

Alexie, Sherman. The Lone Ranger and Tonto  
Fightfight in Heaven. New York: Harper Collins, 1993.

## EVERY LITTLE HURRICANE

Although it was winter, the nearest ocean four hundred miles away, and the Tribal Weatherman asleep because of boredom, a hurricane dropped from the sky in 1976 and fell so hard on the Spokane Indian Reservation that it knocked Victor from bed and his latest nightmare.

It was January and Victor was nine years old. He was sleeping in his bedroom in the basement of the HUD house when it happened. His mother and father were upstairs, hosting the largest New Year's Eve party in tribal history, when the winds increased and the first tree fell.

"Goddamn it," one Indian yelled at another as the argument began. "You ain't shit, you fucking apple."

The two Indians raged across the room at each other. One was tall and heavy, the other was short, muscular. High-pressure and low-pressure fronts.

The music was so loud that Victor could barely hear the voices as the two Indians escalated the argument into a fistfight. Soon there were no voices to be heard, only guttural noises that could have been curses or wood breaking. Then the music stopped so suddenly that the silence frightened Victor.

"What the fuck's going on?" Victor's father yelled, his voice coming quickly and with force. It shook the walls of the house.

"Adolph and Arnold are fighting again," Victor's mother said. Adolph and Arnold were her brothers, Victor's uncles. They always fought. Had been fighting since the very beginning.

"Well, tell them to get their goddamn asses out of my house," Victor's father yelled again, his decibel level rising to meet the tension in the house.

"They already left," Victor's mother said. "They're fighting out in the yard."

Victor heard this and ran to his window. He could see his uncles slugging each other with such force that they had to be in love. Strangers would never want to hurt each other that badly. But it was strangely quiet, like Victor was watching a television show with the volume turned all the way down. He could hear the party upstairs move to the windows, step onto the front porch to watch the battle.

During other hurricanes broadcast on the news, Victor

had seen crazy people tie themselves to trees on the beach. Those people wanted to feel the force of the hurricane firsthand, wanted it to be like an amusement ride, but the thin ropes were broken and the people were broken. Sometimes the trees themselves were pulled from the ground and both the trees and the people tied to the trees were carried away.

Standing at his window, watching his uncles grow bloody and tired, Victor pulled the strings of his pajama bottoms tighter. He squeezed his hands into fists and pressed his face tightly against the glass.

"They're going to kill each other," somebody yelled from an upstairs window. Nobody disagreed and nobody moved to change the situation. Witnesses. They were all witnesses and nothing more. For hundreds of years, Indians were witnesses to crimes of an epic scale. Victor's uncles were in the midst of a misdemeanor that would remain one even if somebody was to die. One Indian killing another did not create a special kind of storm. This little kind of hurricane was generic. It didn't even deserve a name.

Adolph soon had the best of Arnold, though, and was trying to drown him in the snow. Victor watched as his uncle held his other uncle down, saw the look of hate and love on his uncle's face and the terrified arms of his other uncle flailing uselessly.

Then it was over.

Adolph let Arnold loose, even pulled him to his feet, and they both stood, facing each other. They started to yell again, unintelligible and unintelligent. The volume grew as other voices from the party upstairs were added. Victor could almost smell the sweat and whiskey and blood.

Everybody was assessing the damage, considering options. Would the fight continue? Would it decrease in intensity until both uncles sat quietly in opposite corners, exhausted and ashamed? Could the Indian Health Service doctors fix the broken nose and sprained ankles?

But there was other pain. Victor knew that. He stood at his window and touched his own body. His legs and back hurt from a day of sledding, his head was a little sore from where he bumped into a door earlier in the week. One molar ached from cavity; his chest throbbed with absence.

Victor had seen the news footage of cities after hurricanes had passed by. Houses were flattened, their contents thrown in every direction. Memories not destroyed, but forever changed and damaged. Which is worse? Victor wanted to know if memories of his personal hurricanes would be better if he could change them. Or if he just forgot about all of it. Victor had once seen a photograph of a car that a hurricane had picked up and carried for five miles before it fell onto a house. Victor remembered everything exactly that way.

On Christmas Eve when he was five, Victor's father wept because he didn't have any money for gifts. Oh, there was a tree trimmed with ornaments, a few bulbs from the Trading Post, one string of lights, and photographs of the family with holes punched through the top, threaded with dental floss, and hung from tiny branches. But there were no gifts. Not one.

