - the American Revolution, the Civil War, the Boer War, the War of 1812, the two World Wars, Korea, Vietnam, the Desert Storm operation, and even as peacekeepers in troubled parts of the world. It is an interesting paradox to see Native North Americans fighting for either the American or Canadian military, considering the long history of each government's genocidal actions against the ancestors of those Indigenous tribes. Indeed, there are still many land claims and lawsuits pending by Native peoples against each government.

So why have those Native warriors been so quick to go to war for the White man's military? Perhaps it is a need to prove their manhood, considering colonization has stripped them of their ancient male-specific duties, such as hunting, fishing, trapping, or fighting their territorial enemies. Or perhaps it is their perceived duty to protect their community and Mother Earth, which is what Native warriors are told they must do? Or is it gender-based natural aggressive tendencies, which men of all races often exhibit? Whichever it is, the unique situation of Native men from Canada going to Vietnam as American G.I.'s makes for interesting material for this work of fiction and poetry.

A SALUTE AND DEDICATION

This work is dedicated to all veterans of the Vietnam War, 1959 to 1975, and in particular, to the Native veterans of that conflict, from both Canada and the United States of America. Without the bravery and inner strength of those men who answered the call to duty, and fought in the steamy jungles of that faraway land, the stories included in this project could never have happened.

A special dedication to the men and women of Chapter One of the Canadian Vietnam Veterans Association, who are the caretakers of the North Wall memorial in Windsor, Ontario. It is an honor and a privilege to be associated with the Chapter One members.

Finally, a special thanks to all Native warriors, past and present, from every tribe and First Nation across our great Turtle Island. In addition, a proud dedication to the warriors of my family, the Muses. You are the protectors of the people and the keepers of the land. I salute you.

“FREEDOM IS NOT FREE”

“God made me an Indian.”

Sitting Bull, 1876

ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

I would like to gratefully acknowledge my advisor, Dr. John Ditsky, for his patience, encouragement, and understanding of my culture and what I have attempted to do within this project. I have appreciated his wit and humor in helping me to craft my writing. I only wish I knew one-tenth of what he knows of American Literature and History. I am honored to have been a student of his.

Also, thanks to my second advisor, Di Brandt, for her help and support in attempting a cross-genre work. I could not have done it without her creative insight. My thanks also to my outside department reader and much-respected friend, Shelagh Towson, from Psychology. Her understanding and interest in Native culture has also helped me during my years here. My gratitude to Katherine Quinsey, for always treating me with respect, and for supporting me in so many years. I appreciate how she has always made time for me, and recognized my hard work.

I wish to thank the creative writing professors I have had over the past seven years since I came to this university, namely Di Brandt, Wanda Campbell, and Alistair MacLeod. Their help in fine-tuning my work is appreciated. A gracious thank you to Dr. MacLeod for informing me that I am indeed a poet, and a good story-teller.

A special thanks to Lorenzo Buj and Tom Dilworth, who, in my first year here, inspired me with their passion for literature. I would also like to acknowledge a truly talented professor and kind-hearted human being, Suzanne Matheson, who has always believed in me and supported my various projects. Thanks to Marty Gervais for always having an open door when I wanted to talk, and for being a friend. Also, thank you to Dale Jacobs for his help during my graduate work.

I would also like to acknowledge one of my favorite professors, Dr. Stephen Bertman, of Classical Civilization and Modern Languages. His passion for teaching promoted my passion for learning. His thought-provoking lectures fed my hunger for knowledge. Thank you, Dr. Bertman, for helping me find my muse.

I cannot adequately thank my dear friends and sisters, Cathie Gertz and Elayne Isaacs. They kept me going when I wanted to quit. A special *Ny:weh* and *Sgi*.

Finally, thanks to my children, Ganehegwas and Sgigi, for all their love and support over the past seven years of school. They have been my biggest fans and critics, and for that, I am grateful.

TABLE OF CONTENTS

ABSTRACT	iii
A SALUTE AND DEDICATION	iv
ACKNOWLEDGMENTS	v
TABLE OF CONTENTS	vi
PRELUDE	vii
Part I - WAR SICKNESS	
Dancing to Honor our Heroes	1
Dog-Tag Memories	5
Their Reason	33
An Old Debt	35
Part II - WORDWEAPONS	
Wordweapons	60
Colors of War	61
Transformation	62
Flashback	63
Nightraids	64
A Worldly Marine	65
Our Warrior's Rights	66
Running to Remember	67
The North Wall	68
Part III - A HEALING CEREMONY	
Brothers in Arms	69
Spirit Dancing	113
A Change of Pace	118
Healing our Veterans with the Pipe	134
Ayosda's Story	138
VITA AUCTORIS	139

PRELUDE

Native men and women of North America have always assumed their role as warriors and soldiers when it came to any war involving the countries of Canada or the United States. Beginning with the early battles between the English and French for control of the land called Canada, to the American Revolution, to the War of 1812, the American Civil War, World War I, the second World War, the Korean Conflict, Vietnam, and the Persian Gulf War, North American Natives have answered the call to arms. Most of these Native people did not wait to be drafted, but, rather, enlisted of their own accord. Military strategists and officers around the world have long recognized the skills and bravery of Native North Americans. The Navajo code-talkers played a major role during World War II in the Pacific theater, when the Japanese were unable to break the Navajo's code, which was simply their native tongue. A Pima Indian from Arizona by the name of Ira Hayes was among the handful of U.S. Marines who survived a horrendous battle, and hoisted the flag on the hilltop of Iwo Jima. Ira Hayes is memorialized in the famous Washington, D.C. statue depicting that particular battle of World War II.

On this side of the border, the first Canadian (serving in the Royal Queen's Army) to be killed in the Boer War of 1899 was a Huron-Wyandotte Indian from the city of Windsor, Ontario. Stories abound of Walter White's bravery and heroics, and a special dedication was made in the summer of 2000 by the city of Windsor at a Boer War memorial at Windsor's Jackson Park. Also in this area, the Shawnee warrior/chief Tecumseh, or Shooting Star, is highly respected for his contributions to British Canada against the Americans in the War of 1812. He made the ultimate sacrifice. Yet Tecumseh was from Kentucky, and was technically an American Indian, but had lived in Canada for some time, fighting the Americans.

Thus there is a long history of North American Natives serving their country of residence during wartime. But what of those Natives who cross the border dividing Canada from the United States to fight in a war for the "other" country? Why would Native Canadians bother to enlist in the American military to fight in a war that they did not have to

be involved in, such as Vietnam? In addition, we may ask, why would any Native person willingly enlist to fight for a government, either Canadian or American, which was responsible for the genocide, near-extirmination, and in some cases, complete extermination of the various tribal cultures of this continent? This idea of fighting for a government that has lied, cheated, and stolen Native land and daily refuses to honor the treaties it signed with those tribes often seems oppositional. Yet thousands of North American Indians have put aside this argument and, instead, gone to fight for the land. The land is what truly matters. We, as Native peoples, have been taught that we are the caretakers of Mother Earth. And, after all, any threat of war against the countries of Canada or the U.S. is a threat to Native land. This is one justification for so many Natives “signing up” and putting on the uniform of what is basically an enemy government. Another is the long tradition of warriors among all the tribes, and what exactly it means to be a warrior. Incidentally, it does not only mean to fight. A warrior is also a peacekeeper, and oftentimes a leader. They will sacrifice for the people. They help feed the people, protect them, and advise them. A warrior, whether man or woman, also speaks out for their people and will stand up for what is best for the people. We see examples of women warriors in political battles, such as Wounded Knee, Oka, Burnt Church, and Clayquot Sound. For the purpose of my project, I will deal only with the warrior men from the Vietnam era, as women were not allowed in combat roles during that time.

However, one thing we must remember is that this geographic line that supposedly separates Canada from America is merely a colored line upon a map, and a construct of European conquerors. Native people have never accepted or recognized that there are two individual, distinct countries or governments, and undoubtedly never will. Rather, it is all “our home and Native land.” All of North America is known as Turtle Island. All the tribes have sacred creation stories that explain how our land was created, why it was given to us, and how we must preserve it for future generations of our Native children.

Again, our traditions and our teachings tell us that we must care for the land and protect it – at all costs. This is exactly what our warriors/veterans have done, and our culture honors them with special songs, dances, and ceremonies. The warrior holds a highly esteemed and respected position within our tribal cultures. Our powwows cannot begin

without the veterans. They lead off all powwows, carrying the flags that are appropriate for that particular event - such as the Canadian, American, eagle staff, any tribal/band flag, flags for the various branches of the military, the POW/MIA flag, the Vietnam Veterans flag, etc. Following each grand entry at a powwow, a Veterans song is sung, and only veterans can dance. Everyone stands and removes their hats, as respect is shown to these men and women.

I have grown up with these traditions. I was taught to respect and honor those veterans, and to wear my single straight eagle feather upon my head when I dance in honor of the veterans in my family. We are taught to be proud of the vets in our family. They are never forgotten as, too often, veterans in the general society are overlooked.

Native veterans of the Vietnam War hold a special place in my heart. Two of my uncles fought there, and two of my brothers, teenagers at the time, enlisted and were on active duty during that war. Not only are there many Native Vietnam Vets in the U.S., but there are a number here in Canada. Men that crossed the border and intentionally joined the U.S. military, in hopes of going to fight in Vietnam. Three Native men from the Six Nations Indians Reserve near Brantford, Ontario died in that war. Their names are engraved upon the "North Wall." This is the Canadian Vietnam War Memorial that sits upon the banks of the Detroit River in Windsor. It honors the one hundred and seven Canadians who died in that war. The North Wall was built in 1995 by two Vietnam Vets from Michigan, who felt strongly that the Canadians who served and died in the jungles of Vietnam should be honored. After approaching the Canadian government in Ottawa and being rejected, these Vets then went to the city of Windsor, where they received approval and financial support. There is now a move underfoot to get this wall designated as an official Canadian memorial, as it has now been proven that several Canadians died in Vietnam while in the service of Canada's military. Ottawa had denied Canadian involvement, but evidence has come to light that shows Canada had military observers and advisors in Vietnam at the time, and some became casualties of war.

The time is right to tell of the experiences of these Native men who call Canada home, but fought for American democracy in Vietnam. After talking with some of these veterans, I have compiled a collection of fictional short stories, poetry, and personal anecdotes of my

own that deals with some of the issues and events surrounding those brave men. A few of the events are based on fact, but I have fictionalized the characters and action. I have entitled this creative writing project "A Warrior's Song," because those special songs tell of bravery in the face of danger, and of the sacrifices made by all Native veterans. It is an honoring title, and I can only hope to show them honor with my writing. I hope my project will also enlighten non-Natives as to the role of the warrior/veteran among Native societies. Sgi!

Sandra Ayosda Muse

Part I

WAR SICKNESS

Dancing to Honor Our Heroes

One of the best powwows I ever went to was when the Navajo code-talkers came to Canada. And not only were the code-talkers there, but so was the Moving Vietnam Wall. It was at the Grand River Champion of Champions powwow, on the Six Nations Reserve, outside of Brantford. The Grand River powwow was one of the richest and biggest in Ontario. Dancers came from all over the place - Thunder Bay, Sarnia, Windsor and Detroit, Wisconsin, Oklahoma, New York, Minnesota - all over. There was good prize money, and whoever got the most points became the "Champion of Champions." They'd get a fancy embroidered satin sports jacket with the powwow logo on it, extra prize money, and they might be asked to be the head dancer the following year. Their picture would go in next year's brochure, too.

So it was a big powwow! And there was lots of money at Grand River. Those Indians from Six Nations got plenty of sponsors, and did fund-raising, and that powwow committee invited a lot of tourists from other countries. And you better believe those tourists spent plenty of bucks there, buying Indian food and arts and crafts. It was the biggest event in that area. The whole Six Nations Tourism Bureau was involved. I didn't know of any other reserve that actually had a tourism department. But these guys were organized. And every year, there would be special events and special dancers, like Aztec dancers from Mexico, Apache Devil Dancers, and flute players - stuff like that. And that really brought in the spectators.

Well, one year in the late 80's, they decided to honor the Indian veterans even

more than we normally do at powwows. The committee invited and paid the way for some of the Navajo code-talkers to come up to Six Nations. We all grew up hearing about these brave warriors. It wasn't something we learned in regular American History class, though. Mostly, we heard about them from our parents, and other older Indians who lived during World War Two. A lot of Indians laugh now about how the Japanese had cracked every code the U.S. military had come up with, until those Navajo Marines came along. And those quiet little Navajo men totally confused the enemy with their Native tongue. Yep, code-talking. Those top generals got smart when they realized that only another Navajo could understand the language. The Japanese sure couldn't. Those Navajos talking back and forth to each other over the radio just completely baffled the best Japanese code-cracker. So those Indian warriors more or less saved America's butt in the Pacific theater. One thing we didn't hear about when I was young was that the officers in charge of the units that the Code-Talkers were in had orders to put bullets in the Navajo's head if there was any danger of capture by the Japs. And those Indians knew that. Imagine knowing your own officers might deliberately kill you!

I remember when those elderly Navajo men stood up from where they were sitting under a shaded arbor. The emcee introduced them to the crowd, and they all came out to dance in the circle. There was about two dozen of them, dressed in matching casual uniform. It wasn't army greens or fatigues, but more like Legion Hall uniforms. They wore bright yellow button-down shirts, with dark pants, and those little flat soldier hats that you can fold up and stick in your hip pockets. Those little hats were red. It was neat to see! Those Navajos are very dark-skinned, since they're desert people. And even

though these guys were older, they still went around the dance circle in formation. Dancing with pride. It was almost like they became young men again for a few moments. The applause from the audience - from the non-Indians in the crowd and from all the Indians there - was huge! And it went on for several minutes. We got sore hands.

Then, after those code-talkers took their dance once around the circle, the rest of us powwow dancers got to go out and shake their hands. The drum was singing a Veteran's Honor song. The line of dancers waiting was really long - longer than usual for an Honor song. When I got up there, I was so excited. I wished I knew how to say thank you in Navajo, but everyone was saying Meegwetch or N'y:weh. We all got to shake each and every one of their hands. And the feeling I got when I shook their hand and looked into their eyes - well, there's just no way to describe it. I was touching history! And in their eyes I felt like I could see them as young soldiers, brave and strong, without fear. Just doing what they knew best. Being an Indian and helping beat the enemy with words. Simple words. Navajo words. I made sure and shook all their hands and smile at them. They had their wives along. And we all shook their hands, too. They were neat little Navajo grandmothers. You could see how proud they were of their men. I know I'll never forget meeting those code-talkers and saying thank you to them myself for what they did. Some of the greatest Indian warriors of all time!

Then, to top things off, the powwow committee arranged to have the Moving Vietnam Wall Memorial brought to the rez. I guess it was only the second time it'd ever been brought to Canada. The Moving Wall is a smaller copy of the huge Vietnam Wall in Washington, D.C. with all the names of the soldiers, sailors, and Marines that were killed

in the War. The Moving Wall has all the names, too, but the whole thing can be taken apart in panels and packed up and moved. It's made of black shiny granite, and when you stand and look at it, you can see your own reflection within the names. It's just an awesome sight to see! Walking along that wall, and looking at the names, and hearing that there's about 57 thousand men listed on there - well, it gives you the shivers. And just seeing it makes you want to cry. I didn't lose anyone in the Vietnam War, but I knew enough men that went - like my two uncles, and some friends of my brothers. We were lucky. They all came back. And my sister's husband came back, just before their first baby was born. Yeah, we were real lucky.

I remember going back several times over to the part of the powwow grounds where the Wall was set up. It was like it was pulling me back to it, over and over. Instead of strolling around and looking at the traders' tables, I kept going to the Wall. It didn't seem like something made of stone. It felt like it was alive. Like there were stories whispering from it, voices trying to get out. It was just the most perfect place to bring such a memorial to. And I know that every Indian there that weekend, every one of us that reached out and touched that Wall, and that shook those code-talkers hands, none of us will ever forget that, for as long as we live.

Now that my son has one of those talking G.I. Joe dolls, the Navajo Code-talker dolls, I tell him about meeting those Indian Marines and shaking their hands. Those G.I. Joe dolls say seven different commands in Navajo, and then translates the phrases into English. My son sits and mimics the words. I figure it's good for a young Indian boy to know all about our heroes.

Dog-tag Memories

Kevin's hand trembled as he reached for the handle on the medicine cabinet. The bottle of two-twenty-two's seemed to be waiting for him. He didn't like to take any kind of drugs, now that he'd quit toking up, but at least the codeine would calm him down. He'd had that nightmare again. The same damned one! He was in the middle of a firefight in the delta, running blindly through the brush, trying to get away from the burning rush of an air strike that was on its way. His feet didn't move as fast as they should. It was like he was moving in slow motion. He could hear the shrill scream of the A-6's approaching. None of his buddies were around. He couldn't find them, not even the sarge. Then he charged right up on an NVA regular. The soldier was all alone. Kevin fired at him first, and the man fell to the ground. Kevin stepped over to the body to make sure the guy was dead, pushing him over to check his face - and that's when Kevin woke up screaming. It was always the same. He saw the man's face as plain as day, even now. Out of all the gooks and dinks he had shot and killed and blasted dead in Nam, that face always came back at him. The man had looked exactly like Kevin's Uncle Tyler! The gook had that same smooth brown complexion, the flat nose, high forehead, almond eyes.

Kevin filled the small glass with cold tap water and shook out two pills. *No, better make it three. Christ, when is it ever gonna go away? Look at my hands. Shakin' like some old man. I'm so fuckin' sick of this,* Kevin thought. He swallowed the tablets, then flicked the light switch off. Touching the wall, he made his way back down the hallway. Faint light shone through the side of the window shade and he could see Elaine sitting on the edge of the bed, facing the wall. "Honey, are you alright?" he asked her. She didn't

speaking. Then he heard her quietly crying. "What was it this time?" Elaine asked, turning to him. "You scared the shit outta me, Kevin." He reached and clicked on his bedside lamp, sat down and leaned over towards her. "I'm sorry, honey. It was just another nightmare. It's not important. Let's go back to sleep," he told her, touching her shoulder. She shrugged away from his hand. "What's it gonna take before you go get some help? You know, there are ceremonies to take away that war sickness. One of these days you might hurt somebody when you have these nightmares and flashbacks and stuff," Elaine stammered, and Kevin knew she was referring to the time he had pushed her out of bed, screaming at her to take cover. That was when he heard incoming mortar, or thought he had. But it had just been some noise out in the street. He felt pretty stupid. But he covered it up by getting mad at her. He told her she should be more understanding. The next day she had showed him the bruise on her arm when she'd hit the metal bed frame.

He had been home from the Nam for nearly five years. Other vets he talked with hadn't all gotten over their flashbacks yet. Elaine just didn't realize how sick he was of it. Early in the relationship, she had gotten mad because he wouldn't talk about it with her. So he tried once. He told her about the cute little Vietnamese boy that his buddy went to pick up in the vill they were sweeping in their search for VC's. Poor little guy was standing there, crying, dressed only in a diaper. The soldier had a soft spot for kids, since he had two of his own back home. But the kid was booby-trapped. The next thing Kevin knew, he was picking up pieces of his buddy. Those damn gooks used their kids like that all the time! He remembered the second day he was in Nam, waiting to be processed at Long Binh. He and some other guys had gone looking for a cold beer. They were strolling down the crowded street, checking out the sights and looking at the hookers. A

bus had stopped to let passengers out. A small boy, maybe about seven years old, was the last to step out. He clutched what looked like a bundle of clothes in his hands. And then Kevin saw a blast as the kid and the front of the bus exploded. They just blew up! Kevin and the other guys couldn't believe it! There was screaming and mayhem as the fire tore through the rest of the burning hulk of a bus. People were running away from the fire. It was then the soldiers realized that the kid had been carrying grenades in his bundle. It made some of them so sick when they smelled the burning flesh that they threw up on the spot. Kevin would never forget that. Welcome to Vietnam!

But when he told Elaine about the booby-trapped baby, she got upset and said she didn't ever want to hear stuff like that. He had gotten angry at that, telling her "thanks for your sympathy, sweetheart. Guess I won't tell you about prying some grunt's bloody body out of a pit, after he fell in and got shish-kabobbed by punji sticks. That happened at least once a week." Kevin didn't know why he had said that to her. There was no way anyone, especially a woman, could understand the horrific crap that went on in Nam, unless they were there. That stuff could just eat you up if you let it. That's why the grunts always said to each other IT DON'T MEAN NUTHIN! You had to let it go, no matter who got killed in your unit. He had learned to not waste tears on anything after a while of being over there. He even knew some guys that seemed to enjoy the killing. They were the sickest mother-fuckers to him.

That's why he never bothered to tell Elaine about the gook that looked like his uncle. When Kevin had killed that NVA and then saw his face, it did something to him. Up until then, he hadn't thought much about the Vietnamese people. He accepted the brainwashing that the U.S. Army had done. NVA's and Viet Congs were the enemy.

They were dirty, stinking commies. His job, as a soldier, was to kill as many as possible. Kill or be killed. Simple as that. But after he shot that gook, he couldn't get his face out of his mind. It was nearly a month before he got a letter from his mom that said his uncle was fine. She couldn't understand why Kevin was so worried about him that he demanded someone write him back ASAP and let him know if Uncle Tyler was okay. His mom probably thought he was crazy. His uncle was still running his little ramshackle gas station back on the reserve in Sarnia. Kevin figured his uncle would understand, since he had seen action in Korea, only with the Canadian army. Tyler had been the one who urged Kevin to join up after he finished high school. Told him it was his responsibility to be a warrior. Kevin had childhood memories of his uncle coming home in his dress uniform, sporting a new tattoo on each arm. One was of an Indian with the word CHIEF over it, and the other was of his unit insignia. That had always impressed Kevin.

After killing the gook with his uncle's face, Kevin had started thinking about what all the black guys on base were saying about the war. That it was a white man's war. That the black man was sent over to kill yellow men for the white man. Up until then, Kevin hadn't paid much attention to the angry black soldiers. He had grown up in Sarnia, and didn't see too many black people. The few he had known around town were very different from the black guys in the States. These soldiers were mouthy, and some went AWOL because they were tired of fighting and dying for the white man. They said the black guys had to be point (guard) too often. Stick the black soldiers in front so they can be the first to get shot. Besides that, some of the white guys seemed to shine in the bright sun and would be easily seen by the VC's. That's why most of them had to wear face paint. After shooting that lone soldier, Kevin had begun to listen to the angry talk. He

felt that he had to walk point just as often as anyone else in his unit, but sometimes it did seem like the black guys were in front more often. He began to understand their anger. That's when he also started noticing how the army referred to the Vietnamese people as "Indigenous." Any time there were orders from the top, they used that term, usually regarding "friendlies," or South Vietnamese. And he knew that's what the Canadian government, in their bureaucratic jargon, often called his own Ojibway people.

Up until then, Kevin had accepted everything the army had told him to do. He didn't always like the missions his unit was sent on, but he never questioned things. Now he began to feel all torn up inside. He was the only Indian in his unit, but he had run across a couple of other Nishnawb Marines in his travels. Those Indians were from the States, but they said they knew of several Canadian Indians that were in the Corps. One of them asked Kevin why he joined the army, as if that made him inferior. Those damn Marines always seemed to think they were the best and the toughest in the land. He told him the army was a family tradition. His grandpa had been in both the American and Canadian armies during and after WWII. They had laughed and said that's because there was nothing like the USMC in Canada. He figured they were just razzing him. Kevin thought about all this now as he lay in the dark, trying to get back to sleep. He felt the codeine slowing down his brain until he finally dozed off.

Elaine lay in the fetal position on her side of the bed, thinking about what had just happened. She felt sorry for Kevin sometimes, but she was getting tired of him acting like he didn't need help. She told him that he talked in his sleep and swore and yelled stuff out, as if he were still fighting the war. She didn't understand how he could deny it. He

would demand to know what he'd said in his sleep, and when she couldn't really tell him, because none of it made sense, he just denied it. Kinda like people that snore and claim they don't. But too many times he had scared the daylights out of her with his sudden jerking in his sleep and yelling out.

Elaine Maracle had met Kevin Bird just over a year ago at a bar in London, Ontario. She was in town for a Native Elders Health Conference put on by N'Amerind Friendship Center. At the time, she was working with the seniors program back on her home reserve of Tyendinaga. A bunch of the women from the conference had gone out to the local Indian bar to check out the men. Several of her friends hooked up with guys that night, but none of it was serious. Just a little fun before they all went back to their home communities. Elaine was the only one that night that wound up with what she thought was a decent guy. Kevin was sitting there, smoking a pipe, which made him look very mature to her. And best of all, he was drinking a Coke, which really impressed her. How nice to meet an Indian guy who didn't drink! Little did she know that he was a recovering alcoholic. He didn't tell her for a long time that he had only been sober for a little while, and that he came from a long line of drinkers, including his father, who died in a drunken car accident on Highway 21 near Kettle Point Reserve. That happened while Kevin was still in high school and it messed him up so much that he became good friends with ole Jack Daniels. Elaine later learned that he had drunk and toked his way through much of his tour of duty in Nam.

She couldn't remember much about the war in Vietnam, even though her oldest brother had been there. Elaine had only been 11 years old when her brother Jimmy had joined the Marine Corps. He had been ironworking down in Buffalo for almost four years

when he decided to go to war. Said he had nothing better to do, because his company had laid him off anyway. The building trade had slowed down, and Jimmy had been used to making good money working the iron. He had always liked to live dangerously, so it was only natural he joined the ranks of other Mohawk men who built the skyscrapers. There was a long tradition of men from the various Iroquois reserves in Canada and down in New York state who become ironworkers. They all laughed about how the White ironworkers believed the Indian guys had special spirits watching out for them as they strolled along the thin beams high in the sky. The Mohawks, especially, seemed completely comfortable working at those great heights with little to protect them. Many of them didn't even bother to wear the safety harnesses if they were only working a few stories off the ground. Jimmy always said he did put his on once he went over four stories high.

