

In Search of Johonaa'ei: Healing Through Story

by

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ABSTRACT

This dissertation is a creative piece that reflects a dual focus in the American Indian Studies program – American Indian Law & Policy and Native American Literature. This “epidemic of violence,” as James Anaya labeled it, underpins the writing of this dissertation. Some statistics:

One in three Native women will be sexually assaulted in her lifetime.

Some sources purport that 88% of assailants are non-Native.

Only 13% of reported assaults on Native women are prosecuted.

The core of the dissertation is a novella bookended by an Introduction and an Epilog. The Introduction includes the factors and influences that led to the writing of this novella. The novella presents the convergence of the stories of four damaged women and their individual paths toward healing. An Epilog provides a space for thoughts on the writing process and the final product.

The purpose of this dissertation is three-fold: Bring attention to the problem of violence committed against Native women, to promote the sharing of stories to begin the path to healing, and to add to the scholarship of American Indian Studies.

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INTRODUCTION

Story is the basis for all human communication. Terms such as narrative, conversation, news reporting or articles, speech, editorial, novel or memoir, grow like branches from the word story. Within the medium of human interaction, story acts to bind us one to another. As we relay our stories, these pieces of our humanity build empathy and understanding. Thus story can fill the void that pain and anger creates. This power of story forms the principle root of this dissertation.

The seeds of human experiences that grew into this dissertation came from varied and distant origins. Scholarly and literary sources, case law and legislation, incidents shared, problems revealed, chance happenings, as well as confidential conversations intertwined to shape the novella. Within the following pages, some of these origins and influences are discussed, but some not. Pieces of personal conversations, individual stories told in confidence, or snippets from real life experiences have grown into anonymous, unique, but familiar, interactions of the four main characters in the novella.

Two major influences for this novella and dissertation came from my dual focus in American Indian Law and Native American Literature within the American Indian Studies Department. The study of law feeds my mind, while literature fuels my soul. My research into the “epidemic of violence,” as James Anaya, law professor at the University of Arizona Law School, labeled it, against Native women enraged and sorrowed me. That research when studying American Indian Law, and my reaction to what I learned, fed the writing of this dissertation.

The core of the dissertation is a novella bookended by an Introduction and an Epilog. The Introduction includes the factors and influences that led to the writing of this

novella. The novella depicts the convergence of the lives of four damaged women, their stories, along with their varied paths toward healing. An Epilog provides a space for contemplation and reflection on the dissertation process and the final product.

Throughout the novella each woman reveals her own way of responding to and healing from personal trauma. The thread that ties the women together is trauma – and the healing process. The impacts of domestic or sexual abuse are lifelong. I believe that it never really heals completely. Like the trauma to the body from a major surgery, the scar remains, vivid and painful to the touch for a long time, but eventually a numb ache that is often cursed and covered. Each woman has a scar. Some scars are still very painful; some are healing, while others are now covered. This is the braided story of four women held together by a hope for that elusive healing. Each has experienced trauma in a different way, each attempts to heal through a different action, while each stands in a different position on that path in the healing process.

My research into domestic violence on reservations planted the seeds of this project in the spring of 2012. I worked on it sporadically that year, making little progress. I concentrated on Native film and pushed the little book aside to focus on my dissertation topic at that time. But the theme and characters continued to haunt me. Over winter break 2012 I saw a special report on “Homegrown Terrorists” (History Channel. “Homegrown Terrorists, December 2012). The information I learned from that documentary spurred me to research a connection between Neo-Nazi groups and violence against Native women and others on reservations. I found some documented connections. This research became a part of my dissertation.

Thus, a novella and dissertation grew from studying Native-authored literature, reading American Indian case law, learning of inadequate federal policies to protect Indian women and children, researching racist neo-Nazi beliefs and behaviors, as well as hearing women's stories of domestic abuse and rape. However, believing in the power of story as an essential part of the healing process forms the main root of this dissertation.

American Indian Law And Policy: Feeding the Violence

At first glance, American Indian Law and Native Literature appear to be strange bedfellows. One can certainly study law, even American Indian law, without delving into Native American literature. On the other hand, much, if not all, of Native literature refers, infers, or builds specifically on the impacts of treaties, statutes, cases, laws, and policies found in the study of American Indian law.

For instance, treaties between Native peoples and Euro-western governments, especially the United States, along with legislation and Supreme Court decisions, carved this continent into a checkerboard of legal jurisdictions affecting Native peoples. Federal, state, local, and tribal jurisdictions that intersect or overlap create a jurisdictional maze through which perpetrators escape. Between first contact with exploring Europeans until present, American Indian Tribes and Nations moved from independent and autonomous peoples into totally dependent and governmentally controlled economically depressed communities, then struggled their way back to self-determining and self-governing nations. This movement can be directly linked to vacillating attitudes and actions of the federal government.

In order to better understand the severity of the issues created by these actions and attitudes, statistical information is included below concerning domestic violence and rape committed against Native women in Indian Country.

Throughout the continental United States and Alaska, Native women suffer from an excessive rate of domestic assault, violent attacks, and rape. The tragedy lies in the fact that most of these incidents go unprosecuted. According to the report to the United Nations regarding the state of violence against indigenous women in the United States and Alaska, the National Congress of American Indians (NCAI) and other organizations reported that Native American women, including Alaska Native women, are suffering from an epidemic of violence committed on them by mainly non-Native perpetrators. Even though Congress passed the Violence against Women Reauthorization Act in 2013 that gives limited criminal authority to Tribal courts, little action has taken place as yet. Three pilot programs have been put in place within the continental United States to begin prosecuting these types of crimes, but the Act will not go into full effect until March 2015.

According to a report to the United Nations by the National Congress of American Indians, along with other interested organizations, this problem is rooted in the “systemic discriminatory legal framework” in the United States. The report goes on to say:

For decades, United States law has prohibited tribal governments from prosecuting non-Native offenders who commit many of the violent crimes against Native women.⁹ This leaves Indian and Alaska Native nations and tribes as the only governments in the United States without legal authority to protect their own citizens from violence perpetrated by any person. These restrictions, coupled with a lack of serious enforcement by federal and state officials having jurisdiction to do so,

perpetuate a cycle of extreme rates of violence against Indian and Alaska Native women. (National Congress of American Indians. Annual Report 2014.

<http://www.ncai.org/resources/ncai-publications/ncai-annual-report>)

Under United States law, Tribal courts lack jurisdiction over such crimes as rape or assault. Federal policing authorities, such as the Federal Bureau of Investigation (FBI) are granted that jurisdiction through the Major Crimes Act of 1885. However, federal authorities decline prosecuting as many as eighty percent of domestic violence or rape cases that occur on reservations. Percentages vary according to which report one consults. (Indian Law Resource Center. "Combatting Violence Against Indian and Alaska Native Women –United States Violations of the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights through its Discriminatory System. A shadow report submitted to the United Nations, September 2013. " See UN INT_CCPR_NGO_USA_15124_E.pdf. Web. Accessed February 24, 2014.) In this way, many perpetrators go uncharged and unprosecuted.

The report goes on to provide some of these statistics:

Violence against Indian and Alaska Native women is at epidemic proportions and is one of the most horrific manifestations of the discriminatory legal system in the United States. Significant areas of federal law and policy fail to meet the United States' obligations under the ICERD and other human rights instruments with respect to protecting Indian and Alaska Native women from violence and ensuring nondiscrimination and equality under federal law.⁵ Given this situation, Native women are two and a half times more likely to be assaulted in their lifetime and more than twice as likely to be stalked than other women in the United States.⁶ One in three Native women will be raped in her lifetime, and six in ten will be physically assaulted.⁷ Worse, the murder rate for Native women is ten times the national average

on some Indian Reservations.⁸ Indian and Alaska Native women are denied meaningful access to justice and are less protected from violence than other women just because they are indigenous and are assaulted on tribal lands. (National Congress of American Indians. Annual Report 2014.

<http://www.ncai.org/resources/ncai-publications/ncai-annual-report>)

Even though the United States government has taken steps to address these problems in Indian Country, such as enacting the Tribal Law and Order Act in 2010 which strengthens tribal sentencing authority, Native women continue to wait for justice. More importantly, the Violence Against Women Reauthorization Act of 2013 (VAWA 2013) provides limited criminal jurisdiction to tribes over non-Indian domestic violence offenders. These are certainly steps in the right direction to begin curing this epidemic, but Native women continue to wait for justice because the new tribal jurisdiction provisions in VAWA 2013 are not effective until March 2015.

These statistics are shocking. However, the creation of this “epidemic” took decades, perhaps even centuries, to develop. It began with the language contained in treaties between the federal government and sovereign Native peoples.

Most treaties between the U.S. federal government and Indian peoples included a provision concerning the prosecution of non-Native offenders committing crimes within the boundaries of the reservation. These provisions normally required the turning over of the non-Native perpetrator to federal authorities for equal treatment under the law. In recent times, this system collapsed due to a high declination rate by federal prosecutors. Failure to adjudicate these cases left Native women vulnerable. In 1978, the U.S. Supreme Court ruled that Tribal courts lacked jurisdiction over non-Indian perpetrators committing

crimes within reservation boundaries in *Oliphant v. Suquamish Indian Tribe*. (Getches 518)

Through the study of American Indian Law, which includes reading Supreme Court cases and Congressional Acts, one comes to an understanding of how federal policies feed the problems that caused the epidemic of violence against Native women. The cure is almost as slow and painful. However, there is hope. In the novella, the characters confront this problem in varied ways. But, as in real life, there is no real resolution.

Literary Influences: Structuring the Story

Even though the novella grew from multiple influences, the main framework remains story. The problem of applying a theory when weaving several stories and genres eluded this writer. The actions and events experienced by the characters presented varied geographies, cultures, levels of education, histories, as well as numerous time periods. As frameworks were explored and discarded as incompatible with the structure of the emerging novella, one theory glared through as the obvious choice for this work. Porter Abbot's "The Cambridge Introduction to Narrative Theory" included insights that both paralleled and reinforced the structure of the novella. Revisiting Abbot's text stabilized my understanding of narrative theory as the basis of story conveyed in either verbal or written form.

Story is an essential element of human interaction. It explains and relays events, actions, emotions, hopes, heartbreak, elation, depression, in other words, the human experience. Three elements make up story: teller, listener, and actions affected by a "shaping and reshaping of time as a succession of events" (Abbot 1).

The storyteller holds the series of actions or events that constitute the story. He or she arranges those events within a time frame that readies the series of actions or events to be understood by a listener. As Abbot puts it, “free exercise of narrative to shape time” exists in the mind of the teller. (Abbot 4). Narrative theory also fits well when one utilizes the first person point of view for multiple characters. *“It is only through narrative that we know ourselves as active entities that operate through time,”* Abbot states. (Abbot 130) Each character in the novella is a teller in this weave of stories, pulling together events, actions, and multiple dimensions of what we understand as time. As each story unfolds, personal narratives tangle across Tucson and the Southwest, creating a diagram of intersecting geography and character interaction. Thus, the framework of narrative theory fits this project perfectly.

Another way in which narrative theory provides structure to the novella is in the area of “agon” or conflict. Each character brings an internal conflict to the story. The characters are drawn into the tangle of coincidences that creates an external conflict as well. As each character attempts to negotiate the external conflict, each also struggles with her individual traumatic event. As the conflicts are negotiated, whether internal or external, it becomes clear that the healing process for each woman includes sharing her story. Even though other factors initiate these women’s encounters, the central theme of the novella remains healing through story.

Throughout each character’s first person account, manipulations of time, excursions across geography, and coincidental influences, as well as internal and external conflicts, the power of narrative emerges. The narrative theory provides a structure or framework by which the pieces of the text can be categorized. Thus, techniques and

styles of Native-authored literature compatible with narrative theory are used in the novella that emphasizes the power of story.

Reading and studying Native-authored literature also influenced the structure of this novella. Literary techniques used by Native authors are attempted within this writing. I was challenged as a writer while trying to build a narrative that weaves disassociated lives and events while manipulating time, injecting a creation-style story, and attaching color and direction patterns to specific characters. The decision to primarily use a first-person point of view, as well as depending on dialogue to convey much of each character's individual personality, helped induce immediacy and intimacy with the characters. As with life, the ending hopefully depicts how life moves on, shifting and turning in unexpected ways, as well as reinforcing the power of healing through story. Some story time frames are chronological, moving forward or backward in time, but many tellers move the listener around in time through word choice or with "flashes" to enhance or emphasize particular emotions or events. The teller may decide to slow or suspend time in order to evoke particular emotions for the listener. Like a slow motion scene in a film or the sensation of timelessness just after the point of impact in a car accident, time can slow or stop for the listener.

Several Native authors use these techniques in their novels. Two who inspired the suspensions or "flashes" of time in my writing are D'Arcy McNickle in *The Surrounded* and James Welch in *Winter in the Blood*.

In *The Surrounded*, Archilde and his mother move forward in time as they travel up the mountain trail toward her last deer hunt. Throughout their journey, McNickle also uses language that simultaneously gives the feel of moving backward TOWARD time

IMMEMORIAL. Along their journey, Archilde contemplated how the mountains remained steadfast while the rest of the world changed through time.

He swayed with the lazy movements of his horse, looking up occasionally to observe the trail as it twisted between boulders or skirted a ridge. Undergrowth of mountain maple and wild cherry brushed his side. This was how it would have seemed years ago, crossing the mountains to hunt buffalo. Nothing would have been much different. (115-116)

Archilde observed the stability of the mountain landscape in opposition to the tenuous state of the contemporary world. At another point along the trail, his thoughts about the night imprinted that “aspect” even more concretely for the reader:

The sky was over laden with stars. If you looked closely there were stars in the grass as well—dew turned to ice on the tips of grass blades. Archilde did not sleep at once. He heard the horses breathing and moaning in their sleep. They had lain down in a close group. Owls called to each other. This was as it would have been. Certainly the night had not changed with the years. (120)

McNickle moves the reader along with discourse that initiates the sensation of traveling forward and backward in time simultaneously. He creates this movement from those aspects of sun and trees and rocks of the ride into the mountains to the sights and sounds of the night at camp. The theme of timelessness emerges. Although not replicated in the novella, McNickle’s artful implementation of this sensation of suspension of time by combining both forward and backward movement influenced the story and use of language in the novella.

James Welch’s flashbacks in *Winter in the Blood*, provide a space in which the protagonist remembers a tragic accident as a flashback, reliving the moments in slow

motion. The protagonist and his older brother herd cattle across a blacktop highway to reach new pasture on the other side. When one old cow balks, a truck speeds around a curve, then the brother is hit, Welch reveals the protagonist's underlying scar baring his trauma to the reader. These manipulations of time allow the story to have urgency or serenity, move forward in current time throughout the novella, while injecting remembrances of important experiences, travels, or traumas buried in each character's memory.

Another technique found in Native-authored fiction is the weaving of culturally specific creation stories throughout the text. Leslie Silko's and Luci Tapahonso's style of entangling creation and contemporary stories also affected the content and organization of my novella.

Although not the only possible example, an excerpt from Leslie Silko's novel *Ceremony* follows that depicts the insertion of a creation or origin story into a contemporary theme.

He tried to hold it back, but the wind swept down from the green coastal mountains, whipping the rain into gray waves that blinded him. The corporal fell, jerking the ends of the blanket from his hands, and he felt Rocky's foot brush past his own leg. He slid to his knees, trying to find the ends of the blanket again, and he started repeating "Goddamn, goddamn!"; it flooded out of the last warm core in his chest and echoed inside his head. He damned the rain until the words were a chant, and he sang it while he crawled through the mud to find the corporal and get him up before the Japanese saw them. He wanted the words to make a cloudless blue sky, pale with a summer sun pressing across wide and empty

horizons. The words gathered inside him and gave him strength. He pulled on the corporal's arm; he lifted him to his knees and all the time he could hear his own voice praying against the rain.

It was summertime and Iktoa'ak'o'ya-Reed Woman was always taking a bath.

She spent all day long

sitting in the river

splashing down the summer rain.

But her sister

Corn Woman

worked hard all day

sweating in the sun

getting sore hands in the corn field.

Corn Woman got tired of that she got angry she scolded her sister for bathing all day long.

Iktoa'ak'o'ya-Reed Woman

went away then she went back to the original place down below.

And there was no more rain then.

Everything dried up all the plants the corn the beans

they all dried up

and started blowing away in the wind.

The people and the animals were thirsty. They were starving.

So he had prayed the rain away, and for the sixth year it was dry; the grass turned yellow and it did not grow. Wherever he looked, Tayo could see the consequences

of his praying; the gray mule grew gaunt, and the goat and kid had to wander farther and farther each day to find weeds. (13-15)

Silko imbeds the story of the two sisters within the story of the two brothers. Tayo damns the rain as he trudges through the wet jungle as a prisoner of war. He believes that his desperate words caused the rain to leave his homelands back in the United States. Silko's injection of the story of Corn Woman and Reed Woman reinforces the reader's understanding of Tayo's culture, providing background to his belief that he has damned the rain away.

In "A Radiant Curve," a story found in Luci Tapahonso's collection of poetry by the same name, the traditional Dine stories add richness and foundation to stories of contemporary Navajo life. Tapahonso's tells the reader of the First Laugh ceremony for her grandson. Within the descriptions of the arrangements and preparations for the celebration of the child's entrance into the world as a thinking human being, the foundational stories for the ceremony are told.

One fall afternoon in 1998, my daughter Misty called to tell us that her infant son Isaiah had just laughed aloud. It was anticipated, because when a Diné, or Navajo, baby laughs aloud for the first time, a First Laugh ceremony is usually held. Shisóí Isaiah (*Shisóí* means "my daughter's child") had laughed in his sleep, and as a baby he still lived in the world of the Diyin Dine'é, or the Holy People. But this time he had been awake when his father, Lloyd James, tickled him. This occurrence showed that Shisóí had consciously performed the act of thinking, Ntsékees, which is associated with the beginning of creation, childhood, and the sunrise.

Centuries ago, the Holy People decreed that Diné children be honored in this fashion, because before this first genuine expression of emotion, the infant still "belonged to" and lived in the world of the Holy People. The first laugh marks the first step of his or her moving away from this sphere and the beginning of the child's participation in the human family's network. (19)

Silko and Tapahonso provide context for the contemporary story through adding specific cultural knowledge. Each places a window into the author's culture with traditional stories. These traditional stories add a depth to the experiences of the contemporary characters for the reader. The pieces of "The Birth of Stories" throughout the novella hopefully add depth to the stories shared by the four women, as well as a window into this author's beliefs. The addition of colors attached to directions depicted in "The Birth of Stories" is also found in much of Native-authored literature.

Throughout Native-authored literature, one finds the joining of colors and directions that express particular meanings according to the author's cultural landscape. The study of Native authors' injection of these color patterns initiated my thesis topic. Now, I include color patterns connected to cardinal directions, as well as to particular creatures and characters, to add that flavor to the novella.