"But we've got each other," Victor's mother said, but she knew it was just dry recitation of the old Christmas movies

they watched on television. It wasn't real. Victor watched his father cry huge, gasping tears. Indian tears.

Victor imagined that his father's tears could have frozen solid in the severe reservation winters and shattered when they hit the floor. Sent millions of icy knives through the air, each specific and beautiful. Each dangerous and random.

Victor imagined that he held an empty box beneath his father's eyes and collected the tears, held that box until it was full. Victor would wrap it in Sunday comics and give it to his mother.

Just the week before, Victor had stood in the shadows of his father's doorway and watched as the man opened his wallet and shook his head. Empty. Victor watched his father put the empty wallet back in his pocket for a moment, then pull it out and open it again. Still empty. Victor watched his father repeat this ceremony again and again, as if the repetition itself could guarantee change. But it was always empty.

During all these kinds of tiny storms, Victor's mother would rise with her medicine and magic. She would pull air down from empty cupboards and make fry bread. She would shake thick blankets free from old bandanas. She would comb Victor's braids into dreams.

In those dreams, Victor and his parents would be sitting in Mother's Kitchen restaurant in Spokane, waiting out a storm. Rain and lightning. Unemployment and poverty. Commodity food. Flash floods.

"Soup," Victor's father would always say. "I want a bowl of soup."

Mother's Kitchen was always warm in those dreams.

There was always a good song on the jukebox, a song that Victor didn't really know but he knew it was good. And he knew it was a song from his parents' youth. In those dreams, all was good.

Sometimes, though, the dream became a nightmare and Mother's Kitchen was out of soup, the jukebox only played country music, and the roof leaked. Rain fell like drums into buckets and pots and pans set out to catch whatever they could. In those nightmares, Victor sat in his chair as rain fell, drop by drop, onto his head.

In those nightmares, Victor felt his stomach ache with hunger. In fact, he felt his whole interior sway, nearly buckle, then fall. Gravity. Nothing for dinner except sleep. Gale and unsteady barometer.

In other nightmares, in his everyday reality, Victor watched his father take a drink of vodka on a completely empty stomach. Victor could hear that near-poison fall, then hit, flesh and blood, nerve and vein. Maybe it was like lightning tearing an old tree into halves. Maybe it was like a wall of water, a reservation tsunami, crashing onto a small beach. Maybe it was like Hiroshima or Nagasaki. Maybe it was like all that. Maybe. But after he drank, Victor's father would breathe in deep and close his eyes, stretch, and straighten his neck and back. During those long drinks, Victor's father wasn't shaped like a question mark. He looked more like an exclamation point.

Some people liked the rain. But Victor hated it. Really hated it. The damp. Humidity. Low clouds and lies. Weathermen. When it was raining, Victor would apologize to everyone he talked to.

"Sorry about the weather," he would say.

Once, Victor's cousins made him climb a tall tree during a rainstorm. The bark was slick, nearly impossible to hold on to, but Victor kept climbing. The branches kept most of the rain off him, but there were always sudden funnels of water that broke through, startling enough to nearly make Victor lose his grip. Sudden rain like promises, like treaties. But Victor held on.

There was so much that Victor feared, so much his intense imagination created. For years, Victor feared that he was going to drown while it was raining, so that even when he thrashed through the lake and opened his mouth to scream, he would taste even more water falling from the sky. Sometimes he was sure that he would fall from the top of the slide or from a swing and a whirlpool would suddenly appear beneath him and carry him down into the earth, drown him at the core.

And of course, Victor dreamed of whiskey, vodka, tequila, those fluids swallowing him just as easily as he swallowed them. When he was five years old, an old Indian man drowned in a mud puddle at the powwow. Just passed out and fell facedown into the water collected in a tire track. Even at five, Victor understood what that meant, how it defined nearly everything. Fronts. Highs and lows. Thermals and undercurrents. Tragedy.

When the hurricane descended on the reservation in 1976, Victor was there to record it. If the video camera had been available then, Victor might have filmed it, but his memory was much more dependable.

His uncles, Arnold and Adolph, gave up the fight and

walked back into the house, into the New Year's Eve party, arms linked, forgiving each other. But the storm that had caused their momentary anger had not died. Instead, it moved from Indian to Indian at the party, giving each a specific, painful memory.