Elaine hadn't even seen her brother before he left his job and joined the Marines, went to boot camp at Parris Island, South Carolina, then eventually to Vietnam, but she wrote him once a week. She had even helped her mother make cookies to ship to him at Christmastime. Elaine wasn't close to Jimmy, since there were 12 years and five siblings between them, but she was really proud of him. She still kept a black and white photo of him in his fatigues taken over in Vietnam stuck up in the corner of her dresser's mirror, even now. The corners were looking frayed and bent, but she didn't want to take it down. In the picture you could see his bulging muscles and bright white grin upon his brown face. His dark brown hair was chopped so short he almost looked shaved. He clutched a rifle in his hands and had his foot propped up on a jeep. Elaine treasured that photo, since he had sent it to her from Vietnam. He looked so alive and tough.

And he must have been tough. Because he made it through the war without getting shot once. He got shipped back to the States after one tour and did what he'd always talked about doing. He bought a motorcycle in Florida and was going to ride back up some highway until it hooked up with the brand new I-75, take that to Detroit, then take the 401 up to the reserve. Jimmy made it as far as some little hick town in Kentucky when a drunk driver hit him coming over a hill. He was thrown from his motorcycle, and even though he was wearing a helmet, he died instantly when his head slammed into the base of a road sign. The drunk was never charged. The guy claimed Jimmy didn't have his headlights on, and the sun was going down. He said he never saw Jimmy in the dusk. The Maracle family didn't believe it, of course, and figured it wasn't against the law for a white man to kill an Indian in the southern U.S. After all, they had been killing black people down there up until recently. But there was nothing Elaine's parents could do, except bury their son. At least they buried him in the traditional Longhouse way, with the feast for the dead, and grieved for the ten days required. It was then that her father had gone back to boozing. He'd been dry for many years, her mother said, but now her dad's heart was broken. After that, Elaine began to pay more attention to the news reports about the Vietnam War, because she felt if Jimmy hadn't been over there, he wouldn't have bought the motorcycle and he'd still be alive.

Her brother had been the only one Elaine had known personally that had been in Vietnam. So she didn't know if what Kevin was going through was normal. He had seemed like such a sweet guy when she had met him. Her parents weren't thrilled with the idea of her dating a man who was eight years older than her, since she was barely 20. And the fact that he was an Ojibway didn't sit well with her grandma. The old lady was always

lecturing all of her grandkids about marrying only Iroquois. She reminded Elaine that the Ojibway and the Iroquois had been enemies in the old days. She said they weren't to be trusted. Gram said other Indians had lost so much of their culture, their language, and their ceremonies. She spoke Mohawk and Cayuga and understood Oneida and Seneca. Grandma was still a faithkeeper in the Longhouse, and everyone had to pay her respect and listen to her. So Elaine already knew that Gram wouldn't completely like Kevin, no matter what he did. But at least everyone in the Maracle family liked the fact Kevin had been to war. That meant her family would at least treat him with respect, because their traditions gave special status to warriors. It also meant certain behavior was expected of those warriors among the Longhouse people. But Kevin wasn't Iroquois, so even though Grandma lectured him when he first came to visit in Tyendinaga, Elaine suspected none of it meant anything to him. Later, after they started living together in Sarnia, she could see that he didn't abide by the unwritten rules about being a Native veteran. Elaine knew Kevin he should be taking more of a leadership role in the community, as well as being more of a protector and provider for older folks on the reserve. And she suspected that he suffered from what they called the "war sickness." It was the label some older Indians, and the more traditional ones, like her grandma, used to explain how screwed up the men were when they came home from war. Some tribes even had special ceremonies to cleanse those warriors of the mental, spiritual, and physical ills they had from killing other men. Those Indians believed that spilling another man's blood polluted the warrior, because the essence of a man was carried in his blood. But to Elaine, the war sickness was what the White doctors called post-traumatic stress disorder. And the sickness came out in all kinds of ways.

Elaine was eager to move in with her new man after her job came to an end. It was just a short-term contract working with the old folks, but she figured it gave her enough experience to get a job with the senior program on the Sarnia reserve. That never did pan out. She quickly realized that such positions were usually filled by local band members, whether they were experienced or not. She wound up working at a donut shop in town for a while. Elaine didn't much like it, because she felt that she was far too smart to be doing such work. Not only that, but she had to take too many night shifts, so that she'd have use of Kevin's car. He needed it during the day for his construction job. His brother got him in to a company that built houses around Sarnia and Pointe Edward. The work was good during the summer, but Kevin knew he might be laid off over the winter, and since he was the last hired, he'd lose his job when things slowed down. So even though Elaine didn't like her job, it was all she could find for the time being.

After a while, Elaine began to realize that Kevin was spending more and more of his time drinking with some of his buddies from the reserve while she was at work. She could smell the odor of booze in her bedroom when she came home, and it really pissed her off. Their apartment was off-reserve and on the north side of the city, while the Sarnia reserve was in the middle of town, not far from Chemical Valley. She always thought it was a dirty, smelly area when she compared it to her home rez up north. She only went with Kevin to visit on his reserve when there was a family gathering, or for the annual powwow in July. Otherwise, Elaine didn't like to go there much and often made excuses when Kevin would suggest they go and hang out. She always felt like such an outsider because she wasn't Ojibway. But she didn't mind going down the road to Walpole Island Reserve for fishing, even though it was also a mainly Ojib rez. To her, it was a more

traditional community. She also knew a few powwow people who lived there. And besides, Elaine loved to fish. Kevin always said that was one thing he really liked about her.

Liked. Huh! That was another thing that bugged Elaine. In all the time they had been together, Kevin had never once said he loved her. She had waited for him to say it for many months. After she realized she was in love with him, Elaine told him. But he would never commit that way. And that made her feel inadequate, like something was wrong with her, and that she was immature for expecting him to say it. Kevin liked to tell her that saying I love you to somebody was like holding a gun to their head - that they had no choice but to say it back. He told her that she sounded awful insecure. Elaine tried to argue with him, and told him that all women needed to know their men loved them. But the most Kevin would say was that he cared for her. So Elaine was always wondering how he really felt, or if he missed some old girlfriend. And often he would pull crap on her about her "being so young." He'd say that, despite the fact he always told it was no big deal that he was eight years older. He would tell her she had a lot of growing up to do. Sometimes he'd even make fun of things that she liked - like going to garage sales, or writing him little love notes, or watching cartoons on Saturday morning, or watching the Three Stooges on TV and laughing her head off. Kevin would just shake his head and look over his glasses at her in a condescending way. Elaine would feel so stupid and childish. But she would also get angry at him for making fun of her.

Elaine realized he was playing a lot of mind games on her, but he was so good at it she didn't know how to fight it. Sometimes he would call her "Super-Indian" because she was so involved in learning about Native culture and going to powwows. He kept telling

her there was more to life than just being an Indian. Elaine felt like he was throwing it in her face because he had been to several countries, like Japan and Germany, and of course Vietnam, while he was in the Army. And the only traveling she had done was to go to powwows. She had been a fancy shawl dancer since she was about eight years old. If she could afford it, she wanted to go to a powwow every weekend. But Kevin wouldn't go and he certainly wouldn't dance. He would only attend Sarnia and Walpole's powwows, and maybe Kettle Point. Even then, all he did was walk around and look at the trader's tables. Sometimes Elaine thought he felt he was better than everyone else. He often made fun of some of the Indians that were at the powwows, saying that he didn't have to put on feathers to know who he was. Elaine just couldn't understand him. She had tried to get him to go to the Head Veteran at the Sarnia powwow, and offer to carry one of the flags in the grand entry. She told him it was an honor to do that in his home community. But Kevin wouldn't do it. He said he didn't fit with those other Nishnawbe vets, because they'd served with Canada's army. Elaine wondered if he felt ashamed for having been in Vietnam. Thinking about all of this, she finally turned off her bedside lamp and rolled over to go to sleep. Kevin was already snoring. She knew he'd taken some pills to get to sleep. Feeling guilty for getting mad at him about his nightmares, she said a quick prayer that tonight's horrible dream would be the last. And she prayed that he would get over the war sickness.

One day, a few months later, Kevin got a phone call from a cousin of his who lived down in Detroit. The cousin, Nathan, also worked in home construction, like so many in

Kevin's family. Nathan's boss needed a couple more workers and Nathan had thought of Kevin. Elaine listened as Kevin talked excitedly over the phone about the idea of moving to Detroit. Then she heard him tell his cousin that he could drive down the following Sunday night, stay the night with him, and then go see the foreman on Monday morning. Elaine began to feel angry that they hadn't even talked about it

She blew up as soon as Kevin hung up the phone. "How could you decide, just like that (clicking her fingers) that you were gonna move to Detroit? Did you ever think it's something we should talk about, as a couple!?" she fumed at him. "What about what I want? And what about our future together!?" Elaine slammed the pack of hamburger meat she had in her hand onto the kitchen counter.

Kevin gave her one of his looks - the look that said she was acting immature. That made her even madder. He sighed and said, "Well, honey, we can talk about it now. It's a good opportunity. The pay is better down there, and the chance of working most of the year is better. Hell, I think life is better over in the States. I'm glad Nathan thought of me." Kevin untied his work boots and pushed them off by the heels. Then he pulled the cloth bandanna off his head that he wore to catch the sweat. It was the only thing he ever wore that looked remotely Indian. "I don't understand what you're so angry about. It's not like you can't give up your job flipping donuts. You hate it anyway." he calmly said, crossing his hands behind his head and leaning back on the couch. "So what's the problem?" he added, stretching his legs out and giving her another one of those fatherly looks over his glasses.

Elaine crossed her arms to keep from throwing something at him. She hated the fact that he was right about her job, and acted smug about it. She stammered around for a

moment. "The problem is that you accepted the offer right away. Why didn't you tell your cousin we would talk about it, and you would call him back? Why don't you show me that much respect? I am 50 percent of this relationship!" Elaine reminded him.

Kevin smiled and continued resting his head on his clasped hands. "It wouldn't make sense to call him back and run up our long distance bill, sweetheart. That would mean one less phone call up north to your mom. And I know that's important to you." he continued smiling. Besides, I haven't accepted the job. The foreman has to meet me and see what kind of worker I am. When that happens, and I find out how much it pays, then you and I can decide what's best. How's that sound, sweetheart?" he asked smugly.

Elaine felt beat. She knew he just didn't get that what made her angry was him not talking with her first. That made her feel like he would probably move to Detroit, with or without her. She knew he had spent plenty of time across the border, but the idea of living over there really scared her. All the crime and guns. The whites hating the blacks and vice versa. And she had heard that the city was still a mess ten years after the riots. "Fine!" she practically shouted at him, and turned back to the stove. She could just feel him smirking at her. It infuriated her the way he talked to her like a child. Elaine knew she needed to work on her temper. Her mother had always told her that. But she just wanted to feel like an equal partner with Kevin. When he did these kinds of things, she felt like he was making all the decisions for them.

Two weeks later, Kevin and Elaine arrived in Detroit in their little car, loaded down with their personal belongings. Two of Kevin's brothers followed with both their pickups filled with the hand-me-down furniture the couple had accumulated over the year or so they'd been together. Their little convoy pulled up in front of a dilapidated house on

the southwest side of the city. Kevin had been hired, and his cousin had helped him find a cheap place to live. The two cousins thought the house was great! It was cheap, had everything they needed, and even had a decent-sized yard for Elaine to have a vegetable garden. So what if the neighborhood was a little scary? Kevin didn't think it was that bad. It was mainly Mexicans and Puerto Ricans, but there were quite a few Indian families in the area. After all, Detroit had a good-sized Indian population - some 15 thousand, they'd heard. And about one-third of them were supposed to be from Canada. So Kevin figured they'd feel at home after a while. He'd told Elaine all about it before the moving day. Plus, the house was close to the bridge that led over the Detroit River to Ontario. He told Elaine she could pop over to Windsor and catch the train to go visit her mom when she wanted, as long as they could afford it.

Kevin started his job right away. He liked it a lot, and often bragged to Elaine about what a great bunch of guys he worked with. He told her the guys kept asking him to go out for a beer with them on Friday after work. Kevin thought if he laid it on real thick about how homesick he was, she would agree to him going out once in a while. Since she didn't have a job yet, they were home together every night. Just the two of them. She seemed to want him to spend all his spare time with just her. He was beginning to feel trapped in the relationship, because Elaine had hinted about getting married. He felt like she was hanging on tighter than ever to him, and he didn't like that at all. Elaine still hadn't made any friends yet, other than the little old Mexican lady next door. And that was just friendly, neighborly stuff. She asked Kevin why she couldn't go along with him and the guys from work for a night out.

“Because it's just men! I don't need them checking you out! And they swear a

lot, and tell raunchy jokes. Besides, if you tag along they'll think I'm pussy-whipped. I'd never live that down! I mean, a couple of the guys are even married, and their wives don't push themselves on the men," Kevin said angrily, popping the tab off a can of pop and guzzling some down noisily. Elaine thought how he drank pop the same way he drank beer. Very rudely.

Her eyes flashed anger back at him. "Oh, is that what I'd be doing!? Intruding!? Maybe you're ashamed of me! Or maybe you and the guys are gonna do things you don't want me to know about. Maybe you and the guys are out checking out the whores at the Mexican bars, huh? I'll bet the married guys take off their rings when they go out and pick up chicks!" Elaine fumed.

"Yeah, right!" Kevin yelled back at her. "How can you make such a big deal of this!? It's just a bunch of guys going out to have a few beers and watch the ball game on TV. That's all!" he slammed the pop can down on the table. Some pop splattered up out of the can and landed on the table, leaving glistening brown marks. "I can't believe how insecure you are. You oughta listen to yourself. Why don't you grow up!?" Kevin spat out.

"Oh, fine!" Elaine yelled back. "Maybe I should just go out with some girlfriends and get drunk and not tell you where I'm going! Just leave you wondering what I'm doing."

"I wish you would get some girlfriends!" Kevin said much quieter. "That's the problem. You just stay home all day waiting for me to entertain you. You need to make some friends. I wouldn't care if you went out once in a while. I trust you! Wish I could say the same about you trusting me. Because you obviously don't." Kevin sat down at

the table. He gave a heavy sigh and tried to pick his words. "Elaine," he said, "I just feel like you're smothering me. It isn't healthy for us to spend all our time together. I want to be with you. But not all the time."

At that, Elaine started crying. She felt so angry and hurt that she just wanted to throw something at him. And she was mad at herself for letting him get to her. She knew he hated her crying. It just made him madder. She wished, just once, he would come and hold her and wipe away her tears. She stood there sniffing and wiping her eyes with her shirt sleeve, waiting to see if he would do anything. He reached into his shirt pocket and took out a small zipper bag with tobacco, and slowly began filling his pipe.

"Ah, you don't have to do that," Kevin mumbled with the pipe clenched in his teeth, trying hard not to look at her as he lit it. "Crying is for babies. Save the tears for the serious stuff. Christ, why don't you act your age for once? I'm only gonna be gone a few hours."

With that, Elaine growled with anger and went slamming into the bedroom. She flung herself across the bed, tears streaming down her face. A few moments later, she heard the front door open and slam shut. She looked out the window and watched him go down the walk and climb into their little car. A small black cloud blew out of the noisy tailpipe as Kevin fired up the engine before squealing away. Elaine couldn't believe how cruel he was being! For the first time, she felt like leaving him. She fell back across the bed and had herself a good cry. Finally she sat up on the side of the bed and wiped her face. "This is it!" she thought. "I'm going to get a job, so I can have some money of my own, and then I'll go out and see how he likes it!" She knew that Kevin knew she wouldn't really go out drinking. She hated drinking. Every time she tried, it made her

sick. And her grandmother's scolding words always came back to her. Grandma used to chew Elaine's dad out when he came home drunk. He didn't do it often, not like every weekend, but when he did, his mother-in-law had no qualms with telling him about it. Her mom never had to say anything about the drinking, because Grandma always did it for her. And when she did, Elaine's dad sat passively and quietly. Then he would go to bed, and act very remorseful the next day. He'd behave himself, at least until the next time.

Elaine decided to call her mother on the phone, but not until she stopped crying. She didn't want her mom to know how miserable she was. She would just tell her that she was really homesick. And mom would ask her if she wanted to come home. She always asked her that. But Elaine always told her no, and acted like she was quite happy with Kevin.

That night, Elaine heard their noisy little car pull up out front. She listened in the dark as Kevin jangled his keys, trying to unlock the door on the darkened front porch. Elaine had deliberately left the porch light off to make it hard for him. The neighbor's dog began barking. She heard Kevin yell "Shut the fuck up!" She knew he was drunk then, because that was the only time he talked that way. Finally he got the door open and stumbled into the house. Elaine saw a faint light shining under the door from down the hall. Then she heard the scrape of a kitchen chair leg. After a few minutes, she heard Kevin clump across the floor, down the hall, and to the bedroom door to try and open it. He couldn't. She had locked it. She waited, hoping he wouldn't start his drunken yelling. He didn't. She heard him clump back down the hallway and across the kitchen. Then there was a quiet thud. Elaine was sure he had plopped down on the couch. She waited, and after a short while of quiet, she got up, opened the bedroom door and padded in bare

feet into the kitchen. He had left the front door partially open. She peeked around the archway into the living room. Sure enough, Kevin was sprawled out on the couch. Elaine pushed the front door shut, flicked off the kitchen light and went back to the bedroom, locking that door once again. Now that he was home, she knew she could sleep.

Elaine was dreaming about riding a horse at her uncle's place on the reserve. She felt the pounding of the animal beneath her as they hurtled across a bare cornfield. Elaine had always loved to ride. Her uncle let her whenever she wanted. But the horse stopped suddenly and kicked back on his hind legs. Elaine struggled to hang on. The horse started to scream. He sounded just like a man! She kept pulling on the reins, trying to get the horse back down. All the time he kept screaming. Then Elaine jerked up in bed. There was no horse! The screams were echoing in the dark. It took her a moment to realize that it was Kevin. She heard banging around out past the kitchen. She jumped up and flung open the door. By the time she got into the living room and flicked on the light, Kevin was sitting up on the couch, breathing hard. She stood there looking at him. He finally looked up at her, wild-eyed. She knew it was another nightmare. He always had them when he drank. Lots of times he didn't remember the next morning. He would just flail around in bed and finally go back to sleep.

This time, she didn't even ask. He got up and shuffled past her. It looked like his bad leg was acting up. Elaine could hear his ragged breathing. Kevin went into the bathroom and pushed the door. She heard him taking a good long pee, forgetting to flush. She kept standing out in the kitchen. Then she heard him come out of the john and go into the bedroom. She clicked the light off and went down the hall. Kevin was already out like a light, one leg hanging off the bed. Elaine walked into the bathroom and flushed

the toilet. Then she went to bed.

There was an icy cold silence between the two for several days. Elaine didn't bother getting up with him and cooking breakfast. She pretended to keep sleeping when the alarm went off and he didn't bother her. He also didn't bother to make himself anything to eat. This made her mad, because that meant he was wasting money buying breakfast out, and lunch as well. He always cried the blues about their money situation when she asked him for cash. It seemed he only had enough to pay the bills, which he took care of, carefully writing out the money orders he bought. That way, she never really knew how much money they had. "How convenient," she always thought. That also helped seal her decision about getting a job.

That Thursday, she called the employment counselor at Detroit Indian Center. His last name was Antone, so Elaine knew he was an Oneida. When he heard her name was Maracle, he knew she was Mohawk. Harvey Antone told her her timing was just right. The center was looking to hire half a dozen people to carry out a survey in the Cass Corridor area. He told her that was a downtown neighborhood that had the largest concentration of Indians in the city of Detroit. The center was also located down in the Cass Corridor on the seventh floor of the Salvation Army's Harbor Light Center. The counselor told Elaine her work with seniors on the reserve would come in handy, since a lot of the Indians in that neighborhood were older. Three people had already been hired, and if she hurried down there to fill out an application, she stood a good chance of getting hired on the spot. Then Harvey told her what bus to catch to get to the center from Mexicantown. Elaine was scared, but she knew she had to do it.

Two hours later, she was taking the elevator up to the seventh floor. It was the oldest elevator she'd ever seen, and an old man in a uniform sitting on a stool had to operate it. There was a heavy door he closed first, then a cage-like gate that he swung shut. Then he pushed a lever slowly to take them up. Elaine thought it was cool. The old man said his name was Fred, and that he'd been doing this job for sixteen years. He told her that the Salvation Army hired him to do it after he dried out in their rehab program. She told him she hoped to be getting hired by the center, and if that happened, she'd see him every day. Fred told her he was real happy when the Indian Center moved in the building. He said everybody from up there was real friendly to him. He said a lot of the Indians came down at lunchtime and shot pool on the first floor with some of the rehab residents. Fred said the other tenants in the building were too snobby to do that. He said they were mostly lawyers and accountants who barely spoke to him.

Harvey Antone had all the paperwork ready for Elaine when she got there. She filled out everything she could, even though she couldn't remember addresses. She couldn't even give him an emergency contact number, because she didn't really know anyone in town. She just wrote down the name of the company Kevin worked for. Harvey told her about the survey. The questionnaires were all printed up, with eight pages, front and back. He told her it was to find out the needs of the Indians in the area, as well as counting how many, what tribes they were from, blood quantum, and what they wanted from the center. Elaine began to feel excited as he took her around to meet other people that worked there. She finally felt happy, meeting some other Indians and feeling like she had a purpose. Much better than working at a coffee shop.

Elaine broke the cold war that evening when Kevin got home. She told him all about the job, which was for just six months, and how she had caught the DSR bus down to the Indian Center. Kevin's eyebrows went up at all this. He was surprised that she'd done it. They both laughed about how she would make \$3.50 an hour, a good wage in the mid-70's, just going around, talking and asking questions. Kevin told her she was good at that, smiling all the while. She figured that was his way of making up. He finally did say that he was sorry she felt hurt about him going out. But he didn't exactly say that he was sorry he did it. Elaine decided not to let it get to her. That next night, Friday, he stayed home with her and watched TV.

Elaine started that following Monday. She already knew what bus to catch, and Kevin had told her that maybe sometime, he could ride to work with one of the guys and she could have the car. She would be walking around the Corridor to do her job, so she wasn't concerned about transportation then. As it was, she felt kind of scared to drive in Detroit. There was just too much traffic and crazy drivers. She thought riding the bus might be better.

After just a week, Elaine told Kevin she loved the job. She had made friends with the other young people who were working on the needs assessment survey. Two of them were Winnebagos from Wisconsin, a brother and sister. Two more were Chippewa girls from there in Michigan, and the other guy was a Delaware from Chatham, Ontario. Elaine made the sixth person. They had a lot of laughs and usually tried to meet at lunchtime. Sometimes, Elaine lost track of time while she was visiting the homes of the Indian families, but lots of times, she would be offered something to eat while she was there. She knew it was an old rule that you never refuse food at an Indian home. So she didn't. And

she didn't mind saving her lunch money.

After a while, Elaine began to go out with her new friends. They always seemed to want to go to the Indian bars down on Third Street, in the Cass Corridor. At first, she tried to get them to go somewhere else, but since none of them had a car, going elsewhere seemed impossible. But she never told Kevin they were going to the Indian bars. She told him they were going to one of the girls' apartments in Chinatown. That was in the Cass Corridor. Since she couldn't get Kevin to ever come down to the Indian Center when they had a social event, she didn't worry that he would find out where she was hanging out with her friends. After all, she wasn't doing anything wrong. At this point, she only allowed herself two shells of beer during the whole evening. She didn't really like the taste, so she just sipped it. She didn't get drunk, far from it, and she always took a cab home after, because it was too late to catch a bus. And sometimes they did go to Beverly's apartment. Elaine didn't like to go there much, because she saw a cockroach the first time she went to use the bathroom. But she finally felt good about having friends and not counting on Kevin so much to spend time with her. She began to have a life of her own. But she still thought about getting married. She was surprised he wasn't eager to, since he was so much older. She knew her family considered them married already, in the Indian way, since they shared a home.

She was thinking about this the night Kevin called her drunk from Sarnia. It was the wee hours of Saturday morning, and she'd been home for hours. She had tried to get him to do something with her, like go to a show or something, but he wanted to go out with the guys instead. He called drunk from the county jail in Sarnia. He'd been picked up for drunk driving, and he still had an Ontario license. Elaine was fuming. He wanted

her to find a way to come get him, but she had no way. She told him to call his family and then hung up on him. She couldn't believe he could be so stupid. She couldn't believe that when she met him, he didn't even drink. Now Elaine realized the Kevin she'd fallen in love with wasn't the real him. It was just a false face he had put on for her. He was becoming a big lush.

Kevin didn't come home until Sunday night. He wouldn't tell her what the cops said or if he had to go to court or anything. Elaine didn't know about these things. But she was shocked when she saw the car the next morning. He hadn't told her about smashing up the front end. It was still drivable. But it looked bad. When she asked him about it, he said someone had hit it in a bar parking lot in Sarnia. Elaine didn't really believe him. When she pressed him about it, he reminded her that it was HIS car. They both left for work Monday morning angry.

Kevin didn't go out with the guys for a while. Things were uneasy between the two of them for what seemed like weeks. Elaine was frustrated because he'd never admit he was wrong about anything. He ignored her when she nagged him about his drinking. And Kevin was sick of having to report his every move. At least, that's how she made him feel. He just didn't think he should have to answer questions all the time. Sometimes he told her he already had a mother.