Leslie Silko uses color patterns from her Laguna Pueblo heritage and from her Navajo neighbors. As with many indigenous peoples, the Laguna Pueblos have a "creation" or "emergence" story which explains the people's beginnings on their lands. The Laguna emergence story depicts the upward movement of the people who still appear in their super-natural form...climbing from one world to the next, successively going from the white to the red, blue and yellow worlds" which correlates with the

“cardinal directions of east, south, west and north. These colors and directions winter, spring, summer and fall occur respectively in the north, west, south and east. This connection between the four cardinal directions and the four associated colors appears repeatedly, although ambiguously, in Silko’s *Storyteller*.

Much of this cultural information is derived from the anthropological studies of Franz Boas. In his book, *Keresan Texts*, Boas compiles research including information about the four-color pattern found in Laguna stories and ceremonies. As he translates the Keres or Laguna Pueblo “Emergence Stories,” the four lower worlds are each designated a color: “Then there were four worlds underneath. First a yellow one, next a blue one, next a red one, next a white one (10). Within his remarks, Boas also points out the color association between the four lower worlds and the four colors, “There are four worlds under ours, a white, red, blue, yellow one from below upward” (277). In a summary of one of the Keresan stories he designates the association of color to direction in Laguna tradition as “colors: blue, west; red, south; white, east; yellow, north; brown, zenith; green, nadir” (283). Thus, this interpretation of the basic color correlations between underworlds, colors, and directions from Laguna tradition are couched in Boas’s anthropological research. (*Collage of Color* 32)

Luci Tapahonso also brings the Dine color and direction pattern into her writings. Her Dine traditional pattern is white for east, blue for south, yellow for west, and black for north. Cherokee Tom Holm and Choctaw LeeAnne Howe provide the cultural importance of the colors red and white in their novels. For both authors, white is the color for peace and justice, whereas, red stands for war and chaos. Other Native authors

provide cultural information through color and direction –patterns. These are but a sample of how traditional ways of knowing are transmitted through contemporary novels.

The periodic injections of a creation style story that depicts the birth of stories was inspired by these writers. Each color attaches to a direction, a set of living things, then to a character. The hope is that as one reads about each character, each reader's way of knowing can color how that character comes alive to the reader. Non-Native readers hold particular meanings for different colors. Native readers may bring other attitudes to the work through individual cultural epistemologies. Thus, each reader may interpret the novella differently, according to his or her point of view.

I gravitated towards using the first person point of view for each woman's story because that perspective grips the reader with authenticity and immediacy. Two authors I read who used this technique were Betty Bell in *Faces In The Moon* and Louise Erdrich in *Love Medicine*.

Betty Louise Bell's *Faces in the Moon* transforms the memories of women around a kitchen table into piercing truths about women in crisis. Bell tells the story of Luci, a young Indian girl who found her way to a new life through education. The narrative grips the reader with her conversations and use of first person narration.

I was raised on the voices of women. Indian women. The kitchen table was first a place of remembering, a place where women came and drew their lives from each other. The table was covered with an oilcloth in a floral pattern, large pink and red roses, the edges of the petals rubbed away by elbows.

I remember now.

They spent their lives telling stories. The same stories, sitting in the same places,

giving the same answers, warning children with a shake of the head and the tease of memory. Always finding, in the beginning or summing up, a detail undiscovered or a cruel motive revealed. In this way the stories lived, never finishing in circumstance or death. Or even in the storyteller herself. (4)

Words this true, this intense, of how memory transforms into story that lives on through, and beyond, the storyteller, evokes (invokes?) the power of well-crafted narrative. Bell invites the reader to sit at the kitchen table, share in the memories, and digest the tragedies. Her use of first person strengthens that narrative that resonates with so many women. I chose to have each woman in the novella to tell her own story in her own voice to evoke that kind of narrative power.

Another author who utilizes the first person voice in her novels is Louise Erdrich. In *Love Medicine*, her character Marie Kashpaw thinks about her kitchen floor and the reader wonders if this woman is telling us the story of her kitchen floor, or the story of her marriage.

I looked at my linoleum carefully, all the worn spots and cracks, all the places where the tin stripping had to be hammered flat. It was one of my prides to keep that floor shined up. Under the gray swirls and spots and leaves of the pattern, I knew there was tar paper and bare wood that could splinter a baby's feet. I knew, because I bought and paid for and put down that linoleum myself. It was a good solid covering, but under it the boards creaked.

There wasn't any use in thinking . . . Then I took up my brush . . . I never went down on my knees to God or anyone, so maybe washing my floor was an excuse to kneel that night. I felt better, that's all I know, as I scrubbed off the tarnished

wax and dirt. I felt better as I recognized myself in the woman who kept her floor clean even when left by her husband. I had been on a high horse. Now I was kneeling. I was washing the floor in my good purple dress. (164)

In this excerpt, Erdrich allows Marie to tell the story of her failed marriage in a way that many women can understand. When faced with the unthinkable, Marie gains strength from scrubbing her kitchen floor. The linoleum covers the imperfections of the original wooden floor much as Marie had veneered her marriage with propriety. The first person point of view adds intensity and integrity to the scene. These are the qualities strived for in the novella.

Greg Sarris in *Mabel McKay: Weaving the Dream* also uses the first person point of view to expose emotions he felt as he met and learned to know Mabel McKay.

On the way back to the Rumsey Reservation that day, I kept wondering how I was going to write about Mabel's life. She was baffling, even for me. Certainly the facts of her life were interesting and warranted a story. World-renowned Pomo basketmaker with permanent collections in the Smithsonian and countless other museums. The last Dreamer and sucking doctor among the Pomo peoples. The last living member of the Long Valley Cache Creek Pomo tribe. The astute interlocutor famous for her uncanny talk that left people's minds spinning. The facts were easy. The life was not. (3)

Sarris's memoir, and Mabel's story, stretch the perception of ways of knowing. Led by a "spirit" for much of her lifetime, Sarris ponders how to tell Mabel McKay's story truthfully and understandably. As he gathers Mabel's life story, he finds that his life story is tangled with hers. The book weaves together the stories of both Sarris and McKay, and

my novella attempts a similar strategy.

The characters or narrators in these novels tell stories of dealing with and healing from personal trauma, family crisis, or weighty obligations. Each pulls thoughts and memories into focus through a first-person perspective. Each of these authors creates a world in which the female character lives through either a first-person personal perspective or through the first-person perspective of the teller. Regardless of the teller, each story lives vividly when told as personal experience.

Lastly, I left the novella open-ended. Several authors use this technique in their novels. Franci Washburn allows Elsie to go home at the end of *Elsie's Business*, but the reader never learns the identity of her murderer. Tom Joseph escapes over a frozen glacier in Louis Owens' *Wolf Song*, but the reader is unsure of this young man's future. D'Arcy McNickle ends a story by making Bull a murderer in *Wind From an Enemy Sky*, exacting revenge on those who "killed the water" with a dam. These novels exhibit how life moves and shifts, that there is closure of one story, while another story is just beginning.

I have found that life has few tidy endings. Rather, life circumstances evolved through time and changed the future by circumstance and coincidence. I attempted to reflect these perspectives, styles, and techniques in my work.

One author who leaves the reader hanging at the end of the story is Louise Erdrich in *Round House*. Although ending the novel with the family moving through time in an automobile can be seen as a metaphor for life, this particular ending produced angst. As a reader, I felt abandoned by the author, as if someone had come along and ripped the last two or three pages out of the novel before giving it to me to read. All conflicts need not

be resolved, but the reader should close the book feeling that the circle is complete. Stories allow a sense of adaption to change while completing the circle of the story develops closure, which I attempt to do in the novella.

As one can see from the plethora of authors influencing this dissertation, the field of Native authored literature holds varied and unique works. The task of gleaning appropriate issues and techniques to write into the following novella has been difficult. Albeit a fictional piece, the situations and violence suffered by the four female characters emerge from real life experiences. So the hope is that each story feels credible, even though seeming incredible.

CONCLUSION

Finding an effective medium to pull together the coincidences and conflicts expressed in this novella initiated a great deal of concern. On one hand, the “epidemic” of violence against Native women on reservations, and in urban settings, demanded action. On the other hand, I felt as powerless to impact this problem as the women waiting helplessly in their homes. The idea of the novella came slowly, cautiously, out of my desire to confront the problem. The characters tugged at my sleeve, forcing me to listen to their stories, then write them down. The law fed that sense of responsibility, and Native-authored literature provided the means. The assertion of timelessness developed within a minimal time period, the intensity of stories delivered in first person, the ability to provide a closure to the novella while leaving some pieces of the story open-ended all came from the styles and techniques studied in Native-authored literature. Finally, narrative theory provided a literary allowed a literary structure for the piece. As the novella progressed, the characters began to write their own stories. I became the one

pruning the tree, adding the emphasis, structuring the parts, and finally pulling the diverse stories and styles together into the following, hopefully coherent and compelling, work.

CHAPTER ONE

Sentinels

The dual prop plane dipped closer to the flat-topped mesa. A sliver of sun reflected off the left wing and into the small four passenger cabin as the pilot pointed out the landmarks. “There’s the lava flow. Lots of stories about monsters and monster slayers connected to that area. The San Francisco Peaks are west of here. They’re the west end of Navajo land. Mountains to the north, south, and east, too. They border Navajo lands, and they’re considered sacred. The Hopi and Pueblo Indians live in these parts too. Are you ‘goin’ to Tucson for business?”

“Sort of,” the older man with a sculptured haircut mumbled as he fiddled with his cell phone.

“Will you be needin’ a car? Or did you take care of that before you left Denver? I can call ahead to arrange a rental,” the pilot offered.

“No, already done,” he answered without looking up.

“Usually I land from the east this time o’ the mornin’, but the wind’s out of the east at 12 knots. So, we’ll be looping around south of town and landing into the sun. You’ll get a great view of Gates Pass and the Saguaros. I’ll let you know when we get close. It’s really somethin’ to see.”

The tall girl heard the whir of a small plane overhead as she stepped into the doorway and breathed in the moist warmth of pre-dawn. Her thick, dark hair, still ruffled from the short night’s restless sleep, spread like a shawl over her shoulders and

down to the arch of her slender back. She looked at the corn pollen in her hands and stepped to the edge of the broad, wooden plank porch. Three small brown rabbits scampered away from the steps and hid under a nearby bush. Her grandmother's house faced the east. It had rained during the night. The desert scents of damp pine and creosote filled her as she gazed across the landscape in search of the first rays of healing sunshine to rise above the mesa. She waited patiently. She thought of how White Shell Girl had been found in the east, how Old Salt Woman had brought gifts to celebrate the baby girl's first laugh, and how Changing Woman had given birth to the twin boys. Then she thought about how those boys slayed the monsters with their flint knives. The stories had been passed to her by the grandmothers every summer while they hoed the garden and tended the flock.

Those same grandmothers had told her to seek out her uncle. "His medicine can help," they had said just last week.

"Been waitin' for you," he told her when she found him at the local grocery store inspecting some very yellow bananas.

She had only said, "Good Mornin', Uncle." But he looked through her with those dark eyes set deep in his round face that always seemed to be smiling. Then he laid his rough brown hand on her shoulder.

"Run," he had said, "Run to find your connection to the earth again." Most of the physical pain had gone. But her soul ached with anger and hate and fear. He knew. Maybe he knew because he's a medicine man. Maybe he felt it in her shoulder. But he knew her pain, and she saw it through her reflection in his dark eyes. He had said, "Run barefoot. Mother Earth will help you heal. Then we'll go to the old one. She can tell us

the way back to beauty. Tell you how to find harmony again.” His straight, white teeth gleamed as he smiled at his niece. “For now, run. Pray and run.”

New Balance running shoes hung around her neck held together by blue laces with matching cobalt blue socks stuffed under the tongues. She doubted her tender feet would manage the grit and gravel. Damp from the previous night’s rain, the earth felt wet and cool as she scrunched it under her naked toes. She prayed. The blue-laced tennies rested neatly on the step witnessing her long, barefoot strides towards the point of white light that transformed the sky into a brilliant blue bowl covering her world.

The sun moved behind a mountain as the plane descended. The small craft banked gently to the southwest and then headed northward, skirting the west side of the Tucson Mountains.

“There they are,” the pilot reported, finishing his turn to head into the wind. He never got used to the sight of hundreds of Saguaro guarding the west entrance to the valley. Hard freezes in the last two winters had taken a toll. Several of the old sentinels rested on their sides, arms crumpled or sprawled across the desert floor, their wet skeletons shimmering in the sunlight. The healthy Saguaros raised thick arms skyward saluting the morning sun. The pilot shook his head in awe while his passenger grunted, “Yeah, really something.”

“Please make sure you’re buckled in. We’ll be on the ground in about ten minutes, sir.” the pilot reported, sitting up straight, adjusting his seat belt, then checking his gauges.

”Sorry, Mom,” she whispered between wretches into the trash can.

“Let me put this wet cloth on the back of your neck,” a middle-aged woman in a long, black nightgown answered. “Give me your face.”

A teenage girl knelt on the floor while her mother sat on the unmade bed wiping the girl’s upturned face.

“I just couldn’t make it to the bathroom.”

“You just sit right there. I’ll be right back,” She went to the kitchen, wet the washcloth again, and poured Sprite into a glass.

“Bonnie, is she all right?” a male voice called from down the hall.

“Upset tummy,” Bonnie called back. “I got her something to settle her stomach.”

“Is that a helicopter?” the girl asked, her tight curls bouncing as she drank the soda in short, cautious sips. Hours spent in a swimming pool had streaked her chocolate hair auburn, almost blonde in some spots.

“Sounds like a small plane. It’s pretty low. Must be landing,” the male voice stated, now from the bedroom doorway.

“Matt, can you wake Tara while I finish up here? She has class this morning,” Bonnie took the empty glass and helped her daughter back into bed. “Is your tummy better?” she asked, pulling a zebra striped comforter up to the girl’s chin.

The girl nodded, snuggling into the pillow, and closed her eyes.

The tune from “Seven Spanish Angels” welcomed Mary as she stepped out of the shower. Wrapping herself in a red towel, she felt around on the dresser for her cell phone.

“Hopkins,” she said.

“Rise and shine,” a female voice chuckled. “Come by for coffee on your way in.”

I’m shining, all right, standing here in a towel, dripping all over my floor.”

Well, you’re missin’ a gorgeous sunrise. The milk and bread men are gone. So I stepped outside for a smoke and to catch the first rays. A small plane is flyng right into the sun. Headed for the airport, I guess. He’s gotta be blinded, flyin’ right into the sun like that.”

Kate’s faithful clientele of delivery men frequented her café every weekday morning. She and her husband George opened the small restaurant together about two years ago, but George had died from a heart attack the previous December. After that, Kate started closing after lunch. She still opened early to accommodate her early morning regulars, but closed after lunch because she didn’t trust anyone else to run her business.

“I’ll be by about seven, but should head out by seven thirty. It’s about a fifteen minute drive from the café over to the east side,” Mary said.



CHAPTER TWO

*Four Beings stood at the edges of the Earth, watching and waiting.
One wore white and stood in the East where the sun rises.
Another wore red and stood at the south edge waiting for a warm wind.
A third stood in blue at the western edge and listened for gentle winter rains.
The last wore black and stood at the northern edge.
All stared outward into the darkness.
Each held a story, but no listeners.
None wanted to empty them into the void at the edge of the world.*

“Ain’t It Funny How Time Slips Away” - Mary

My watch read 7:48, but the asphalt already shimmered with heat as I pulled into the parking lot that the neighborhood library shared with the Eastside police substation. Sitting and listening to the last refrains of “Funny How Time Slips Away,” I slid my Raybans down the bridge of my nose watching a uniformed officer settle into his patrol car and move off before picking up my purse from the floorboard, then shoving the 9 mm. Browning into its holster on the waistband of my skirt. Halfway across the parking lot, I glanced back at my old white Lincoln to make sure I’d parked her under a shady mesquite tree at the west edge of the large lot. In the desert, it’s important to park on the east side of the tree. Then the scorching afternoon sun filters through those spidery branches laced with tiny leaves. White’s the only color for a car when you live in the desert. I paid \$2,000 for her a couple of years back, replaced one headlight and the windshield, and Gracey has taken care of me ever since. I named her Gracey after my mother because Gracey’s beautiful, classy, comfortable, and dependable, just like my Mom.

On the way across the parking lot, the asphalt burned the bottoms of my new shoes. I buttoned, and then unbuttoned, my dark red jacket, deciding that this suit made

me look over dressed. New promotion, new office, new captain, and new co-workers – I had celebrated by getting Gracey a bath and her interior cleaned at the Jiffy Car wash while I ate a McDouble. Then I splurged on this new suit and shoes.

Pushing the sunglasses onto the top of my head, I hesitated in the entrance to the substation to allow my eyes to adjust.

“My name is Mary Hopkins and I’m here to see Captain Garcia,” I said to the high and tight haircut behind the glass, flipping open my shiny new gold badge. A year of night classes and lots of bologna sandwiches went into that badge. Six years of wearing a dark blue uniform, a marriage, a miscarriage, and then a divorce. I had told him that I wouldn’t be hit, that I had seen my Mom beaten by her second husband, and that would not happen to me. I guess he didn’t believe me. After the divorce, I bought Gracey and went back to school at night. Now I have a shiny new badge and a new job.

“Hi, I’m Bobby Garcia. Let me show you around and introduce you to everybody.” His voice felt friendly, but authoritative. About forty-eight with dark hair trimmed short, his rounded face accented by a mustache, he looked younger than his photo on the website.

The tour ended at my cubicle. Captain Garcia went to his office for a file as I stood staring at the tiny office where a blank computer monitor sat on a metal desk with a gray upholstered chair in front of it, and a metal filing cabinet in the corner. I had envisioned a noisy room full of desks and telephones. Too many episodes of Law & Order, I guess.

“Our IT person will be around in a few minutes to set you up in the computer. Here’s an auto theft case to get you started. I’ll be around all morning if you need

anything,” the Captain said from behind me. I stood frozen in the doorway. He moved a couple of steps down the hallway then turned back. “You’ll be fine. Holler if you need something,” he said , now in a soothing and knowing voice.

I took a step inside and exhaled. I had been unconsciously holding my breath. So much training and time spent to get here. And now . . . Willie’s lyrics played over and over in my mind -

Well, hello there

My, it's been a long, long time

How am I doing?

Oh, I guess that I'm doing fine

It's been so long now,

But it seems now, that it was only yesterday

Gee, ain't it funny, how time slips away.

“Loose Lips” – Kate

“Mornin’ boys. How ‘bout some coffee to start?”