Victor's father remembered the time his own father was spit on as they waited for a bus in Spokane.

Victor's mother remembered how the Indian Health Service doctor sterilized her moments after Victor was born.

Adolph and Arnold were touched by memories of previous battles, storms that continually haunted their lives. When children grow up together in poverty, a bond is formed that is stronger than most anything. It's this same bond that causes so much pain. Adolph and Arnold reminded each other of their childhood, how they hid crackers in their shared bedroom so they would have something to eat.

"Did you hide the crackers?" Adolph asked his brother so many times that he still whispered that question in his sleep.

Other Indians at the party remembered their own pain. This pain grew, expanded. One person lost her temper when she accidentally brushed the skin of another. The forecast was not good. Indians continued to drink, harder and harder, as if anticipating. There's a fifty percent chance of torrential rain, blizzardlike conditions, seismic activity. Then there's a sixty percent chance, then seventy, eighty.

Victor was back in his bed, lying flat and still, watching the ceiling lower with each step above. The ceiling lowered with the weight of each Indian's pain, until it was just inches from Victor's nose. He wanted to scream, wanted to pretend it was just a nightmare or a game invented by his parents to help him sleep.

The voices upstairs continued to grow, take shape and fill space until Victor's room, the entire house, was consumed by the party. Until Victor crawled from his bed and went to find his parents.

"Ya-hey, little nephew," Adolph said as Victor stood alone in a corner.

"Hello, Uncle," Victor said and gave Adolph a hug, gagged at his smell. Alcohol and sweat. Cigarettes and failure.

"Where's my dad?" Victor asked.

"Over there," Adolph said and waved his arm in the general direction of the kitchen. The house was not very large, but there were so many people and so much emotion filling the spaces between people that it was like a maze for little Victor. No matter which way he turned, he could not find his father or mother.

"Where are they?" he asked his aunt Nezy.

"Who?" she asked.

"Mom and Dad," Victor said, and Nezy pointed toward the bedroom. Victor made his way through the crowd, hated his tears. He didn't hate the fear and pain that caused them. He expected that. What he hated was the way they felt against his cheeks, his chin, his skin as they made their way down his face. Victor cried until he found his parents, alone, passed out on their bed in the back bedroom.

Victor climbed up on the bed and lay down between them. His mother and father breathed deep, nearly choking alcoholic snores. They were sweating although the room was cold, and Victor thought the alcohol seeping through their skin might get him drunk, might help him sleep. He kissed his mother's neck, tasted the salt and whiskey. He kissed his father's forearm, tasted the cheap beer and smoke.

Victor closed his eyes tightly. He said his prayers just in case his parents had been wrong about God all those years. He listened for hours to every little hurricane spun from the larger hurricane that battered the reservation.

During that night, his aunt Nezzzy broke her arm when an unidentified Indian woman pushed her down the stairs. Eugene Boyd broke a door playing indoor basketball. Lester Falls Apart passed out on top of the stove and somebody turned the burners on high. James Many Horses sat in the corner and told so many bad jokes that three or four Indians threw him out the door into the snow.

"How do you get one hundred Indians to yell *Oh, shit?*?" James Many Horses asked as he sat in a drift on the front lawn.

"Say *Bingo*," James Many Horses answered himself when nobody from the party would.

James didn't spend very much time alone in the snow. Soon Seymour and Lester were there, too. Seymour was thrown out because he kept flirting with all the women. Lester was there to cool off his burns. Soon everybody from the party was out on the lawn, dancing in the snow, fucking in the snow, fighting in the snow.

Victor lay between his parents, his alcoholic and dreamless parents, his mother and father. Victor licked his index finger and raised it into the air to test the wind. Velocity. Direction. Sleep approaching. The people outside seemed so far away, so strange and imaginary. There was a downshift of emotion, tension seemed to wane. Victor put one hand on his mother's stomach and placed the other on his father's. There was enough hunger in both, enough movement, enough geography and his-

tory, enough of everything to destroy the reservation and leave only random debris and broken furniture.

But it was over. Victor closed his eyes, fell asleep. It was over. The hurricane that fell out of the sky in 1976 left before sunrise, and all the Indians, the eternal survivors, gathered to count their losses.