When he'd first met Elaine, she seemed to be in awe of him. She liked the battle scars he had (except the bad one on his knee) and how worldly he seemed. He even got her to appreciate other kinds of music than just country, rock & roll and powwow singing. He told her those country hick songs appealed to Indians, because they were all about cheating, boozing, and fighting. Kevin had introduced her to jazz, the blues, and even

some classical. He'd learned about Beethoven and Tchaikovsky from a buddy in the Army. Elaine didn't like the long-hair music at first, but Kevin made it sound like it made her more intelligent if she learned to appreciate it. He insisted she give it a try. Later, she realized she did enjoy much of it. When she thought about the relationship years later, she realized Kevin was the teacher and she the student. Being older and more experienced, he taught her a lot about life, and forced her to grow up, though he didn't do it in a nice way. Trouble was, she eventually outgrew her teacher.

It was the hot month of August in Detroit, and Elaine felt she had never lived in such muggy conditions before. It never seemed to get that humid up in Tyendinaga. She missed the lake and the coolness of the pine trees around the reserve. Even dancing in the Longhouse during Green Corn ceremony in the summer never made her sweat as much as the sun's heat radiating off the concrete of Detroit sidewalks did. She and her friends still had a couple more months to go before they completed their survey work. Some of the group hoped to stay on at the center to help compile the results. So much of it had to be done by hand.

The gang of young friends decided to go out on Friday night. Elaine mentioned to Kevin that she was going to go out with Beverly and the others. She used to hope Kevin would take her up on her offer of coming along. Elaine wanted Kevin to meet her friends that had become like family to her. She had shared with the girls about problems in the relationship. Finally, Elaine stopped inviting Kevin, because he always had something else more important to do. Sometimes she wondered why they were even living together anymore. They did so little together. At least their lovemaking was still okay. Elaine just

hated when Kevin came home drunk and expected her to drop her pants. He would be all over her, and his booze breath made her want to puke.

So when Elaine told Kevin she was going out on Friday, she didn't bother to invite him. And he just grunted "um-hum," when she said she wouldn't be home right after work. She almost felt relieved, because he still didn't know that sometimes the group went down to Palmer's on Third Street or Sabb's on Second Ave. As soon as you mentioned Third Street to any Indian in town, they immediately recognized the strip of local Indian bars.

It was a bit after 9 that night before the friends got to Palmer's. They had gone to have dinner over in Mexicantown, and had to pack into Ronnie's '63 Rambler. He had recently bought the old clunker. The six friends had been laughing all evening, and were in the mood to dance. Beverly went up to get a bunch of quarters for the jukebox while Elaine went to the bathroom. The pool table was busy, and Ronnie already had his quarter up to try to get into a game. But the one-armed pool shark from Mt. Pleasant rez was keeping everyone at bay. He was an old Indian guy who seemed to live on Third Street. It was amazing how well he played!

There was a small lineup in the women's john. Elaine took a minute to brush her long dark brown hair and put it back into a ponytail. She put on some lip gloss, then wondered why she bothered. The bar was so dark you could barely see anyone outside the circle of light at the pool table. She tucked the gloss back into her small purse and went out. Coming down the hall, Elaine heard loud, boisterous laughing out by the bar. When she came around the corner, she stopped to let her eyes adjust. When that happened, she saw something she didn't want to see.

Kevin was leaning on a squat, busty white woman who was helping him tip up a beer. Two other guys stood behind him, and Elaine recognized one as Kevin's cousin Nathan. The little group was laughing as the bartender brought over more beers. Elaine watched as Kevin puckered up and kissed the dishpan-blond woman. He was obviously drunk, as he leaned and rocked against her with his arm around her neck. Kevin dropped his hand down and let it slide into the front of the woman's dress. Then he stuck his tongue into her ear. The woman pressed her body closer to Kevin and they locked lips. The two friends were jeering and egging them on.

Elaine had seen enough. She stomped over to Ronnie and asked him to take her home. Her friends looked quizzically at her as she whispered to Beverly what was happening over by the bar. The other girls offered to go home with her, but Elaine said she didn't want to spoil their fun. Then she walked over to Kevin and his floozy and waited until he finally noticed her before she threw her full glass of beer in his face. The suds splashed on both Kevin and the woman, who just stood and sputtered. Kevin didn't even call out after Elaine as she stomped furiously out of the bar. Elaine spotted Kevin's crunched-up car out on Third Street. She wished she had a baseball bat. Ronnie smirked at Kevin as he followed Elaine out of Palmer's. He teased her all the way over to her house about hell having no fury like the wrath of a Mohawk woman. Later, Beverly called her from the bar to let her know that Kevin and his tramp didn't stick around for long after she had left. Elaine then told her friend what she was going to do.

Elaine stood outside the Via Rail station in Walkerville the next morning, waiting for the 11:00 train. Kevin never did come home, so he didn't interfere with her packing.

She took only her clothes and toiletries, leaving behind anything he had bought her and all the pictures of the two of them. She had ripped each of them cleanly in half and left them on the dresser. She didn't even take the photo of Kevin in his dress uniform taken years before when he left for the war.

She was sure it had been him that kept calling that morning. The phone rang at least a dozen rings every few minutes before Elaine finally picked it up and slammed it down. She didn't even want to see him or hear any explanation. She figures he'd been screwing around on her for a while. That's what she got for being trusting. Grandma was right about Ojibway men.

Elaine couldn't know that as she was climbing up onto the train steps, Kevin was quietly coming in their front door with flowers in his hands. He had had another bad nightmare during the night as he crashed out on his cousin's couch, and in this one, Elaine's face was on the gook Kevin shot in the dream. He lay there sweating after and realized how much he really did love her. And he had never, in two-and-a-half years together, spoke those words to her. Now he wanted to. But she was gone.

Elaine looked out the train window at the passing houses on the outskirts of Windsor. She clutched the single dog-tag on a chain that Kevin had given her when they first made love. Years later, she would give it back to him when she saw him at a powwow in Detroit. Any time she went to a powwow in Michigan, she got the dog-tag from a drawer just in case. By then, she had her two children in tow, and a husband sitting and singing at a drum in the center of the dance arena. And, by then, Kevin was limping much worse from the shrapnel he had taken in his knee, supported by a hand-carved cane and looking very much like an old beaten-up veteran. But, Elaine noticed, he still would

not go out to dance with the other vets in their Honor dance. She knew then that he still had the war sickness that he'd come home with. And that he would probably die with it.

Their Reason

“Do you know why so many Indians become soldiers during wartime?” the gray-haired, brown-faced Munsee man asked me. I shook my head, knowing he would tell me what he thought. “It’s real simple,” he said. “In the old days, our men had all kinds of ways to prove their worth as men. They could be good at hunting... or at fishing... or good at raiding the villages of our enemies... or at catching wild horses... or just plain being warriors. Those old Indians knew they had to protect their villages and their families... and they had to provide food. Not only did they have to take care of their wives and kids, but they had to help feed their grandparents, aunties and uncles, their mom and dad, anyone that was older in their extended family... and sometimes they had to help feed those people that had lost their husbands and fathers. So in the old days... those Indian men had lots to do to prove what good men they were. Each man was known for what he was best at. In some tribes, that even meant the man was good at farming and providing vegetables to eat. But now,” he said, “we don’t have much to make us feel good about ourselves. Except for fighting. And some of us are reeeeeeall good at that. I was. I fought and killed plenty over in Vietnam. And just look at how many other Indians joined the service. Every single tribe and Indian band right across the land. Just let there be an inkling of a war... and you got Indians just waiting to sign up. Heck, some like the military just so they can do maneuvers and pretend they’re going to battle. And now you got Indian women joining up, too.” The ex-Marine lit a cigarette and took a few drags. The sunlight sparkled off the many pins on his ballcap. Each pin was a military one - a bulldog, the yellow, green and red bars of Vietnam, a Canadian flag and an American one, a set of

crossed guns with feathers hanging down - and several others. He smiled when he saw me looking at the pins. "Yep, the Army, and Navy and Marine Corps...there's been Indians in every branch of the U.S. and Canadian military. Right from the days of Joseph Brant and the Red Coats, to the American Civil War, and on to Desert Storm. And there will ALWAYS be Indian soldiers. It's the only way we can still be warriors, yah know." I nodded my head and looked over at the veterans lining up with their flags in hand to start the powwow. "Do you know why so many Indians have joined the United States Marine Corps? The toughest branch of any military anywhere? Do you know?" he asked me. "No, I guess I don't," I replied. "It's simple," he said. "It's because of the Eagle on the insignia. Soon as some Indians see that symbol representing the USMC....that's what they want to join. That's what did it for me." The veteran smiled, flicked his cigarette on the grass, and stood up. He picked up the flag for the Munsee-Delaware First Nations and walked over to join the rest of the veterans.

An Old Debt

The short, skinny man walked briskly down Campbell Street. His pace matched the fury going on in his head. He had to find a new place to live, and he had to find it soon. Otherwise, his wife would call it quits. They had only been back together three short months since she threw him out for drinking too much. Since he came back, Tom LaRoque felt like he was walking a tightrope. He still had a case of Blue each weekend, but at least he wasn't hanging out at the Legion hall a couple times a week. That's what seemed to really piss her off. When he came home from a night of partying with the other vets, she'd scream and call him a good-for-nothing drunken Indian. Then he'd get the silent treatment for a day or two before she finally gave in to his apologies.

Tom pulled off his ballcap and raked his permanently-grease-stained fingers through his short gray hair. He looked at his left hand, then scraped some dirt from under his nails. He held both hands out in front as he continued walking. Both were shaded gray from the engine grease they were in all day. *That's what I get for working on those big truck engines,* he thought. Tom knew that some people might think he was a slob who never washed his hands. *But that's okay,* he told himself. *Shows I'm a hard-working man.*

Tom kept walking. He was looking for an address in the 800 block, and he was only in the three hundreds. He hoped this house wasn't a dive like the one they almost moved into two weeks ago. It was just crazy. His family had to move out of the neat little brick house they'd lived in for a little over a year now, because the landlord wanted to give it to one of his kids. So even though Tom and his wife and boys were good

tenants, they had to go. *Hey, that's life*, he thought, trying to smile. That was a month ago. Then he had found another house just a few blocks away, and closer to his work. It seemed alright. Not a mansion, but Tom wasn't picky. He was used to the bare necessities. The army had taught him that. His wife hadn't liked the new place much, but they had little choice, what with winter coming soon. So Tom had put down 12 hundred dollars for the new place. First and last months' rent. He had borrowed money from a couple of friends and gotten an advance on his pay just to raise the bucks. Everything was right on schedule. He and his teenaged boys had loaded a borrowed pickup with some furniture and headed over to the new joint, only to find a freshly-painted sign that read

CONDEMNED. UNSUITABLE FOR HUMAN HABITATION.

What the hell!? Now he was waiting to hear about getting his deposit back. His wife was convinced they had kissed that 12 hundred goodbye. And she had nagged him about it ever since. But Tom was a trusting type. He believed that landlord when he said he'd pay him back. Tom knew if they had to go to court about it that it would takes months. In the meantime, they could be out on the street. He was sure then that Peggy would pack up and move back to her mom's.

That was the kind of bullshit luck Tom seemed to have all the time. But he didn't complain. He always managed to shake it off with a smile. He knew if he let things get to him, he might hurt something or someone. And he used to do that. He never took any shit from anyone when he was younger. He might be small, he thought, but he was a scrapper, and he really believed that the bigger they are they harder they fall. But after Nam, Tom had learned to just shrug it off. Any time something went wrong, or any bullshit luck, he just told himself what they said in the Nam, *It don't mean nuthin*. Tom

already knew that life could be a lot worse. He had gone through hell when Peggy had kicked him out back in the summer. *Too much boozing*, she had screamed at him. She was sick and tired of him spending so much money on his beer. *Shit*, he thought. *She should understand how hard I work over at the garage*. He earned every penny he made. And he always handed it all over to her. All except about 40 bucks. Just enough to keep him in smokes and buy a case each weekend. And Peggy always bitched when he'd go over to the legion hall on Wyandotte. He couldn't understand what her problem was about that. Tom didn't spend much when he went there. There was usually some drunk old veteran around who would cover for him and buy a few rounds. Those guys were the only ones who liked him and respected him for what he had done, even though they razzed him about fighting for the U.S. All Tom had to do was listen to their war stories and he'd tell them his. All about life as a tunnel rat. Those World War Two veterans loved the Vietnam tales. Of course, they claimed nothing was as bad as Dieppe, or Normandy, or D-Day. That's why these vets had to stick together. *Wives never understand*, he thought. A few of them were okay and came down to the legion once in a while to hoist a few with their men. Tom wished Peggy'd do that. But she pretty much quit drinking after he came home from Nam. Now she only liked a wine cooler once in a while. He remembered how much fun she used to be when they had gotten married. *Christ*, Tom thought, *that was over 26 years ago. Time sure flies*.

It was Vietnam that taught him to drink. He was just a kid then. Nineteen years old, the same age as his oldest boy. A few other Indian and Metis guys he knew had joined up as soon as they could. A couple of them had lived over in the States as kids, or else had worked over there, so they had both American and Canadian citizenship. He

knew some of his relatives back in Quebec had gone across to Maine and signed up. Tom had been working as an industrial roofer over in Detroit at the time and living in Windsor. He heard that other Canadians were joining up, too. It wasn't that he wanted to go over and kill people. Nothing like that. He had been drunk the day he cruised down to the recruiting office on Jefferson Avenue with some of the boys from work. The Sergeant had no qualms about him being from across the Detroit River. As long as he was old enough to sign. Tom heard from someone later that it was actually against the law for a Canadian to join the U.S. military, but most of the recruitment officers didn't seem to know that, or else didn't care. They were just anxious for bodies to fill the quota. And Tom and his buddies figured this was a good way to show what men they were. *How could I ever have been that stupid or that drunk?* Tom thought.

So off to Army boot camp he went. That was a few weeks of hell. But before he knew it, boot camp was over and he was packed into a cargo plane with dozens of other scared guys headed to the Nam. Once they got there the name of the game was wait. And wait. And wait some more. Sometimes they'd sit for days waiting for the Viet Cong. And what better way to kill time than to get plastered. This happened pretty often. Some of the guys in his unit preferred smoking dope, but Tom didn't much like that stuff. And when they were back at their base, and had time in the local vill(age), all the guys spent it drinking, or with the Vietnamese hookers, or both. He remembered that he drank more during the first month of his two tours of duty than he did over his first five years of marriage. *I guess I drank to cope with all the bullshit that went on and the stuff I saw and couldn't believe*, Tom now thought. The trouble for him when he was there was that you didn't always know who the enemy was. Even babies might be booby-trapped and old

ladies could be armed to shoot G.I.'s who thought they were harmless; soldiers who had jungle rot and needed fresh, new socks couldn't always get them from their supply sergeants; and high-ranking officers could get fresh lobster and steak while troops at the front were stuck with ancient canned rations. It was easy to get disillusioned over there.

Things changed after Tom's C.O. volunteered him for tunnel duty. Tom has no idea what it was at first. The sarge said he was picked because he was the smallest guy in the platoon. Lucky him! He'd often wished he were bigger. His own mother was bigger than him. She was a big round Metis-Cree woman, but his dad was a short, wiry Frenchman. Tom was only five-two and about 140 pounds. That made getting into the tunnels real easy. And he did it 57 times. So many times that he stopped feeling the overpowering fear. It actually became thrilling to slide down that hole knowing it could be the last time. Fear was replaced by an adrenalin rush.

All he had to do, the Sarge told him, was flush out the VC's or kill them on the spot. So after Tom dropped a grenade down to announce himself, yelling "Fire in the hole," he would then crawl into the tiny openings that were hidden by brush and vines. He could only take grenades and two handguns down with him. There was no room for any larger rifle. There was barely room to maneuver. Those VC's were smaller than him even, so it was always a tight squeeze. Sometimes the tunnels were empty. Most of the time they weren't. He laughed as he remembered the look on those nasty slant-eyes' faces. He really took them by surprise. But he had to be fast. He'd blast them in the head, most of the time right in the forehead. Later Tom would joke about giving them a third eye. Those gooks were generally relaxing and talking when he slid into their dirt-packed rooms. Sometimes they just didn't know what hit them. And he had to reload the

cartridge quick because you never knew when a couple more would slide in through the other side. It was a nasty job because you had no backup down there at all. Those VC's were ingenious when they built those tunnels. If they tried to get out the other side, his buddies were sitting outside another hole waiting for them. It was a good day when you could blow away a few Victor Charley's and contribute to the all-important body count. That's all that seemed to matter to most of the officers and Washington. Tom used to wear two playing cards under the strap on his helmet. They were both Ace of Spades, since he was credited with two ace and a half killed. An ace was equal to one hundred. He never really knew if he killed two hundred and fifty VC's or not, or if his lieutenant had exaggerated Tom's count. He didn't really care. He was just doing his job.

That's why Tom was called a Tunnel Rat. And he wore the title with pride. No one but his family and other Vietnam vets knew what the insignia on his greasy ballcap was all about. It was a cartoon rat, dressed in green fatigues, gun in hand, cigar clenched tight in grinning teeth, with the word Tunnel above it and Rat beneath. But when he marched in the Color Guard with the local chapter of the Canadian Vietnam Veterans at local parades, he couldn't wear the ballcap. So his Marine buddy Carl had gotten him a silver Tunnel Rat pin from the Army surplus store over in Detroit. Tom wore that on his color guard uniform. He knew that the other guys sometimes thought he was crazy. Nah! He wasn't. He had just learned to laugh at the bad things, instead of whining about the terrible things he'd seen and done. He'd heard enough moaning and complaining from other vets.

And that's why he didn't get angry when he saw the condemned sign on his new home. And he didn't get mad when Peggy screamed at him and called him a loser. He

knew she was scared. It's hard to be forced out of a home you really like and then to think you found another one, only to risk losing 12 hundred bucks. Tom walked faster as he thought about the money. He would go see that other landlord about their deposit right after he looked at this new place on Campbell. It sounded good in the newspaper ad. Three bedrooms. A small yard. He hoped there was a big picture window, or better yet, a front porch so he could sit and sip his beer and watch the traffic. Even after working on big truck engines all day, he still enjoyed watching cars and trucks go by. Maybe because he hadn't owned his own car in so long. Oh, well! His feet got him everywhere he needed to go. And when he got kicked out, he had moved out to the county to his mom's house. So all he had to do then was hitchhike into the city for work each morning and back out to the county at the end of the day. He was usually pretty lucky about getting picked up, but it made for a longer day. Tom was so relieved when he finally convinced Peggy to let him come back home again.

So he felt optimistic by the time he got up to the 800 block. His eyes ran across the house numbers as he slowed his pace. Eight-13, eight-17, here it was. Eight-21. A duplex. Nice brick. A shared front porch. Tom tugged at his ballcap and climbed the stairs. He stood on the porch and looked around. The FOR RENT sign still hung in the window, so he wasn't too late. He lifted his greasy right fist and knocked on the door. It was just a few moments before the door flew open.

Tom looked through the screen into the eyes of an old Vietnamese woman. There was no mistaking it. He had looked into many eyes like hers. She pushed open the door and stared at him. He swallowed hard. "I came...uh...about the place to rent," he stammered. *Shit!* he thought. The old woman looked up at his hat. She didn't speak.

She didn't even smile. Tom got ready to tell her to forget it. He wasn't gonna kiss nobody's ass just to get a house. Especially some goddamned Vietnamese. "It's 600 dollar. You got that?" she spoke fast in choppy English. "Yeah, I got that. I don't have it on me, but I can get it tomorrow," Tom answered. "You got wife? And kids?" the woman snapped. Tom watched her closely. She was small. They all were. He actually felt big next to her. "Yeah, I have my wife and two sons who live with me. Can I see the place?" he asked. "I get key," she said and hurried back into the house. Tom stood on the porch, feeling like he was in a dream. He knew there were plenty of Vietnamese and Cambodians, and even Laotians, all over this city, but he had always steered clear of them. He'd see them from a distance walking down the street and would even cross over just to avoid them. Just his luck to go house-hunting and run smack into one.

The little yellow woman scurried back out onto the porch and shuffled over to the other front door, jingling keys. She stopped and turned to look at Tom. "You soldier?" she asked. He nodded. "Where were you in Vet-nam?" *They always missed pronouncing the "i" in the word*, he thought. Tom braced for the worst, expecting a torrent of rapid Vietnamese cussing. He straightened his shoulders and looked at her with fierce pride. "I was stationed in Pleiku a few months in '69 and then in Phan Thiet the next year and a half," Tom answered, wondering if she was North or South, "and I spent a little time in Chu Lai, too." A slow smile revealed her tobacco-stained teeth. "Pleiku! Pleiku! My village just 40 miles from Pleiku. You American?" the woman asked. Then Tom risked a half-grin. "No, I'm a Canadian. But I served in the U.S. Army. That was a long time ago," he said with pride. The woman turned, smiling, and unlocked the door. Tom heard her mumbling "Pleiku," and followed her through the neat two-storey.

After checking out the house, Tom followed the little Vietnamese lady back out onto the porch. She locked the door and put the keys in her house dress pocket. "You like?" she asked him, scrunching up her face to show her smile. "Well, it looks good to me. Just need to fix the drip in the bathroom tap. So you said 600. Is it first and last month?" Tom asked, as he said a quick prayer that he could get that money back from the other place. "No, G.I. For you, jest first month. Jest 600 you give me. Move in soon you want. OK?" the woman smiled again. Tom was surprised, but he answered, "well, yeah, yeah, I have to go home and tell my wife first, but I know she'll like it. I'll come by tomorrow, OK?" The little Vietnamese lady said, "OK. You go now." And she shuffled back into her house and closed the door, smiling out the pane at Tom.

He bounded down the steps. Tom chuckled to himself as he headed back up the street. Some students walking by looked at him funny, because he was talking to himself by then. "What bullshit luck I got," he mumbled. "Got a damn Vietnamese landlady. Wait'll the guys at the legion hall hear this. Holy shit!" Then Tom crossed the street to make a quick stop at the Legion hall.

Five hours later, Tom was feeling pretty good. Two other Vietnam vets had stopped by the Legion and they were celebrating Tom's bullshit luck. One was Keith, a guy from Amherstburg, who had spent most of his one tour as a supply sergeant for the army, and Carl Isaacs, a Mohawk guy from up near Brantford. Carl had done ten months in the Nam with the 3rd Marine division. He could be pretty crazy at times, but liked to brag that he always went home to his wife and kids. He had already called home twice since he starting drinking with the other two, and they had been teasing him about it. Carl countered by razzing Tom about having a new Mamma-san to shack up with. Then he

made fun of Keith's long gray ponytail, nudging him and saying, "Why is it you White guys try to look like old leftover hippies?" Carl kept the front and top of his black and gray hair in a Marine-style cut, and a long braid in back that touched his belt. Keith grinned and replied "maybe those hippies had the right idea. Yah know - peace and love. No violence. Those few weeks I spent humping the boonies and shooting at gooks taught me that I didn't like killing and I didn't like being shot at." The other two men just nodded. Keith was one guy that tried hard to put the war behind him. They knew that, even now, Keith wouldn't put on a uniform for local Chapter One of the Canadian Vietnam Veterans Association. All three were members, and all the rest of the guys who belonged wore color guard uniforms when they marched in local parades. Keith always went to the parades and stood on the sidelines, along with the spectators. All the vets in the group respected Keith's wishes. He said once he got out of the army and took off his uniform for the last time, it really was the last time.

"Hey, so when do you figure you'll be moving?" Carl asked Tom. "I'll know after I talk with the wife," Tom replied, "but it's gotta be by the end of the month. Christ, I just hope we have good weather, and that I get my money back from that other guy." Tom grinned, adding, "I'd hate to have to go over there and put a thumping on him." The other two men laughed. "Yeah, right, a little skinny weasel like you is gonna beat anybody up," Keith chuckled. "You'd better bring your wife and your momma and your sons for back-up," said Carl. Tom was drunkenly indignant. "Hey, I'm a lot tougher than I look. I don't back down from no one," Tom ranted. The other two men just smiled. They hadn't drank nearly as much as their tunnel rat friend, and they knew from experience that Tom liked to talk big when he was tying one on. But he was a happy

drunk, so they didn't mind him too much. They shared a strong camaraderie .

“So you'll have to let us know what day you decide to move. I can help, and we can use my pickup,” Carl offered. Keith added, “Yeah, count me in. And we should be able to get a couple of the other guys to give us a hand.” Tom smiled and swayed on his chair. “Hey, you guys are great, man! That's really great,” he slurred. Carl said, “Yeah, and if it's a Saturday, that's even better. We can get everything moved in no time.” “Hey, I know who we can get to help us,” Tom said, lurching forward. “How about ole Wally Solomon? He'd probably love to hang out with some real vets for a day.” Tom starting laughing, but Carl snarled. “Yeah, that fat fuckin' coward! He's never worked a day in his life. Don't even think about him.” Keith shook his head. “Doesn't he just sit back and collect disability, and let his wife support his gambling habit?” Tom grinned and said, “Yeah, Casino Windsor's his second home, along with Classic Bingo on Huron Line.” Tom laughed some more, while Keith shook his head and sipped his beer.