The two men sat across from each other in the booth. The younger one’s long blonde hair, tied in a ponytail at the back of his head with a piece of blue yarn, grunted but didn’t look up. He scribbled on a small yellow pad as the older fella across from him spoke. “Coffee would be great . . . uh, Kate?” he said, looking for confirmation of the name he read off my name tag.

“That’s right. Coffee comin’ right up,” I quipped cheerfully, turning the cups upright on the table and pouring in the aroma of early morning.

Somehow, the two men didn't fit. The older one's neat slacks, shined Wingtips, black leather briefcase, dark blue polo, along with his attractive, sculptured hair didn't match the younger's faded jeans, scuffed boots, western shirt, and bull-rider straw hat.

Setting the coffee pot onto the counter, I turned back to the table, pulling out my order book and placing my pen at the ready.

"How's about some nice orange juice and hotcakes this mornin'? Our cook José makes great hotcakes."

Never looking up, the cowboy snorted, "Not for me," he said to me. Turning to the older man, he said, "Her name is Joanna and her Daddy is some kinda councilman or somethin'."

The older man taps the tabletop sharply with his knuckles to hush the cowboy and turns toward me.

"Kate, I'll take you up on that offer. Scrambled eggs and sausage, too. I'm really hungry after that drive from Phoenix this morning."

As I turned away from the table, still writing, I glanced back to see Mr. Wingtips leaned over the table, coming face to face with the cowboy, giving him a stern look.

"Loose lips, Toby. And NEVER write anything down," he hisses. Then Mr. Wingtips takes the pad, opens his briefcase, and tosses the pad inside.

After delivering Mr. Wingtips hotcakes, my mind wandered to Mary. The first day on a new job is hard. She's tough though. Never said a word about being nervous this morning.

"You look like a Dalmatian," she had chuckled that morning over coffee at the counter.

I held the gigantic stainless bowl of chocolate pie filling in the crook of my left arm and wedged it tight to my belly. My extra two hundred strokes with the whip gave it just the right airy texture.

“My Mama Bess always said that you can tell a good cook from how dirty her apron is,” I quipped, observing the chocolate speckles all over my long, white apron. I handed the bowl to Maggie in the kitchen, and she began pouring our famous filling into her pie crusts laid out on the prep table.

“It’s about 7:30,” I had told Mary. “How ‘bout some enchiladas at El Charos tonight to celebrate your first day on the new job? My treat.”

“Does this skirt look okay?” she had asked, tugging at the crisp material. “I liked it when I bought it, but now I’m feelin’ sort of uncomfortable. I don’t know. Just not quite right.”

“You’ve worn pants to work with solid shoes for the past six years. Now you’re on the way to work in a skirt and heels. You probably feel exposed. Vulnerable,” I told her. I stepped around the counter and pulled up my apron showing her my pants and white, nurse-style shoes.

“My Mama Bess always said to go by the three C’s of dressing yourself – Clean, Covered, and Comfortable. See, my legs are covered. I’m wearing comfortable, substantial shoes – in case I have to kick anybody out,” I added with a chorus line move and giggle.

“Well, you had better work on that third C – Clean,” she had retorted, looking at my apron, then puckering her face.

I had watched her gather up that big purse and the piece of pie I had boxed up for her sweet tooth, then move toward the front door still tugging at her skirt.

“About six then,” she had confirmed on her way out the door.

Taking Mary’s advice, I had put on a fresh white apron before waiting on these two fellas who sat down just as Mary left.

After picking up the empty plate from the table and refilling coffee cups, now I stand at the cash register to receive payment from the mismatched fellas talking in whispers. I survey the small café. It seats only about twenty, consisting of four four-tops and a short counter. I make a mental note to call a cleaning crew to deep clean one Saturday night. That way the carpet can dry on Sunday when we’re closed. Otherwise, our little café is in good shape.

George and I had known this was the right one after only a few minutes. Too small for most folks, the large parking lot for the morning delivery men, a working jukebox filled with old country tunes, along with the well-appointed kitchen had sold us.

My third husband, and first partner, knew what color scheme and theme he wanted. An ex-Marine cook, the colors had to be red, white, and blue, and the theme nautical.

“Everything from Scratch” he wanted to call it, but I talked him out of that one. Everything has always been made from scratch here, but that name sounded like we went out and dug everything out of the dirt. I even came up with a radio commercial jingle to sell him on calling our little place the Harbor Café. I used the lyrics “Meet me at the Harbor” set to the tune from “Take Me Out to the Ball Park.”

“Kate, here you go,” the man in the polished wingtips with the sculptured haircut said with authority. Taking his bills and giving him change, I thought, This fella is used to tellin’ folks what to do, and I bet they do it, too.

The small bell on the front door clatters as the two men leave. Singing my little jingle to the empty café, I pick up a cleaning cloth from beside the coffee maker. I go about cleaning the white table tops and counter, wiping down the red and blue seats, then checking on the daily lunch special. We serve some fish or seafood dish every day. I had thought about expanding the menu, but decided against it. The thought flashed through my mind again to sell the café, but I dismissed it. George had left me well off. I didn’t have to work. This place makes me remember George, and helps me remember him, too. After he died it was hard being here, but now the memories make me smile. Sometimes even sing.

Chicken Salad – Bonnie

“Well, the maitre’de has reserved my table for lunch,” I muttered with a chuckle, taking a seat on the bench in the shade in front of the grey marble library. Just across Church Street is the pink dome of the county courthouse, and just up the street is the Superior Court building. Almost all the city, county, state, and federal courts and government offices are clustered in downtown Tucson, along with several banks and restaurants and lots of attorney’s offices. At the center of this array of finance and litigation rests the public library. The public area in front of the library holds a small park with a red metal piece of artwork that looks like it belongs on a children’s playground and shady benches perfect for eating a quiet lunch.

My lunch usually consists of a chicken or tuna salad sandwich on nine grain bread, some raw carrots, six Ritz crackers that I usually save for an afternoon snack, and a Fiber One bar for dessert . . . and regularity. I'm diabetic so I have to be careful about what I eat. My doctor tried once to prescribe a pancreas stimulant and informed me that eventually I would have to give myself insulin shots. When I asked for an alternative, he said, "Change your diet and lifestyle." So I did.

The first few months strained my marriage and relationship with my girls. I went wild with low fat, no fat, and no sugar added labels. After several family meetings and adjustments in menus, the simplest changes made the most difference. I packed my own lunch instead of ordering from the nearby sandwich shop. I walked the few blocks to the library park and ate my lunch under this beautiful tree, and then walked back to the office stress free after contemplating on the sanity of the individual who conjured up that red monstrosity the city called art.

No time for scrutinizing the symbols and signifiers imbedded in the strips and curves of red metal today. My youngest girl stayed home from swimming with a stomach ache.

"Annissa, how are you feeling?" I asked cheerfully when my athlete answered the phone. She took to the water at about three, and now we're hoping she will get a scholarship for swimming and diving when she's ready for college in two years. "If your tummy's still upset, eat some crackers . . . No, no milk. I put some Sprite in the fridge last night. Drink that . . . No, I can't come home yet. Your sister will be home from class about two. Just lie down and watch TV or play videos . . . You could read a book, you know," I added, laughing . . . "I was appointed a new case today . . . a girl your age. . .

yes, attacked . . . Navajo, I think . . . You know I can't discuss that . . . Get well, girly, I have discounts for the water park. If you're better, we can go this weekend . . . No, Dad's still gonna be in San Francisco on business. It'll be just us girls . . . Since last weekend was the fourth of July, this coming Saturday shouldn't be too busy . . . Well, I've gotta get back to the office. I'm sorry you're not feeling well. A beautiful day. Love you, Sweetie. Have Tara call me when she gets home . . . Be sure and call me if you get to feeling worse . . . Yes, bye."

Pretty good chicken salad if I do say so myself, I thought, taking another bite and flicking crumbs off my black skirt to a nearby pigeon. Suddenly feeling very warm, I shifted to the shady end of the bench. If it gets too hot, I may slip into the library to finish my lunch. I opened the file folder and began reading the police report. I giggled when I saw the deputy's name – Joseph Campbell.

CHAPTER THREE

Then the sun began to rise and the being in white looked around, seeing the one standing to the south.

She called to her and they turned to face each other.

Then these two beings discovered the one in blue and called to her. She turned to face the beings in white and red.

Even though the being in black hid in the darkness of the North, the other three felt her presence and they called out to her.

Soon she turned and all four faced the center of the Earth.

“Blue Eyes Crying in the Rain” – Mary

This morning I brought in my own multi-colored file folders, matching hanging file holders, and triangular plastic paper clips, as well as a dozen spiral notebooks. The drabness of this one-color cubicle urged warm colors. Sitting here yesterday after the tour and all the introductions felt like being in a stainless steel cooking pot. So, from my rainbow-striped beach bag, I placed a calendar with Arizona sunsets and mountain scenes next to a white board equipped with several erasable markers. My trusty red pillow for an aching back slumped in the chair and accented the pot of silk chrysanthemums on the far corner of the desk. That favorite lidded coffee mug and water bottle inscribed with "Go For It" in magenta perched atop the filing cabinet.

I leaned back in the high-backed chair, adjusting the pillow and surveying my personalizations. Better, I thought, much better.

Now, time to get to work. So, I took a spiral notebook from the bottom drawer of that grey two-drawer cabinet and set it on the desktop. From the in-box, a wire basket carefully positioned on the back corner of the desk, I grabbed the case file that Captain Garcia had given me the previous day. On the inside cover of the spiral notebook, I wrote the case number with a black Sharpie. Then I noted pertinent facts on the first page in blue ink:

Honda Civic. 2011. Arizona.

After printing today's date in the top corner with my red pen, I logged into the computer and popped in the license number, noted the registered owner's name and address, and printed off a copy of the police report.

"Looks like you're getting' settled in," Captain Garcia said, scanning the personal touches from the walkway.

"I'm working on that stolen car case. I'll touch base with the owner first."

"Well, wrap it up fast. I have a burglary case waiting." He tapped the file with his finger.

"Just set the file on my desk. I'll get on it as soon as I get back later this afternoon."

"Here you go," The Captain dropped a very thin and plain manila file folder onto the desk. Glancing up into his smiling face, I quickly placed the folder into the in-basket, scooped up my beach-bag style purse, plopped in the police report and the spiral notebook, as well as a few of those triangular paper clips and colored pens, then added essential sun glasses and water bottle .

“On the road again, as Willie would say,” I chuckled affectionately to Gracey, wiping ever-present Arizona dust from the dash with a McDonald’s napkin from the door pocket. It took several minutes for the air conditioner to cool off the oppressively hot interior. But soon, Gracey and I headed for the impound lot where the stolen Honda had been taken by the towing company. George Strait sings “Amarillo by Morning” on my favorite C&W station.

Several people stood in the open doorway of Gary’s Towing as I parked in the end spot. The last verse of Garth’s “I Would Have Missed the Dance” filled the cool serenity as I watched groups of folks in twos and threes file into the office and back out. A large woman emerged with two saggy-pants teenagers. A cowboy and his lady glared at them, sauntering through the open front door. I waited for that couple to come out before going in. The guy behind the heavy glass window delivered me the keys and indicated where the Honda was sitting in that sea of impounded and wrecked vehicles. After twenty minutes of searching, there it sat – an oven of a black Civic with a flat back tire. Standing all the doors wide open, I go to work. First, I gave the exterior a thorough once-over from bumper to trunk, Then examined the wheels, fender wells, under the hood, and inside the trunk. My cell phone camera made short work of documenting the condition of the vehicle, but everything appeared in order. The interior reeked of beer.

“Probably grabbed by kids for a joy ride,” I think out loud, slipping on latex gloves. I have to stop for fresh air three times during the search because of the stench. After pulling out the back seats, checking under the floor mats, and feeling under the dash, I accidentally hit the eject button on the compact disc player. Other than the trash

and empty beer bottles on the floorboard, the only thing I find after an hour of searing heat and sweat from that oven is a CD marked with a red heart. The beer bottles and miscellaneous trash is placed in evidence bags, then carefully labeled. After consolidating all the gathered evidence into a large plastic bag for easy transport, I gladly close the auto up and return the keys to the man behind the glass.

The one gadget I added to Gracey just last year is a CD player. Usually the radio station croons out C&W from the local station, and I sing along with Reba or Kenny or Blake. But I had come across several of Willie's CDs at a garage sale and used that as an excuse to get a plug-in player for Gracey. Today, instead of Willie, I shove in the CD that I found in the stolen Honda's CD changer. I figure it's some kind of mix because it's not marked except with the outline of a heart in red with "For Dan" under the heart. The stolen Honda had turned out to be a rental and the last driver, Daniel Boone, from back east. I can check his name and driver's license number when I get back to the office. Gracey's AC still blasts hot air into my face as I pull out onto Irvington Road from the impound lot and head towards the substation with a huge sun staring through Gracey's back window. Thunderclouds loom over the Rincons promising some late afternoon rain. Lightening streaks over the horizon and I start counting. One, two, three. Then the thunder rolls off the mountains and across the valley floor. Still far off.

Hopefully, I get back to the station before this monsoon storm hits. The CD whirs and I settle in to listen, but no music surges from the speakers . . .

My name is Deputy Sheriff Joe Campbell, Badge number
6244. The date is June20, 2012, and the time is 4:04 a.m. I
am in my vehicle in front of 512 Sunrise Road in Window

rock, Arizona. I am interviewing Joanna Yazzi regarding case number 0620452. Please state your full name, Joanna, and spell your last name.

JOANNA:

Joanna Tsosi Yazzi. My first name is spelled J O A N N A and my last Y A Z Z I E.

POLICE OFFICER:

If you want, you can introduce yourself in the Navajo way.

JOANNA:

Not here. Not for this.

POLICE OFFICER:

Can you tell me what happened tonight?

“What the hell?” I muttered out loud. “How did an interview CD get into a rental car? A stolen rental car?” I sit up straight, gripping the steering wheel with both hands and listening more closely. then turning up the volume as Joanna’s soft voice quavers through the speakers.

JOANNA:

Toby and Sara brought me home from the dance about midnight. You know, the dance they have once a month over at the community center. Well, Sara Begay and I went together because her Dad doesn’t like her goin’ out anywhere alone with her new boyfriend. He’s a white guy. His first name is Toby, but I don’t know his last name.

Well, after the dance, Sara and toby and I went over to the Dairy Queen in Toby's truck and he bought us burgers and blizzards. Sara always gets an Oreo, but I like the Butterfinger one. You know how great DQ's blizzards are .

..

Joanna's voice fades away and she suddenly begins to sob. I realize that my fingers are going numb and aching from the strangle hold I have on the wheel.

POLICE OFFICER:

Joanna, just take your own time . . . But I have a question. Were your grandparents home when you came into the house?

JOANNA:

No, they're at sheep camp. Moving the flock to higher pasture this weekend. I stayed home to take care of the animals here.

POLICE OFFICER:

Can you contact them? Or can I call someone for you? Someone should be here with you. You still have to go to the hospital and be examined. And the doctor will have to do a kit and make a report.

JOANNA:

A kit? . . . Report for what?

POLICE OFFICER:

Yes, a rape kit and a report of your injuries and such about the attack. The ambulance is here to pick up the alleged assailant and one will be here shortly to take you to the hospital.

Just then an ambulance siren wails. I pull over into a parking lot, stop the CD, and sit gripping the wheel and trembling. Quarter size raindrops pelt the windshield and then pound on the roof. I take my clenched fingers off the wheel and roll the window down part way. The scent of damp asphalt comes in with a blast. No emergency vehicles pass and I turn on the radio just in time to catch the end of Alan Jackson's "Remember When" classic tune. Tears stream down my face. It took quite a while for the music to do its work, but I eventually dried my eyes and blew my nose with a McDonald's napkin from the door pocket.

The scent of the wet asphalt and even rhythm of the rain filled Gracey, and then me . I pull the interview CD out of the player and stick in one of Willie's. He croons "Blue Eyes Crying In The Rain."

In the twilight glow I see them
Blue eyes cryin' in the rain
When we kissed goodbye and parted
I knew we'd never meet again

Love is like a dyin' ember
Only memories remain

Through the ages I'll remember

Blue eyes cryin' in the rain

Some day when we meet up yonder

We'll stroll hand in hand again

In a land that knows no partin'

Blue eyes cryin' in the rain

Now my hair has turned to silver

All my life I've loved in vain

I can see her star in heaven

Blue eyes crying in the rain.

After listening for a while, I drive on.

CHAPTER FOUR:

Sheep to the Slaughter – Mr. Wingtips & Toby Cowboy

“Rain’ll be here soon. Already rainin’ on the Rincons and the east side,” the young cowboy told the older man sitting on the bench next to him. He took off his wide-brimmed straw hat and motioned with it towards the dark clouds covering half the sky. He scratched the top of his head then returned the hat to its permanent position, the sharp, downward bend of the front edge almost hiding his pale blue eyes and serious, sun-browned face. His only long-sleeved white shirt with pearl snaps irritated his neck. He pulled at the collar. Raised in farm country, he had taken to working with the animals in the stock yards and on the ranches around Arizona, but missed the expansive green and gold fields of corn and wheat back home.

“Better to meet out in the open like this. More privacy,” the older man with the sculptured haircut said, scanning the area with discerning gray eyes. The sun moved behind a tall building making the small park suddenly shady. A stiff breeze from the east cooled the oppressive heat. The gray marble building behind them gleamed. People poured out of the buildings while vehicles surged, then stopped abruptly, all hurrying home. He frowned at two young women, one white and one brown, in bright, summer dresses, chatting and laughing as they strolled along the sidewalk in front of him.

“Mud,” he whispered, glaring at their backs flitting across the street and into the building with the pink dome.

The cowboy spit onto the ground in their direction.

“So, how did this one go wrong? Jed is dead and that squaw has disappeared,” he continued in a whisper, stretching his arm out along the back of the bench, then turning towards the cowboy.

“Well, I dropped her off at her house that night,” the cowboy began. “Then called Jed to let him know. We knew that she’d be alone.”

“How did you know that?” the older man interrupted.

“She told me. She lives in Flagstaff ‘cause her mother’s a teacher at a college up there. But she spends the summers with her grandparents on the rez. They have livestock, sheep and horses, and she helps with the garden. The old folks were moving the flock to higher pasture. She stayed home to take care of the stock. Gals do that back home, helpin’ with the harvest and cannin’ and such.” He looked into the older man’s face expecting some sign of recognition.

“So what happened?” The older man’s steely stare forced the cowboy to look away. He kicked at a small brown bird hopping around the scuffed toe of his boot.

“I’m not sure what happened from there . . . Sara told me that Joanna cut him up. Her family has sheep and she helps slaughter them. She must be good with a knife to get the best of Jed.” The young cowboy spoke slowly, remembering that night, thinking of how it could have been him instead of Jed.