## A DRUG CALLED TRADITION

“Goddamn it, Thomas,” Junior yelled. “How come your fridge is always fucking empty?”

Thomas walked over to the refrigerator, saw it was empty, and then sat down inside.

“There,” Thomas said. “It ain’t empty no more.”

Everybody in the kitchen laughed their asses off. It was the second-largest party in reservation history and Thomas Builds-the-Fire was the host. He was the host because he was the one buying all the beer. And he was buying all the beer because he had just got a ton of money from Washington Water Power.

And he just got a ton of money from Washington Water Power because they had to pay for the lease to have ten power poles running across some land that Thomas had inherited.

When Indians make lots of money from corporations that way, we can all hear our ancestors laughing in the trees. But we never can tell whether they’re laughing at the Indians or the whites. I think they’re laughing at pretty much everybody.

“Hey, Victor,” Junior said. “I hear you got some magic mushrooms.”

“No way,” I said. “Just Green Giant mushrooms. I’m making salad later.”

But I did have this brand new drug and had planned on inviting Junior along. Maybe a couple Indian princesses, too. But only if they were full-blood. Well, maybe if they were at least half-Spokane.

“Listen,” I whispered to Junior to keep it secret. “I’ve got some good stuff, a new drug, but just enough for me and you and maybe a couple others. Keep it under your warbonnet.”

“Cool,” Junior said. “I’ve got my new car outside. Let’s go.”

We ditched the party, decided to save the new drug for ourselves, and jumped into Junior’s Camaro. The engine was completely shot but the exterior was good. You see, the car looked mean. Mostly we just parked it in front of the Trading Post and tried to look like horsepowered warriors. Driving it was a whole other matter, though. It belched and farted its way down the road like an old man. That definitely wasn’t cool.

“Where do you want to go?” Junior asked.

“Benjamin Lake,” I said, and we took off in a cloud of oil and exhaust. We drove down the road a little toward Benjamin



Lake when we saw Thomas Builds-the-Fire standing by the side of the road. Junior stopped the car and I leaned out the window.

"Hey, Thomas," I asked. "Shouldn't you be at your own party?"

"You guys know it ain't my party anyway," Thomas said. "I just paid for it."

We laughed. I looked at Junior and he nodded his head.

"Hey," I said. "Jump in with us. We're going out to Benjamin Lake to do this new drug I got. It'll be very fucking Indian. Spiritual shit, you know?"

Thomas climbed in back and was just about ready to tell another one of his goddamn stories when I stopped him.

"Now, listen," I said. "You can only come with us if you don't tell any of your stories until after you've taken the drug."

Thomas thought that over awhile. He nodded his head in the affirmative and we drove on. He looked so happy to be spending the time with us that I gave him the new drug.

"Eat up, Thomas," I said. "The party's on me now."

Thomas downed it and smiled.

"Tell us what you see, Mr. Builds-the-Fire," Junior said.

Thomas looked around the car. Hell, he looked around our world and then poked his head through some hole in the wall into another world. A better world.

"Victor," Thomas said. "I can see you. God, you're beautiful. You've got braids and you're stealing a horse. Wait, no. It's not a horse. It's a cow."

Junior almost wrecked because he laughed so hard.

"Why the fuck would I be stealing a cow?" I asked.

"I'm just giving you shit," Thomas said. "No, really, you're stealing a horse and you're riding by moonlight. Van

Gogh should've painted this one, Victor. Van Gogh should've painted you."

*It was a cold, cold night.* I had crawled through the brush for hours, moved by inches so the Others would not hear me. I wanted one of their ponies. I needed one of their ponies. I needed to be a hero and earn my name.

I crawl close enough to their camp to hear voices, to hear an old man sucking the last bit of meat off a bone. I can see the pony I want. He is black, twenty hands high. I can feel him shiver because he knows I have come for him in the middle of this cold night.

Crawling more quickly now, I make my way to the corral, right between the legs of a young boy asleep on his feet. He was supposed to keep watch for men like me. I barely touch his bare leg and he swipes at it, thinking it is a mosquito. If I stood and kissed the young boy full on the mouth, he would only think he was dreaming of the girl who smiled at him earlier in the day.

When I finally come close to the beautiful black pony, I stand up straight and touch his nose, his mane.