Wally was a Potawatomie guy who lived in Leamington, and who had spent exactly four days in Vietnam with the army. The other vets knew Wally never even saw time in the bush. Never even fired his M-16. He had gone on a big drunk while still at Long Binh, and then went AWOL, winding up back in Ontario two weeks later. Everyone figured he stowed away on a ship or two. He was eventually given a dishonorable discharge, and since he was from Canada, the army really couldn't touch him. Otherwise, he'd have wound up in the stockade. The three men all knew different guys back in the Nam who'd gone AWOL. Some had come back and finished their tour, and some were booted out. That meant no G.I. benefits at all. But the worst thing was the stigma attached to them. They were branded cowards and never forgiven by many Vietnam vets.

Chapter One in Windsor would not even let someone like Wally Solomon be a member. In order to join, you had to present your honorable discharge papers. But in the meantime, Wally often showed up for the various events and ceremonies with the local vets. The guys in Chapter One, for the most part, ignored him, while one or two said they understood why he went AWOL. But Carl often talked about taking Wally out to the bush and kicking his ass. It made him angry that the deserter wore an eagle feather in his cap, because Carl felt the guy didn't have the right. He had heard that Wally went around claiming to be a Vietnam vet to others in the Native community, who didn't know any better. Carl had such contempt for the man that he ranked him right at the bottom with the so-called conscientious objectors who managed to avoid the draft by coming to Canada.

Keith picked up his glass and drained it, then stood up. "Well guys, I gotta get home. Gotta head back to the 'burg. Work tomorrow," he said, then turned to Tom. "So call me as soon as you know what day so I don't make any other plans." The men exchanged good-nights and Keith left. "Let's get another pitcher. I'll buy," Tom mumbled. Carl sucked down the rest of his glass. "Nah, I think we better go, too. I gotta get some sleep. And you better get home before Peggy kicks your ass. You want me to drop you off?" Carl asked as he pulled out his keys. He led the way out of the legion hall as Tom stumbled along behind him. Carl heard him bragging about how much Peggy loved him and how happy she'll be about the new place.

It was just a week and a half later that Tom's family moved. The guys in Chapter One had enough pickups and vans between them that Tom didn't have to rent a moving truck. He was glad he didn't have to cough up extra bucks for that. Peggy had been so

mad at him that night he came home drunk that he promised they could use the deposit money they were saving to get cable hooked up right away. But, he told her, she had to let him buy a few cases and some pizza for the guys the day of the move. Peggy didn't realize the other vets didn't drink that much, which would leave Tom with a nice stockpile of Blue. It wasn't often he could outsmart her when it came to his beer.

But Peggy seemed too happy about the new house to rag him about anything. She got the most important things for her - cable TV, a bingo hall and grocery store right down the street, and a nice big kitchen with a fridge larger than their last one. They had two teenage boys who ate a lot and were much bigger than Tom, so the family needed plenty of food space. Tom checked out the fridge and thought, *Hot damn! I can fit most of a case in there.* He had always dreamed of having one of those little beer fridges right by the television. To him, that was the ultimate.

When the pickups first arrived at the new place, Mamma-san was there to greet them. The vets all got a kick out of her, and some of them used some of their rusty Vietnamese phrases with the old lady, who just smiled and nodded, saying "G.I. number one!" Tom had told Mamma-san that a couple of the guys helping him had spent time in Nam. She had already met Peggy a week before when Tom took his wife over to see the house. He felt relieved to see Peggy's reaction. For her, it was the nicest place she had ever lived in. Even better than their last house they had had to leave. She didn't even notice the drip in the bathroom which still hadn't been fixed. There was a small pane of stained-glass in the main bedroom at the front of the house that caught Peggy's eye. She wanted the bed on the opposite side of the room so she could see the stained-glass each morning when she woke up. Peggy had grown up in a Catholic family, and though she

rarely went to mass, she still liked things that reminded her of her childhood days in St. Joachim and the church there. The furniture arrangement was all up to her. Life was easier when Tom did exactly what she wanted. He felt it was the give-and-take of married life. If she was in a good mood, she might not bitch about his drinking.

It took the men no time at all to haul everything from the old place to the new one. Then they all sat around Tom's high-ceiling living room and munched pizza. Keith was telling the group about the three new names to be added to the North Wall down at the Detroit River. He had received letters and documentation from the families of three more Canadians who had died in Vietnam. These KIA's were not in the U.S. military, but rather in the Canadian army, Keith told them. "So now we have proof that Ottawa's been lying all these years," Carl angrily said, adding "Those sons-a-bitches! We should call the media when we have the names put on." Keith shook his head, "Nah, it isn't worth the trouble. Besides, if we piss off the local MP's, we may not get their help when we go for official recognition of the Wall as a Canadian war memorial. We already know how the feds feel about it, since they wouldn't let it be built in Ottawa." Tom reached down, grabbed another slice of pizza and said "Yeah, but I'm glad we've got it here in Windsor instead. Just look at all the vets from across the border that come to our events. If it had been built up there, a lot of them might not be able to travel that far. We got the biker-vets from all over for the "Run to the Wall," and look at how many we have show up that are disabled. Plus they always bring their wives, so I bet they wouldn't have wanted to make that trip up the highway. Christ, that's a haul to Ottawa. This is so much easier." Several men nodded. The group continued talking and eating pizza until finally one of the guys stood up and announced he had to get home. "Hockey game on tonight. Toronto's

gonna kick Detroit's ass," he said, which started a flurry of friendly ranting back and forth. Most of the group were Red Wing fans, having grown up in the area.

Before they all left, Keith reminded them of next week's meeting over at the legion. Chapter One met on the last Wednesday of each month at Canadian Royal Legion 143 on Wyandotte West. The group felt lucky to have been offered the use of the hall. They knew that some other Vietnam vets groups around the country had trouble getting respect and recognition from many vets in Canada because Vietnam was just considered an American war. Those older men who fought "for the queen and dominion" never understood how any Canadian could fight for an army other than their own. Over the years, that recognition had come slowly in Vancouver and around Quebec. Most Windsor vets got along fine with the Chapter One group. Their color guard took part in the Remembrance Day parade and ceremony down at the citadel near Windsor City Hall. Of course, the Vietnam vets were near the end of the procession, because the vets of the Canadian military had to go before them. But at least Chapter One came before the police pipe band and local groups of cadets.

Slowly, the men all went home except Carl. He told Tom he needed to talk with him about something. Peggy was bustling around the house, dragging boxes, while the two boys were in their respective rooms. Loud music poured down the stairs. Tom shook his head. *Damn shits. Of course they hooked up the stereo first.* He jumped up and stomped to the door and yelled "Hey!! You wanna turn that down some?" Then Tom strode back to the recliner, stepping over the pile of pizza boxes and looking at Carl. "Christ, they're gonna make Mamma-san wish she'd never rented to us," he said, as he grabbed another Blue. "Hope these walls are good and thick. So what's up? What'd yah

wanna talk about?" Tom asked. He could see anger building on Carl's face, so he said, "Hey, it couldn't be that bad. Take it easy and tell me what's going on." Carl lit up a cigarette and inhaled. Tom knew he was trying to quit, but decided to say nothing. It was the first smoke he'd noticed him having all day. Carl took another drag and started talking.

"Yah remember that blonde guy that got up at the ceremonies at the Wall two summers ago and claimed he was speaking for the Native veterans? He stood up on the stage and held some raggedy-ass peace pipe. Started talking about being a warrior for his people and stuff. He kinda took over the whole show for a bit." Tom grinned, nodded and said, "Oh yeah, the one who says he's Huron, but can't tell us what reserve he's supposed to be from. Claims he grew up over in Wisconsin and was raised by Menominees, but he's really from over here. Yeah, I remember him. What a joke!" Tom chuckled. "I was surprised you didn't tell him off, or better yet, kick his ass," said Tom, adding "I notice he hasn't showed up for anything else in a while. Maybe he knows we're on to him." Carl shifted on the couch and took another drag. "Yeah, well, I haven't thought too much more about him. Figured he was just another wannabee, and if he showed up at ceremonies again, I would have to ask him to see his Indian card. Christ, he's got a Polish last name. What is it now? Frank something. Ends in "ski." Not a very traditional name, huh? Well, I heard awhile back from some brothers down on Moraviantown reserve that this clown was conducting sweats out on his property. He lives somewhere outside Bothwell. That's near the reserve. And I guess he has some property and has his own sweat lodge built there. Thinks he's a fuckin' medicine man or something!" Carl's cigarette dropped ashes as he reached for an ashtray on the floor. He

stood up and walked over to the window. Tom opened his mouth to speak, but Peggy came into the room to grab another box. She looked at the pizza boxes and empty bottles cluttering the coffee table, then looked at Tom. He said, "Don't worry, honey. I'll clean up the mess in a little while. Why don't you take a break?" Peggy said nothing. She pulled another box behind her into the bedroom, scowling as she went. "Because if I don't do this tonight, we won't have sheets on the bed to sleep on!" Peggy grumbled in Tom's direction.

Tom looked over at Carl, who was trying not to smile. He came back over and sat down on the couch. "So there's more," Carl said. "A while back, this Shaman Frank had a sweat for a bunch of people. Some were Indian, some were white. Mostly women, right? One of those mixed sweats that they seem to like to do around these parts. It's not the way we Iroquois do it. According to what I've been taught, men and women have separate sweats. Anyway, everything went fine. They had their sweat, had their feast afterwards. This clown always invites everybody to spend the night at his place. Has some little shed rigged up with wooden bunks where anyone can just throw their sleeping bags on one and camp out. So I guess there was this young Munsee woman from London there. It was her first time at a sweat, so the Shaman was giving her lots of attention. Huh!" The anger flashed again on Carl's face. "Yeah, I'm sure he was hoping she'd spend the night. But I guess the people she rode with were going back to London. It was a bunch from the friendship center up there. Anyway, so everybody's giving each other a hug goodbye. Yah know how it is at the end of a good sweat. Yah wanna keep the good feelings, so you hug everyone or shake their hand. Well, Shaman Frank gave this girl a little more than a hug. He grabbed her ass and held her close! Stupid fucker had a hard-

on when he did it! Nobody even saw it, 'cause they were all out in the bush, and the moon wasn't out. He was far enough away from the fire that no one could see what he did. And this girl's like, only 18 or 19. That son-of-a-bitch!" Carl was just fuming. Tom couldn't believe it! He said, "So did this girl scream, or smack him, or tell somebody?" Carl shook his head and said, "No. She was so surprised she didn't know what to do. I guess she got away from him real quick. She was pretty embarrassed, and even thought someone had seen him grab her. No one said anything, so she realized they must not have. Then she got the others she rode with to hurry up and leave, saying her mom wanted her to hurry home. She didn't mention it to anyone until she got home and told her mom. Her mother didn't even know what to do about it. It took her mom a while, and she finally started talking to some people around town about it. Says her daughter doesn't ever want to sweat again." Tom asked him where he'd heard all this. Carl answered, "I heard this from that one Marine vet from down in Bucktown. you know, that Snake guy. Everyone's hopping mad. Some of them are even wondering if this guy is really a vet or not. He's a wannabee Indian. Maybe he's a wannabee veteran, too!" Carl had a look on his face that could kill. Tom had never seen him this mad.

"Okay, so what do you wanna do?" Tom asked his friend. "We can't just go down there and beat the shit out of him. Even though he deserves it. I thought he had a wife. Where the hell was she?" Carl grunted. He lit another smoke. "Oh hell, she left that asshole a while back. So he's a poor lonely bachelor. It just kills me that he goes around calling himself a shaman. Shaman my ass! He better make some strong protection medicine. He's gonna need it before I get through with him!" Carl stood up again with those last words. "So what do yah wanna do?" Tom asked him. Carl walked back over to

the window and looked out at the setting sun. He was quiet for a moment. "I'll tell you what," he said. "Lemme talk with some of the other Native vets down on Walpole and up in Chippewa of the Thames and Oneida. See what they think. Sure we'd all like to cut his balls off and hang them and him out in the bush. But there's other good ways to hurt him. I'll see what they all say. I know the guys up on the island meet at their legion hall on the night after our meeting here. Maybe I'll cruise up there and talk with them." "Hey, I'll go with you," Tom said. "Get me out of the city for a while. And I'd like to be in on whatever happens. Christ, I'm glad that guy doesn't claim to be Metis. We don't want him" Tom said with a scowl on his face.

Carl smirked at that one. He said, "Alright. That's what we'll do. And later we'll take care of the shaman. We'll teach him to play grab-ass on Indian women. Listen, I better head home. I think my wife wanted to go to a show or something." He smiled at Tom and said, "Don't forget to clean up this mess in here." Carl walked over to the door. "You got a real nice place here, bro. Hope Mamma-san treats you good. See yah later!" With that, Carl left, and Tom began putting bottles back into the empty case.

Over the next few months, Tom got to know Mamma-san real good. She had told him he was too skinny. He didn't want to tell her that Peggy was not the greatest cook. If he really wanted something, he often had to cook it himself. And if he was late for dinner, his sons had usually eaten everything in sight. He complained about it to Peggy, but she just told him it was his own fault for not coming home on time. Too often he wound up having a liquid supper. But now he could always go over and ask Mamma-san for something to eat. She was always bringing over some of her Vietnamese cooking for him and Peg to try. He swore he had put on ten pounds since they had moved in. Several

times a week, the little Asian lady would come knocking on the door. She'd knock and walk right in. She was so cute that even Peggy didn't mind the intrusion. She'd shuffle in, hand the hot dish to Peggy and poke Tom in the stomach as she left, smiling her gap-toothed smile. Then she would stick her head back in the door and tell them the name of the dish. It was always a name they could hardly pronounce. Tom just loved it! He felt like he had a second mother watching out for him. His mom was old and lived out in the county, so Tom didn't see her much. And Mamma-san had only daughters and no husband, so she seemed to like having Tom around. It gave her someone to cook for. Tom didn't see much of the daughters, even though they lived there. One of them was in university, and the other two worked. One of his sons had tried to get to know one of the Vietnamese girls, but she shut him down. Tom's sons didn't stay home much anyway.

They were gone out the Saturday night that Carl came to get Tom. A bunch of the vets had got together and were going to go down to Bothwell and take care of the shaman. Carl hadn't told Tom because it was a spur of the moment thing. They had been waiting for winter to get over with before they took care of business. There was no hurry. Shaman Frank didn't hold wintertime sweats. Peggy had gone with a girlfriend to bingo, and Tom knew she wouldn't be home until late. Sometimes she liked to play the midnight session if she had been lucky. Tom had already killed a few Labatts when Carl showed up. Carl was annoyed when he saw Tom half in the bag. "Christ, Tom. I need you to be sober if you're going with us. These other guys don't know you. I don't want you acting stupid," Carl told him. "Don't worry. I'm not drunk. Just feeling good. Let's go!" Tom said as he grabbed his jacket. The two men headed out and climbed in Carl's truck. "We'll meet up with the other guys at the Tim Horton's in Chatham. They're coming

from the island. We're supposed to meet them at seven. We better boot 'er," Carl said as they pulled away.

A pickup and a minivan were waiting for them at the Timmy's on the outskirts of Chatham. Carl got out and introduced Tom to the others. There were five guys in the van and two in the truck. Tom recognized several faces he'd seen at the Native ceremony that had been held at the North Wall last summer. The men talked about what they were going to do. One of them had gotten directions to Shaman Frank's place, so they were ready. They didn't know if the wannabee would be at home or not. The men had decided not to beat him up, even though they all felt he deserved it. A couple of the guys had a record, and said they didn't mind going to jail again. Carl told them how bad he'd like to throttle the son-of-a-bitch, but didn't figure he was worth going to jail for. So they all agreed they would just tear down the sweat lodge and maybe even his sleep shed. That way, if he wasn't home, he'd get the message loud and clear. And if he was there, they would give him a good threat. One of the Walpole vets had heard that the wannabee already knew from someone that he was in big trouble with the Native vets. And if the shaman was home, they might just trash his house and maybe flatten his tires. But under no circumstances were they to lay a hand on the guy. The men all agreed and headed down to Bothwell.

Shaman Frank was home when the men arrived. They kept each other in check and did exactly what they talked about. Not only did they tear down the lodge and the shed, but they covered over his fire pit, as well. And none of them felt bad about any of it, because they all knew it was their job, as warriors, to do what it takes to protect the women. They had agreed that would be their defense, in case the shaman reported it to

the police. But they didn't figure he would. They all took turns chewing him out and threatening to come back if he ever played medicine man again. By the time they left, he was hiding in his bedroom, whimpering and promising to never conduct another sweat again. The vets had a good laugh about it when they all stopped for a coffee in town before going their own separate ways. One said no doubt the shaman shit his pants when he saw them, and another said it's probably the closest that wannabee ever came to real action. After much bragging and guffawing, the men shook hands and hugged, several promising to see each other at the next powwow. Then the Walpole boys climbed in their vehicles and headed back to the island, while Carl and Tom hit the 401.

It was close to midnight when Carl dropped Tom off at his place. Tom invited him in for a beer, but Carl turned him down and went home. The house was dark with only the living room lamp on. Tom went to the kitchen, opened the fridge, and smiled, thinking, *Ah, good! Still got more than half a case.* He lugged a few bottles into the living room before clicking the remote, then he settled back to watch Mad TV and get buzzed. Tom chuckled to himself as he thought about the shaman. He'd only recently started learning about what being a Native warrior was all about. Once he had even carried the Canadian flag at a small traditional powwow, though he hardly knew what to do, and had to just follow the other vets. But it was a real honor for him - about the best he'd ever had since he came home from Nam. And Carl had told him that even non-Native vets are always invited out to dance at the powwows in the special dance that honors all veterans. Tom thought that was so cool!

It was a couple of hours later that Tom first heard the racket. He was really feeling his oats and didn't care what was going on in the world. He'd been lining the

empties up on the scarred coffee table and flipping the bottlecaps over into the small trashcan by the TV. The voices he heard were getting louder and louder, but he couldn't make out what they were saying. Then he realized it's because they were yelling in Vietnamese. Tom turned down the volume and listened for a minute. It wasn't Mamma-san's voice. Sounded like a daughter and some guy arguing. He listened for a moment, then turned back up the TV. A few minutes later he heard the girl screaming and some thumps. He thought, *What the hell? Wonder where Mamma-san is?* Usually the women were quiet as mice next door, even when they had company. Tom thought he better go check things out.

He walked unsteadily to his door, around the porch, and over to the other door. The inside door was wide open and the storm door was fogged up, so he couldn't see inside. He could hear more yelling, so he pulled open the outside door. Sticking his head inside the house, Tom yelled "Hello!" several times, but thought they couldn't hear him over the yelling and thumping. He stood still for a minute. Then he heard the crash of something being broken. That's when he charged down the hall and into the kitchen. Some guy had one of the girls pushed up against the fridge and they were screaming at each other. The girl was crying. Broken glass littered the floor. The couple didn't even notice Tom at the entrance. And he still couldn't understand what they were saying. Things looked fuzzy to him, but when the guy slapped the girl in the face, Tom bolted across the room. He grabbed the Vietnamese man and pulled him back. He was still clutching the girl's shirt front, so she tumbled with them. Tom fell back across a chair and the couple stumbled across the floor, slipping on the glass. The man let loose of the girl and she ran over towards the back door. Before Tom could realize what happened, the

man had grabbed something from the table and swung at him. Tom felt a quick pain in his side as he reached out to hit the guy's face. He barely made contact and the other man pushed him back towards the table. It took Tom a moment or two to pull himself together. His head was spinning. The woman was screaming at the man, who grabbed her by the hand and pulled her out of the room. Tom wasn't sure at first where they went until he heard the front door bang. He staggered to the door and couldn't see out through the fogged pane. Then he heard car doors slam and an engine start. His left side was really smarting, but he paid no mind to it. He went back into the kitchen and looked at the glass on the floor. *Have to tell Mamma-san about this when I see her*, he thought. *Christ, what the hell was that all about?* He stumbled back to the front door, making sure to close both of them as he went out. He stood and gulped the cool night air. *Wonder when Peggy's gonna get home? She won't believe this bullshit*, he told himself. Tom touched his side where the pain was. He felt wetness. He held his hand out to where the streetlight would shine on it. Red. *Dammit! The little gook stuck me*, Tom realized. *Son-of-a-bitch!* He went back into his home. Standing and swaying at the door, he thought, *Wonder if Peggy's home yet*. "Honey!" he called out. No answer. Feeling thirsty, he plopped back down on the sofa and reached for his half-full bottle. He leaned up against the pillow on the end of the couch, put his elbow on the arm and propped his head on his hand. Then he slowly nodded off.

About 45 minutes later, Peggy came home. The TV was blaring and Tom was passed out on the sofa. She slammed the front door angrily. Tom didn't wake up. She yelled at him, "Do you have to have the TV so freaking loud?" Even that didn't wake him. Peggy stomped over and turned off the set. "Huh. Son-of-a-bitch. Fucking drunk

again.” she fumed. “Well, you can just sleep on the couch.” She walked over and turned off the lamp and with that, she went into the kitchen. She opened the fridge to get some lunchmeat out, noticing there were only three bottles of beer left. Peggy made herself a ham sandwich and read some of the newspaper. Soon she heard the boys at the front door. The two of them stared at their father as they walked through the living room. Peggy scolded them for being so late, but they paid little attention to her. They too made sandwiches and sat at the table. Peggy couldn’t get them to tell her where they’d been, so she got up and went to bed. She didn’t bother to tell them she had won a hundred bucks. She knew they’d ask her for some of it. The boys wolfed down their sandwiches and went up to their rooms. Peggy heard their TV come on. It was loud, but not loud enough to get up and yell at them. She snuggled down and went to sleep.

The next morning Peggy slept in. Usually Tom was up early and his bustling around often woke her up. She didn’t hear him this morning, so she slept until well past ten. When she got up, he was still slumped over on the couch. Peggy couldn’t believe he could be passed out so long. She called out his name but he didn’t budge. So she shuffled over in her house slippers and nudged him. He was leaned over onto the left arm of the couch. She pushed his shoulder. He still didn’t respond. So she pushed his shoulder harder. His whole body moved with that, and that’s when Peggy realized something was wrong. “Tom!!” she yelled at him and pushed him back. It was then she saw the bloody pillow wedged between him and the couch arm. She touched his cold face and started screaming.

Part II

WORDWEAPONS

Wordweapons

I stagger and stumble from the stabs
wordweapons sticking into my back
daggers of derision hit my heart
spiteful insults strike deep in my soul
you blast my brain with cruel bitter barbs
slice my senses with sarcastic spears
impale my spirit with harsh hatred
driving all emotions from my heart.
The ordeal is over and I fall
just another successful campaign
what military training taught you
never give `em a chance to react.

the colors of war

**brown native men in green fatigues
sent to kill the yellow man
save white man democracy
sweating in wild green jungles
night raids blacken the young hearts
men of color also bleed red
rotting soldiers on brown earth
pasty gray faces zipped away
black body bags hide the cost
send them home through bright blue skies
return them to brown native land**

Transformation

That same hand that used to clench
the barrel of an assault rifle
now wraps in a fist 'round the neck
of a cold beer bottle weapon.

Strong legs once good at marching
through clinging jungle bushes
now stumble just to bring him home
after he's answered the last call.

In Nam he cried too many tears
for the loved ones he missed back home
now his heart aches with anguish when
he thinks of buddies left behind.

He used to spend his long dark nights
fighting the hated Viet Cong
now he rages at home in the dark
and fights the woman who loves him.

He left before the fall of Saigon
but the war has not ended for him.

FLASH<<BACK

Black and white images
flashing on a glass screen

smoking village
jungle carnage
napalm nightmare
naked children

screaming
running
crying
flesh burning

Walter Cronkite informs us
the U.S. is winning the war

battle scene footage
dying G.I.'s
blasted bodies
bloodied uniforms

screaming
bleeding
crying
life draining

glad the T.V.'s not color
change channels, ignore the war

Nightraids

Sometimes
they crowd into his
dreams at night-
mares of
misty green soldiers
some bodies whole
some missing parts
an arm or a foot
sometimes a hole where
the chest should be
or half the head
gone
lying all over the ground
reaching out for help
he runs to get out
of the dream
they remind him of the
old pictures of Indian
massacres
killed by US cavalry
soldiers of the same army
as misty green soldiers
that killed natives in
Vietnam
and he was part
of that killing
he runs
but in the dreams
misty green soldiers
keep reaching

A Worldly Marine

I never did meet him that day
-a powwow held on my reserve-
although we were both there
Vietnam was going on
he was a young Marine
home on leave for a week
looking for a good time
one last time before shipping out
watching the women dancing
light-footed shawl dancers
tinkling jingle dance ladies
and buckskin traditional steppers
checking out the fine ones
just like in the old days
the way a man chose his wife
I should have noticed him
hard lean boot camp body
no uniform but you could tell
a G.I. cut gave him away
chopped black hair and nice
white smile crossed his brown face
someone caught his eye that day
but it wasn't me
he went home with her
some Ojib from across the river
spread her legs for the soldier
with the crisp American bills
a good time just one last time
I went home with mom and dad
a teenage girl still too young
to interest a worldly Marine

I met him after Vietnam
twenty-five years later
fine looking ex-Marine
with too many nightmares
says he buried his ghosts
but they keep getting up
and bothering him
he has scars that I can't see
they hurt so much sometimes
he kills the pain with liquor
and fights the bad spirits
with nastier bottled spirits.

Our Warriors' Rights

They have the right
to speak first in council
and first in the sweat lodge
their words go to the Creator
but aren't always answered
 they bring food to the old ones
 speak for the people
 fight for the people
 sometimes die for the people
 that's their job as warriors
 they alone have the right
 to give Eagle feathers
 to those who have earned one
 their honor to give a feather
 and our honor to receive it
 they cannot take the job
 of hereditary chief in
 the Iroquois Confederacy
 since they once bathed their hands
 in the blood of another man
 they may have left the fighting
 on a battlefield long ago
 but that still gives them the right
 to talk about those horrors
 and perhaps teach a lesson
 they hold these special honors
 within their Warrior hearts
 but with honor comes duty
 and great responsibilities
 to take care of the people

Running to remember

He runs
because he can.