Shaking his head in disbelief, the older man began, ”Next time, remember that the two of you are a team. The organization can’t stand these kinds of mistakes.”

“I understand,” he says. “By the way, what ever happened with that missing rental car?”

“I called the rental place. They called the cops. As far as I know, they’re looking into it. That’s what insurance is for, Toby. I picked up another car from the rental place. So, it’s between the local police and the rental company now.” He stands up and continues, “I’m headed back east tomorrow. A new partner will be out here next week. In the meantime, find that bitch and get rid of her.”

Toby watched the older man take quick, sure steps down the sidewalk. He stopped before crossing the street, then disappeared around the northwest corner of the gray marble building. Several quarter size raindrops hit the ground at Toby’s feet and hammered the wide brim of his hat. . He took a moment to stand, hitching up his pants, then pulling his hat down tight against a sudden gust of damp wind. Straightening his back, he breathed in the scent of damp earth . He poked his thumbs into the frayed pockets of his faded jeans and scanned the empty benches around him. He surveyed the streets, still packed with vehicles looking a lot like cattle moving through a chute. Then the young cowboy sauntered to his old truck parked at the curb.

CHAPTER FIVE:

*The being in white said, "I have a story in my mouth. Would you like to savor it?"
The other three all wanted to savor her story and sat down, ready to listen.
She began to speak and trees and plants and flowers flowed across the lands, making the
Earth a collage of colors and fragrances. The land became green with forests, golden
with grains, and grateful with the pinks and purples, yellows and oranges, and reds and
blues of the flowering plants.*

Immaculate Conception -- Kate

"Materials for a case?" I queried, stooping to scoop up photos and papers spilling from the rainbow beach bag purse. Mary's cozy kitchen smelled of freshly brewing coffee and lemon scented dishwashing liquid. Leftover lasagna and salad had been tucked away in the fridge for a single's supper during the work week. Our ritual once-a-week meal rotated among our two houses and El Charro's Mexican restaurant, a mutual favorite.

"Thanks, I need to get this file organized. Divide it into two files. It's really two cases and I can't see how they fit together . . . Not yet."

"Is this the one you were talking about the other morning?"

Sorting papers and photos into two piles, Mary seemed perplexed. "Yeah, and I took your grandma's advice. Remember, your Mama Bess always said that when you can't figure something out, to start at the end and work your way backwards to the beginning? Well, it didn't help."

"I've seen this fella," I informed my friend, picking up a photo that Mary put on one stack. "He came in the other day. . . Real cute, but kinda grumpy. . . . Mr. Wingtips, the nickname I gave his buddy, called him Toby. What's he got to do with your case?"

“Well, the case I’m working on is a stolen vehicle. Turns out it’s a rental car. Forensics is going over the car and the trash I collected from the floorboards, but it looks pretty standard. I figure some kids stole it to go joy-riding. The crazy part is this CD that I found in the stolen car,” Mary explains holding up the CD enclosed in a paper sleeve. “I know I told you this the other day. The problem is that the whole thing gets crazier and stranger. I can’t seem to make sense of it. Do you mind if I talk this out with you over a cup of coffee? There’s a peach cobbler in the fridge too.”

I go to the cabinet and pull out two tall mugs, two bowls, then the cobbler. The coffeemaker is still dripping, so I dish up our cobbler first. I remember the night we picked out these dishes. Mary’s kitchen is dark, almost black cabinets with a gray tile floor and counter top. So she wanted something bright, probably white she had said. We had looked at three different stores, spent an hour at the last place trying to decide between four patterns. She finally picked out the heavy, white set with the small images of birds in vivid colors along the rim.

“This’ll brighten up that drab kitchen,” she had said. “I’ll have my own private flock.”

I choose the cardinal for Mary because that’s her favorite. I like the bluejay.

“Coffee’s almost done. Go ahead. I can hear,”

“The stolen car was rented to a Daniel Boone, yeah, Daniel Boone, and get this . . . out of Kentucky. If that ain’t an alias, I’ll kiss your nose. Then, the CD I found in that stolen

rental turns out to be a deputy's sheriff's interview with a Navajo girl named Joanna Yazzi. Her attack happened in Window rock up on the reservation.

When I looked up her case in the system, all I got was a sketchy report and photos of her and two friends she hung with the night of her attack.”

Sitting back down across from my friend with our cups of coffee and bowls of cobbler, I interrupt, “Seems to me, the sixty-four thousand dollar question is how did that interview CD get into that stolen rental car?”

“Yep, that's the question all right. And I'm still looking for the answer.” Mary takes a few sips of her coffee, gazing out the window into the moonlit backyard.

“Well, I did find a social worker's name, too, Bonnie Holder. She seems to be court appointed as the Navajo girl's case worker. That would be standard procedure for a minor.”

“Have you talked to this case worker?”

“I'm doing a follow up on a robbery case tomorrow downtown so I'm supposed to meet her in the park there in front of the library at noon. That's where she eats her lunch.”

I pick up the photo from the table, telling Mary, “Well, you know how I nickname customers . . . This grumpy guy I named Toby Cowboy. The city slicker with him I called Mr. Wingtips. Toby Cowboy reminds me of my second husband. His name was Bill. I don't think I've ever told you about him. We lived in Fort Worth. Real cowboy country. He was grumpy. Real grumpy, and had a temper. Bill had a habit of smashing his fist through doors. He never smashed me, but he scared me, sliced away at me every day.”

“One afternoon I was in the kitchen choppin' some veggies for a salad. There I was, my new, wooden choppin' board. It had a handle in the shape of a bouquet of wild

flowers, painted all up in yellow, pink, purple, green, and white. So pretty that I made a special spot on the wall to hang it. It came with a foot long butcher knife.”

“Oh really?” Mary chuckled, raising her eyebrows, then holding her hands about a foot apart to show me the exaggerated length.

“Well, it looked that long to me. You know I’m no good at measurements.”

“Anyway, Officer, that’s my story and I’m stickin’ to it,” I sang, raising my right hand as if swearing in court. After a bite of cobbler and sip of coffee I continued, “ I was slicing cucumbers, when Bill snuck up behind me and slammed his fist into the cabinet right next to my face. I jumped and turned. The knife point almost touched his beer belly. I stared at the knife, then into his angry face.”

I look into Mary’s cop face. She doesn’t get rattled, just listens patiently.

“I almost . . . I mean, I could have . . . I think about that day a lot. How I could have made the biggest mistake of my life.”

“Well, anyway, I turned back to the cucumber, finished slicing, then washed up the board and the knife, putting it away carefully. I felt like little pieces of me lay everywhere in that house. I walked around picking up the pieces and trying to put things back together. Then later that day, when I looked in the mirror, no one looked back at me. Yeah, like there’s nothing human left. I had disappeared. So, I picked up my purse and the van keys, told Bill that I was going to the store, and drove off. I didn’t stop until I ran out of money at the Triple T truck stop out there on I-10. I went inside to get a cup of coffee and figure out what to do. I came out with a waitress uniform and a spot to park my van for a couple of weeks.”

Mary and I take bites of cobbler and sips of coffee.

“Anyway, that’s how I ended up in Tucson, Arizona,” I sputter, hopping up from the table. “I’m runnin’ to the bathroom. Don’t you eat my cobbler!”

Mary takes another bite of her cobbler and nods approvingly, stating, “Not too bad, if I do say so myself.”

“I’ve always been good at puzzles, even as a kid. The pieces are here, right in front of me, I just have to put them together,” I hear Mary mumble to herself as I step back into the kitchen.

“Maria Valdez Hopkins. You still haven’t taken down the nursery. Are you expecting an immaculate conception?” I scold, standing in the doorway with my hands on my hips. I believe in giving people their space, their privacy. I sure treasure mine. That door had been shut for months. But I expected to see an empty room, maybe some boxes or junk piled in the corners. What I find is an expectant nursery, crib made with a wind-up Disney mobile, a teddy bear sitting in the rocking chair, Pampers still in the dispenser on the back of the door, ready for the little one to come home from the hospital.

“No, I’ve tried to donate the furniture a couple of times since I divorced Mike, but I can’t bring myself to pack it up. I know that I should be over losing the baby by now. But every time I pick up the teddy bear and it sings “You are my Sunshine,” I break down. I just need more time Or more guts. Or more something.”

“If that bastard hadn’t beat you. . . “

“That’s all over now. Let’s not dredge it back up,” Mary pleads in a very small voice.

Our cups of coffee go cold as we sit in silence, my hand on Mary’s forearm.

CHAPTER SIX:

Then the one in red stood and told the group, "I have a story in my hands. Do you want to feel it?"

The being in white sat, joining the listeners, and the new teller raised her hands, releasing flocks of blue and green and red and gray and yellow and white birds of all sizes and shapes into the soft southern breezes to sing their songs.

The birds filled the forests and flitted through the flowers, adding music to the land.

"Hello Walls" - Mary

It took a good twenty minutes of circling to find a parking place downtown. I settled Gracey into a shady spot on the north side of the Pima County Courthouse. One of the things I like best about Tucson glares at you right here on both sides of Church Street. On the west side of the street there's the old courthouse – a restored Spanish Colonial two-story topped with a pink dome, the entire building wrapped around a central courtyard complete with a round, ceramic tile fountain. On the east side there's the sparkling, square, gray marble and glass five-story public library nestled next to a small park with that piece of red metal artwork that children immediately attack believing it some kind of jungle gym. After listening to the last lines of "Hello Walls," I unplugged the CD player and tucked it under the front seat, ran the back windows down about an inch, and walked over to meet Bonnie Holder.

I spotted an African-American woman sitting on a bench under a sprawling Palo Verde tree. Fortyish with long black braids pulled into a skrunchie, and glittery eye shadow, she wore a long black skirt and white blouse with jacket and heels to match. As I approached, several birds flew away, flapping and fussing in protest. Bread crumbs lay scattered on the ground by the woman. I stopped near the bench and pigeons and finches swooped in for more snacks. They cooed and chirped their approval and gratitude.

"Bonnie Holder?"

“Yes. Are you Detective Hopkins?”

“That’s me,” I affirmed, taking a seat on the bench. “I could really use your help.”

“Well, as we discussed on the phone, you should have access to everything that has been inputted on the case.”

“The problem is that I have an auto theft case that links to this assault case somehow. Can I verify the case number again?”

Glancing at my file, Bonnie confirmed, “That’s the same case. I’m the court appointed case worker. Joanna is a minor, so the court asked for an evaluation. That’s where I come in.”

Bonnie took another bite of her sandwich and chewed thoughtfully, “It’s a little tricky though. She’s a victim, but she is also a possible perpetrator.”

”How do you mean? I thought she had been raped.”

“That’s right, but she stabbed her assailant. He died from his wounds.”

I couldn’t hide my surprise. “Well, that’s a new twist.” My mind went into overdrive. Bonnie just added more pieces to the puzzle. “What’s his name?”

“The young man’s name was Jed West,” Bonnie reported after consulting the file that had been lying on the bench between us.

“Have you interviewed Joanna yet?”

“No, I haven’t.. Do you like tuna salad? No onions. I love onions, but they make for bad breath.”

Bonnie offers part of her sandwich to me. Most times I would decline the offer, but something inside of me said to accept her gesture.

“I haven’t been able to find her.” She’s disappeared and my report is due to the judge in just two weeks.

We chewed the tuna salad on nine grain bread, tossing bits of crust to the birds begging at our feet. Behind us, two hidden birds warbled, and the chatter became a chorus lifting upward through those yellow flowering branches of the old Palo Verde. “Well, I’m looking, too,” I informed Bonnie, shuffling through my rainbow beach bag and pulling out some photos. “I’m sure you have the photos of her friends – Toby and Sara. Do they know where she stays?” I handed the two photos to Bonnie and she nodded, chewing slowly. “I’ll let you know if I find anything. Will you do the same?” “I’m going to see the prosecutor tomorrow. If I get any information, I’ll let you know. Otherwise, let’s talk again in a couple of days. Okay?” Bonnie flicked a crumb off her skirt, scattered the remains of her sandwich to the waiting flock, and pulled out a water bottle.

I stood, deciding to take a stroll around the block before heading back to the east side of town.

“Sounds like a deal,” I agreed, moving away from our bench and towards the street.

Two brown squirrels scampered up one of the taller trees and a mother bird fussed at them for climbing too close to her nest. Drops of sunlight filtered through the branches and danced along in front of me. Memories of my family backyard and lively birdfeeder attracting cardinals from nearby trees made me smile.

Then an emergency vehicle accelerated down Stone Avenue heading south. As it passed the library, its siren wailed, echoing in the canyon created by the tall buildings along Stone Avenue.

That sound carried me to a different day. The squirrels and birds and busy street dissolved away. I remembered my body floating like a feather lifted on a gentle breeze. Then dreaming of a woman's face resting in the Mercy Seat and calling my name. Seeing God's face as female didn't shock me. It seemed normal and natural that God would be a woman. "Mary, Mary" she insisted in an irritating voice, "Can you hear me?" The cherub wings covered her eyes and then became silvery eyeglasses. I remember thinking how odd that God wears glasses. I opened one eye and saw a white wall. I heard beeping like a backup alarm and wondered, "Who's backing up?"

The lyrics of "Hello, Walls" rolled around and around in my head:

Hello, walls

How'd things go for you today?

Don't you miss her

Since she up and walked away?

And I'll bet you dread to spend

Another lonely night with me

But lonely walls, I'll keep you company

Hello, window

Well, I see that you're still here

Aren't you lonely

Since our darlin' disappeared?

Well look here, is that a teardrop
In the corner of your pane?
Now don't you try to tell me that it's rain

She went away and left us all alone
The way she planned
Guess we'll have to learn to get along
Without her if we can

Hello, ceiling
I'm gonna stare at you a while
You know I can't sleep
So won't you bear with me a while?

We must all stick together
Or else I'll lose my mind
I gotta feelin' she'll be gone
A long, long time

I felt hollow again, just as I had felt that day, as if my soul had been wrenched from inside me. For weeks I had scrubbed my bedroom walls and carpet to remove all the blood, then the memories. Sleepless nights I spent staring out the window or inspecting the imperfections of my bedroom ceiling and then roaming the house until dawn, or sitting in my rocking chair with his Teddy bear clasped to my breast. Finally, the walls tired of my sighing and crying and forced me back into the outside world.

A dove's mournful cooing brought my mind back to the present. I had sat down on another bench and several birds had gathered around me looking for another handout. Suddenly self-conscious, I glanced back to see Bonnie talking on her cell phone. The jungle gym art near her had become a tangle of arteries and umbilical cord with a pair of glasses staring through the pulsing mass straight at me. A newborn hung upside down, open mouthed but silent. The next scream of the siren seemed to come through his mouth. It was not the insistent cry of a baby but a scream of horror.

"Are you okay?" Bonnie asked, sitting down next to me on the bench. "Did the tuna give you a queasy stomach. Sometimes mixing fish and Tucson heat can get messy."

"No, that's not it. Just some bad memories." I looked into her concerned face, startled by her presence. But then I noticed something in her right hand. "You use a cane?"

"Oh yeah." She stroked the rubberized grip with manicured fingernails. "My legs don't work well some times. A childhood injury."

"Listen, Mary. Can I Call you Mary? You're trembling and your face is white as a sheet. We can step into the library out of this heat if that will help."

"Thanks for your concern, Bonnie," I stated in my official voice reserved for interviews with bad guys. Then continued, while trying to pull my eyes from the red jungle gym behind Bonnie's shoulder. "Yes, please call me Mary. I'm okay now. Maybe a little dehydrated," I fumbled, trying to think of a valid excuse.

“Here’s an unopened water bottle. I try to keep an extra in my lunch kit, you know, just in case,” Bonnie offered. She smiled. Her teeth sparkled, even more than her glittery eye shadow. Sometimes it’s a long time before we’re ready to tell our stories.”

I accepted the bottle of water, twisting off the cap. We both took long drinks of water.

“Story?” I asked, looking into Bonnie’s face.

“I believe that everybody has a story. Sometimes it takes a long time before we can tell our story. . . . Like my Uncle Johnny, for instance. My Great Uncle Johnny didn’t tell his story until he turned eighty. He was a flight chief on PBVs in the Pacific during World War II. You know, the planes with pontoons that land on water? His plane crashed just a few miles off the coast of Japan on June 28 in 1945.”

“He and two other crew members survived. His best friend Eddy had half his head blown off. Johnny tried to save him, but there was nothing he could do. Those three men floated around in that raft for seven days thinking that the Japanese Navy would find them at any moment.”

“They all had horrific injuries. My uncle had all his clothes burned off. The only thing left was his belt. All of them had been burned badly from the fuel fires that spread across the water after the crash. One of the survivors also had a deep cut on his left leg. He eventually lost part of that leg to infection.”

“They had no idea what was going on in Japan. But finally a U.S. military plane spotted them. The plane sent a ship to rescue the three men. All went to Hawaii where they found out that the war was over. They spent months in the hospital. Well, after my uncle told me all that, he cried. One of the survivors of that crash had died that summer

right around the same date as the crash. Then Uncle Johnny confided in me that he had nightmares every year in that week beginning on June 28. Nightmares about the crash, the fire, the raft, every year for sixty years. Only his wife and the other survivors knew.”

I glared into her eyes. “Why did he tell you? Why are you telling me this?” I asked.

“He told me because he said that it helped him. I’m telling you because the telling keeps him alive. He died last month. Besides, I think we all have stories to tell. We just have to wait for the right time to tell our story.”

I emptied the water bottle and threw it in a nearby trash can. Bonnie and I said our good-byes again promising to keep in touch.” Gathering myself, I strode quickly across Church Street to my waiting Gracey, wondering if I had a story to tell.

CHAPTER SEVEN:

The being in blue stood and said, "I have a story in my ears. Do you want to hear it?" The one in red joined the other listeners and the being in blue turned her head to call the raindrops.

A soft rain began to fall, tapping out a rhythm, a song, a heartbeat to the story. Within the veil of drops water creatures formed and the waters flowed- rivulets into washes, washes into streams, streams into rivers, and rivers into seas, carrying whales and fish and turtles and crabs of all kinds into the lakes and oceans.

Seven Spanish Angels -- Mary

Anxious to hear the rest of the interview, I shove the CD into my computer tray as soon as I get back to the office. Plugging in headphones for privacy, I click "Play." After adjusting the pillow to my back, then closing my eyes, I begin rocking. I'm back in that patrol car in Window Rock listening for inflection and inference.

DEPUTY CAMPBELL:

This is Deputy Campbell continuing the interview with Joanna Yazzi, June 20, 2012, at 4:45 a.m. We took a short bathroom break while the ambulance pulled away with the wounded assailant. Joanna, can you continue?