*I have come for you,* I tell the horse, and he moves against me, knows it is true. I mount him and ride silently through the camp, right in front of a blind man who smells us pass by and thinks we are just a pleasant memory. When he finds out the next day who we really were, he will remain haunted and crowded the rest of his life.

I am riding that pony across the open plain, in moonlight that makes everything a shadow.

*What's your name?* I ask the horse, and he rears back on



his hind legs. He pulls air deep into his lungs and rises above the ground.

*Flight*, he tells me, *my name is Flight*.

"That's what I see," Thomas said. "I see you on that horse."

Junior looked at Thomas in the rearview mirror, looked at me, looked at the road in front of him.

"Victor," Junior said. "Give me some of that stuff."

"But you're driving," I said.

"That'll make it even better," he said, and I had to agree with him.

"Tell us what you see," Thomas said and leaned forward.

"Nothing yet," Junior said.

"Am I still on that horse?" I asked Thomas.

"Oh, yeah."

We came up on the turnoff to Benjamin Lake, and Junior made it into a screaming corner. Just another Indian boy engaged in some rough play.

"Oh, shit," Junior said. "I can see Thomas dancing."

"I don't dance," Thomas said.

"You're dancing and you ain't wearing nothing. You're dancing naked around a fire."

"No, I'm not."

"Shit, you're not. I can see you, you're tall and dark and fucking huge, cousin."

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*They're all gone, my tribe is gone.* Those blankets they gave us, infected with smallpox, have killed us. I'm the last, the very last, and I'm sick, too. So very sick. Hot. My fever burning so hot.

I have to take off my clothes, feel the cold air, splash the water across my bare skin. And dance. I'll dance a Ghost Dance. I'll bring them back. Can you hear the drums? I can hear them, and it's my grandfather and my grandmother singing. Can you hear them?

I dance one step and my sister rises from the ash. I dance another and a buffalo crashes down from the sky onto a log cabin in Nebraska. With every step, an Indian rises. With every other step, a buffalo falls.

I'm growing, too. My blisters heal, my muscles stretch, expand. My tribe dances behind me. At first they are no bigger than children. Then they begin to grow, larger than me, larger than the trees around us. The buffalo come to join us and their hooves shake the earth, knock all the white people from their beds, send their plates crashing to the floor.

We dance in circles growing larger and larger until we are standing on the shore, watching all the ships returning to Europe. All the white hands are waving good-bye and we continue to dance, dance until the ships fall off the horizon, dance until we are so tall and strong that the sun is nearly jealous. *We dance that way.*

"Junior," I yelled. "Slow down, slow down."

Junior had the car spinning in circles, doing donuts across empty fields, coming too close to fences and lonely trees.

"Thomas," Junior yelled. "You're dancing, dancing hard."

I leaned over and slammed on the brakes. Junior jumped out of the car and ran across the field. I turned the car off and followed him. We'd gotten about a mile down the road toward Benjamin Lake when Thomas came driving by.

"Stop the car," I yelled. and Thomas did just that.

"Where were you going?" I asked him.

"I was chasing you and your horse, cousin."

"Jesus, this shit is powerful," I said and swallowed some. Instantly I saw and heard Junior singing. He stood on a stage in a ribbon shirt and blue jeans. Singing. With a guitar.

*Indians make the best cowboys.* I can tell you that. I've been singing at the Plantation since I was ten years old and have always drawn big crowds. All the white folks come to hear my songs, my little pieces of Indian wisdom, although they have to sit in the back of the theater because all the Indians get the best tickets for my shows. It's not racism. The Indians just camp out all night to buy tickets. Even the President of the United States, Mr. Edgar Crazy Horse himself, came to hear me once. I played a song I wrote for his great-grandfather, the famous Lakota warrior who helped us win the war against the whites:

*Crazy Horse, what have you done?*

*Crazy Horse, what have you done?*

*It took four hundred years*

*and four hundred thousand guns*

*but the Indians finally won.*

*Ya-hey, the Indians finally won.*

*Crazy Horse, are you still singing?*

*Crazy Horse, are you still singing?*

*I honor your old songs*

*and all they keep on bringing*

*because the Indians keep winning.*

*Ya-hey, the Indians keep winning.*

Believe me, I'm the best guitar player who ever lived. I can make my guitar sound like a drum. More than that, I can make any drum sound like a guitar. I can take a single hair from the braids of an Indian woman and make it sound like a promise come true. *Like a thousand promises come true.*

"Junior," I asked. "Where'd you learn to sing?"