He runs
for those who can't.

For those who shipped back dead
vinyl body bags zipped tight.
Never again to feel pain
or the heat of sun on their cheek.

For those who came home in pieces
battered bodies, shattered souls.
Never again to walk or run
or hold their loved ones in their arms.

He thinks of them as
he runs.

A tear in his eye
and a tear in his soul.

The North Wall

Three slabs stand together
gray black shiny granite
stare down at the water
cold gray Detroit River.
They call it the North Wall
a Vietnam memorial
square slab in the middle
holds the names of the dead.
One hundred and seven
young Canadian men
fought an American war
buried in Canada.
Diamond slab on the left
bears five insignias
U.S. military
and map of Vietnam.
Diamond slab on the right
speaks a poem of honor

“As long as we live
 you will live
As long as we live
 you will be remembered
As long as we live
 you will be loved.”

M.A.C.V.

“They are not forgotten.”

Part III
A HEALING SONG

Brothers in Arms

Nimkee John slowly drove his pickup truck along the grassy hill, carefully steering around the trader's tables and tents behind the ice arena on Walpole Island. He squinted against the sunshine, looking for a shady spot to pull his truck into. It was always nicer to get dressed in the shade so that you wouldn't be all sweaty when you put on your bustles. It was the weekend of Walpole Island's traditional May powwow and Nimkee was head veteran. He was nervous as hell and hoping some other more experienced veterans with dance outfits would show up. He had never been the head veteran before, and really wasn't sure if he could remember everything that had to be done. He didn't want his inexperience to show. This meant a lot to him, for the most he had ever done was just carry a flag at a few other powwows. Then he simply did what all the other vets did. This time, all eyes would be on him.

Nimkee waved at a few other dancers who were getting their gear on as he drove by. Shouts of "Boozhoo" came his way, along with friendly smiles. There were only a handful of dancers so far. It was always a small powwow. Nimkee was glad for that. After all, he'd only been dancing for about four years now. Until he quit drinking, he never even thought about dancing. Powwows were just another party for him in the past. Especially after he came back from Vietnam. He spent many years in a haze. He lived off what he made as a guide for the rich American duck hunters who came up to the island during the season. Some of them liked hearing his war stories, especially the guys who had never been in the service. He told them lots of bullshit, and played the ever-faithful

Indian scout for them. They didn't realize what a game it was for him. The more bullshit he shoveled, the bigger the tips. And those tips meant the difference between having Indian steak, which was baloney, or T-bone steaks.

But eventually Nimkee got tired of that life. He got fed up with the hangovers, and fed up with having no money. And he was tired of just having an old clunker which was broke down more than it ran. It was your typical Indian car. Nothing much worked on it. One window was covered with cardboard, a big spring stuck out of the passenger seat, it guzzled gas and spewed black smoke constantly, and it only had an AM radio. And finally he got caught by the local OPP for having expired plates. He never bothered getting it out of the pound.

So after he smartened up, quit drinking and got a decent job, things turned around. He got a good deal on a pickup truck from a cousin of his, and he had moved out of his mom's house to his own little apartment in Wallaceburg, the nearby town. After a while, he went from his landscaping job to a tool-and-die job in town. That gave him some security, since it wasn't affected by the change of seasons like laying turf and planting shrubs. Nim had really enjoyed the landscaping because he liked being outdoors. But he was getting older, and maybe being inside where it's warm was the best idea. His mom had bragged about him to his relations back then, but said little about his older brother, Geeshig. Geeshig was still living crazy, even crazier than Nimkee ever had. And since their mum had died last year, Geeshig's wildness had turned into recklessness, and their family home had changed into a party house.

Nim felt sad when he thought about his big brother. Geeshig had gone to Vietnam

before him and did three tours, while Nimkee did just one. They were both Marines. But Geeshig was the perfect Marine. He really bought into a lot of the crap that the Corps force-fed, like believing any other branch of the military was not as competent, or that great physical suffering made a Marine a better Marine, or that the officers should never be questioned. Meanwhile, Nimkee had his own mind. Not that he didn't like being a Marine. He loved it, and wore his uniform with pride when he came home. He had done his time humping the boonies, and spent the last three months of his tour working in the camp morgue, cataloguing the dead. That's the way he always thought of his job. Just a simple clerk, keeping records of just who lay inside those vinyl body bags in the dark, cool room, making sure the body matched the dog tags, filling out the forms, boxing up the personal belongings. You had to keep yourself detached from it all. And Geeshig was even better at detaching. He had been a sniper through most of his three tours and very good at his job. A cold, calculating killer. Geeshig never missed. His lieutenant and Sarge knew they could count on him. His sharp-shooting skills were much admired by the other grunts in his unit. But they also avoided the tall, thin Indian. They probably thought he was wacko. And, of course, there was the suspicion that the supply sergeant, who'd been fragged when a hand grenade had been tossed into the latrine he was in, might have been Geeshig's victim. That sarge had been known for refusing new boots and socks for the enlisted men who weren't white. The incident had been investigated and never resolved, but everyone in camp had their suspicions it was Geesh. He just smiled when the topic came up. Even Nimkee couldn't quite understand his brother when they'd see each other. That happened a few times while they were both there, even though they were

at different camps. Nimkee noticed a strange, distant look in his brother's eyes. Geeshig made Nim uncomfortable when he talked about his kills. He seemed to enjoy describing in detail just how he did each one. Nim once heard that his brother kept a little leather bag filled with a bunch of dried shriveled ears - an ear of each of his kills - but he never showed it to Nim. Nim wasn't sure if Geesh really did slice off an ear from the gooks he greased, but when he thought back to when they were kids, and how much Geesh liked to torment their auntie's cats, Nim leaned towards believing those stories.

So Nimkee wondered, as he parked his truck and pulled his powwow suitcase out of the back, whether his brother would make an appearance there. He'd like to have him there, but only if he was sober. That wasn't likely, since it was the weekend. There was probably a big party planned for the John house. Nimkee hoped it was all over by the time he got there later on. He would need his sleep after dancing all day. Before his mom passed on, Nim had promised her he'd try to watch out for his older brother. So he'd moved back home from Wallaceburg to be with Geesh. There were only the two of them. Their dad had died of cancer several years ago. Everyone said it was the mercury in the fish that most Nishnawb's pulled from the St. Clair River. The water was so polluted from the plants upstream in Sarnia's Chemical Valley that you could often see sores and cancers on the fish. The Walpole Band Council had been fighting for years for compensation from the chemical companies for its band members. Everyone knew there were a lot of birth defects on the Island from the bad water. Even the newspapers had reported it. But it was tough to prove anything, and who listened to a bunch of Indians, anyway?

Thinking about the mercury poisoning reminded Nimkee of his friend's son, a young Marine who was in the Desert Storm operation. The guy had come back right after the Gulf War was over because his wife was due with their first baby. The little girl had been born with a club foot. The young man had cried so much and blamed himself. He thought he was being punished for killing Iraqis. But everyone knew it was the mercury poisoning. For too many years, the chemical companies rarely reported their "accidental" spills into the river. At least now they were better at reporting spills immediately. When that happened, the water treatment plant on Walpole was shut down right away. Word went out, by a phone call or a knock on the door, to stop drinking the tap water. But the homes that used well water, instead of piped-in water, were probably poisoned, too, and those folks kept drinking it. And you always wondered about the buildup of gunk along the river bottom.

Nimkee had his suitcase open on the ground and was busy tying his bustle together when Big John Kiyoshk strolled up. John was one of those guys who often won the title of "Biggest Indian" in the Big Indian contest at some of the local powwows. He could put away four plate-sized Navajo tacos at one sitting. And that was just a snack! John was on Walpole's powwow committee, and was the one who called and asked Nim to be their head veteran. "Ah-nee!" John called out to Nim.

"Boozhoo!" Nimkee smiled, standing up and sticking his hand out to shake John's. Then the two men hugged. Nim was a lot shorter than Big John, so it looked like a papa bear hugging a little bear. "I see you ordered plenty of hot sun and mosquitoes for the weekend," laughed Nim. "I'm gonna be sweating my balls off out there today. Ahhhh,

that'll give me that good traditional smell." Both men chuckled at the old powwow joke.

John grinned and said, "Just lay on a lot of that cheap aftershave you traditional dancers use to impress the ladies. And maybe you'll luck out and get some deodorant and soap in the giveaway." He laughed and pulled off his cap to wipe his forehead. "The powwow committee's gonna have a nice little giveaway tomorrow afternoon." Then John reached into his shirt pocket, pulled out a pack of DuMaurier's, and handed them to Nim. The two men shook hands and John said "Meegwetch" to thank Nimkee for being head vet.

"Cool!" Nim said. "You knew my brand." Nim pulled his extra lawn chair out of the back of his pickup and handed it to John. The big man popped the chair open, set it down, and eased his body into it. Nim heard the chair squeaking from the weight, and felt glad he had brought the sturdier chairs. He said, "I'm still surprised you asked me to be head vet. Like I told you, I've never done it before. I thought you would've got someone with some experience. I'm just a rookie grunt!" Nim chuckled.

"Well, I'll be honest with you," John said, losing the smile. "At the end of last year's powwow, one of the other committee members had asked Mark Thomas to be head veteran this year. She even gave him tobacco. But you heard the latest about ol' Dark Mark, haven't you?" John asked, squinting. Everyone called Mark Thomas "Dark Mark" because he was a very dark-skinned Shoshone from Nevada. Mark was a traditional dancer, and reminded many people of the ancient photos of Indians from the old days. He often looked out of place down in London where he lived, because he was so much darker than most Indians around southern Ontario. And, of course, he had a different accent than

anyone else.

“No. What about him?” Nim asked, tying his eagle bustle to a nearby tree.

“Couldn’t he make it?” Nim almost wished Mark was there. He had been the head veteran at lots of powwows around the area, so he could give Nimkee some advice. Mark looked so mean in his dance outfit that newspaper photographers had often taken his picture and run it in the paper. Everyone teased Mark about being a Hollywood Indian.

“Well, you must not’ve heard,” Big John said, looking uncomfortable. “There’s a few vets out there who’d like to kick his ass. Turns out he was never in the Army. It was all a lie. And of course nobody ever checked it out. But a Indian vet over in Michigan had a friend do some checking down at Veteran’s Affairs, and they couldn’t find any record of Mark.”

Nim was stunned, and let his mouth hang open for a moment. “Holy shit!” he said. “That means he was never in Vietnam. Why the hell would he do something like that? When did all this come out?”

“I guess it was the big talk at Ann Arbor powwow a couple months back. And Mark was there,” John said. “But once that guy from Michigan confronted him with it, ol’ Mark packed up and left. Pretty quick, too. The guy that found out, I guess he did two tours in Nam himself. I think he was a chopper gunner, and things that Mark had said to people just didn’t jive with this guy. Plus, on top of that, Dark Mark and his woman had been bad-mouthing this other vet’s daughter for beating their girl in a dance contest somewhere. Made her sound like a tramp. So there was already bad blood. Anyway, once the powwow committee here heard about it, we knew there was no way we could

use him. I mean, he's not a vet. He's a wannabe-vet." John shook his head. "Pretty damn stupid, if you ask me. Why pretend to be something you're not?"

Nimkee stood up and pulled on his ribbon shirt, then his breastplate and choker. He stopped and shook his head, looking over at Big John. "I guess he must've done it for the money, huh? I mean, those competition powwows pay their head veterans pretty good money. And if he placed in his dance contest, that's more shu-nee-yah. Some powwows, just being a vet gives you an edge with the contest judges. Plus, if he picked up any fallen eagle feathers, he could get money for that, too."

Nim was referring to one of the duties of the head veteran - to retrieve any eagle feathers that a dancer might accidentally drop. It was an embarrassment and dishonor to any dancer to lose an eagle feather from their outfit as they danced. Only the head veteran could retrieve it during a special honor song, after all the other dancers had cleared the arena. The dropped feather represented a fallen warrior, and the head vet had to "bring that fallen warrior home." He would go out with three other veterans to dance at the four directions, circling the feather and laying tobacco upon it. Then, by the end of the song, the head vet would pick up the feather. Next the head vet would take that dancer aside and give him a good talking-to. Usually, the dancer was so embarrassed that they either gave the feather to the vet, or paid him for retrieving it, in hopes of keeping it. The head vet could decide what would happen with the feather. It was his right.

"I just want you to know, Nim, that I wanted you to be the head vet all along. Even without knowing this crap about Mark, I felt strongly that we should use our own local vets. It's just some of these other committee members who thought that getting

Spirit Dancing

One time at a powwow we were all dancing with ghosts, but didn't know it at first. It was the Fort Erie powwow back in the late 80's. It was the first time the Friendship Center there had put on a contest powwow. I guess they had put on lots of traditional powwows in the past, but this was their first stab at a competition one. They said they'd done a lot of fund-raising for it. So there were a lot of dancers that showed up for this first one, because the prize money was pretty good, and the only other powwow that weekend was far away. I didn't think I stood a chance in my contest, since there were so many traditional women dancers. But my daughter always did well in her contests. She was in the young women's jingle dance category, and she won pretty often. She was a young pre-teen at the time, and had to compete a lot against her cousins from the Six Nations reserve. It was the usual group of dancers we knew well because we all saw each other almost every weekend at one powwow or another. The powwow was set up at a large park there in town, right close to the Niagara River. I didn't know much about Fort Erie, other than they used to have a fort there. It was a real hot day, that Saturday, and I knew when we were getting ready that we'd need lots of stuff to drink. We were pretty much right out in the open sunshine. Didn't seem to be many trees around that part of the park, but I guess we're all used to that. Dancers like to joke around about sunscreen being part of our dance outfits these days.

It started off like a normal powwow - like any other powwow I've been to. We had grand entry, flag song, veteran's song, the opening prayer, all that stuff. And then we were right into the inter-tribals, song after song. I didn't notice anything unusual at first. Somebody dropped an eagle feather, so we all had to clear the arena and let the veterans do their thing. One of the drums sang the proper song for the vets to retrieve the feather. Whoever dropped it got it back after the song. But not too long after that, someone else dropped a feather. That's something you don't see too often. Lots of powwows happen with no one ever dropping an eagle feather through the whole weekend. So having two fall in one day is kind of strange.

Anyway, the head veteran got his vets together and danced and picked up that eagle feather and returned it to the owner. The day continued, the dancing continued, and before you knew it, someone else had dropped an eagle feather. This one I didn't see, because I wasn't in the arena when it happened. I think I had gone to get a cold drink, or to the bathroom, or whatever. But before I got back out, my daughter came up to me and said her dad had dropped a feather. I was shocked! In all his years of dancing, I'd never

backwards and catching it before it fell. “I guess I better get back to work. I’d like to start this thing on time, if we can.” The big man laughed. “No Indian time, if I can help it.” With that, he picked up Nim’s Marine flag, placed it across one big shoulder, and strolled away.

Nimkee finished getting ready, locked up his suitcase in his truck, and dropped the keys in the beaded leather pouch he wore hanging on his belt. Then he reached up and untied his eagle feather bustle from the tree and swung it behind him. He pulled around the leather belt it was attached to, buckled it in front, then pulled the two long shoelaces around from the bustle and tied them together underneath his breastplate. Next, he picked up his porcupine roach and silver spreader from where it lay on the back bumper and, centering it on his head, tied the stiff leather ties under his chin. Nim’s hair wasn’t quite long enough to make a braided scalp lock on top of his head to run through the metal spreader that held down the roach on his head, so he had to settle for just the chin ties. He couldn’t wait for his top hair to get long enough for that. A small stick run through a scalp lock held the roach on much tighter, and kept the roach from ever falling off. He walked over to a nearby minivan and checked his look in the reflection of the window. Everything looked straight. He decided to go walk around and check out the traders while he had the chance. And maybe he’d check out the women, too. He hadn’t had a girlfriend in a while, and sometimes felt lonely. So, he hoped, maybe some fresh faces will show up, especially among the women dancers. He’d already gone out with most of the women on the island that were near his age, and hadn’t found anyone quite right for him. There had been a couple he liked, but they gave him the feeling they were looking for a

daddy for their kids.

Nim thought he should make the round of the food booths, since it was almost one in the afternoon, and he hadn't eaten since breakfast. He stopped and had a blanket dog at one booth, and then made his way over to the chip wagon that had the best corn soup. As he walked around blowing and slurping on the hot soup, he stopped and gabbed a bit with the people he knew. There were plenty of other dancers coming out towards the circle now from where their cars were parked on the outskirts of the grassy field. Three or four big drums were in the center of the arena warming up. Several men were still setting up the P.A. system, hanging mics throughout the hand-built arbor which shaded the drums from the hot sun. His old buddy Stick was the emcee this weekend, and he was under the arena, shuffling papers and getting his chair set up near a drum. Stick waved at Nim when he saw him looking in. Then Stick clicked on his mike and made a joke over the P.A. about Nim having his "snagging" clothes on. Stick, whose real name was Russ, got the nickname because he was so tall and skinny. He was good at making the audiences laugh, and he always liked to single out dancers he knew for his friendly ribbing. It made Nim feel good when he heard other Indians laughing at Stick's joke.

A small group of veterans were gathering over at the east entrance of the dance arena. It looked like Big John was the arena director, as he walked around inside the dance circle, looking one last time for any rocks or sticks hidden in the grass that might trip up a dancer. Nim swallowed his nervousness and headed over to the eastern door to talk with the other vets. It was up to him to see what flags had been brought, and who wanted to carry what. John had propped Nim's red flag against the start of the yellow

roping that circled the arena. Nim's friend Kyle was there, grinning and ready to shake Nim's hand. And another vet was holding the eagle staff that John had given him. The vet was an older Walpole man named Bill who had served in Korea with the Canadian forces. He had known Nim's dad when he was alive, since Nim's father had also been a vet. Bill shook Nim's hand when he walked up, and handed him the eagle staff. Nim felt a strong, nearly overwhelming urge to cry as he took the staff. He only wished his mom or dad were there to see him being head veteran. It made him think of the day he graduated from basic training down in Parris Island, South Carolina. Most of the new Marines had family there for the ceremony, but Nim's parents couldn't afford to go. And now his mom and dad were gone. But he knew other relatives would be in the crowd, so that made him feel better.

It began to get noisy. Each of the drums were taking their turn singing a warm-up song, and Stick was calling for all dancers to come out for the grand entry. His voice boomed over the drummers. Big John came huffing over to the entrance, and the men all began to talk about who would carry which flag. They had a Canadian flag with the picture of a solitary Indian man in the middle of the maple leaf, an American flag, the black and white POW-MIA flag, Nim's USMC flag, the blue flag for the Korean vets, the Oka Warrior flag, and the flag with the seal of the Walpole Island Unceded Territory. There were five vets in dance outfits, two in street clothes, and four vets in navy blue blazers from the island's Legion Hall. More than enough to carry the flags. Nim felt real good when he saw all the men who would be dancing behind him. Kyle had already taken the spot right behind Nim. The other men lined up with the vets in traditional outfits first, the

Legion guys next, and the men in regular clothes bringing up the rear. Big John got busy lining up the other dancers in order behind the veterans. A couple from Kettle Point were the head dancers, and followed the warriors. The emcee asked the audience to put away their cameras and video-recorders, then requested they all stand for the grand entry and remove their hats for the dancers and veterans.

The host drum, Walpole Island Singers, kicked off their grand entry song. Nim lifted the eagle staff as high as he comfortably could, and began dancing. He entered the east door and headed to the left. Powwow dancing always went clockwise. Nim tried not to look out at the audience, knowing it would make him lose step if he saw everyone watching him and got too nervous. He put on his best warrior face. He could feel the ground shaking and hear the cowbells jingle as the other veterans followed his lead, dancing hard. Nim felt like his heart would burst, because he felt so proud of himself. He took the line of dancers around the circle once, and then brought the warriors to a dancing-stop near the drum arbor while the Head Man and Woman dancers continued leading the grand entry line around the arena again. All the veterans held their flags high during the whole procession and continued dancing hard in place. Big John had set everyone in order - veterans, followed by the two Head Dancers, then the Traditional Men, the Grass Dancers, the Fancy Dance Men, and the little boys. After that, the Traditional Women, the Jingle Dancers, then the Women Fancy Dancers, and finally, the little girls. Nim could hear the war whoops from the Traditional Men dancers as they went behind the veterans. Nim finally took time to look around the arena as he danced in place. He saw the Traditional Women in buckskin and cloth dresses slow down and line

up along the outside of the circle. They stayed in place and scrub-danced, moving up and down in time to the drumming. It made Nim feel good again to see those women wearing their single eagle feathers standing straight up from their heads. Watching the women helped him stay in step. He watched with interest the younger Women Fancy dancers as they spun in fast circles, their shawl fringe flying. Then he looked over and saw the little children go by, some dancing hard and some dragging their feet in shyness. Everything was a rhythmic swirl of color, ribbons, fringe and feathers. The drumbeat matched Nim's thumping heart in his chest. He could feel the adrenaline rush and danced harder as the singers beat the drum harder on the honor beats. It was a good grand entry song, and for Nim, it was the best feeling in the world. He would never forget this day, for many reasons.

Finally, the grand entry song came to an end. Then the dancers all held their positions for the Flag Song. The audience was reminded to remove their hats in honor of the various flags and the veterans. After that, an elderly Ojibway woman gave a prayer in her language as the crowd continued to stand. It was a long prayer, and several dancers shifted from one foot to the other as they waited patiently. Then it was time to "post the colors." The dancers stayed in place as Stick announced, one by one, each of the veterans who were carrying a flag, beginning with Nim and the eagle staff. When he said each of their names and what branch of the military they served in, and which war they fought in, the respective vet would carry his flag over to the arena director standing at the drum arbor. Big John helped each vet place his flag into a painted metal pipe stuck in the ground, and then tied rope around each flag staff, attaching it to one of the upright wood

poles that supported the arbor. John shook each vet's hand before each went back over to their place in line around the drums.

Next came Nim's favorite - the Veteran's Dance. Stick invited any veterans in the audience, of any race or color, from any branch of service, American or Canadian, to honor the gathering of dancers by taking part in the Veteran's Dance. Nim watched as several non-Native veterans made their way out of the audience and came to stand next to the Native vets. You could always tell the men who had never danced at a powwow before. They looked awkward at first, but generally got the hang of it. Nim liked this part, because the vets all shook hands, hugged each other (sometimes teary-eyed) and then danced together. The crowd would cheer and clap, as each vet did his own thing in the arena. Some, like Nim, had outfits and danced hard, swinging their shields and war clubs, giving their war cries. Other older vets, sometimes with canes and limps, slowly made their way around the circle. Sometimes there would be a veteran in a wheelchair, being pushed by a relative. Often there would be a woman veteran or two. Each and every one of the vets would get that proud look in their eyes, holding their heads up proudly, as the crowd acknowledged their military accomplishments. Stick reminded the audience to remain standing and keep their hats off.

Nim again led the group of veterans, now much larger than before, slowly around the sacred circle as the drum sang out an Honor song. Those Veteran Honor songs could only be sung at that time, for those men and women. Once they had made a complete go-around, the other dancers lined up to shake the hands of the veterans. The vets were by now lined up across in rows, like wheel spokes, so that the other dancers could go across

the line, shaking hands with each vet and thanking them. “Meegwetch, meegwetch!” was heard over and over. Then the dancers would go to the back of the group and dance behind the veterans.

Several of Nim’s relations came in to hug him and laugh and say how proud they were. Nim’s Auntie Flora had left her food booth to come out and dance. She had flour all over her shirt front from making fry bread all morning. Flora hugged Nim with tears in her eyes, and whispered to him that his mother would be so proud. Nim could feel the sweat running down his face, mingling with the couple of tears that had snuck out. He didn’t think anyone would realize he was crying, and kept wiping his face with the bandanna clutched in his hand along with his dance staff. After all the people had filed past and shook hands with the vets, Nim was able to speed up his dancing. As he came around by the eastern door, he saw his brother Geeshig standing there alone. Geesh had a styrofoam cup in his hand, and lifted it in a toast to his baby brother. Nim smiled and nodded, then motioned with his shield for Geesh to come out and join them. Geesh shook his head. Nim figured there was more than Pepsi in the cup. Drugs and alcohol were never allowed on the powwow grounds, but some people still brought it in disguised, or already within their bodies. By the time Nim was able to look again, Geesh was gone. The song ended, and all the vets milled around again, shaking hands and hugging. Several of the non-Native vets thanked the Indian veterans for letting them dance. Only in the Marines had Nim ever felt such camaraderie with other men. There was laughter and some tears before they finally cleared the arena. Then Stick announced the first round of inter-tribals, and Nim went to get some water. His job was done for the moment. He

wouldn't be called upon again until the evening's grand entry - unless someone dropped an eagle feather. He hoped that wouldn't happen, because it often made him feel uneasy. Nim almost felt like it was a bad omen.