JOANNA:

Yes, I think so. Well, I remember that Toby pulled off, and I walked around the house and straight for the horses. I remember thinking how bright it was. You know, for midnight. When I looked up, the moon glowed blue. It had sucked up all the darkness and lit my path to the pens. I checked the water buckets, you know, for the horses. With it as hot as it's been this summer, I fill the water buckets two or three times a day. My dog Tasha followed me into the barn. She ran out chasing after the old barn cat. I figured I'd go ahead and feed some hay. That way I could sleep in. I grabbed the knife off the shelf and stuck it in my back pocket. I pulled off a bale, drug it to the center of the walkway,

and cut the twine . . . Just cut the twine. That's when somebody pushed me hard from behind. I guess I fell over the bale and landed on my back.

DEPUTY:

So you got home about midnight?

JOANNA:

Yeah, I think it must have been about midnight when Toby dropped me off.

DEPUTY:

Joanna, did the assailant say anything?

JOANNA:

He said my name when he pushed me. Something like, Joanna, what're you doin' out here all alone? But, I'm not exactly sure. I remember thinkin' that one of my brothers had come home.

Then he was on me, one hand on my mouth and throat, and one pullin' at my jeans. I couldn't breathe and I couldn't get up. At first, I just lay there, praying for him not to kill me. I closed my eyes. Started praying, you know, to the Holy Ones, to help me. All of a sudden I saw my little sister's face. Her face flashed through my mind. She was cryin'. Then, when he hurt me . . . you know, inside, I just started screamin' . . . screamin' NO!. He still had his hand on my mouth, so I bit him. Then, I hit him. Started hittin' him with my fists. I forgot the knife was in my hand. I hit him because he hurt me. But for my little sister too.

Joanna's voice had become muffled. I realized that I had covered my face with my hands. Maybe Joanna had covered her face too. My hands felt wet. Wet from my tears.

Did I cry for her – or for me? Maybe for both of us.

Then I heard Joanna’s voice again. She sounded far away now. Maybe she had turned her face away from the deputy in shame. Or maybe the horror of the attack had sunk in. Almost inaudible, she began whispering.

JOANNA:

Then the knife got stuck. In his back. My hands were wet. Slippery. I gripped the knife tight. Pulled hard. He made a strange sound. Not like a sheep. The sound came again. A gurgling sound. He crawled a ways off. I heard him. Only a few feet away, groaning. I lay there for a long time, you know, listening. It seemed like forever. Then I ran to the house. Called my Auntie.

I stared at the chrysanthemums on the corner of my desk, but only saw the blood. His blood would be on her hands, making them slippery. Hard to hold the knife. On her clothes. On the door handle. On the phone. I knew it would be there for a long time.

After listening to the rest of the interview, I dried my face and blew my nose with a McDonald’s napkin from the rainbow beach bag and began reconstructing that wall – that wall that kept the pain out there – that solid wall of professionalism and objectivity that I had developed over the past six years.

“He never Mirandized her,” I said out loud, “or had an adult present. And how did this CD get in that rental car?”

The tune from “Seven Spanish Angels” floats from inside my bag. I know it’s Kate. I don’t answer, but the words tumble around in my mind:

Seven Spanish angels at the altar of the sun,

Praying for the lovers in the valley of the gun,

When the battle stopped and the smoke cleared,
There was thunder from the throne,
And seven Spanish angels took another angel home.

I rock forward and back. So many questions. What was this perp doing there in the middle of the night? Why wasn't he in the house? If he's a druggie lookin' for cash, or maybe some turquoise and silver jewelry, or something else that's easy to pawn, wouldn't he be in the house?

The dog. Where was the dog? Why didn't her dog sound an alert, bark at this stranger?

CHAPTER EIGHT:

Hearts on the Ground - Bonnie

Here it is, 32 North Stone Avenue, the hub for Pima County's legal work. The pink-domed County Courthouse on Church Street holds the Recorder, Tax Assessor and Collector, with the Justice courts upstairs. But 32 North Stone houses the county prosecutors, overworked public defenders, those tax lien processors, along with the bad check chasers. What my Daddy calls the "business end of the stick."

I had worked as an intern in this building during my college days, enjoyed being in downtown Tucson, learning about the courts, as well as Tucson's past. This building had been erected in 1965, the same year I had been born. Designed by Roy Place, the same architect for the Courthouse building and Arizona State Museum, but no thick adobe or tile roofs here. Twenty-one stories of desert technology. Hollow blue salteo tiles on the south facing side reflected the sun's rays while gold metal lattice on the west side gathered the light from the hot afternoon sun, lowering electric consumption, especially for air conditioning in Tucson's sizzling summers. Unobstructed north and east glass walls provided dazzling views of the city, valley, and mountains.

After a quick elevator ride to the fourteenth floor, a short wait in a very uncomfortable chair, then a long walk down a hallway lined with heavy oak doors adorned with brass nameplates, I find myself sitting across from a well-dressed man in a gray striped dress shirt with the cuffs rolled up once, tie removed, collar unbuttoned, with a black suit jacket draped over his chair. The District Attorney for Pima County pulls file after file off the stack on the corner of his large desk.

“Here it is,” the graying man reports, squinting at the label, then pushing his gold-rimmed glasses up to their proper position.

“So this case has been placed under the jurisdiction of the U.S. Attorney?” I ask. “Do you have a contact person for me?”

“To tell you the truth, if the jurisdiction is Federal, then the Superior Court case must be vacated,” he says, scanning the list of documents in the file. “I’ll take care of that this afternoon. I guess that means you’re off the case,” he stated, flashing a dazzling smile.

“You know what they say about attorneys who begin their sentence with ‘to tell you the truth’?” I prodded, returning his smile. Chuck and I attended law school together in another life, that life of classes, exams, and unattainable righteousness. He became a prosecutor, me, a defender. He’s been here ever since. I moved on after a long year of successful cases. But I had gritted my teeth every time a case came to court. Started suffering from headaches that began in the pit of my stomach, squeezed my shoulders and neck, then landed in a dull ache between my eyes. So I became an advocate for juvenile defendants. Changing my role meant no more adversarial confrontations. I found that working with young people was my gift. I was good at my job besides feeling that my education and efforts assisted kids who really needed that help. No down side.

“You know, these types of cases – Native females assaulted by non-Native males –have about a 70% declination by federal prosecutors. What makes this case different?” I ask.

“She killed this guy. That turns the tables. The case is now a Native female killing a non-Native male. That’s a whole different ball game.”

“In our initial meeting, you indicated that no charges would be brought for the stabbing. That it was apparently self-defense. Statistics show that at least one out of three Native women is a victim of violence, like domestic assault and rape, and most by non-Native men. The Feds didn’t take this case over for a self-defense killing,” I argue, knowing that Chuck is holding back. I lean forward and finger the matching gold cuff links on the mahogany desk. “What’s the real skinny here?” I prod in my stern Mama voice.

“Okay, okay. The FBI swooped in as soon as this Jed West’s info hit the system. I got a call from the U.S. Attorney’s office claiming jurisdiction. The investigating officer said that this West had connections to that group you looked at last year out of Kentucky. That’s all we found before the Feds stepped in.”

“I know that everybody thinks I’m a little crazy. But that’s ten out of the past twelve cases like this with some connection to that organization. There’s got to be a reason for all these connections. You know, during the assimilation of Native Americans, the saying, ‘get the girls, get the race,’ told the story. Now, I think a more appropriate saying may be from the Cheyenne, No people is broken until the hearts of the women are on the ground. Then they are broken. Then they will die. The term ‘hearts on the ground’ indicates another type of genocide. Even if it’s not a conspiracy, these assaults certainly slice these women’s souls—and through them their entire community.”

A small sculpture resting on a shelf behind Chuck’s head catches my attention. The rest of that shelf is filled with Indian law books, the Getches case book, volumes by Camby and Cohen, as well as Wilkens and Williams. Many of Vine Deloria’s volumes are there too. So many words, so little help for these women.

The fragile sculpture depicts an O’odham woman harvesting Saguaro cactus fruit using a tool constructed from a Saguaro skeleton. O’odham women have gathered the fruit this way for thousands of years, boiling it into a dark wine for the annual ‘Calling the Rain’ ceremony. They live with the desert, not against it.

“You know, Chuck, these cases take a piece out of me, too, every time. I’m not sure how much longer I can do this,” I said.

I gather myself, rising to leave. Suddenly weary, I lean hard on my cane for support.

“You’ll send me a copy of the vacate order?”

“Of course,” Chuck says, standing, then continues as he moves around the end of the desk to assist me. “Bonnie, whether you’re right or wrong about your conspiracy theory, the court system needs you. You’re one of those rare folks who really care about the victims. Don’t let these cases put your heart on the ground. You’re too good a person.”

I had forgotten how tall he was until he stood between me and the door. Graying at the temples with his shoulders slightly slumped from hours at his desk, Chuck showed signs of the strain of this job. He covered my hands with one of his, trying to coax me to look at him.

“How’s Tommy doing at law school?” I ask, turning to face him.

His quick smile and hearty laugh brightened the room.

“Oh, he pulled out of law school. Said law students are arrogant assholes. He’s doing an MBA instead.”

“Well, I’m sure we were just that,” I add with a laugh as he opens the door for me.

Chuck walks me back down the long hall to the reception area where I gravitate toward the north facing curtain of glass. The Santa Catalina's are topped with thunderheads gathering strength for their trip across the valley this afternoon. Off to the left, there is Sentinel Peak that Tucsonians call "A" mountain. The O'odham named that mountain "Black Rock Place." Tucson got its name from that O'odham word. This valley used to be Tohono O'odham homelands, complete with trees, grassy areas, as well as the Santa Cruz river that ran with water year round. The valley has few open areas now. It is filled with offices, hotels, houses, hospitals, expanses of shopping malls, a grid of asphalt avenues. Pima County has topped a million, about ten times the population of the entire territory when it became a state in 1912.

"Did you go to the Centennial celebration?" I ask Chuck, wondering how the valley looked a hundred years ago when Arizona became a state. Time had changed Tucson. The folks who built Tucson exchanged the one-room adobe houses and Presidio walls for the first two skyscraper structures in Tucson at the corner of Pennington and Stone one block away. Over a dozen working dude ranches replaced by Walmarts and the Auto Mall. The old airport now Davis-Montham Air Force Base. Tucsonians once prohibited irrigation or other major water usage from six a.m. until 7 p.m., levying heavy fines and jail time. Now water travels in open aqueducts across the desert to replenish the aquifer under us.

"Of course. Quite a show," Chuck answered in a faraway voice.

Then he asks about Matt and the girls, trying to lighten the conversation. We chat for a few minutes about nothing, his hand resting lightly on my shoulder.

The elevator ride down seems to last forever as I think of the last Native girl I interviewed. She had known her assailant. Reported the attack to the Tribal police, then waited. Nothing happened for months. The perp turned out to be non-Native, the jurisdiction federal. While she waited, the same guy raped another woman. The second victim was non-Native so the case came to Superior court. When the first victim heard about the case, she came forward to testify. The scar across her cheek stared at me while she told the story of his brutality. I threw up in my office trashcan after she left.

My pace quickens as I reach the sidewalk. “I need to find Joanna,” I whisper to the tangle of traffic moving south on Stone.

The short walk back to my office took longer than usual. First, I stood at the corner, counting the cars going by. I sat down to rest on a nearby bench for a moment and found myself counting the bricks in the sidewalk. Stop it, I told myself. You don’t need to do that anymore. My childhood habit of counting everything popped up when things became too hard to handle. The sky became dark, monsoons moving in. Unlocking my office door, sitting at my desk, I didn’t even turn on my computer.

“Annissa,” I said in my Mama voice, “how are you feeling?”

Hearing her voice helped. She skipped from swimming practice to how Tara had worn one of her favorite blouses, then to excuses about why she hadn’t finished folding the towels.

“I love you, girly. I’m coming home early today.”

I ignored her concerned questioning, continuing, “Can you put the lasagna from the freezer into the oven. Set it on 350 degrees.”

I'll go home, hug my girls, sit down to dinner at the kitchen table, listen to them chatter about their worlds. Matt will call from wherever he's at this week. I'll lie to him about how great we're doing. The storm will wash out the dirt in the air. Tomorrow things will smell fresh and clean.

CHAPTER NINE:

Chinese Checkers- Kate

I glance at the clock on the white wall behind the receptionist's desk. It reads ten 'til three. Checked in and settled into this comfy, black leather chair with still ten minutes to spare. I sigh and smile with self-satisfaction. Picking out a National Geographic from the stack of magazines on a nearby glass-topped table, I flip absent mindedly through the vivid images of sleek cheetahs and stark glaciers. But the glossy photo of serene green grasses edging a shallow stream causes me to pause.

On the right edge of the page a sympathetic willow stands, its silver-green leaves reflected in the placid pools formed by formations of inviting rocks. The creek swishes over and around several small boulders before disappearing into a column of text on the left side of the page. The fresh scents of flowing waters and moist grasses lift off the page as my mind wanders to a similar scene from times long forgotten.

A young, barefoot girl sprang quietly into the scene from my memory carrying a short piece of old kite string and a small slab of raw bacon. Her faded jeans had all the most worn spots cut away until a short light blue fringe just touched the tops of her knees. Her white tee shirt displayed dribbles of cherry Kool-Aid down the front like markers on a treasure map. Stepping carefully onto one of the larger boulders in the creek, she peered into the waters, searching carefully each crag and crevice for her elusive prey. A tangled, brown ponytail veiled her eyes, but a bright smile signaled that she had made a discovery. Squatting back on her heels, she transformed the bacon into the bait on one end of a makeshift fishing line from the kite string to dangle into the cool, clear water. Just then the lyrics of Elvis's "Love me Tender" floated across time. The girl looked to

where a phonograph needle scratched out the melody just inside her mother's open bedroom window.

The girl spoke to the creature she taunted with the bacon saying, "Mommy loves Elvis Presley," then whispered, "but don't tell Daddy." A giggle erupted onto the watery mirror causing tiny ripples to lick the tips of the grasses along the edges of the stream.

This narrow waterway meandered across the western part of town, supplying a channel for the numerous torrents of rain in this area. The last rain storm had raised the creek to overflowing and flooded several yards. Just three days ago it roared, raging past the quaking willow, but today it whispered its way meekly through the neighborhood.

A tug on the line startled her, but she gripped the rounded top of the perch with nimble toes. The small sea monster had clamped onto the bacon with one pincher while the other flailed wildly when she broke the surface of the water. Two eye stalks moved to and fro for a moment and then the sunburned crayfish released her grip and fell splashing into her watery home, backing into another hole under a gray, striped rock.

"Katielynn, git yourself outa that crick this minute," an older female voice commanded from the kitchen window that also opened onto the backyard.

"Yes Ma'am. Just catchin' crawdads."

Looking past the willow, the girl called to two barefoot boys in similar cut-off jeans moving towards her through the neighboring backyards.

"Catch anything? She yelled at the two boys."

"Got two right here in this coffee can," the tallest called back. "Fixin' to cook 'em up. Want some?"

The shorter of the two boys snorted, "Not 'less she caught one to add to the pot!"

Both boys were shirtless, tanned from the southern sun, and had the usual summer burr haircuts. The taller boy had sharp blue eyes and black hair, even though it was hard to tell the color when his hair was cut so close to the head. The shorter boy's hair and eyes looked to be a soft brown.

"I got a li'l one, but she fell off."

"How ya know it's a she?"

"Just do," she retorted, stepping back onto the thick grass with the string still dangling from her fingers.

"Put those crawdaddies back into that crick afore I get me a willow switch," yelled the older female voice from the window.

"Yes'am," the older boy answered and dumped their prize reluctantly back into the creek.

"Wanna play Chinese Checkers," the shorter boy asked.

Smiling at each other, all three ran up the hill to the back door of the house, tussling over the handle to the screen door and shouting, "Mama Bess, can we play Chinese Checkers?"

Their daddy had cut the six-sided playing board out of a left-over piece of oak from one of his carpentry jobs and then drilled all the holes just so. Mama Bess supplied the colored marbles, giving the set as a joint Christmas gift for all three kids. The three sorted the marbles and each chose a color, blue for the girl and green for the shorter boy and red for the taller one. From the back of the house, the robotic arm of the record player shifted and another record fell into place, then the needle scratched for a moment before Hank Williams began singing "Your Cheatin' Heart." The marbles traveled

around the beautiful wooden board for almost a half hour before one of the boys hissed, “Liar, liar, pants on fire!”

A young dark-haired woman moved through the hall doorway and rebuked the children sprawled over the living room floor, “Kids, mind your Mama Bess. And don’t be callin’ me at work tonight. Luv ya all. “ The red Ford station wagon started and the children listened to it move up the street.

“Jimmy, I dare you to call Mommy tonight.”

“Well, even if I dial “0” for the operator, she don’t always answer. Don’t ya know that she’s not the only telephone operator at Southern Bell?”

“It’s gonna be dark soon. Let’s go get Betsy and Johnny and catch fireflies,” Katie suggested.

“Bobby’s mad and I’m glad and I know what it takes to please him: a bottle of ink to make him stink, a bottle of wine to make him shine, and Betsy Boney to kiss him,” the shorter boy teased, laughing convulsively while rolling on top of the Chinese Checkers game, scattering the red, green, and blue marbles across the hardwood floor.

“Y’all put up those marbles and go play outside,” their grandmother stated from the kitchen doorway, “and I’m fixin’ to mop so stay out there. I won’t have those dirty bare feet tracked onto my clean floor again. Ya hear? Your Daddy’ll be home soon. Supper’s ‘bout done. Black-eyed peas and cornbread tonight. Eat black-eyed peas on Monday and have money the rest of the week. He’ll whistle when it’s on the table.”

The cool hardwood floors glowed from the light filtering through the camellia trees shading the front porch. Only a few dusty marks from the children’s bare feet marred the reflection. “And don’t slam . . . BLAM! . . . that screen door,” she added

fruitlessly as the three pair of cut-off jeans and bare feet raced out the open front door and down the black tar street.

“Mrs. Williams, Mr. Barker will be out in just a few moments,” the twenty-something receptionist says from behind her sterile white desk. A cascade of brilliant blonde hair seems marred by a streak of red above her right eye. Bright blue eyes watch the computer screen and her first finger clicks the mouse in rhythm to the syllables of the sentence.

“Thanks, sweetie.” I close the magazine, still holding the image of those lost days close in my mind. A little girl would be nice. We could play Chinese checkers. Then, as I move to return the magazine to the stack, my eyes noticed the hands holding the colorful magazine and I gasp. Red fingernail polish accents short pudgy fingers. Purple veins look like ropes stretching from those fingers across sharp crevices from years of farming, waitressing, Ajax and Clorox. The ropes stop at the rolls and ridges of the wrist.

These aren't my hands. I feel as if I have entered the Twilight Zone, as if those hands are disconnected from this body .

“These are my Mama Bess's hands,” I say aloud.

“Pardon me?” a deep male voice comes from behind me. “I'm Hal Barker. Ms. Williams, let's talk in my office.”

I clasp my grandmother's hands together to regain my mental footing, then move down the hall behind the broad gray suit topped with manicured black hair. Beside his door a small sign reads:

H.B. BARKER, SPECIALIZING IN ADOPTION, GUARDIANSHIP, AND
CHILD SUPPORT CASES.

“Please have a seat right here,” he says, motioning to a comfortable-looking black leather chair, the daddy to the one in the waiting area. Afternoon sunlight from a brilliant blue July sky fills the room, causing the hardwood floor to gleam around the edges of a forest green rug. A crude paperweight made of deep blue and dark red marbles sits atop one pile of papers. On the huge desk, stacks of files and yellow legal pads wait while a tall grandfather clock’s slender, brass pendulum swish-swishes in one corner. Shelves of black leather-bound books cover the walls. The aroma of pipe tobacco tinged with peppermint that reminded me of my Uncle Nolan helps me feel secure in this man’s office.

Settling into the arms of the spacious chair and stroking the marble paperweight, I think, Life is like a children’s game. You roll the dice and move round the board, coming right back to where you started from. Yes, a little girl would be nice, if it’s not too late.

Muted chimes from the old guardian of time in the corner mark the hour as the gray suit closes the golden oak door behind us.

CHAPTER TEN:

Bad Men -- Joanna

It takes an hour to drive into town, shop for the particular baked goods to take to Mrs. Tsosi. At least her house is in town, too. She sits on the porch, trying to stay cool in the afternoon heat, watching us come up the long gravel driveway in my uncle's old Ford pickup.

Her Dollar Store fan flitted like a small bird around her dark, wrinkled face. Several freshly painted, old metal chairs lined the edges of the porch, waiting for folks coming by to sit a while and visit. Climbing out of the single bench seat, my uncle stood at the bottom step until the short, round woman invited him up.

Come on up and take a seat," she offered as I helped my grandmother climb out of my uncle's pickup. My grandmother, uncle, and I sat down. Then Grandmother pointed with her chin at the bundle in my uncle's lap.

"We brought a bit of sweet breads for you to have with your mornin' coffee.

Thank you," she replied politely. She moved to stand and her dress shimmered, a weave of geometric designs in several shades of turquoise and white. How could someone be regal and humble at the same time?

She took the bundle with trembling hands, then disappeared into the house. The aluminum screen door rattled as she let it slam behind her. I could hear her flip-flops shuffle across linoleum, a refrigerator door open and close, then ice crackle as she poured glasses full. We waited. Soon, she returned with three glasses of iced tea. @We took them gratefully.

“I have to ask you some hard questions, young woman.” She spoke directly to me, but seemed to avoid my eyes.

“Then we will know how to proceed. Are you ready?”

I nodded.

Then she asked my grandmother and uncle the same question. They both nodded.

Tell me what happened. I will probably have questions after,” she said quietly, taking a long drink of her iced tea.

The house faced the east. So the porch made it shady. No crickets chirped or small birds fussed. A few bees buzzed near the end of the water hose wound up near the corner of the porch. Thirsty, they must be looking for a drink. I sipped the cold, bitter tea, then pressed the coolness to my cheek. The silence grew long,, but the three elders waited patiently as my mind resisted. Finally, I began, “Well, I came home from the dance. Went to the barn.

You know, to water the horses. I remember thinking that the moon looked blue.”

My hands trembled, then shook violently, splashing iced tea onto my jeans.

Grandmother took the glass and placed it on a nearby table. I looked out into the street for help, but none came through the heat. So, I went on, “He must have been there already. ”

Jesse the Piano –Mary

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Coolness rushed out when I unlocked the door. “Evap cooler’s workin’ great today,” I said to the piano. I made a mental note to call the tuner in October when the humidity went down again. Opening the lid, I plunked a few keys. “Yep, Jesse, you definitely need tuned,” I confirmed, then straightened the music books stacked on top of the old, battered Steinway.

I had found Jesse at a garage sale under a tarp in an old lady's carport. "Is that a piano under there?"

I had asked the frail lady sitting behind a folding table piled with mix-matched dishes.

"Belonged to my husband," she responded, not really answering the question.

"Mind if I take a look?"

"Help yourself," she offered, standing unsteadily and moving to lift the tarp. . "I don't play. So, my boys helped me move it out here about a year ago.

The flat black and battered fella came home the next day. The old lady and I settled on a price of three hundred dollars, the amount she needed to take a bus tour to see Graceland. The piano movers groaned and moaned at his weight, then the tuner had to replace a couple of strings and hammers. But he sounds pretty good for being one hundred and forty years old. That's the great thing about pianos. Through the manufacturer, the serial number holds some of the piano's history. This old guy had been built and shipped to Kansas City in 1871. I imagined him in a saloon full of gun slingers and outlaws, drunk drovers and dance hall girls. So his name became Jesse for Jesse James.

Slipping off my shoes, I stood barefoot on the memory foam padding front of the refrigerator and wriggled my toes. The stress of the day flowed out of me like dirty water down the kitchen drain. then shoving a frozen dinner into the microwave, I poured myself a tall glass of iced tea. Standing on my stress-reliever mat soothes my toes, but everything in this black plastic plate tastes like cardboard except the whole kernel corn.

After emptying that compartment with a spoon and savoring each bite, I toss the rest in the trash.

I busy myself with tidying up after dinner, starting a washer load of clothes, dusting Jesse, then vacuuming the living room even though it didn't need it. This time between work and bedtime is hardest. I still miss Mike. It's agony to love someone you can't live with.

The nursery door is shut tight. I reach for the door handle, clench the cold brass knob, even turn it a bit. The tune of Seven Spanish Angels drifts down the hall from my bag laying on the kitchen table. My hand drops, then my head, as I slip away to the bedroom.

CHAPTER ELEVEN:

“Gentle on My Mind” - Kate

Dozens of raindrops on the plate glass reflect the pale glow of the old juke box in the far corner. This time of the morning the café is cool and quiet. I make coffee without turning on any of the overhead lights. Barely making out the hands on the clock mounted in a porthole above the order window, I figure out it's almost 3:25. Another hour before Jose gets here to start the breakfast prep.

A thump, thump, thump. from outside calls me to the front window just in time to see a homeless guy pushing his shopping cart piled high with his precious possessions down the sidewalk toward the park a block away. I should take some sandwiches down there after lunch, I remind myself. George had fed the homeless in the park several times a week. He had gathered up leftover donuts from breakfast, wrapped several sandwiches in clear plastic, grabbed some one dollar bills from the register, then walked to the park to disperse the goodies.

I listen for the hiss and gurgle of the coffee maker. Almost done. The sounds shifting to something like Rice Krispies on steroids, becoming loud pops, crackles, finally, distinctive snaps. Meandering over to the juke box, my eyes look for the name Glen Campbell, a mutual favorite. George's tune had been “Galveston.” I often wondered how many sweethearts he had left standing on a tarmac when he flew away to his next duty station. A Gunnery Sergeant for the first half of his military career, George had transferred to the kitchen after being injured on a mission. He often said, “If I can't lead 'em, I can feed 'em.”

I pull a quarter from my pocket, drop it in the slot, then press the worn buttons G and 1. Whirring, clicking, then the scratching of the phonograph needle fill the quiet café. Glen croons my favorite, “Gentle on My Mind.” Singing along with Glen brings thoughts of my late husband. George travels ‘along the back roads, by the rivers of my memory.’

Having plenty of time for the morning setup, I sip my coffee while wrapping silverware. Next, the filled jelly trays and condiments are placed on each table just so. Jose comes in the back door, then begins setting up for my breakfast regulars. The aroma of sizzling sausage and bacon drifts through the order window. The first truck pulls into the parking lot. I unlock the front door, turning on the overhead lights that make the café bright and inviting. Then my delivery men begin filing in. The little Harbor Café hums with the shuffle of work boots, clattering dishes, and man conversation.

I wonder how the café will adjust to the changes to come. A better question is: How will I adjust to those changes?

Mary comes through the door just as I finish wiping up from the early morning breakfast rush. She’s wearing dark slacks, flats, a crisp white, short sleeved shirt, with her dark curly hair pushed up in the back and held by a mother of pearl pin. Her rainbow beach bag lands on the seat to her right.

“Sorry I didn’t call you back last night. I was working on a case.”

“I figured it was something like that,” I said, pouring each of us a cup of coffee.

“I feel like I’m at a dead end with that rape case,” Mary says, looking around the empty café to make sure we’re alone. “I’m just not sure where to go from here.”

“You know, sometimes we just need help carrying the load,” I suggest, stirring my coffee. “My Mama Bess used to say that God gave women strong hearts and wide

hips ‘cause they carry the weight of the world. Laundry baskets heaped with dirty laundry on one hip. Babies on the other. You know, on one side, we’re cleanin’ up the dirt of the past. On the other side, we’re holdin’ the future. I didn’t learn ‘til late that the work goes faster and easier when you share the load.”

Mary smirked at me, quipping, “Your grandmother had a saying for everything, huh?”

“Yeah, but I probably don’t tell them as good as she did. The thing is that sometimes we just need a little help. Who did you go to for help when you were a street cop?”

“Well, my partner, when I had one. Or my old Training Officer . . . or the Captain,” Mary says in a faraway voice. “By the way, what did you need last night?”

A pickup truck pulls into the parking lot, so I rise. “Oh, that can wait. It’s kinda important, but we can talk about it later. There’s time yet. Speaking of time, it’s 7:35. You’d better hit the road, Jack.”

“And don’t ya come back no more, no more, no more, no more,” we sing together, laughing.

Mary drains her coffee, grabs her bag, then rushes to the door. “I’ll call later. We can talk then,” she shouts over her shoulder as she heads to her old, white Lincoln.

That’s how Mary and I became friends. We both love to sing along with country tunes or golden oldies. She had come in about three o’clock one morning when I worked graveyards at Triple T. After scanning the restaurant with those sharp blue eyes of hers, she had chosen a seat at the end of the counter where she could get a good view of the place. It was my usual seat. From there, I could see the door, through the front windows

into the parking lot, the entire counter, while having my coffee or watching for customers. She wore a halter top, mini skirt, along with high-heeled boots. Here comes trouble, I had thought. But it wasn't long before several cars and a couple of vans pulled up, another similarly dressed gal, along with a herd of cops in vests and guns piled out of the cars. Just as Mary laid two bucks on the counter, Brooks and Dunn's tune "Cowgirls Don't Cry" began to play on the restaurant's speakers. We both began singing along. Handing her change back, I had said, "Ain't it the truth. By the way, my name's Kate."

"I'm Mary. C&W's my kinda music."

A lot of life's water has traveled under the bridge since that morning. I met, married, then lost George. She lost the baby, divorced Mike, then went back to school. We've sure helped each other carry the load.

I recognize the bull rider hat when he comes in the door. Mary just missed him, I think, watching Gracey's red tail lights flash as she pulls out into the already congested street.

"Mornin' boys. How 'bout some coffee to start?"

"Yeah, that sounds good," the kid with the shaved head says with a smile.

"Not for me," Toby Cowboy grunts.

Still grumpy, I think, turning one of the cups on the table upright, then pouring in the aroma of early morning.

"How 'bout a breakfast burrito? That's the special this mornin'. Ham, bacon, or sausage, with home fries. Red or green salsa on the side, too." I pull out my pad, putting my pen at the ready.

"Not for me," Toby Cowboy shakes his head.

“I’ll have that with bacon and green chili salsa. Tabasco, too, if you have it,” his friend says, adding, “In west Texas, we like our eats hot and spicy.”

“Comin’ right up,” I reply, moving quickly to hang the ticket in the order window. Picking up my spray bottle and rag, I wipe the already clean table closest to my only customers. Being sneaky isn’t my best suit, but I figure Mary might like to know what they said.

“I’m gonna head down to Sells tomorrow and check out the rodeo grounds. Maybe I can find work in the stock yard or runnin’ the chutes,” Toby Cowboy tells his friend.

“Did you ever find that little Navajo gal?” Baldy Boy asks.

Looking around the restaurant, Toby hesitates. I take that as a cue, moving to the juke box that’s a little further away.

“Not a trace of her. Navajo Nation ranges over three states. Besides, she could be out at a sheep camp in the back country. I heard from Sara that the feds took over this case. Sara hears all the gossip from that gal’s family. So, I’ve decided to move over to the Tohono O’odham reservation for a while.”

The bell rings in the order window, so I deliver breakfast to the table, grabbing silverware and tabasco sauce on the way. When I set the plate down, I notice a swastika tattoo (description instead?) on Baldy Boy’s forearm. Glancing quickly away, I realize that Toby is wearing a long-sleeved snap-up western style shirt. Another mix-match, I think.

“I’ll be in touch,” Toby says, leaving his friend still eating.

I check on my solitary customer, refilling his coffee, then finish wiping the juke box. I think about how to approach Mary. I feed the juke box another quarter, pressing G and one.

Jurisdiction - Mary

“Do you have a minute, Captain?” I ask, stopping in his office doorway on the way back from the coffee maker.

“Sure, have a seat. Give me just a minute to finish up this email Send. There, all done,” he says, turning towards me. “What can I do for my newbie this morning?”

“Well, I need some advice,” I begin, having spent the last hour figuring how to approach the Captain with my dilemma.

“Okay, but no love, family, or religion issues, please,” he says with an inviting smile.

“It has to do with this auto theft case I’m working on. Something I found in the stolen vehicle.”

He pulls a legal pad out of a desk drawer, finds a pencil, then stares at me across his cluttered desk.

“Well, when I went out to the impound yard to document the condition of that stolen Honda, I found a CD in the player,” I begin.

“Okay, bring me up to speed. Which auto theft case is this?”

“I’ll be right back.” I rush down the hallway, snatch the file off my desk, then return to the chair across from Captain Garcia, turning the file so that he can see the case number. He writes it down.

Pretty standard case. The vehicle was a rental. Taken from in front of the motel. Probably joy riders,” I tell him. “The piece I can’t make fit is this CD.” I hand it across the desk to him. “It’s a deputy’s interview of a rape victim up on the Navajo reservation.”

He pulls the CD out of its paper sleeve and looks at the red heart, then asks, “Who’s this Dan?”

“Well, I think he’s the guy who rented the Honda. His name is Daniel Boone. The rental paperwork stated that he was from Kentucky.”

The captain raises an eyebrow. “Did you do a follow up on this Daniel Boone?”

“Yes, but hit several brick walls. Looks like he used an alias at the rental place.”

“Interesting,” he mumbles, frowning. “So what’s your question?”

“I just wanted to ask for permission to look into it a little further,” I explain. “The victim is about sixteen. She also stabbed her assailant, killing him. I spoke with the case worker assigned to interview the girl, but she can’t find her.”

“Okay, let me get this straight. A Navajo girl is raped on the Navajo reservation. Right?” The pencil moves quickly over the pad as he makes notes.

“That’s right.”

“The girl fatally stabs the perp. A deputy interviews her at the scene. Right?”

“That’s right,” I affirm.

“You find the interview CD in a stolen vehicle here in Tucson.” He hesitates, looking directly into my eyes. I nod. Then he begins tapping the pencil on the pad. I wait. Laughter from down the hall cuts the silence.

Well, I don’t know much about the Navajo reservation. My mama is Pascua Yaqui from out west of Tucson. But I did take some Indian law in college. So, I’ll try to sort this out,” he tells me, now drumming the pad in a distinct rhythm.

“First,” he begins, “the rape and stabbing took place outside of our territorial jurisdiction. We’re the Tucson PD, not the Arizona PD.” He hesitates, making another note on the yellow pad.

“Second,” he continues, “the subject matter jurisdiction is Federal. Since the crime took place on the reservation, a Native is involved, and the crimes are rape and murder, this falls under the Major Crimes Act. That also makes it federal jurisdiction.”

“Third, the individuals involved are Native and non-Native. Tribal courts are prohibited from prosecuting a non-Native perp, especially for a crime like rape. That jurisdiction is federal as well. The U.S. Attorney’s office should be handling this case.”

Then he looks up from his notes and stares at me.

“Lastly, this is not the case I assigned you.”

I lean forward, trying to protest.

He holds up his pencil, silencing me.

“Give me the file.” I hand it over, but I’m not happy about it. The Captain reads my mind.

“I may need to ask you more questions about this situation. Keep good notes. If you find out anything else about the perp or victim, keep me updated. Internal Affairs may need to talk to you as well. That’s where this file has to go now.”

“But Captain,” I argue. My mind is spinning. This conversation did not go as I had expected. Where are my notes? In the desk drawer? In my bag?

“Mary,” he continues, “you did the right thing bringing this to me. I’m sure that you want to continue working on the girl’s case, but it is out of your hands now.”

Stunned, I go back to my little cubicle and collapse into the chair. My phone begins to vibrate and play “Seven Spanish Angels.” Bonnie Holder sounds cheerful, inviting me to eat lunch at her normal place in front of the library tomorrow. I’ll have to tell her that I’m off the case when I see her.

CHAPTER TWELVE:

The Terror Gang – Mary

I hurry up the north side of the courthouse. At the corner, I stop and stand to watch the flow of traffic turning off Alameda south onto Church Street. The pink dome catches a shaft of sunlight as the clouds swirl in the rising wind. I wonder if the dome looked this distinctive back in the early 1930s when it was new and what Tucson looked like back in the day.

In 1934, one of the worst years of the depression, Tucson became famous across the United States. A set of strange coincidences and circumstances caused a display of what was known as “The Terror Gang” right here on the second floor of the Pima County Courthouse. When the Courthouse was constructed, the north end of the second floor housed the jail. Some of the most dangerous criminals in the U.S. had been confined there in February of 1934.

It started with a fire in the Hotel Congress just south of here where the federal building sits now. Two men staying on the third floor of the hotel paid two of the firemen to bring down their heavy traveling bags. A couple of days later, the two firemen recognized those men as two of the nation’s “most wanted” criminals when they happened onto their pictures in a detective magazine. They reported their discovery to a deputy sheriff. The deputy went to the police department to report the information but found everyone out to lunch.

Almost simultaneously, another citizen informed the police chief that a New York man had bragged about earning a living robbing banks to him at dinner the night before. The police chief left his unfinished lunch to take this witness back to the police

station. Once there, the witness picked out two faces from the FBI's most wanted list. The Tucson Police Department now faced the task of capturing some of the most dangerous men in America. Tucson's Police Chief organized his officers to corral these notorious criminals.

The police officers found these men one by one, tricking them into going to the police station to "straighten out the paperwork on their automobiles." Once at the station, the men found that the officers had already identified them, arresting each of them with almost no resistance.

Soon four of the five Terror Gang members had been locked up right here in the Pima County jail. But the ring leader was still at large. With a little more diligent police work, officers located the missing criminal. They went to a hotel on 6th Avenue where they picked up John Dillinger. The notorious Terror Gang had been apprehended by the Tucson police without firing even one shot.