The afternoon dance performance was almost over when it happened. An inter-tribal was going on when Nim noticed Kyle standing still in the middle of the arena, while the other dancers continued dancing around him. Kyle was guarding a fallen feather. When he saw Nim, he motioned him over. Nim made his way to him and stood in place, blocking the feather from any on-coming dancers. Finally, the song ended and Stick asked everyone to clear the arena, since there was a feather down. He asked the host drum to get an Honor song ready for the retrieval of the eagle feather. Nim looked around, wondering who had dropped the feather. It was a white fluffy eagle plume, the kind worn by a lot of the younger women. Nim spoke loudly to Stick that he wanted Charley and Ken, two of the vets with outfits on. Meanwhile, Nim pulled a small plastic bag with Indian tobacco out of his leather pouch and reached down to sprinkle some on the feather. Charley and Ken came out to join Nim and Kyle, and they took their places around the feather. The song started and the four men danced in place at the four directions, then slowly began circling around it, and moving in at times to reach down towards the feather. At the end of the song, Nim reached down and picked up the plume. He and the other vets had brought the fallen warrior home. Nim walked around a moment, holding up the feather for everyone to get a look at, before a young fancy dancer timidly walked out to claim it. Nim quietly spoke to her, reminding her of her responsibility to the eagle feather, to wear it with respect, to take good care of it, and to always fasten it tightly so that it

would never fall again. The girl looked to be about 13 or 14, and seemed very scared. So Nim smiled as he gave her the feather back. A woman, probably her mother, came hurrying out to them with a pack of cigarettes in her hand to give to Nim. The girl and her mom shook Nim's hand, and they made their way out of the arena. Nim began to feel uneasy, but told himself to ignore those feelings. After all, it was not unusual for someone to drop a feather over the course of a weekend. And he was glad he had conducted the Honor dance and retrieval properly. But that feeling came back to him several times through the day.

Nim thought about it again later in the evening, when he and the other veterans retired the flags. It was after the evening grand entry, and the sun was beginning to set, when he went to Stick and told him it was time to take down the flags. Again, the arena was cleared and the drum sang a song for the vets. They each gathered their respective flag from the arbor and lined up holding them. Nim and the others danced the flags around and when the song ended, rolled them up and put them away. The inter-tribal dancing continued for a while longer, until it became too dark. There were no lights for night dancing, so the powwow finally came to a close for the day. Stick invited everyone back on Sunday, and reminded the dancers that the grand entry would be at 12 noon sharp. Several dancers smiled, knowing that most powwows never started on time, but anywhere from five or ten minutes late up to even an hour behind schedule. It was the old joke about Indian time. But Nim knew he'd be there in plenty of time. After all, he had a job to do, and if he did well, it could mean him being asked to be head veteran at other powwows. Now he felt better about things, and didn't feel so overwhelmed as earlier in

the day.

After Nim changed back into his regular clothes, he hung out with Kyle for a bit. He wanted to invite Kyle and his woman to come spend the night at his house, but he was afraid of what condition things might be in at home. He hoped Geeshig wasn't there with a bunch of his drinking buddies. He was honest with Kyle about this, and Kyle said he really preferred camping out anyway, and his girlfriend had already built their campfire and had coffee going. Nim sat with the couple and visited for a while, talking about Kyle's work as a counselor at a Native rehab program on his reserve. Nim shared his concerns about his brother, and, while Kyle was sympathetic, he also pointed out to Nim that until Geesh wanted help, he wouldn't get it and there was nothing Nim could do to force him. Kyle encouraged Nim about the fact that Nim was sober, and living the right way and following the "good red road." He told Nim that it was an honor to know him, and that he was proud of him for being Head Veteran. These words of support meant a lot to Nim, because Kyle was someone he really respected.

Nim got home just after 11 that night. He breathed a sigh of relief when he pulled up and saw no lights on. That meant Geesh was long gone, and Nim could get some sleep. He hauled his suitcase and bustle into the house and as he flicked on the lights inside, he saw a couple of open cases of beer in the kitchen. When he took a peek, he saw there were no full bottles left. No surprise. Nim pulled his powwow suitcase over to the couch and opened it up. He took out his sweat-soaked leather leggings and hung them up to dry. Then he spread the rest of his outfit around on the couch and on the coffee table to air things out. He tossed his ribbon shirt into the hamper and took another one out of

the closet to wear Sunday. Then Nim let the dog in the house, fed him, and went to bed. He turned the stereo on quietly in his room, a habit he had picked up while he lived in town. It always drowned out the noise of the neighbors and the traffic there, and he found he slept better that way. So Nim never heard Geeshig when he came home.

Sunday morning Nim woke bright and early to the dog nudging him to get up and let him out. He opened the front door for the dog and saw that his pickup was gone. In its place was Geeshig's beat-up old deuce-and-a-quarter. *Son of a bitch!!* Nim thought to himself. He had warned Geesh not to take his truck many times before. More than likely the Electra 225 had conked and wouldn't start. It was covered in mud. When Geesh was drinking, he took that car on roads it usually bottomed out on. He called it his ghetto cruiser. *Damn! How am I gonna get to the powwow if that piece of junk won't start!?* he worried. He looked around the house for the keys and didn't see them. Then he looked in the car and, sure enough, the keys were still in the ignition. Nim tried to start it, but it just kept chugging and dying. So he popped the hood, unscrewed the metal cover where the carburetor was and stuck a screwdriver into the butterfly choke. After a few tries, it finally kicked over. The smell of gas was strong, since it had been flooded. Nim let the old car run a few minutes while he ate some quick breakfast. It was only 9:00, so he decided he'd drive around the island and see if he could find Geesh and his truck. If he found him, Nim would just switch the vehicles and not even bother with Geesh. If he was still drinking, it wasn't worth an argument. Geesh was probably at one of the local bootleggers.

Nim drove around the island for a good half-hour before he finally gave up.

Christ! he thought. *Geesh will turn 49 this fall. When is he ever gonna grow up and stop this bullshit?* Nim was feeling really frustrated. Geesh was a good artist and woodcarver, and made decent money off his work. *When he would do it, that is.* And that was only when Geesh decided to get sober for a while. Then he would crank out a few good pieces, either paintings or carvings. He'd sell them to one of the powwow traders, or, if he was lucky, sell them straight out without the middle-man to some wealthy American hunter who was anxious to bring a gift home for the missus. But those sober, artistic spurts only lasted a short time. Everyone wanted to be Geesh's friend when he had money. Then Geesh would be back on the bottle. Nimkee kept telling him if he'd keep working, he could finish enough pieces to have his own art show somewhere. Then he could get some recognition as an up-and-coming Aboriginal artist. But Geesh would laugh and say he didn't want to be rich or famous. He just wanted to enjoy his life the way it was.

So Nim headed to the powwow. He knew he'd have to sort things out later. He needed to focus on what he had to do that afternoon. He liked powwow Sundays best, because there was only one grand entry, so less pressure and more time for socializing and fun. And the giveaway was always nice, because the head staff, meaning the Head Veteran, Man and Woman Head Dancer, Arena Director, the Host Drum and whoever else, always received their gifts first. So it was a lot of fun. Then there would be an Honor song, and everyone would dance and hold up their gifts when the singers hit the honor beat.

Nim got that uneasy feeling again, just like yesterday, as he pulled the raggedy old

car into the powwow grounds. He told himself that there was nothing to worry about. Geesh had pulled worse stunts than this and, besides, Nim had managed to get to the powwow. And that was all that was important at that moment. He decided to park over by Kyle's camp, and visit with him until it was time to get dressed. Kyle's car wasn't there, and neither were the couple, so Nim went for a walkabout to check out the traders' tables. That killed a little time for him, and he wound up buying some more brass beads to re-string his bone bandolier. He stopped and gabbed with friends and other dancers as he made his way around. His Auntie Flora tried to feed him a big breakfast, but Nim asked for a rain check on it. He knew he'd be hungry later on. He told her if he ate too much before grand entry, it would slow him down and he wouldn't be able to crouch down low to the ground in the Sneak-up dance. That was the dance for all traditional men, and sometimes women, where the men would pretend they were warriors and hunters of old, sneaking up on an enemy, or on an animal to make the kill. A big smile creased his aunt's round, leathery face and she patted Nim's arm. He thought about telling her about Geesh's latest trick, but he knew his mother's sister had a soft spot in her heart for her troubled nephew, believing that Geeshig was very lost without his mother. She still seemed to think of the two brothers as young boys, and he didn't want to be disrespectful. So Nim kept his mouth shut about his predicament. Then he spotted Kyle and his woman over by their camp, so Nim headed over.

When Kyle saw the junker Nim was driving, they all had a good laugh. By this time, Nim was over his anger. He figured the worst that could happen was that Geesh would get picked up for speeding, or drunk driving. Then he'd have to sleep it off in the

Wallaceburg jail. Kyle told Nim maybe he should consider an alarm system for the truck, or even rigging it so Geesh couldn't get it started. Even though the pick-up meant the world to Nim, he knew it wasn't worth a big cash investment. He laughed off that idea, saying a good Indian car didn't need a fancy alarm. That was only for White people in the city.

Before long, people began getting ready for another day of dancing. The drummers made their way in, some looking rough from a night of camping out. Walpole was notorious for their constant deluge of monstrous mosquitoes, and anyone who didn't have to camp, simply didn't. You get one blood-thirsty bug in your tent, and you were in agony all night. The old joke was that during World War Two, the Air Force had used Walpole Island for a training camp for pilots, and the mosquitos had learned to dive-bomb from those airmen. The rough-looking drummers became Stick's fresh victims for his friendly teasing over the loudspeaker. He centered different singers out, and had them all laughing before long. Then the amiable emcee announced that today there would be a "Wannabe" contest. The dancers all knew this was one of Stick's favorite dances. He promised the audience that later on, anyone who wanted to try their best Indian-style dancing would get their chance. Little did the tourists in the crowd realize it was a way for the powwow dancers to have a good laugh at how foolish the uncoordinated Whites out there were. Often the Indians would emulate the White tourists and run out with their cameras to take pictures of the Wannabes as they bounced and shook clenched fists in time to the drum, thinking all the time they were being cheered on by the applauding Indians. Stick told the crowd there would be a prize for the best male and female

Wannabe of \$20 each. The prize money assured there would be plenty of silly Whites to come out and show their stuff. After all, so many of them stood outside the arena, tapping their feet and bouncing their bodies in time to the drumming that you could just tell they were anxious for an invitation to come on out.

Nimkee was happy to see that another Vietnam vet had showed up for a day of dancing. It was his old buddy, Carl Isaacs, from down Windsor way. The last time Nim had seen him was late last summer, when Carl and a Metis friend of his had come to the vet's meeting here on the island to ask the Walpole boys for some help in straightening out some White guy who was conducting sweats. Nim hadn't gone with the group of men that day, but his brother Geeshig had and told Nim about it later. Geesh had been real happy about teaching that Wannabe a lesson. He told Nim that the self-appointed shaman had violated some young Indian girl, and the other vets had to set him straight. At first, Nim was afraid Geesh might've gotten violent and done something stupid. But Geesh assured his little brother that they only messed up the guy's property and sweat lodge, and hadn't laid a finger on him.

Carl came over to shake Nimkee's hand and give him a hug. He congratulated Nim on being Head Veteran. Kyle strolled over to talk, and the three of them laughed about Nim no longer being a "cherry," the term used in Vietnam for the brand new soldiers who had never been in combat before. After a few minutes of friendly gabbing, Kyle walked back to his tent to get his outfit on, and Carl became serious. He told Nim about his friend, Tom LaRoque, being killed over the wintertime. Carl asked Nim if they could have an Honor dance for Tom. Nim agreed, and told him he would ask the

powwow committee and the emcee for permission. Carl told Nim it would be better not to talk about the details of Tom's death, as it was painful for anyone who knew him. The irony of a Vietnam vet getting knifed by a gook years after the war was not lost on Nimkee. They both knew the details would get around to the veterans at this powwow, and later at other powwows, and that was enough. Then Carl saw his wife and kids getting their dance outfits on, and headed over to get ready.

Nim didn't get that uneasy feeling again until he was lined up with the other vets for the grand entry. He told himself that it was just butterflies, and they'd go away. Nim hoped that there would be no more feathers down today. He had asked Carl to carry the USMC flag, only to find that Carl had brought his own, which was on a much nicer flagstaff than Nim's. So Nim left his with Big John. He asked John to take it home with him, because he knew it was too long to fit into Geeshig's car. He could always get it later with his truck. He thought maybe when Geesh sobered up, he would show up at the powwow with the truck. He hoped.

Nim felt good as the grand entry procession made its way around the arena. Kyle and Carl paired up behind him and offered whoops for encouragement. Nim was glad for that. It made him dance even harder. Carl had showed him the plastic holder he had rigged up on a waist belt to hold the base of a flag so that it had support. Nimkee knew Carl was in the color guard for the Vietnam vets group in Windsor. Carl told Nim it made carrying a flag easier, since it took much of the weight off your hands and arms. No danger of the flag slipping then.

The afternoon performance went along smoothly. Every so often, Nim would

think about dropped feathers and hope it would not happen again today. He felt superstitious and kept himself from saying anything to Carl about how much it bothered him the day before that the young lady had dropped an eagle plume. Nim knew it was not unusual, and most veterans at powwows had seen it plenty of times. Carl had once told him that whenever a feather went down, he always thought about some of his buddies that bought it back in Nam. He had said that he could still see, very clearly in his mind's eye, how each one of them had died. For many years, Carl said, he struggled with those flashbacks. Now, Carl told him, he really did feel that they were picking up a fallen comrade when he helped retrieve a feather and that it helped him put things into perspective.

That made Nimkee think about requesting the honor song for Carl's friend from Windsor. When he danced by Big John Kiyoshk, Nim told him about the need for a song for the fallen warrior. Tom LaRoque had no family there at the powwow, and not many people knew him, so there would probably only be the veterans, head dancers, and Carl's wife and kids to dance the Honor song for Tom. Nim knew that usually, when there had been a death, the dead person's family would make a request for an Honor song, and it was the family members who came out and danced in their honor. Sometimes a blanket might even be laid out for donations to help with the cost of a funeral, or even to feed the family. Since the death had happened months before, and the family wasn't there, a blanket wasn't necessary. A short while after Big John made the request to Stick, a drum group from Michigan sang the Honor song. John had simply told Stick to say that Tom LaRoque had died in Windsor, and that he was a veteran of the U.S. Army, who had

served in Vietnam. When they danced slowly around the arena to pay respects, Nim thought he saw Carl crying. He wasn't sure. Carl had always seemed like such a tough guy.

Soon it was time for the giveaway. The powwow committee volunteers had been bringing out armloads of assorted gifts, like blankets, pieces of fabric, plasticware, towels, socks, toys, and a couple of boxes of apples. The dancers always watched this with interest and took a closer peek as they danced by the area where the gifts were laid on the ground on large blankets and sleeping bags. Some of the little kids would go right up and look at the toys. Often the moms or dads would have to run out and make their child put back a toy they had picked up. The idea was to wait until the giveaway was all set up, and the volunteers in place to hand out the gifts. The emcee would have a list to read of the head staff and host drum members, inviting them out to receive their gift and join the line of powwow committee members. The host drum and head veteran would all be given a gift of tobacco, either a packet of loose tobacco or cigarettes. After that, the various categories of dancers would be called out to choose a gift off the blankets. Then, with gift in hand, everyone would take an apple and go down the line of volunteers, shaking hands and saying "meegwetch" to all. Each dancer would then take their place at the end of the line, until the giveaway line grew and snaked around the arena. Everyone loved the giveaways, and there would be plenty of laughing and teasing as each person went down the line. There would be hugs from most of the women, rough handshakes from the young boys, and giggles from some of the girls, as everyone showed off their gift and admired the others. When all the gifts were given out, the emcee would ask the host drum

for an honor song. Then anyone who received a gift, whether they were dressed in outfits or not, would dance to the song. When the hard honor beats hit, everybody would hold their gifts up in the air for those few hard beats to show how they had been honored by receiving a gift. It was an honor to hold a giveaway, and also an honor to receive something in a giveaway.

Nim felt very fortunate. He had been given a new ribbon shirt by the committee, along with another pack of DuMauriers. The shirt was just the right size and was a bright red calico with blue, white and green ribbons. He laughed as he shook hands down the line, joking about how threadbare his old dance shirt was getting. A few of the men teased him that he needed to get a wife so he'd have someone to sew for him. As Nim was standing in line, he heard some people behind him in the audience talking about seeing several police cars down at the river when they were coming to the powwow. One of the women talking said the cops had some kind of hoist there, pulling a vehicle out of the water. She said she couldn't see what it was, just that it was dark green. Nimke's ears perked up, because his truck was green. Over the years, there had been plenty of people who didn't quite make a curve in the road that ran along the river and faced across to Algonac, Michigan. The cars would miss the curve and wind up slowly sinking in the water. It was usually a bit of a joke because, almost always, the driver was drunk. People would joke that they were trying to make the car ferry, and didn't quite get there. The car ferry was the main transportation for Islanders who worked over in Michigan.

Nim turned around to see who was talking, but they were some Indians he didn't know, so he didn't bother to ask them for more details. All he could do was pray that it

wasn't Geeshig. The water wasn't real deep along there, but deep enough. Nim told himself that he couldn't do anything right now, because he couldn't just leave. He had duties to take care of, and he'd look pretty stupid dashing down there in his outfit and finding out it was someone else's car. But he did get that uneasy feeling again and tried to shake it off. He was already thinking ahead to the end of the powwow, when the veterans had to retire the flag. That wasn't too far off. It was already four in the afternoon, and people were tired. Some of the traders and food booths had started packing up. Those were probably the ones who had the farthest to travel. It was then that Stick called for his Wannabe contest. A few dancers groaned. Most had forgotten about the plan to hold it. But the audience seemed enthused. Stick told them as soon as the giveaway dance was over, that special contest would take place.

The dancers began to go around the circle in the honor song. Stick turned off his mike, laid it down, and came out from under the drum arbor to join Nim and Carl to dance. The tall, lanky emcee put his hand out to shake Nim's and told him what a good job he'd done. While they were dancing around and talking, Nim noticed a couple of police officers standing off to the side of the dance arena and looking in. It was Butch Soney and Ray Williams from the reserve's detachment. It didn't seem unusual because the constables on duty often came to check out the powwow (and the women) and have something to eat. After all, it was one of the few community gatherings that brought out a lot of people, and sometimes there could be trouble. It wasn't until the song ended and Nim walked out the east entrance that he found out they wanted to talk with him. The two cops walked up and greeted Nim.

“Hey, Nim, can we talk with you?” said Butch. Right away, Nim felt wary. After all, he did have a bit of a record. All those years of partying and racing around. There had been a few fights, but he hadn’t done any serious time. His story was similar to most younger men on the Island. Nim tried to look unconcerned and said, “Sure. What’s up?” as he shifted his dance staff from one hand to the other and tugged his silver armbands higher up his arms.

The older constable, Ray spoke. “Do you own a forest green Chevy pick-up, Ontario plates K-V-Victor-R 21-7?” Ray Williams had his dark mirrored sunglasses on, and really looked the role of a tough cop. Nim wanted to laugh. He wasn’t much older than Ray, and remembered how a lot of kids used to tease Ray when he was little just to hear him cry. “Uh, yeah, I think that’s my plate number. I don’t have it memorized. And it’s a green Chevy.” Nim confirmed.

The two cops exchanged quick looks. Carl walked over and joined the small group, with Kyle following shortly after. Neither dancer said anything. Carl didn’t trust cops of any kind, Indian or not. In fact, he looked at Native cops as “sellouts,” while most other Indians were glad to have a Native police force. It didn’t really matter that Carl had never been arrested or roughed up by a cop from the reserve. Because he had had plenty of trouble with the police during his craziest drinking days, he never trusted any of them. And he had spent a few nights in the stockade back during his Marine days, compliments of the Military Police.

Butch spoke next, asking “so where’s your truck now, Nim?” As soon as Nim heard those words, he knew Geeshig was in trouble. There was no way he was going to

tell them his brother had borrowed his pick-up, and that he had no idea where Geesh was. He would tell the truth, but not all of it. “Well,” Nim said, “I drove it home from the powwow last night, and I couldn’t get it started this morning. So I drove my brother’s car.” He pointed over towards where the old car was parked under some trees. “It’s right over there, if you want to see it,” Nim told the two cops, keeping what he thought was an honest look on his face.

Meanwhile, Stick had called for his Wannabe contest, and the dancers were clearing out of the arena, some going to their lawn chairs, and some heading towards the food booths. Nimkee half-listened as Stick told the crowd the rules of the contest, inviting the powwow dancers to all go grab someone from the audience to teach them how to “Indian dance.” Many of the dancers wouldn’t bother to take part, because they were expected to loan parts of their dance outfits to the non-Natives they grabbed, and some dancers didn’t like to do that. The investment of time and money into a good dance outfit was huge, so some Indians wouldn’t want anyone else touching their regalia. So it looked to be a small crowd of Natives going out with Wannabes in tow to teach them how to dance their style. This kind of event was good for educating the non-Natives about powwow dancing, and that’s why Stick liked to hold this particular dance.

Nim looked back over at the two cops standing before him. Ray spoke again. “Nah, we don’t need to see the car you drove today. So, let me get this straight. The last time you drove your truck was last night?” he asked Nim. Nimkee nodded his head. “Yeah, that’s right,” he said, adding “what’s this all about, Ray?” Ray Williams cleared his throat and hesitated before he spoke. This was a part of the job that he hated. It was

hard to have to put an old friend or neighbor into the squad car. It was embarrassing for all concerned. "Well, Nim, I think you're gonna have to come with us to answer some questions," Ray said. That's when Carl got indignant.

"Hey, you can't take him away," Carl snarled at the police. "He's our Head Veteran. We need him here. Can'tcha show some respect for a veteran?" Ray's eyebrows went up and he took off his glasses. He didn't know who this dancer was, but Ray's back went up pretty quick. "Excuse me," he said to Carl, "but we can't share with anyone right now what this is about. We need to talk with Nim, and no one else. He's not under arrest, so don't worry about it." Carl looked disgusted, and Kyle nudged Carl's shoulder. "Come on," Kyle said, trying to calm his friend down. Kyle pulled Carl aside to tell him not to make anything worse on Nim. They both knew about Nim's brother taking off with his truck and didn't need to say anything about it. So the two of them stood back, apart from the others. Nim didn't know what to do. He didn't want to look nervous or anything, but he sure didn't want to leave the powwow until the end. So he told the two constables just that. Nim told them that he still had duties to fulfill as the Head Vet, but that it was almost over, and that if they could wait just a little while, he could change and go with them. Nim thought to himself that it would also buy him some time to think of what to say to cover for Geeshig. He was even afraid to ask the cops if Geesh was all right. He simply hoped that if his brother wasn't all right, Butch and Ray would've told him right off.

The two cops stood there for a minute, not saying anything. Then Ray said they'd have to talk about it. They stepped aside, and put their heads together. Meanwhile, Nim

walked over to Kyle and Carl. He could see that Carl was calmed down a bit. Nim whispered to his two friends to not mention anything about Geesh taking his pick-up. Kyle told him "that goes without saying." Nim asked Kyle to let Big John know what was going on, and to tell him not to say anything about the matter, either. Earlier, when Nim has asked John to cart his Marine Corps flag back to his house, he had told John then about the truck. He knew his friends would keep their mouths shut, even if they were related to either of the two cops. So Kyle went off to talk with Big John, who was out in the crowd of dancing Wannabes, watching.

Ray and Butch walked back over to where the two veterans were standing. Ray spoke up. "So when will you be all finished with things here?" he asked Nim. Nim looked at his watch. It was just after 4:30 then. "Probably by about 5," he told Ray. "We just have to retire the flags and dance them out of the arena to end the powwow. Hey, come on, you guys. It's not like I'm going anywhere. I just don't want to let the powwow committee down. It's my first time being Head Veteran, and I want to finish the job right," Nim added. "Okay, Nim. We'll wait," Ray told him. He and his partner had already agreed that Nim wasn't going anywhere, especially with a full bustle and outfit on. They both felt they could trust Nimkee John, so they were willing to hold off taking him in until things wrapped up. Both cops didn't want to piss off anyone around the powwow by taking Nim away. After all, he wasn't under arrest. If he was, they wouldn't wait. They'd cuff him and take him right in. They knew from experience that being a cop on a reserve needed a balance of common sense and good public relations. It wasn't like in the city.

Once Big John had heard what was going on, he went to Stick and told him they would need to retire the flags pretty soon. Stick had planned on having one more round of inter-tribals, which meant four more songs. He called for the next drum in rotation to give them an inter-tribal so he could talk with the powwow committee members. Stick simply told them that their Head Veteran had an emergency to deal with, and asked if they could wrap things up. It was almost 5:00 by then, and that was generally the cut-off time on Sundays for traditional powwows. The competition powwows often went longer, because of announcing the winners and giving away the prize monies. But they didn't have that to do here, so could end things whenever they wanted. The committee members agreed. Stick went back out to the drum arbor, picked up the mike, and asked the veterans to get ready to retire their colors.

By the time the inter-tribal ended, the veterans had all come out to the center and picked their respected flags from the flag stands. Nim thought he had been nervous at the start of the first grand entry on Saturday. Now he was even worse. But this was a different kind of nervousness. He now knew why he had that bad feeling after the feather had been dropped. He just prayed that Geesh was okay and hadn't hurt anyone else. Nim had thought it was strange that he couldn't find Geesh at any of the bootleggers earlier. He should've been at one of them. Where else could he be? These thoughts were running through Nimkee's head as he began stepping to the drumbeat. Carl and Kyle were right behind him. Big John stood over at the east entrance, waiting for the vets to dance the flags out. Nim led the group around the arena slowly. The Head Dancers followed the vets and the rest of the dancers crowded in behind them. Nim wished to himself that other

veterans, of all races, could experience what he and his friends felt each time they carried the flags at a powwow. He felt that so many veterans who were still “messed up” since Vietnam could start to heal if they could feel the respect shown to Native veterans at such events. Nim knew how much it had helped him, and how dancing kept him on the straight and narrow. His eyes stung with tears when he thought about Geeshig.