The insanity of having an Open House to display these murderers to the public like animals in a circus side show took place soon after. Tucsonans, young and old, marched through the jail and past the jailed criminals. John Dillinger flew out under FBI custody soon after the display. Only months later, several of this gang murdered some guards while escaping from a jail in the Midwest.

The way I look at it, the Tucson Police Department and the citizens of Tucson lucked out in 1934.

I spot Bonnie sitting on her bench as I cross Church Street. Swinging my umbrella confidently, I scan the sky, smelling the advancing rain storm. Bonnie and I may be

forced to retreat to the coffee shop across Stone or to a nearby sandwich shop. There's a wide choice of eateries downtown.

CHAPTER THIRTEEN:

The being in blue sat down and three expectant faces turned toward the one in black.

She stood slowly, facing the group. "I too have a story.

I carry it in my eyes. Are you sure you want to see it?"

The other three nodded, waiting patiently.

From the black center of one of her eyes all the four-legged creatures emerged – antelope and anteaters, bovines and bison, cats and donkeys, elephants and goats, Horses and iguanas, kangaroos and llamas, mice and opossums, puppies and rabbits, salamanders and tortoises, yaks and zebras, and so many more.

The animals moved into the forests and meadows, becoming part of the landscape.

From the other eye, a single tear rolled onto her cheek. "All the stories we have told live together and nourish one another. The story I give you now is both a blissful and a sad one. This is the most beautiful and the most dangerous, the most loving and the most treacherous. As her tear touched the earth, a human being stepped out of her eye and planted two bare feet firmly on the soft, supporting soil.

Scars – Bonnie

Monsoons moved in early today. Heavy with desert dust and moisture, the dark clouds looked pregnant and ready to pop.

Matt and I had considered having more children. He never said but I knew he wanted a boy. Someone to shoot hoops with in the backyard and teach to drive a dirt bike. When the doctors told us that I shouldn't risk another pregnancy, he became a fantastic uncle to our nephews. We never discussed it again.

I brought my umbrella to lunch in case rain began falling before I could get back to the office. No appointments this afternoon. So I could escape into the library and peruse the shelves if the storm threatened to blow me away. I wonder if that Detective Hopkins will make it today with the weather like this. From her record she looks like a good cop. Her marriage sure was rough though.

There she comes. I wish I had more to tell her about the Yazzi girl.

"Sure looks like the sky's about to drop buckets of rain on our heads," I say as she draws closer.

“I brought an umbrella, but I’m not sure how much it will help.”

“Wind’s sure whipping on the east side of town,” she replies, taking a seat at the other end of my bench.

If things get rough, we can duck into the library,” I tell her, making a point of arranging the strap on my lunch kit for easy access.

“I don’t think they’ll let us eat in there.”

“I’ll get a room. I’ve done it before,” I explain just as lightning strikes to the northeast where the Santa Catalinas nudge up against the Rincons.

“One, two,” Mary counts out loud. Thunder cracks, making us both jump.

I think that’s our cue,” I chuckle, gathering the lunch I had brought for the two of us and heading for the library doors.

The small library reading room holds a table and four chairs. I pull out the two chicken salad sandwiches, bags of grapes, a variety pack of miniature muffins, along with two bottled waters. The now frequent thunder seems very far away. Silence replaces the drumming of the rain.

“Not as nice as my bench, but an adequate alternative, don’t you think?” I smile at the younger woman sitting across from me.

Picking up her sandwich, she says, “My captain took the file on the auto theft case.” She takes a bite of the sandwich, chewing slowly. “Remember, I told you that the Yazzie rape case had something to do with my auto theft case?”

“Vaguely,” I mumble through a mouthful of grapes.

“Well, I had found a CD of the Yazzi girl’s initial interview in that stolen vehicle.”

“What? How did that happen?”

“I don’t know. That’s what I was trying to figure out. Anyway, the CD is the deputy’s interview of Joanna Yazzi right after the assault. That’s how I got involved in your case. Your name came up when I researched the police report and court documents. I talked to my captain yesterday afternoon, you know, about the CD and finding it in the stolen vehicle. I asked him for permission to look into the assault and stabbing. What I really wanted was his help finding the girl. Big mistake. He took the file and the CD.”

I laugh, shaking my head.

“To turn over to Internal Affairs?” I ask.

“Yeah, but he told me that I can let him know if I hear anything else about the girl,” Mary affirms, then looks at me with a quizzical expression.

“The news I have isn’t good either. I spoke to the prosecuting attorney. The case has been taken over by the FBI,” I respond.

“That’s pretty much what Captain Garcia said. That the case should be under federal jurisdiction because Joanna is Navajo and the assault took place on the reservation.”

“Well, the clincher turns out to be the guy she stabbed. His name came up on their radar.”

“What’s his name?” Mary’s expression becomes stern.

“Jed West,” I offer.

“That’s right. You told me that before. Oh well. There’s a heart and the name Dan written on the CD.”

“Dan?” I ask.

Mary continues, “Yeah, the guy who rented the car, a Daniel Boone,” smiling and raising her eyebrows at me. “And his driver’s license is from Kentucky. If that ain’t an alias, I’ll kiss your nose.”

“Kentucky, huh? Hmmm. Interesting. You know, I’ve been looking at a crew out of Kentucky for a while,” I said.

“Gang related?”

“Not a gang exactly. More like a white supremacy group. There is about one hundred and thirty of that type of organization in the country now.” I take a drink of water and watched the young detective, wondering how far I should go with this conversation.

“I know the type you’re talking about. I’ve run across a few when I worked the streets. Most are just punks, but a few are, well, I think, dangerous.”

I chance it, digging a news article out of my lunch kit, then passing it across the table. “Read that and tell me what you think.”

Johnny and Lisa Bonta, a Native family from the [Reno Sparks Indian Colony](#), became the latest victims of an apparent hate crime on May 24 when they were allegedly attacked at a gas station along I-80 in Fernley, Nevada, a border town between the Fallon and Pyramid Lake Indian reservations.

“I was pumping gas at Quick Stop on our way to Reno to look for another job when these skinheads in a blue car drove by real slow and checked us out. The driver jumped out with a baseball bat, and I asked them ‘why you holding a bat?’” said Bonta. “He said ‘let’s do this’ and tried to pick a fight. I don’t know how to explain what happened—we didn’t do anything to them.”

Bonta, a Paiute member of the Reno Sparks Indian Colony, says he tried to avoid the confrontation by telling them he didn’t want to fight. He got back in the car, with his son-in-law Shane Murray at the wheel, and they quickly drove away with the carload of skinheads in close pursuit.

As they approached the freeway ramp, they were cut off as the blue car swerved in front of them, then slammed on the brakes, causing Murray to crash

into it. Murray said he recognized one of the attackers as Jacob Cassell, a former classmate and son of retired Lyon County Sheriff officer Jim Cassell.

“They all jumped out of the car with baseball bats, knives and a crowbar, and we knew they were going to hurt us,” said Lisa Bonta, in an interview from Washoe Medical Center, where she was in treatment for seizures she suffers.

The fight broke out on the highway after 1 p.m. and while traffic was passing by, no one would stop to help them. Lisa and her daughter, Alyssa, were terrified watching the brutal and bloody fight as her unarmed husband and son-in-law tried to fight off the three young men in their 20s.

“I saw one of them hit my husband in the head with a bat, and the other one was trying to cut off his braid with a knife. Johnny was covered in blood and they just kept hitting him with a crow bar. They even tried to slit his throat.”

Mary looks up, commenting, “Okay, looks like a local bunch of punks assaulting a family. So?”

“Looks local. But one of the perpetrators is connected to that group in Kentucky. I started researching these types of attacks a few years ago. Being connected with the court and law enforcement network helps. I’m still doing it because many of the assaults on Indians can be traced back to that particular organization.”

“So?” she asks again.

“I’m not even sure anymore. I had hoped to put enough information together to take prosecutorial action.”

“Are you an attorney? I thought you’re a court advocate.”

“Used to be a public defender. I’m still licensed in Arizona. California, too.”

“How’d you get into this in the first place?” Mary asks with an intense stare.

“Well, it really began when I got into my second year of law school. I had been researching a couple of cases. Came across an article on white supremacy groups, started making connections. You see, my mother was killed when I was only five years old. in

1970, we lived just outside London. You know, England. All I remembered was that a pack of young boys attacked us. They knocked my dad out cold, then kicked me and my mother. They killed Mommy.” I Hesitate. It’s been a long time since I’ve had to tell this story. After taking a couple of gulps of water, I look at Mary. Her expression is calm, emotionless, so I continue. The kicks damaged my spine. I used a wheelchair for years. Several surgeries while I was in high school made it possible for me to walk instead. At least, most of the time. Turns out that “paki bashing,” as they called it, became prevalent in London in the early 1970s. White supremacy crews targeted Asians and Middle-easterners mainly. Bashing, then robbing them. Mommy was Japanese.”

“How’d you cope with all that? As a child, I mean.” Mary’s voice sounds concerned.

“Dad and I had therapy sessions for years. I didn’t know until about middle school that they were therapy. We played games, I drew pictures, then we talked. But, as far as I remember, the term ‘white supremacy’ never came up. I spent months in military hospitals. Dad being in the Air Force meant I went to military facilities all over the world. The nurses and doctors doted on me. Probably because of my superior wheelchair skills. I totally ruled the hallways. the rest of the patients were grownups.”

“How’d you end up in Tucson?” Mary asks.

“Good question,” I giggle. “Truth is Dad has a Ph.D. in A10. Where they go, he follows.”

“A 10?” Mary looks puzzled.

“The A 10 close air support bomber. Their main training facility is Davis-Monthem.”

“I see.” So, you move to Tucson, go to law school, become a court advocate, research attacks on Indians.”

“That’s the timeline, all right,” I answer. “Sounds boring. But I have a job I like, two beautiful daughters, beautiful inside and out, and a good marriage.” Oops, I shouldn’t have brought that up.

“Sorry about that. I know your marriage ended badly,” I offer.

“I guess I’m in that network, too?” Mary looks away. I follow her gaze. Through the glass window at one end of our little room, several people sit reading at large tables or walk through the stacks. Some are obviously homeless, probably trying to escape the rain.

“Yes,” I answer, then probe, “I’m sorry about the baby. How do you cope with that?”

“Still trying, you know, to cope.” Mary still stares at the people outside our room. Then, she speaks softly, more to herself than to me.

“I should’ve known better. I’m a cop, trained to know when to back down, when to be aggressive. But that night . . . I’ve thought about it a lot . . . but I still don’t understand what happened. My fault.”

“No it wasn’t,” I blurt out. Mary turns to look directly into my face, her dark blue eyes flashing.

“I made a mistake. I stepped up (check terminology) to Mike. He had been drinking. Drinking a lot. When he started that talkin’ to me like I’m trash, like crap under his feet, I just didn’t back down.”

“You paid a huge price for that mistake,” I inject.

“No, my baby boy paid the price for my stupidity.”

I wait, taking a sip of water while watching Mary closely. I had learned a long time ago that the best way to help is to be a patient listener.

Mary finishes her sandwich. She begins speaking slowly, measuring her words, “You know, I took a woman’s self-defense class in high school long before I even thought about being a cop. The first thing they taught us was avoid the fight. ‘Avoid if possible; escape when necessary.’ I sure didn’t remember any of it that night.”

“Have you talked to anyone about this? A therapist, maybe?” I ask, trying to use my coaxing voice. Mary looks down, playing with her grapes. She seems to be counting them.

“I went to a psychologist, you know, through the department. But it did no good. I couldn’t talk about it. And all she ever said was, “How did that make you feel?” Mary pops a couple of grapes into her mouth and bites down hard, chewing quickly.

“I remember that phrase. I remember thinking, ‘If you ask me that again, I’m going to explode,’ but of course I didn’t,” I say, understanding her frustration.

Mary looks at me across the table again, her face as dark as the storm clouds outside. She spits the words, “Well, I did. Explode, I mean. Walked out. Never went back.”

We finish lunch in silence.

Thunder rolls as the storm moves across the valley. After packing up the trash, I push two of my business cards toward Mary.

“Let’s meet again next week, okay? My home and cell numbers are on the back. Looks like that scar is too tender to talk about. But you can call me anytime you need to chat about anything.”

“I don’t know.”

“How about we meet same time, same place, next week. I’ll work on a connection I have with the FBI. Try to find out about Joanna Yazzi. At least what’s happening with the case. I’ll bring some info on that crew out of Kentucky, too. By the way, it’s your turn to bring lunch.”

The moist air is pungent with the smells of wet asphalt and Palo Verde trees as we stop outside the front doors of the library. The storm is moving fast towards the west. A shimmering sun emerges between the thunderheads still remaining. Shifting patches of brilliant blue dot the sky.

Mary walks toward Church Street, then turns back, yelling, “I’ll bring egg salad. Okay?”

“Sounds great!” I respond, smiling, then waving. I head towards the office, wondering where I put that FBI guy’s cell number.

CHAPTER FOURTEEN:

The four beings stood, then reached into the center with long, outstretched arms and splayed fingers. With thumbs and little fingers touched one to another, they encircled the human being.

The being in white said, "We released our stories. Care for and nurture them, for this is the beginning of the thick forest of stories that will come in time. You are a part of them as they are a part of you."

"Always on My Mind" – Mary

Mary stopped at the edge of the quiet street, pressed numbers on her cell phone, then asked, "Where are you?"

Kate's voice answered, "Pullin' 'round the corner right now."

"I see you. Be right there." Mary waited for a couple of cars to pass, then jogged across the street towards Gracey and her friend. Reaching the opposite sidewalk, Mary realized how much she depended on the two of them. Both had been there during the worst times. Gracey's bulldog stance made her a rock solid car, even in the worst storm. Kate listened, always adding sayings from her Mama Bess, but never pushed too hard. Kate had borrowed Gracey to run an errand this afternoon because her old van was in the tire shop. But here they are, right on time.

"How do some enchiladas sound for dinner?" Kate asked as Mary slid into the passenger seat.

"Did Gracey behave for you?" Mary grinned, observing that the vehicle had been washed. The interior was especially clean and shiny. Puzzled when she found that a car seat, complete with a dark-haired baby, occupied the back seat, she responded to the question about dinner with, "Sounds great." Then, turning to Kate, tilting her head while raising an eyebrow, she asked, "Well, who's your little friend?"

“Her name is Sunshine. Sunny for short.” Kate hesitated, making the turn onto Congress heading west. Then she rushed on, “Her parents died in a car accident, and she’s got no relatives here in Arizona.”

“So,” the older woman spoke with reservation. “I might be adopting her.” Now Kate turned to her young friend, “I could sure use some help, you know, carrying the load,” she added. Kate let out a sigh that sounded like a tire going slowly flat, then looked hard at Mary.

“You know, it’s been a long time since I’ve cared for a six-month-old baby.”

“Her red, white, and blue outfit sure matches the café. Are you puttin’ her to waitin’ tables tomorrow?” Mary chuckled, reaching over the seat to straighten the sailor style dress, avoiding her friend’s question.

“Well, what do ya think?” the older woman pressed, smiling broadly at her friend.

“Well, I don’t know what to think, Kate. You know I’m not over . . . “

“I know, I know,” Kate interrupted. “Believe me, this wasn’t planned. I got a call from some of George’s people, from Oklahoma. They needed someone here in Arizona to take the baby. Her parents had their accident in Gila Bend. None of the family could come and take her. Financial problems. So they called me. I went to see the attorney. He arranged everything. I couldn’t bring myself to say no.” Kate had been looking straight ahead through the windshield, maneuvering through downtown as she spoke. A traffic light turned red. She braked and stared at Mary in search of some recognition or approval. .

“Kate, I have ugly thoughts pushed into the dark corners of my mind. You know, things that I don’t want to remember but are always there. I just don’t know, Kate.”

“Well, Mama Bess used to say that life is like music. Some parts are written down with time signatures and notes on a staff. But most times life is like playing music by ear. You keep messin’ around with the tune until it sounds right. Hows about we just play it by ear?”

“I just don’t know,” Mary mumbled, pushing the play button on the CD player as she spoke. The twangy tones of one of Willie’s hits came through the speakers:

Maybe I didn't love you

Quite as often as I could have

And maybe I didn't treat you

Quite as good as I should have

If I made you feel second best

Girl I'm sorry I was blind

You were always on my mind

You were always on my mind

The two women rode in silence, listening to the tune, until they pulled into the restaurant parking lot.

“I’ll try,” Mary said softly as Gracey came to a stop, lightly touching her friend’s arm. Then, reaching into the back seat to tousle the little girl’s hair, Mary asked, “What would Sunny like?” Then she continued, “Well ,little one, looks like it’s El Charros tonight. Enchiladas sound great to me. Let’s go find some.”

“Sunny told me earlier that she loves frijoles. But I have some cereal or strained carrots for her in the diaper bag,” Kate said..

Willie's tune continued as the two women gathered their belongings. Mary tucked a fluffy toy duck with matching blanket embroidered with turtles and red-headed ducklings frolicking in a field of wild flowers into her rainbow beach bag purse. While Kate grabbed the yellow diaper bag then struggled to release the catch on the car seat.

And maybe I didn't hold you

All those lonely, lonely times

And I guess I never told you

I'm so happy that you're mine

Little things I should have said and done

I just never took the time

But you were always on my mind

You were always on my mind

Bonnie

Bonnie walked briskly back to the office, swinging the umbrella from one hand, while tapping her cane only occasionally on the sidewalk with the other. The key slipped easily into the lock on her office door. Hanging her umbrella and cane on the coat rack just inside the door, she surveyed the room, remembering why she chose this one. She had liked this space, older style high ceilings with almost floor to ceiling windows facing north and west. She had taken her time picking out the furniture, the cherry wood desk, small conference table, and bookshelves, tan instead of black chairs, black leather bound law and statute books, but especially the rug hanging behind the conference area. She had known it was made for her the instant she saw it. Trimmed with dark green leaves, the

center held a jungle scene. A black and white Bengal tiger sprawled on green grasses, her golden eyes watching you.

Bonnie moved around her desk, kicking off her black pumps, shoving the desk chair to one side, then opening the vertical blinds on the west facing window. Usually tightly closed this time of day, the open blinds revealed an amazing sight. Bonnie smiled at the orange, pink, and purple cloud formations along the horizon.

“The storm brings the rainbow,” she said to the sky. Turning to sit at her desk, she called home. Her husband answered.

“What are you doing home?” she asked, delighted to hear his voice.

“Packing,” he answered.

Bonnie voiced her disappointment. “Where to this time?”

“Well, that’s up to you. Tara voted for Flagstaff and the Grand Canyon. Anissa wants San Diego and Sea World.” He explained. “What’s your vote?” he added.

“How much time do you have?”