The crowd of dancers snaked their way around the circle. Nim led the group out the entrance, dancing past John. The vets lined up on each side of the east door, forming two lines going out, with flags bent forward creating an archway for the dancers to go under. As the dancers came out, they took time to shake each and every vet’s hand. Nim liked this part, because, again, there were smiles and thanks to the vets for what they had done. Everyone shook hands and said “Meegwetch” to the flag carriers. Once the line of dancers came out of the arena, the song continued and everyone danced in place on each side. It was a good way to end the powwow, and they all ended that way. Even people who weren’t dressed to dance often came in the circle to dance the flags out. Nim had never thought much before about how ceremonial the powwows were. His father had always said there was nothing traditional about powwows. He felt they were just shows for White people. And Nim never argued. But now he felt different.

The song ended. The vets rolled their flags up. There were more handshakes, hugs, and promises of “see you at the next powwow.” Nim stood and smoothed out each of the eagle feathers on the staff with his fingers. Feathers often got roughed up and needed straightening. When he finished, he walked with Big John over to John’s truck to put away the eagle staff. Nim saw, out of the corner of his eye, the two police constables

waiting for him. John gave him words of encouragement, then told Nim again what a good job he'd done. Once the flags were laid in the truck bed, and the eagle staff placed standing up against the car seat inside John's truck, the two men hugged. Then Nim walked over to his brother's car and started to undress.

Butch and Ray strolled over towards Nim's vehicle, but stood off at a distance while Nim got out of his outfit. He took his time untying the wet leather straps that held his roach on his head. Nim neatly wrapped the porcupine quill roach around the miniature baseball bat, then wound the old elastic bandage around and around until the roach was completely covered by the brown stretch bandage. He placed that in his suitcase, then untied his bustle. Nim knew that breaking down his bustle would take time, and he didn't know how patient the police would be. So he motioned to the two of them. The constables walked over. Nim told them that it would take him about 15 minutes to get completely changed. Ray told him to go ahead. Even they knew taking off a sweaty wet dance outfit wasn't a quick operation.

Nim had popped open the trunk of Geeshig's old deuce-and-a-quarter. He placed all his gear inside the roomy trunk as he took things off. Most of it went back into the suitcase. Nim peeled off the wet ribbon shirt and dried his torso off with a hand towel before he put back on his T-shirt. He asked Ray if he could walk over to the nearby port-a-john to change into his jeans. Ray told him to go ahead, and the two cops stayed by the open trunk while Nim went to change. He came back after a moment, joking about the condition of the outhouse. Finally, Nim sat down and pulled on his gym shoes. He slammed the trunk shut and double-checked it to make sure it was locked. Nim told the

cops that he'd hate to have someone steal his outfit out of the car. He asked them if he could drive it to the police station. Ray shook his head. So Nim called Carl over from where he was changing by his family and their van. Carl knew where Nim's house was, so Nim asked him to drive the car home. Carl agreed and said his wife would follow him once they were all changed. Then they'd gas up on the reserve and head back to Windsor. Carl told Nim he'd call him later on to see if everything was all right. The two constables stood nearby, but still offered no explanation as to what was going on.

It was close to 6:00 before Butch and Ray brought Nim into the Walpole Island Police Office. Their captain was there, which was unusual for a Sunday. Nim was put into a small room with only a tiny window high towards the ceiling. He heard the door lock when Butch went out. Not long after, the three cops came back to the door and told Nim he was under arrest. They told him they wouldn't question him anymore until he had a lawyer present. Butch read Nim his rights. Nim could tell Butch and Ray were surprised. He didn't think they had expected to arrest him, and were taken back when the captain told them otherwise. Once Nim heard what had happened, he understood they had no choice but to hold him.

It was his truck that the police had dragged out of the river. When the police told Nim that, they watched his face closely for his reaction. But he had learned in the Corps how to hide emotion. You couldn't look hurt or upset when some 200 pound sergeant was screaming in your face. Nim knew well how to keep his face plain and unemotional. Finally, Ray told Nim that there was a dead woman in his truck. Nim thought for a moment, then said, "so...she must've stole my truck." Butch shook his head and said

“No. Because she was in the passenger seat, with the seatbelt still on her. It looks like she drowned. Her body’ll be sent out for an autopsy to find out the cause of death for sure.” Nim took a minute to absorb this. Finally, he asked if there had been anyone else in the pick-up. Ray said there wasn’t, adding that whoever the driver was, that he or she had gotten out. Nim just nodded his head. That meant that if it had been Geeshig, he had got out somehow. Nim decided not to say anything else. Finally, he was driven in to Wallaceburg to their OPP station and locked in a cell.

It was the next morning before Nim bothered to call a lawyer. It was no big deal to him to sit there overnight, knowing few lawyers would be available late on a Sunday. He wondered where Geeshig was, and whether he was okay. But Geesh was a survivor. Even when he was drunk, he could still be sharp as a tack, with good reflexes. He had always been skinny and nimble and he was a good swimmer, even before he went into the Corps. And in boot camp, all recruits had to jump in a pool with full gear on, and tread water for an hour. It was one of those ultimate tests. A lot of guys didn’t make it and lived with that embarrassment. Nim had struggled to do it. Geesh had teased him about it later, because he had no trouble himself.

Nim called his cousin, Colleen, who was a new lawyer. She didn’t think she was experienced enough for a criminal case, especially one so serious. So she referred Nim to a lawyer in Sarnia, one who worked a lot with Indians. Colleen told Nim she would give the attorney a call for him. She asked Nim who the dead woman was. Nim had been told the police hadn’t identified her yet, but were sure she wasn’t from the Island, though she was Indian.

Nim was charged with careless driving causing death. He was told there could be more charges. The White cops at the Wallaceburg detachment gave him looks like they fully believed he did it. Of course, they had already seen his record and knew he'd done his share of drunk driving. Almost everybody that sailed their car into the river was drunk when they did it. And Nim knew Geeshig must've been in order for him to lose control like that. So far, the cops hadn't asked him anything about his brother. Nim didn't even know where Geesh might hide out. He didn't know the crowd his brother hung out with too well, and never wanted to.

The attorney came to meet with Nim Monday afternoon. Nimke told him the same thing he'd told the cops. He said he'd drove the car home on Saturday night, and took Geeshig's car on Sunday morning. No, he hadn't seen his brother, but he could have been sleeping when Nim left for the powwow. His bedroom door was shut. Now, Nim was having to lie. But that didn't bother him any. He had to protect his brother. Geeshig was the only close family he had left. Yes, his truck was at the house, right where he had left it. No, it wouldn't start. So he took Geeshig's car and left around 9:30. And that was it. He didn't know anything else. He wasn't about to tell the attorney he had driven around the Island looking for his older brother. And he didn't mention that Geesh had been at the powwow Saturday afternoon. He suspected they would put out an APB on Geeshig anyway.

Nim went for his arraignment the next day, Tuesday. He wanted to laugh when the Crown asked for bail to be set at 100 thousand dollars. Yeah, right, he thought. I couldn't post 100 dollars. His attorney tried to get it lowered, until Nim leaned over and

told him not to bother. Nim couldn't make any amount. So he was taken back to his cell in Wallaceburg, but not for long, because he had to be transported up to the provincial jail in Sarnia. Nim had been there before. He even recognized a couple of the guards from the last time he'd terrorized the Island.

The next day, he had a visitor. He was allowed out to the long room for the inmates during visiting hours. He looked through the thick plexiglass and saw Big John Kiyoshk. John grinned at him, and they both sat down opposite each other. You had to yell at each other through a slot at the bottom of the window. There was no privacy whatsoever, and everyone figured the place was bugged anyway. So you had to be careful what you said. John just talked about pleasant stuff, like the powwow and the praises the committee had for Nim - what a good job he'd done, and all. He told Nim that if he needed it, he'd write a good letter of reference for his court date. John owned a gas station on the reserve, and had a good reputation as a business man. And he was a former band councillor. The two men talked and laughed for close to an hour before John took his leave. Nim asked his friend if he'd go over and feed his dog. John laughed and said if he was a good reserve dog, he'd have already found a way to get food. Then he promised Nimke he'd take care of the mutt and not to worry. Nim went back to the "range" or open room the inmates stayed in during the day. He felt a little better, but still felt alone.

That night, as Nimke lay on his cot, he thought about his family. He had always wondered about his brother, and why he had always seemed so crazy. Nim had known that his parents drank a lot in their younger days. And he had heard a bit about Alcohol Fetal Syndrome, and how a lot of Native people suffered from it, because of their mothers

drinking while pregnant. He never would've had the nerve to ask his mom if she had drank while she was carrying his big brother. But he thought it was entirely possible. No one knew about AFS back then. And it would explain a lot about Geesh's mean behavior right from childhood on.

But Geeshig had been a good big brother, especially when they were kids. He often fought the kids that picked on Nim, and sometimes took the punishment for things Nim had done around their house. Nim couldn't remember his brother ever ratting on him. And when Nim had finally started high school in Wallaceburg, like all the kids from Walpole, Geesh made sure that nobody started any stuff with his little brother. A lot of the White kids were scared of Nim's brother. Yeah, Geesh was a good big brother. He had even tried to keep Nim from joining the Marines. Geesh had told their dad he didn't think Nim was cut out for it - didn't think Nim was tough enough. That was one of the rare times Nim had gotten really angry with Geesh and told him off. That hurt a lot, because it was a long time before they saw each other, and that was in Saigon when they ran into each other on leave. By then, Geeshig was in his second tour of duty. That's when Nim saw the coldness in his brother's face. Geesh was bitter and cynical then, and bragged about his kills.

And Nim thought about his mother, and how patient she had always been with her sons. Nim intended to keep his promise to his mom. He would watch out for Geesh the best he could. As he lay in the dark thinking about things, Nim felt tears start to run down his temples and into his hair. He knew it was the only time it was safe to cry - in the shelter of the darkness of the cell so no other inmate could see you. Finally, Nim fell

asleep, determined to maintain his silence about his brother.

Nim's attorney came later in the week to see him. He told Nim that the dead woman had indeed drowned, and she had also been drunk, according to the toxicology report. After all, she hadn't tried to get out after the truck went into the water. He said that the police were now looking for Geeshig and had issued an APB for him. Nim didn't comment on this. The lawyer seemed agitated with Nim, and told him that if he didn't come clean and tell him everything he knew, that he would have a hard time representing him. Nim said he'd already told him everything. There was no more. So the attorney left, feeling frustrated and promising himself that he was going to stop taking Indian clients. He just couldn't understand them.

It was on the weekend when jail officials told Nimkee John he was free to go. They told him that his brother, Geeshig, had turned himself in to Walpole Island's Police Force. Apparently he'd gone over to Michigan after he'd run from the scene of the accident. Geesh had confessed to the constables on Walpole that it had been an accident. He told them he had tried to get the woman's seatbelt loose, but it had been so dark in the night water, and she had passed out drunk that he just couldn't get her free. He had called a friend on the Island while he was across the border and found out his brother had been arrested. Geeshig told them he wasn't about to let his kid brother take the fall for his stupid mistakes. So he made his way back home.

The police, of course, were still wondering how the rough-faced, lanky Indian with the long gray pony-tail had even got back across the border, considering Canada and U.S. Customs officers had all the information on Geeshig John, including his mug shot. But he

wasn't ever going to reveal that to them. No doubt a few Customs workers would get a strip torn off their hide, at least verbally. Geeshig just smiled when the cops asked him who brought him back.

Nimkee caught a quick glimpse of his older brother when he was going out the front door of the Sarnia Jail. Three constables were escorting Geesh around to the back, where new prisoners were admitted. Nim knew Geesh saw him, because a quick grin crossed Geesh's face. Big John was waiting out in the parking lot for Nimkee. The two men climbed into John's truck, saying as little as possible. John knew his friend well enough to know he would talk when he was ready. When they reached the Island, John told him what little he had heard about Geeshig's return - how he had calmly strolled into the police station and taken the cops on duty by surprise. They had just been sitting at their desks, doing reports. It wasn't Butch and Ray, but two other younger constables. They seemed intimidated by the ex-Marine with the rough face, and almost acted afraid of cuffing him. Geesh had been so calm and quiet that they expected him to jump them both and go for their guns. Big John laughed at that. He said those two young guys had already heard about Geeshig being a sniper in Vietnam.

John dropped Nimkee off at his front door. He offered to stay and visit for a while, but Nim quietly told him he wanted to be alone. His big dog came running up to greet him and John, thinking it was time to eat again. Nim called the dog to the house and waved as Big John's truck spewed gravel as it took off down the dirt road. The door creaked as he pushed it open. It was a cloudy day, but Nim didn't feel like turning on any lights. He noticed John had brought his powwow suitcase into the house. He walked into

his living room and sat down on the couch. He just felt numb. Like he wanted to cry and couldn't. The house felt emptier than ever before. He wished his mom's spirit, or his dad, would visit him now. Then he wouldn't feel so alone. But Nim knew that the old people say your loved ones visit from the spirit world only when they think you need them.

Nim stepped over to the shelf above the wood stove. He took down an old family portrait from when he and Geeshig had been young teenagers. Even his mom and dad looked so young. And healthy. Not like his dad looked those last few months of his life. His mother had been so pretty back then. Wiping the dust off the glass with his palm, Nim carried the picture over and sat back down. He cradled it in his hands as the tears started dripping onto the glass. Mom and Dad were gone, and now so was Nim's only brother - sitting in a jail cell with little hope for the future. Nimkee John had never felt so alone.

Spirit Dancing

One time at a powwow we were all dancing with ghosts, but didn't know it at first. It was the Fort Erie powwow back in the late 80's. It was the first time the Friendship Center there had put on a contest powwow. I guess they had put on lots of traditional powwows in the past, but this was their first stab at a competition one. They said they'd done a lot of fund-raising for it. So there were a lot of dancers that showed up for this first one, because the prize money was pretty good, and the only other powwow that weekend was far away. I didn't think I stood a chance in my contest, since there were so many traditional women dancers. But my daughter always did well in her contests. She was in the young women's jingle dance category, and she won pretty often. She was a young pre-teen at the time, and had to compete a lot against her cousins from the Six Nations reserve. It was the usual group of dancers we knew well because we all saw each other almost every weekend at one powwow or another. The powwow was set up at a large park there in town, right close to the Niagara River. I didn't know much about Fort Erie, other than they used to have a fort there. It was a real hot day, that Saturday, and I knew when we were getting ready that we'd need lots of stuff to drink. We were pretty much right out in the open sunshine. Didn't seem to be many trees around that part of the park, but I guess we're all used to that. Dancers like to joke around about sunscreen being part of our dance outfits these days.

It started off like a normal powwow - like any other powwow I've been to. We had grand entry, flag song, veteran's song, the opening prayer, all that stuff. And then we

were right into the inter-tribals, song after song. I didn't notice anything unusual at first. Somebody dropped an eagle feather, so we all had to clear the arena and let the veterans do their thing. One of the drums sang the proper song for the vets to retrieve the feather. Whoever dropped it got it back after the song. But not too long after that, someone else dropped a feather. That's something you don't see too often. Lots of powwows happen with no one ever dropping an eagle feather through the whole weekend. So having two fall in one day is kind of strange.

Anyway, the head veteran got his vets together and danced and picked up that eagle feather and returned it to the owner. The day continued, the dancing continued, and before you knew it, someone else had dropped an eagle feather. This one I didn't see, because I wasn't in the arena when it happened. I think I had gone to get a cold drink, or to the bathroom, or whatever. But before I got back out, my daughter came up to me and said her dad had dropped a feather. I was shocked! In all his years of dancing, I'd never known Richard to drop a feather. In fact, he often made fun of anybody that did drop one. He thought they were careless, or lazy, and didn't tie their outfit on tight enough. He seemed to think there was never a good excuse for such an accident. Besides, it was embarrassing to drop any part of your outfit. On top of that, it usually cost you money when you dropped a feather, 'cause you were supposed to pay the head veteran for retrieving it for you.

So, here comes my husband stomping up to us real quick. I always knew when he was nearby, because I recognized the sound of the dance bells on his legs. I asked him what happened, and he was pretty upset. He told me to give him ten bucks so he could go

back and pay the vets. The song was going on then. I could hear it, and he wanted to be waiting right there for when they brought his feather out. My daughter and I just stayed over by our lawn chairs. Didn't want to add to the embarrassment. Some of our friends around us remarked about how that was the third feather to go down. We all wondered what was going on. It was just really strange.

But what was even stranger was when Richard came back over to us with the feather in his hand. It was the little one that he wore tied to his neck scarf. It was attached to an abalone shell by a piece of leather tie...and he would just knot it several times around his scarf, and put a safety pin through the ties and into the fabric underneath it. Then it would be really secure. He looked funny, and told me to look at it. I did and I saw that the leather string wasn't broken, and it wasn't untied. I asked him how had it fallen off? He didn't know. The knots were still tied. The leather wasn't broken. He still had the safety pin in his scarf. There was no way the feather and shell could've slid down off the scarf. And it was in a spot that didn't go through a lot of pulling or tension. It simply hung on the scarf. We couldn't figure it out. He even went around to several of the other men dancers and showed them, and everybody was kind of scratching their heads about it. Usually, when a traditional dancer dropped a feather, it was off their roach on top of their head because they're shaking their heads so hard as they're dancing, or maybe when some leather wears out and breaks and they drop their entire bustle. Still, it's pretty unusual.

But the worst thing was that before the day was through, at least six eagle feathers were dropped. And they had been lost by dancers who simply never dropped a feather. A

lot of us started feeling like maybe we should go take off our eagle feathers and put them away in our feather boxes. Any good dancer stores their eagle feathers in cedar boxes to keep the moths from getting to them. Anyway, it was sometime that evening, after we'd had supper and were into the evening performance that somebody mentioned we were dancing on a battlefield.

It came as a shock to most of us. We started asking people who were from the area if that was true. It turned out that it was. That whole area had been the scene of fighting during the War of 1812. That meant that blood had been spilled right there where we were dancing! Some of the elders out there said this was not a good thing, and that the powwow should be moved. We all figured that was impossible. But it wasn't a good feeling to know we were dancing where warriors of all kinds had fallen in battle. It would've been British and American soldiers, but there were plenty of Indians involved in the War of 1812. None of us knew the history in that area too well, but we all knew about the battles in the Windsor area, because of Tecumseh and some of the other Indians from the area that fought with the British to defeat the Americans. When it comes to warriors, most Indians respect all soldiers of all colors and races. So we didn't care what kind of warriors had died on our powwow grounds. We felt we shouldn't be disturbing them by dancing there.

The veterans got together with the powwow committee and the elders who were there. They decided that in the morning, there would be a ceremony at sunrise to take care of those spirits. One or two of the elders who spoke their own language would conduct the ceremony, and any veterans who wanted to should take part. It was their

right, and it was their job to look out for those fallen warriors, regardless of whether they were Indian or not. Meanwhile, a few of the dancers had decided they weren't going to dance anymore. The whole thing gave me the willies. I was mad about the powwow committee not knowing that it was a battlefield site.

So I guess that Sunday morning, the ceremony was held and the right prayers were said. There were no more feathers dropped that weekend. No one joked about any of it. It was more like we were all afraid to mention anything about how many feathers fell, because it might cause more to drop. The rest of the powwow went okay. But never in my life had I ever seen so many eagle feathers fall to the ground at any powwow. It was just too many fallen warriors for most of us. I don't think Fort Erie Indian Center ever held another contest powwow on that site. If they tried to, they wouldn't get too many dancers again, because it was the big topic for many powwows after that weekend. The moccasin telegraph was burning up with the story the rest of the summer.

A Change of Pace

Carl Isaacs reached down to tighten his shoelaces. His long salt-and-pepper braid swung down over his shoulder and touched the ground. When he finished, he stood up and tucked the long braid inside the back of his t-shirt, feeling it slide down to fit into the groove of his spine. Then he squat down and stuck his right leg out behind him to stretch. Next he stretched his left leg. He felt the muscles begin to loosen in his legs and he reached out and flexed his calf. *I'm getting to be an old man now*, he told himself. *Can't afford to tear something. Just take a little more time than I used to.* Then Carl bent forward to touch his toes and stretch his back muscles. *Bet I'm still the only 49-year-old around that can put his palms flat down on the ground*, he thought with a self-satisfied smile.

It was only the second time of the season Carl had set out to run. The ex-Marine chose to run on the path that ran along the Detroit River in Windsor, Ontario. He had been running the same route for the past eight years - even before he met his wife. Running was like a religion for the slim, muscular Mohawk. It was the only healthy way he could achieve a euphoric state and feel good about himself. Carl knew every time he got away from running on a regular basis, he was tempted to fall back into his old ways. And his old habits always got him into trouble. The last time he'd gotten stupid and fell off the wagon, he'd almost lost his wife and daughters. So he knew as long as he ran, he wouldn't drink. On top of that, he liked to stay in shape for his job.

Carl always started his run in front of the North Wall, down near the Ambassador

Bridge. The North Wall was the memorial built in 1995 to honor the Canadians killed during the Vietnam War. He got chills up and down his spine whenever he stood at the Wall and said a prayer. When he ran, he told himself he was running for those guys that couldn't run - thinking of the many soldiers who were crippled or killed. Carl would place his hand on the Marine insignia on the far left diamond-shaped granite slab, known as the Service Panel, and think about some of his buddies who were killed in Vietnam. He had been in the 3rd Marine Division when he did his tour back in '72. Then Carl would step over to the middle black granite square where the names of the dead were etched, followed by the date the men were killed in action. Carl's eyes would go down the first column until he found

THOMAS E. FRASER 04/04/70

Then he would touch the name, reading it with his fingers. Tom Fraser was a Mohawk man from the same reserve as Carl - the Six Nations Reserve near Brantford. The Fraser family still lived in Windsor and Carl's wife knew Tom's parents. Then Carl would look across to the second column of names until he saw

GREGORY L. BOMBERRY 09/06/68

Carl's mom knew some of the Bomberry family down in Ohsweken. They were a traditional family who were very involved in the Cayuga Longhouse, as Faithkeepers, Clan Mothers and Speakers. Greg had been in his early twenties when he was killed, Carl's mom said. Mrs. Isaacs had been so afraid of her own son not making it out of the war alive. But Carl had been able to keep his promise to her, and come back in one piece. At least, physically. His eyes skimmed down a few names farther until he saw his friend's

cousin

LESLIE N. GENERAL 05/01/68

Leslie was the third Indian on the North Wall, and the first of the three Six Nations man who was killed in Vietnam. There were 107 names in all on the memorial. Carl thought about his Metis friend, Tom LaRoque, who was stabbed to death last winter by some punk Vietnamese kid. Tom had been a Tunnel Rat during the war. The two of them had been the only Natives in the local chapter of the Canadian Vietnam Veterans group. Carl felt misty-eyed when he thought about Tom. He knew of many other vets who had their soul and spirits die during their tours, but they were still physically alive. But they seemed dead emotionally and spiritually. Carl thought of what the Ojibway writer and Vietnam vet Jim Northrup had said, about how some guys had died in the war, but hadn't fallen down dead yet. There were no plaques or memorials to them because they had physically survived. So many of them were slowly killing themselves with booze. Carl had done that for a while. Next his eyes went down to the Purple Heart Medal panel that lay flat on the ground, and he read

**HERE WITHIN THIS MEMORIAL IS A SYMBOL
THAT AMERICA'S FIRST PRESIDENT GEORGE
WASHINGTON FOSTERED**

"THE PURPLE HEART MEDAL"

**WHETHER THEY WORE THE MAPLE LEAF OF
CANADA OR THE STARS AND STRIPES OF THE
UNITED STATES THESE MEMORIALIZED
VETERANS ARE HEROES BELIEVING THAT
FREEDOM KNOWS NO BORDERS, AND MUST
BE DEFENDED WHENEVER IT IS CHALLENGED.**

This whole memorial was like sacred ground to Carl. He felt lucky to have made it through his tour alive. But he'd seen and done a lot of horrible, horrible things while he was there. He used to have the nightmares, and the only way to sleep through the night without waking up in a cold sweat was to get plastered first. And so he did. Carl remembered doing a lot of drinking and crying those first few years home. He had a real pity party. Then he went through an angry stage where he hated almost everything, mostly himself. Too often he wondered why he hadn't been killed. So many of the guys he knew that died in the Nam deserved to live more than him, he felt. They had families, or they were better soldiers than him. He felt so guilty sometimes. For several years he had wandered around in a haze, wasting his life. Finally, he met another ex-Marine up in London, who ran a therapy group for Vietnam vets. The guy, Stoney, was an ordained minister, and Carl wasn't a church person. But Carl finally gave in and went to a meeting. It was the first time he felt like he fit in anywhere since coming home from the war nearly 27 years before that. A couple of the vets in the group were Indian, but it didn't even matter to Carl what anybody was. They had each gone through the same kind of hell. And after all, Carl remembered how they always said in the Corps that the only color in the Marines was green. That was one place where it didn't matter that Carl was Indian. They were all just Marines - the finest fighting force the U.S. had.

Stoney and the rest of the group made Carl realize that his problems weren't unique. All the vets in the group suffered from PTSD, or Post-Traumatic Stress Disorder. In the old days, it was called battle fatigue, or shell-shock. Most of the guys Carl met were into their second or third marriage. Almost all had battled a drinking problem.