“All the time we need. I’m free for at least two weeks. Can you get away for that long?” Matt’s excitement flowed through the receiver.

“Absolutely. Beam me up. But seriously, I have nothing pressing right now. I can rearrange things,” Bonnie exclaimed, remembering her lunch date next week with Mary.

“Well, come on home. We’re already packing.”

“I vote for the redwoods, honey. But in two weeks, we can fit in all three, maybe even the San Diego Zoo, Redondo Beach, or the Golden Gate bridge. What’s your vote?”

“I’m just the chauffeur, baby. The up side is I get to spend two weeks with three gorgeous gals.”

After hanging up the phone, Bonnie left a voice mail for Mary, telling her about the trip, then promising to call as soon as she returned. She tidied her desk as she spoke, packed her laptop, then closed the blinds before taking off.

Turning to survey the room for forgotten things, Bonnie saw a single strand of sunlight cutting into the darkness. It illuminated the miniature crystal animal collection on one of the shelves. Antelopes, bears, elephants, even zebras, absorbed the light. Matt tried to bring one to her from every trip. Half lived at home; the other half of her treasures stayed with her at the office. She smiled at them, promising, “I’ll be back soon.” Then, continuing her scrutiny, she found the eyes of the tiger. She felt humble in the tiger’s presence. The ancient Sequoias gave her the same feeling. Both had survived the human onslaught for millennia.

Suddenly remembering something, she went back to her desk. Opening the drawer, she pulled out a thick, well-worn spiral notebook, checked that her favorite pen was still attached, then shoved it into the pocket of her bag. Looking up, she found the eyes of the tiger again, instructing her, “Watch over things while I’m gone.”

Bonnie quietly closed the office door, clicking the dead bolt.

Joanna

She jumped away, startled by his touch, then turned to face him, raising her fist. She held an untied tennis shoe in her right hand. She dropped her left hand, relaxing her fingers and letting out a groan.

“Uncle,” she rebuked, “you scared me!”

“I’m sorry,” he said, dropping his outstretched hand to his side. “I didn’t mean to.” He looked at the untied tennis shoe in her hand, the blue sock on her foot, then to her face. “Still runnin’?”

“Yeah, but with my shoes now. Going barefoot worked, though. My feet were so sore that I couldn’t think about anything else for days.” She grinned at him, moving to sit down on the step, pulling on her shoe, then tying it with a double knot.

Taking a seat beside his niece, he told her, “The ceremony begins at sunset. Maybe you should try to take a nap instead of a run. We won’t be done ‘til late.”

Pulling her dark hair into a scrunchie at the nape of her neck, she answered, “I always run before breakfast and after dinner.”

“You’ll need your strength.”

She looked into his round, always smiling face. “You’re scaring me again, Uncle.”

“Regaining your hozho isn’t easy. You have begun, but you’ve got a long way to go.” He picked up a nearby stick, drawing squares and circles in the sand at his feet.

“Okay, I’ll make it short.” The young girl’s expression turns solemn. “I know this is important, Uncle,” she added, staring into his concerned face. “I’ll run the short path.”

“Good,” he answered.

Hearing the whir of a small plane, they both looked skyward, watching the gray shape bank slightly, then heading north.

It disappeared into one of the feathery clouds floating across the endless sea of blue sky.

“Don’t you think it looks like a whale?” Joanna spoke softly .

“It’s a face,” the uncle stated, continuing to draw in the dirt.

“No, I mean that cloud.”

Her uncle looked up again, following her gaze.

“No, it’s a person layin’ down. See the face?” he mumbled, going back to his drawing. “You see fish everywhere. You still want to study fish?”

“Sort of. I’m thinking about marine biology. You know, study life in the oceans and such.”

“No oceans in Dinetah,” he said softly.

“But there’s rivers and lakes, Uncle,” she laughed. “Marine biologists work wherever there’s water.” She wrapped her arm around his broad shoulders and gave an affectionate squeeze.

She popped her ear-buds in, secured a MP3 player to her waistband, then checked for the small pocket knife stuffed into her sock. Standing, she moved quickly off the steps, then turned down the path that led west. Low on the horizon, the sun glowed white. Her face shone with sweat. A broad smile appeared as she shooed several brown rabbits off the path ahead of her. Taking notice of the position of the sun, she clicked on the MP3, lengthened her strides, then quickened her pace. She listened as she ran:

AH-UH NAYAH OH-WA OH-WA

SHON-DAY OH-WA OH-WA

SHON-DAY CAN-NON NON NOHA (NOHA)

AH-UH NAYAH OH-WA OH-WA

SHON-DAY OH-WA OH-WA

SHON-DAY YEHA-NOHA (NOHA)

AH-UH NAYAY TOR-SHNA NENA-NAY-YAYAH

NENA-NAY-YAY YEHA-NOHA (NOHA)

AH-UH NAYAY TOR-SHNA NENA-NAY-YAYAH

YEHA-NOHA (NOHA)

NEE-YOH-WAH NEE-YOH

NEE-YOH-WAH NEE-YOH

AH-UH NAYAH OH-WA OH-WA

SHON-DAY OH-WA OH-WA

SHON-DAY CAN-NON NON NOHA (NOHA)

AH-UH NAYAH OH-WA OH-WA

SHON-DAY OH-WA OH-WA

SHON-DAY YEHA-NOHA (NOHA)

AH-UH NAYAY TOR-SHNA NENA-NAY-YAYAH

NENA-NAY-YAY YEHA-NOHA (NOHA)

AH-UH NAYAY TOR-SHNA NENA-NAY-YAYAH

YEHA-NOHA (NOHA)

The four beings sat down, now facing the center of their world.

The being in black sat in the north.

The being in blue sat in the west.

The being in white sat in the east.

The being in red sat in the south.

But now they shared their special sounds and senses with the human being and one
another.

The sun shone over them from the west, filling this new world with warmth and light,
making it fertile, pregnant with stories.

EPILOG

The epilog allowed a space in which to reflect on the writing of the dissertation, the novella, and the changes that took place during the dissertation process. The interest in domestic violence against Native women triggered the research that underpins the novella, but those stories, statistics, and situations left a void as each character came to life in the novella. Each female character's story of violence or loss made up only a part of her, not all of her. Building coincidence, circumstance, conspiracy, along with diversity and correlations in the relationships of all the characters expanded the story world of the novella. Beginning with the traumatic event, including physical and psychological scars, then closing the novella with no tidy ending for any of the characters became the framework, but this was not enough. As each character became rounder and fuller, became more than their traumatic stories, the novella moved from a series of stories portraying injury to collaborations between women in search of an elusive healing. .

The premise underlying the work purports that we all suffer some kind of trauma during our lifetimes. Although the novella focuses on only four female characters, those characters depict several age brackets, socio-economic categories, as well as diverse cultural backgrounds. The hope is that making the work more universal in scope generalizes the overall story world, producing a more cosmopolitan piece. An overview of the mosaic of characters, colors, and connections follows.

JOANNA YAZZIE

Joanna Yazzie is a young woman about fifteen years old living in two worlds, the contemporary city of Tucson and the mainly rural Navajo Nation, a reservation traversing

New Mexico, Utah, and Arizona. As with many Navajo women, Joanna treads carefully between the two worlds.

The character of Joanna pulls together the urban and reservation experiences. About two-thirds of all Native Americans live in urban areas. Some are the product of the federal government's relocation policies implemented after World War II. Others live in urban centers for educational and economic reasons, but value their cultural heritage. Joanna represents that family that seeks economic stability in the city and sends the children home to the reservation for the summers to retain the cultural connection. Spending her summers visiting and working at her Dine grandparents' sheep ranch contrasts with her home life of attending high school, shopping with friends, along with watching TV or surfing the Internet.

Joanna's rape occurs as she tries to fulfill her role as a responsible granddaughter. She has been charged with taking care of the livestock while her grandparents move the flock to higher pasture. Sheep herding continues to be a way of life for the Dine. Young Navajos learn how to care for the sheep, shear them for the wool, as well as butcher them for food. Joanna would have learned these skills during her visits to the reservation in the summers.

In the first drafts of the novella, Joanna consisted of only a voice on the interview CD. But she required more.

Joanna wanted friends, family, a past, even a purpose for telling her story. Although she grew up in the Tucson valley surrounded by mountains and spent summers in the shadow of the mesas on the Navajo reservation, Joanna gravitated towards the oceans and wanted to be a marine biologist. Her sensory association is sound. Her color

became blue, like the seas and the sky; her direction, west, as she traveled towards the sun in search of warmth and wellness.

Joanna's trauma throws her off balance. Her injured body heals, but she has lost that childhood sense of security. Her family knows that Joanna's pain and disharmony must be put back into balance. She must "walk in beauty" again, according to Dine culture and cosmology. . The violence committed against Joanna affects the young girl, as well as her family, but also the entire community and Navajo Nation. To regain harmony and *hozho*, *a diagnostician should be consulted, then the appropriate ceremonies conducted. Performing the appropriate ceremonies in the proper way should bring beauty and harmony back to this young girl, her family, along with the community.*

KATE WILLIAMS

Kate Williams Lives a life of coincidence. Her life has been spent wandering from man to man, from job to job, and from town to town. Her life consists of new beginnings. So her color is white, her direction, east. She cooks and serves food so her association is with the sense of taste.

At almost sixty, Kate finds her partner, George. But his untimely death forces her to reevaluate her life. Financially stable, she finds a "new beginning" when she is approached to care for a baby girl.

Just as the sun rises each morning in the east to bring a new day, Kate accepts the responsibility of this baby girl with the hope of building a new life for herself and her friend Mary. Dubious but hopeful, Kate takes action, knowing that she should try to bring a healing about for the baby girl and Mary.

Just as Joanna is the youngest of the four characters in the novella, Kate is the oldest. They represent sound and taste, water and earth, respectively. Opposites in every way.

BONNIE HOLDER

Bonnie depicts an integration of military life, international racism, disability, as well as success over adversity. She has traveled the world, accompanying her father from Air Force bases in England and Europe to a current home in Tucson, Arizona. In her late forties, Bonnie's past impacts her today, but she has learned to cope with, even conquer, those situations from the past that scarred her life. As with all the female characters, her life is a work in progress, a good marriage in which she feels neglected, two daughters who will soon leave home to build their own lives, and the career that slices at her emotionally on a daily basis. Bonnie's color is black like the darkness she faces in many of the stories she hears. But black also connotes the inner peace Bonnie has found in her life. Her direction is north which carries two meanings: She is physically cold because of her childhood injury, so she wears black to gather the warmth of the desert sun. She also generates a magnetism that draws people in and encourages an open exchange of injury and emotion.

She is compelled to help others explore ways to endure and overcome their particular trauma. She wants to help both the elusive Joanna and the troubled Mary. Both Bonnie and Mary have lost a loved one. Bonnie lost her mother and Mary, her baby. Bonnie's chilly black is attracted to Mary's warm red; they are north and south, respectively.

Bonnie's last name denotes her choice of profession, but also other parts of her personality. She holds her family together as her husband travels frequently on business. She holds her cane to use for support when necessary. But mainly, she holds all those painful stories she has heard over the years.

MARY HOPKINS

Mary Hopkins began as the main character in this novella; her trauma, as the central story. Although still important, Mary's role in the novella transformed into the tether between the other three female characters. She possessed the CD of Joanna's interview with the deputy. Her friend Kate disclosed information about customers in her restaurant that fed into Mary's investigation. Finally, Mary worked with Bonnie in an attempt to find Joanna and resolve the quandary of the two cases. To Mary's frustration, she never concluded how the pieces of the two crimes fit together. The puzzle remained unsolved.

Only about thirty years old, Mary works in a profession that demands maturity. Her role as a police officer brings her in contact with pain and trauma on a daily basis. This ability to compartmentalize helps her in her job, but delays healing from her personal loss. Mary buries her story, refusing to share or release it. Glimpses of her inner turmoil emerge when she hears the wail of sirens. She blames herself for her baby's death and refuses to disassemble the nursery-shrine in her home.

Mary connects to the missing Joanna only through that young girl's voice on the interview CD. Mary feels Joanna's pain through the sound of Joanna's story. They connect through the wail of the sirens on the CD, then through the blood of Joanna's

assailant on the young girl's hands. This correlates with Mary's feeling of guilt and the baby's blood "on her hands." The two are inextricably linked by blood.

Mary also associates with Bonnie. Both women hold careers in the law. As a police officer and detective, Mary apprehends perpetrators while Bonnie works in the court system advocating for the victims of crimes. A tenuous relationship develops between the two women during the novella.

Throughout the writing of the novella, the female characters became rounder with fuller lives and personalities. But other components became important parts of the plot and setting of the novella. A conspiracy theory, facts about federal Indian law, a Christian component, and *The Birth of Stories* were included to provide background, complexity, and causality.

CONSPIRACY THEORY

After following up on the research on white supremacy violence against Native peoples, I felt compelled to include that conspiracy theory in the novella. Several groups popped up when researching this topic. Overt action against Native peoples by proclaimed white supremacists emerged in several newspapers and media sources. As with most conspiracy theories, no direct connection could be traced back to one particular group. In the novella, the impression of a covert, but well planned, conspiracy that could explain the statistics regarding rapes of Native women by non-Native men was included.

FEDERAL INDIAN LAW

One problem that became particularly prickly was how to include the facts about federal Indian law without sounding preachy. Two male characters provided that space.

Through the Pima County District Attorney, and his conversation with Bonnie, facts about the dual guidelines regarding prosecution of non-Natives committing crimes on reservations could be injected. Although the Violence against Women Reauthorization Act of 2013 became fully effective in March 2015, the Act covers only domestic violence cases. Major Crimes, such as assault and rape, remained under federal jurisdiction. The declination rate for such cases has remained at sixty percent or even higher from some sources.

Another character, Captain Garcia, in his conversation with Mary, gave a space to explain the jurisdictional maze when Native Americans and Indian Country are involved. Territorial, Subject matter, and personnel jurisdictions all came into play as the captain analyzed what Mary told him about this case.

Indian law feels like a maze with many dead ends. The sovereign status of many Native peoples is difficult to understand for those who have not studied American Indian history or federal Indian law specifically. That sovereign status provides that a Native Nation or Tribe has the right to make and enforce laws over that particular membership, but not over those who are not members of a Native Nation or Tribe. Understanding how to navigate the jurisdictional maze requires knowledge of treaties, the U.S. Constitution, Tribal Constitutions, as well as federal laws and U.S. Supreme Court rulings. This “maze” makes it necessary to study Federal Indian Law as a specialty in order to understand it thoroughly.

THE CHRISTIAN COMPONENT

Another component included in the novella is references to Christianity. The two areas including this component are Mary’s memory about the Mercy Seat and Kate’s

remark about the “immaculate conception.” The Mercy Seat is found atop the Ark of the Covenant. God appeared to the Israelite priests between the two cherub figures. There are several implications here. Mary felt that she “sinned” because her actions led to the death of her unborn child. The face of God being female, rather than male, depicts females as the givers of life. Lastly, the notion that God may wear glasses brought a smile. A female god would not consider herself perfect or infallible. Mary’s vision of the Ark alludes to her religious background. The guilt that Mary feels and her inability to move past her loss, stems from her cultural upbringing.

Kate’s remark about the immaculate conception foreshadows the adoption of the baby girl at the end of the novella. Adopting a child is an immaculate conception. The situation is troubling for Kate, but the reality is that there are many children who need a good home. Kate is impulsive, but courageous.

These Christian components should add balance to the novella. Just as Joanna turns to ceremonies to regain beauty and balance, Kate turns to her cultural roots and Mama Bess’s stories to remember how to live her life.

THE BIRTH OF STORIES

Although inspired by creation stories from Native-authored literature, *The Birth of Stories* portrays my belief that narrative or “story” holds the potential to bring us together, heal our hurts, build relationships, or even create worlds. Each color attaches to a direction. This attachment becomes the basis for each character in the novella. Each being also portrays a sensory function. As the beings release their stories, a new world comes to life, existing and expanding as each adds her individual story. Each populates this new world with plants, birds, sea creatures, other animals, then finally, humans.

Correlations between the components of *The Birth of Stories* and the characters in the novella add levels of knowledge. Each reader brings individual educational and cultural knowledge to the reading. The hope is that blending the use of a color pattern with the cardinal directions, four senses, as well as living things, adds texture to the work.

CONNECTING THE DOTS

In the introduction of this dissertation, I used the metaphor of a tree to explain my beliefs about story. The story world of the novella grew in much the same way as a tree. First, it sprouts from a seed, then sways in the breeze as a sapling. Eventually, the trunk grows solid and straight, sending branches outward.

The seed of this novella and dissertation dropped into my lap in an Indian Law class. I was shocked by the statistics regarding all types of violence committed against Native women. Several roots formed as I researched this situation. Looking at Supreme Court cases, Tribal Court rulings, along with available statistics, confused and enraged me. That confusion and rage spurred me to write about this “epidemic” of violence against Native women.

I looked to the *Oliphant* ruling by the Supreme Court as the underlying cause of the exponential rise in domestic violence and sexual assault victims in Indian Country. In that case, the U.S. Supreme Court ruled that Tribal Courts could not adjudicate non-Native perpetrators, even when the violence was committed against a Native victim within the external boundaries of a reservation. However, this case only began the research for this dissertation.

Ideas began to develop for what I called “My Little Book.” Character profiles grew melding the personalities of acquaintances and colleagues. A few pages of notes

formed the beginnings of the novella. The found interview CD, a conspiracy by white supremacists that helped explain the high percentage of non-Native assailants, and facts about Tucson's history added complexity to the story world.

Narrative theory, story structures of events or actions within specific time sequences, formed the theoretical framework for the novella. That framework provided a structure to tell or write the story. Condensing the actual time frame of the novella to one month of monsoon season in the desert landscape of Tucson expressed one type of "time." Flashbacks pulled in other places and experiences that gave glimpses of diverse cultural backgrounds. At the end of the novella, the characters all find themselves looking towards the west, but all are actually looking toward the future. Joanna makes preparation for the Enemy Way ceremony, Bonnie closes her office to travel with her husband and girls, while Kate and Mary take the first tenuous steps toward sharing the load of raising a child. The novella begins with the rising of the sun, but ends as the sun sets. However, each character now holds hope for facing tomorrow.

In conclusion, this dissertation relies on the power of story as a form of communication and connection. Although the roots and trunk of this novella grew through the combination of imagination, careful research, and creative craft, the branches of communication and connection appear only as each reader brings that element of personal experience and knowledge to the work. The act of conversation between the characters initiates or furthers the healing process for both the teller and the listener. The story world emerges as each character exposes that covered scar of trauma. As the story world gains texture, the four main characters gain complexity as well. The hope is that my little book, those stories of personal trauma, as well as the information about federal

Indian law, allows a space for healing while adding to the scholarship of American Indian Studies.

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