Some had quit completely. And some of the guys still weren't ready to admit there was anything wrong with them. Drinking and being crude were the manly things to do. That's when they liked to tell their war stories. And Carl was pretty sick of war stories. He never talked about his experiences with anyone, because he felt no one understood. Even now, in the group, he didn't tell the others about what he'd gone through - helping carry a buddy who was half-blown away to the medi-vac chopper, or stumbling across a maggot-infested, rotting corpse of some G.I. while on patrol, or seeing a Newby trip over a booby-trap wire and get blown to bits by the grenade attached. The punji sticks were the worst. There was no way to survive if you stumbled into one of those pits. Those gooks sharpened the sticks and embedded them into the ground in a way that killed almost instantly. Shish-kabob G.I. Soldier-on-a-stick. And it was hard to get the impaled body out safely. Too easy to slip in yourself. Then there were always the burnt corpses of South Vietnamese villagers. Maybe that was the worst. Because it was kids and women and old people. You never got used to seeing that. Never. Or the smell.

Carl knew damn well that all these other guys in group had experienced the same things, but he still didn't want to talk about life in Nam. He wanted to put those memories into a compartment in his brain and leave them there. When he talked in group, he spoke in general terms of his feelings, and how the war experiences affected him now, while some of the other guys seemed to like to dredge up particular gory scenes and talk about their feelings at the time. Carl thought that was a waste of time. *Life goes on. They should try to work on themselves in the present*, he thought. So sometimes he got frustrated, and almost wanted to scream at the other guys that they needed to get over

those bloody events. Leave the past in the past. The only time the past crept into his head was in the occasional bad dream, or now, when he was standing at the Wall, staring at the rows of names.

Carl reached his left hand out and touched each of the three names of the Iroquois men and said a prayer for them and their families. It had been over two decades since these warriors had gone on to the Spirit World. But they were still heroes, and always would be. He remembered how scared his mother had been when he joined the U.S.M.C. He had just turned 20 years old. And he just wanted to fight. He had spent his high school years in Buffalo, after his parents had split up. And he did a lot of fighting around his neighborhood. His mom wanted to get far away from his dad down on the reserve, so she packed up Carl and his two younger sisters and moved to New York. That area was the original homeland of the Iroquois people anyway. The Tonawanda Senecas had their rez just outside of Buffalo, while the Tuscarora rez was near Niagara Falls. A lot of Six Nations people left Ontario and lived in Buffalo and Niagara Falls, or even over in Detroit, especially those that were into ironworking. That's what Carl did now, but he worked around southern Ontario. He had worked building both casinos in Windsor and in Niagara Falls. It was he who spray-painted MOHAWKS RULE on an upper beam of the Windsor Casino at the riverfront as his crew was erecting the steel structure. There were other Mohawks in the group, but they were from Akwesasne. Carl hated casinos now, because the last time he fell off the wagon, he had blown a lot of money at Casino Windsor and over at the Soaring Eagle Casino on the Mt. Pleasant Reservation in Michigan. That's why his wife Nancy had packed up the girls and left him. *God, I was stupid then, he*

thought, as he began his run.

Carl would start running west from the North Wall and head out the path towards the Ambassador Bridge. He'd circle around by the bridge, and head east along the trail. After about 35 years of smoking, he had quit over the winter. That made the breathing even easier than before. He'd always been told that he had "runner's lungs," whatever that meant. He never seemed to get winded, no matter what he was doing. And he loved to run. He discovered when he was a teenager that it was something he was good at, so he joined his high school track and field team. What Carl liked the most about running was that it was a solitary thing. Not like team sports. And he was extremely shy. He didn't want to play on a team and have to be chums with other guys. He liked being alone and being left alone. So running was perfect. You could compete against yourself, and you didn't have to worry about winning or losing a game, or having an entire group of athletes or coach counting on you. Even when he ran for the school, he never let the coach down. He was fast, and for the most part, no one could touch him. There were only a couple of times other guys from another school beat Carl's time. And each time, Carl hadn't been trying that hard, anyway.

Then when he was in the Marine Corps, one of his C.O.'s found out about his running. He was stationed in Okinawa for a few months before his unit shipped out to Nam, and often went out running in the early morning when he got the chance. Carl could run ten miles with no problem. Word got around, and his C.O. wanted him to start competing in some of the meets around the base. Before he knew it, he was running marathons, and in no time, he became a member of Camp Foster's "200 Mile Club."

There was a lot of money gambled on the races and marathons. That's when Carl started feeling the pressure from the other guys. Then it became a chore. He was still good at running, but he wasn't enjoying it as much. He found he could win even when he'd been drinking the day before. So a few of his wins happened when he had a hangover. But one time, a lieutenant from another base beat him, fair and square, because Carl was too sick from the booze. When that happened, and a lot of guys lost money, he made sure to stay sober the day before a race.

Carl was Wolf Clan, and he knew that was why he was fast. In the old days, the Wolf Clan people were messengers among the Iroquois villages. The young men and women of the clan were fast-footed, and respected for that. So Carl knew he was a natural. And he knew that he would always run, as long as his body allowed him to, and his health held. He figured he'd be running when he was 70. And it was nice to have his wife's support about it.

Carl saw Nancy in the distance. She was set up for fishing in the river. She wasn't much of a runner, though she had tried. So, instead, when Carl went running, Nancy would often come along and spend the hour or so drowning a few worms. A smile crossed his face as he came running up near her. She was sitting in a lawn chair by the iron rail and had two fishing poles cast out. He felt lucky to have found such a good woman. One that liked things he liked, like fishing and powwows and old rock-n-roll. Carl whistled as he came up, and slowed his pace. Nancy looked up and smiled, as Carl mumbled some flirting words to her. "Get going!" she said, laughing at him. "Hey, woman, hurry up and catch my dinner!" Carl joked back at her, then added "see you

later!” as he sped up.

As he ran, Carl thought back to when they had met. It had been at the community drumming night at the Indian Center about six years ago. She was one of the few women who came out and sang with the drum. Nancy brought along her two girls, who were just about six and eight years old at the time. He never saw her with any man, and he finally got brave enough to ask her out. She was very pretty and slim with a light complexion. He found out she was a Micmaw from Big Cove, New Brunswick. A lot of them were light-skinned. Her last name was Paul, one of the big family names among the Micmaw. Nancy had come to Ontario with her girls’ father, who was from Chippewa of the Thames, near London. He turned out to be quite a loser, beating her up in front of the girls when he’d get drunk. She finally took the little girls and went to the women’s shelter in London.

Nancy had been abused as a child by both her parents, who had grown up in residential school. They had been beaten by the priests at the school, and only knew that kind of life. So, of course, Nancy and her brothers and sisters suffered the same kind of beatings from their parents. It was the typical story of many Indians who’d been taken from their homes by the Canadian government and sent away at a young age to live and work in residential schools run by the Church. So many of them were beat and molested. And they grew up and became abusive to their children and often their spouses. Nancy had been raped by an uncle when she was 12, and none of the family ever believed her. So, as soon as she was sixteen, she ran away with the Chippewa man, a drifter, who had come to Big Cove to learn how to fish and trap lobster for a living. Nancy often said she

jumped from the frying pan into the fire. It took her many years of counseling, therapy, and doing volunteer work at the women's shelter in London and later in Windsor to start getting healthy. When Carl met her, she had just started going to school at St. Clair College for the Aboriginal Healing Methods program. He admired her for trying to make something of herself. Nancy wanted to work on a reserve one day and help other Native women. But Carl had convinced her to marry him. He promised her he'd treat her good. And he grew to love her two daughters, now teenagers. He knew she still carried that dream, but since he made such good money as an ironworker, he told her she didn't have to work. So she went to the Sharing Circle at the center instead, in hopes of somehow helping other battered Native women with her story. Every once in a while, Nancy talked with Carl about one day moving back to Six Nations so she could work at the shelter there. Then, she said, they could build the log cabin they both wanted on the rez.

Carl thought about all these things as he ran. He liked running along the river, because it was a good time to do the thinking he needed to do. And there was always lots to see. Kids on bikes, students roller-blading, lovers walking hand-in-hand, moms pushing babies in strollers, old people. All kinds and flavors of people. Carl looked at everyone as he was running towards them, but always turned his eyes downward when he got near them. He was still very shy. And he was afraid of someone speaking to him. Sometimes he thought he'd never get over that.

He liked looking across at Detroit, too. He had worked a little over there for the Ironworkers Local 25. The pay was great, but he didn't like dealing with the traffic and going across the border twice a day. He was lucky, he knew, that he could work on either

side. A lot of other guys from his reserve had gone as far away as Kentucky in the past just to find work. Those guys would stay gone for months, missing their wives and families. Carl had worked a bit over in Buffalo, but had never liked the city. Going there brought back bad memories of his teenage years, and how much trouble he got into in high school. He had gotten into a bit of shoplifting, and one day got nabbed at a Kmart with some cassette tapes in his pocket. They let him off with a warning. Then later he was in a bike-stealing ring, and had been sentenced as a juvenile delinquent. They sent him to a juvenile home for six months. Once he got out, his mom moved the family back to Ontario. First they stayed on the reserve, and finally moved down to Windsor, where one of his mom's sisters lived. And, for the most part, that's where Carl stayed.

Carl had been running for fifteen minutes or so when he began getting near the downtown area. He didn't like going along this part of the walkway, because it got much more crowded. People would be in the way, hanging over the railing and looking at the river. There were more bicycles there, and lots of tourists from Michigan. Carl was always glad when he got through that part. Sometimes it was so crowded that he went up the hill and ran on the sidewalk along Riverside Drive. It was less busy. And that's what he'd have to do today, he realized, as he approached big crowds of people milling around.

So when he reached the foot of Ouellette Avenue, Carl made his way up the hill to the intersection. He was trying hard to keep up his natural pace when he heard some yelling. It was coming from a group of older women standing at the traffic light. He slowed down as he saw someone break away from the crowd of women and bolt across the street. As he ran near the group of old ladies, he heard several screaming about

someone grabbing a purse. Carl slowed to a stop and saw that the guy running across the street had something black tucked under his arm, and kept looking back. One of the old women grabbed Carl and yelled for him to help. Carl took off after the guy.

The younger guy had a decent head-start on him, but Carl turned it on. He wasn't even winded from his running and still had plenty of energy. It took about two and a half blocks to catch him, but when he did, Carl just leaped on the guy. The two men struggled, and Carl clipped him on his face. The guy shoved the purse into Carl's gut and tried to get up, but by then, a couple of other men had happened upon them. Carl yelled at them to help him - that the guy had stolen a woman's purse. The two men each grabbed an arm of the purse-snatcher and jerked him to his feet, then held him. Carl got up slowly, feeling his knees creaking where he had banged the pavement as he went down. He reached over and picked up the purse, dusting himself and then the handbag off. Carl took a good look at the crook. He was probably in his early to mid-twenties, scraggly brown hair below his ears, a five o' clock shadow, and an earring. Carl didn't think much of men with earrings. Thought they were pansies. And he wished the other two guys hadn't come so quickly. He would've liked to beat the shit out of the creep.

By then a couple of uniformed cops had come jogging up. They must've been on foot patrol, because Carl didn't see a car. At first, the cops, who were both White, eyed Carl suspiciously, as he stood there breathing hard with the purse in his hand. He could just guess what they were thinking. So he simply told them that he had chased and taken down the mugger. The cops' eyes then went over to the man being held by the two passer-bys. Those two men confirmed Carl's story, adding that they had just happened

upon the scene. The officers thanked Carl as he handed the lady's purse to one of them. The other was busy getting his handcuffs out. Carl just wanted to get out of there. He could see there were crowds of people gathering up and down Riverside, looking in their direction. He asked the officers if he could get back to his run. They asked him his name, so he told them. The one holding the purse asked him if he'd like to go with them to return the purse to the elderly woman, but Carl didn't want to. He said he wanted to get back to his run, because he was cooling off. He simply told them he was in training. They let Carl go. As he ran off, he could hear the cops asking the other two men who had held the purse-snatcher what had happened and what their names were.

Carl didn't want to run back along Riverside Drive to where the crowd of old women was still gathered, so he went back down the hill to the pathway at the river. After that, he simply continued his run eastward. He didn't even think about things until he had gotten past the downtown area and the crowds of pedestrians had thinned out. Then he felt good about himself. It was a little thing, but he felt good that he had helped someone. He despised scumbags like that creep who victimized the weakest ones around. He lumped someone like the thief right in with wife-beaters and child molesters. He hated them all and thought someone should cut their balls off. He knew he'd been no angel in his lifetime, but most of his dumb mistakes had been made when he was drunk. *Not that that was a good excuse*, he thought to himself, but he didn't intentionally and consciously try to do harm. He could never see how harmful some of his own actions were to his own family. Once in a while, in an argument, Nancy would tell him he shouldn't be so judgmental of others, when he had done plenty of wrong himself.

Carl was beginning to feel tired after he ran to where the walking trail came to an end, but he kept on. He went back up the hill to the street, and ran down the sidewalk for a few blocks more, before turning around near the Hiram Walker complex and heading back. The smell of yeast and sour mash was disgusting as it drifted through the air. Carl allowed himself about a half an hour one way for his run, then back again, making a full hour. He knew he'd get his second wind pretty soon. He just kept pushing himself. When he got tired running, he'd take himself mentally back to his younger days of marathon running and try to get into that same mindset. He'd give himself a pep talk, and push to go on for a while longer. He began to set little goals along the way. *I just have to get to that little bush up there on the right*, he'd think. Then after he reached the bush, *now if I just make it even with that lamppost*. He reminded himself to bring his walkman next time with his cassette of Marine cadences. Hearing those old chants always made his endurance better, and helped him keep a natural rhythm with his running. He was already wearing his black t-shirt with the Marine Corps bulldog on the front. The dog was circled by the words **NOBODY EVER DROWNED IN SWEAT**.

There was a long stretch between Belle Isle and downtown Windsor where Carl was almost completely alone on the path. That's when he took the time to glance over at the buildings on the Detroit side of the river. Sometimes, especially when he sat fishing on the riverbank with Nancy, he liked to look over and imagine how the land must've looked before the huge city was built. Even before it was Fort Detroit. He had heard that it was such a lush, beautiful land. Full of all kinds of animals and wildlife, fish and birds. Carl felt almost jealous of those old-timey Indians who had such a wonderful life before the

White man stumbled on the shores and declared that he had “discovered” the New World. It must’ve been great to have been alive way back then. Those Indians had everything they needed all around them in great abundance. Even Belle Isle was known as rich hunting grounds. And so many tribes traveled up and down this river, trading with each other. The Hurons, Potawatomies, Wyandottes, Delawares, Ojibway, and, of course, the Haudenosaunee. That was the real name for the Iroquois. It meant People of the Longhouse. A lot of tribes from all over were known to gather and set up camp in the area. They could get beaver and moose furs from up North, and, from the Southern tribes, those fresh-water mussels with purple shells that his own people turned into wampum. Carl imagined there were probably canoe races back then. The land on both sides of this river must’ve been so beautiful with all the various trees, flowers and plants. Plants that the White man called weeds, but the Indian called medicines. *Well, he thought. If what the old prophets have predicted is true, one day the White man will simply slide back into the ocean where they came from. Then this will be all Indian land again. One day.* He sniffed a stench of rotten fish as he ran along one spot. *Trouble is, when we get it back, the land will be so polluted, it won’t support much human life.*

Soon Carl neared the downtown area again. His eyes scanned the area up near the intersection, but everything looked normal. He stayed down along the river footpath and worked his way around the other pedestrians. Eventually he got through the crowds and was back on a mainly clear pathway. He checked the time on his watch and saw he was coming up on one hour. It must’ve cost him close to ten minutes when he chased that purse-snatcher. Oh, well. He’d have a better time next run. It took him another 12

minutes or so to get back down to where Nancy was fishing. She smiled as he came puffing up to her. "So! What'd cha catch?" he asked. She held up her empty chain that she used to slip through the fish mouths after she'd catch them. "Nuthin worth keeping," Nancy grinned. "Just a couple of those ugly goby fish and a big fat sheephead. Only baby bass are biting today," she laughed. Carl kept jogging in place as they talked. "Guess you'll have to make some fry bread and corn soup for supper," he grinned. "Lots of fry bread! I need those carbohydrates." Nancy pushed her ballcap up from her forehead, and said, "Aaayy...too much fry bread makes yah fat." Carl patted his tight stomach with that comment and said, "That's okay. Uh, I'm gonna finish my run. I'll go back down to the bridge, then I'll be right back," he said and took off. Nancy stood up and called after him, "I'll put my stuff in the van." Then she sat back down again and watched her husband as he ran off. She sat still for a few minutes and thought about him, feeling very glad that he was back into running. *It's so much better that he's running than sitting in a bar,* she thought. Then, Nancy began putting things back into the tackle box and picked up the plastic tub of night crawlers. She pulled her keys out of her pocket and lugged her stuff back up the hill to the mini-van and packed it away in the hatch. She opened the passenger door and sat inside with the door open, enjoying the spring breeze off the river.

Right about then, Carl had ended his run back at the North Wall. He stopped and stood quietly, slowing his hard breathing down and doing a few stretches. He thought about the upcoming "Run to the Wall," when all the Vietnam vets from the area, and from over in Michigan and Ohio, had their big get-together on this spot. There were always lots of vets and their friends and family members who came over on their motorcycles. It

was a great sight - to see them come down Huron Church Road in a slow procession to Riverside Drive. The bikes would arrive at the wall, then a contingent of veterans in color guard uniform would march in and meet up with the bikers. It was always a big ceremony, and the mayor of Windsor was usually there. There was always a big deal made about the city allowing the North Wall to be built there, after Ottawa had turned it down. The Canadian event came about a week after the bigger Run to the Wall in Washington, D.C. *One day, Carl thought, I'm gonna go to the big Run. See what it's like.*

Carl checked his time, then leisurely strolled over to the van. Nancy watched him as he approached, thinking how she never got tired of looking at his muscular physique. She liked to tease him and say that he looked like how those Indian warriors from the old days must've looked - slim and strong, with rippling muscles, and able to run for miles chasing a deer. Nancy knew her husband didn't even realize how handsome he was. She was smiling as Carl opened his door and grabbed his warm bottle of Gatorade out of the console. He cracked it open and downed most of it. Nancy could never get how he could drink that stuff warm like he did. Then he walked up to the grass in front of the van and did his stretches again. His wife waited patiently in her seat, looking across the river to the People Mover gliding along its track in downtown Detroit. Then Carl came over, hopped into the van, and started it up. The air conditioner blew out a blast of hot air, which slowly turned cool. Then they each closed their doors. Nancy looked at her husband and said, "So. How was your run?" Carl put the gear in reverse and turned his head to look out the back window, as he slowly backed out of the parking spot. He

braked and gave her a quick kiss. "Oh, about the same as always," he told her, as he smiled to himself, adding "It felt real good."

Healing our Veterans with the Pipe

The skies over Windsor were a bright blue with hardly any clouds that day. I noticed it especially when the F-16's flew over. We were all gathered down by the North Wall for a special ceremony for Native Veterans. And there were quite a few Indian men at the riverbank who served during the Vietnam War. None of us really know how many Canadian Natives were in the service during Nam, but I hear there's about 20 from Walpole Island alone. A lot of Iroquois guys were in it, and several Delawares from both Moraviantown and Munsee. And we all know of the three Six Nations men who are casualties listed on the North Wall. So, each year in Windsor we have something special for the Native vets. Either we have something as part of the regular Run to the Wall event or a separate ceremony like last July.

I felt really good that day, because my younger brother had come over from Michigan to be part of the event. He wasn't in Nam, 'cause he's much too young, but he was in the U.S. Army for about six years, and got out a couple years before Desert Storm. I know he was hoping they'd call him up from the Reserves when things started heating up in the Middle East, but they didn't. I'm glad they didn't. But David shows his respect for Vietnam vets by flying the POW-MIA flag on a tall flagpole behind his house. He came across the border in his Army fatigues, and the local vets asked him to march with them. Those guys are all part of the Color Guard with Chapter One of the Canadian Vietnam Veterans Association. They were all out in their camouflage fatigues, so David fit right in. He had his long hair in a single braid, and seeing that made me feel so proud.

The Munsee fellow that organized the event, Floyd, was there with an eagle feather in his cap. He was in Nam for two tours, and lost much of his hearing from the mortars exploding so close. Floyd was in the Marine Corps. When all the vets got together to make their parade march from down by the Ambassador Bridge over to the Wall, Floyd carried his Eagle Staff. The Color Guard carried all the proper flags - Canadian, American, City of Windsor, POW-MIA, the Vietnam one. My brother David marched alongside my boyfriend, Neil, who is part of the Color Guard. Neil had his hair in a single braid, like always.

As the vets made their march up to the Wall, there were several Native men and women from Floyd's reserve standing on the sides with their drums in hand. They beat their drums as the vets marched up. The men all got into their formation down on the grass and pathway directly in front of the Wall, while we spectators gather around to watch. There were prayers, and several vets from the Legion Hall spoke. You didn't have to be Indian to be there, and most of the vets there weren't. But they all show respect and honor for any of the ceremonies or speeches for the Native vets. One Native vet had brought smudge medicine, and got up to say a prayer. It was all very respectful.

Then at one point, the president of Chapter One was up speaking and welcoming his fellow Vietnam veterans back home, and we all heard a very loud jet sound. We looked up in the sky and saw two military jets streak across right over us. The vet at the microphone told us those were F-16's from a base in South Carolina who came all the way up here to do the fly-by. It was one of those things that makes your heart want to bust with pride. I looked around at the faces of the veterans - both Indian and White - and felt

real lucky to know these men. These men are true Warriors, regardless of their color.

Then it was time for the Pipe Ceremony. Floyd always brings his pipe - which is a Friendship pipe - and shares it with whoever wants to smoke it. I remember the first time he did that a few years back. He had come over and asked me to take part. I was surprised, because some pipes are meant only for men. My dad was a pipemaker, so I've learned a lot about our different kinds of pipes. But Floyd told me it wasn't just for the men, and that as a Traditional Woman dancer, I had the right to take part. So now, I always do join in when the vets hold their Pipe Ceremony down by the North Wall.

We all gathered in a circle up close to the Wall, but still on the grass, and knelt down. My brother David joined the other vets and the drummers, both men and women. Floyd was busy trying to get the pipe lit, because there was a bit of a breeze coming off the Detroit River. You don't use a bic lighter with Indian pipes. You use either wooden matches, or a coal from a fire. That's when I saw the long-haired Vietnam vet come over and quietly join the circle.

I had noticed him the previous year at the ceremony at the Wall. He wasn't part of the Chapter One group, but someone said he did live in Windsor. I think he's a White man, but I'm not sure. He never talks to anyone that I know of. Dick, one of the guys in the group says he knows the fellow - because the guy was a sniper and based at the same camp as Dick. Dick says the fellow was one of the best snipers around, and men who are snipers are really different. They're always loners, and plenty of other soldiers avoid them. And most snipers are really good at what they do. This man now has long gray hair. I mean, almost down to his waist. And he wears it loose and hanging down.

I noticed he always looks very serious, never smiles. It was the second time in two years that he came and took part in the Pipe Ceremony. So Floyd got the pipe going and started passing it around. We all took our turns taking it from the person to our right after they smoked it. You take it, turn it in a complete circle with your hands, then smoke it. It made me feel good to see my brother smoking it. I watched when the pipe got over to that sniper man. His long hair was hanging down and almost touching the ground as he kneeled. He turned the pipe in a circle and then smoked it. He passed it to the next person - and I saw the sniper smile. Then there was some friendly quiet talk made and I saw him smile again.

That was probably the best part of the whole ceremony for me - seeing that veteran make use of the sacred Pipe, and seeing how it brought a smile to his face. I've never seen a Vietnam veteran yet who didn't have a lot of respect for the Indian ways, even when they don't understand everything going on. They're still respectful. And it's good when people discover the healing powers of the Pipe.

Ayosda's Story

In the old days, my tribe had women warriors, who were known as "Beloved Women." They were strong Tsalagi, or Cherokee, women who fought alongside their husbands, brothers, fathers, uncles, and friends. Some Beloved Women never wanted or asked to be a warrior. But when their husbands were killed by the enemy, these women picked up the weapons and took their husbands' place in battle.

In the old days, I *was* a woman warrior. I used the blowgun, bow and arrows, and the war club. At another time, I used the white man's gun. Sometimes I used it against the white man, whom we call *Unega*. I died from a musket shot from a white man's gun. I died with honor. My people buried me with honor.

In this life, I am a different kind of warrior woman. I do not fight with guns or war clubs. Now my weapon is words. White man's words. The language of the *Unega*. They say "know your enemy" – and I do. I can fight as a Tsalagi woman in the white man's world and win at his game.

I am the granddaughter, daughter, sister, niece, cousin, and wife of Indian warriors. Some of my ancestors fought in both the American Revolution and the Civil War. My Tsalagi grandpa was a doughboy in WWI. My father served in the army in WWII. My uncles fought in both Korea and Vietnam. Five of my brothers served in the army and navy, two of them during Vietnam. Many Indian warriors fought in the white man's war in Vietnam. They did not fight for American democracy. They fought for our land. Indian land. Turtle Island. Mother Earth. And many died for our land.

It is for them that I wear my single eagle feather. It is for them I dance.

VITA AUCTORIS

Sandra Muse was born in 1957 in Detroit, Michigan. She is a member of the Bird Clan of the Tsalagi (Cherokee) Nation, and her Indian name is Ayosda. She graduated from Frank Cody High School in 1975. Eventually, she moved to London, Ontario and obtained a two year diploma in Broadcast Journalism from Fanshawe Community College in 1987. Sandra taught for two years in the Program in Journalism for Native Peoples at the University of Western Ontario as an adjunct professor. She then obtained a B.A. in Honors English in 1999 at the University of Windsor, where she is currently a candidate for the Master's Degree in English: Creative Writing. Sandra hopes to graduate in Summer 2002.