"I don't know how to sing," he said.

We made our way down the road to Benjamin Lake and stood by the water. Thomas sat on the dock with his feet in the water and laughed softly. Junior sat on the hood of his car, and I danced around them both.

After a little bit, I tired out and sat on the hood of the car with Junior. The drug was beginning to wear off. All I could see in my vision of Junior was his guitar. Junior pulled out a can of warm Diet Pepsi and we passed it back and forth and watched Thomas talking to himself.

"He's telling himself stories," Junior said.

"Well," I said. "Ain't nobody else going to listen."

"Why's he like that?" Junior asked. "Why's he always talking about strange shit? Hell, he don't even need drugs."

"Some people say he got dropped on his head when he was little. Some of the old people think he's magic."

"What do you think?"

"I think he got dropped on his head and I think he's magic."

We laughed, and Thomas looked up from the water, from his stories, and smiled at us.

"Hey," he said. "You two want to hear a story?"

Junior and I looked at each other, looked back at Thomas, and decided that it would be all right. Thomas closed his eyes and told his story.

*It is now.* Three Indian boys are drinking Diet Pepsi and talking out by Benjamin Lake. They are wearing only loincloths and braids. Although it is the twentieth century and planes are passing overhead, the Indian boys have decided to be real Indians tonight.

They all want to have their vision, to receive their true names, their adult names. That is the problem with Indians these days. They have the same names all their lives. Indians wear their names like a pair of bad shoes.

So they decided to build a fire and breathe in that sweet smoke. They have not eaten for days so they know their visions should arrive soon. Maybe they'll see it in the flames or in the wood. Maybe the smoke will talk in Spokane or English. Maybe the cinders and ash will rise up.

The boys sit by the fire and breathe, their visions arrive. They are all carried away to the past, to the moment before any of them took their first drink of alcohol.

The boy Thomas throws the beer he is offered into the garbage. The boy Junior throws his whiskey through a window. The boy Victor spills his vodka down the drain.

Then the boys sing. They sing and dance and drum. They steal horses. I can see them. *They steal horses.*

"You don't really believe that shit?" I asked Thomas.

"Don't need to believe anything. It just is."

Thomas stood up and walked away. He wouldn't even try to tell us any stories again for a few years. We had never been very good to him, even as boys, but he had always been kind to us. When he stopped even looking at me, I was hurt. How do you explain that?

Before he left for good, though, he turned back to Junior and me and yelled at us. I couldn't really understand what he was saying, but Junior swore he told us not to slow dance with our skeletons.

"What the hell does that mean?" I asked.

"I don't know," Junior said.

*There are things you should learn.* Your past is a skeleton walking one step behind you, and your future is a skeleton walking one step in front of you. Maybe you don't wear a watch, but your skeletons do, and they always know what time it is. Now, these skeletons are made of memories, dreams, and voices.

And they can trap you in the in-between, between touching and becoming. But they're not necessarily evil, unless you let them be.

What you have to do is keep moving, keep walking, in step with your skeletons. They ain't ever going to leave you, so you don't have to worry about that. Your past ain't going to fall behind, and your future won't get too far ahead. Sometimes, though, your skeletons will talk to you, tell you to sit down and take a rest, breathe a little. Maybe they'll make you promises, tell you all the things you want to hear.

Sometimes your skeletons will dress up as beautiful Indian women and ask you to slow dance. Sometimes your skeletons will dress up as your best friend and offer you a drink, one more for the road. Sometimes your skeletons will look exactly like your parents and offer you gifts.

But, no matter what they do, keep walking, keep moving. And don't wear a watch. Hell, Indians never need to wear a watch because your skeletons will always remind you about the time. See, it is always now. That's what Indian time is. The past, the future, all of it is wrapped up in the now. That's how it is. *We are trapped in the now.*

Junior and I sat out by Benjamin Lake until dawn. We heard voices now and again, saw lights in the trees. After I saw my grandmother walking across the water toward me, I threw away the rest of my new drug and hid in the backseat of Junior's car.

Later that day we were parked in front of the Trading Post, gossiping and laughing, talking stories when Big Mom

walked up to the car. Big Mom was the spiritual leader of the Spokane Tribe. She had so much good medicine I think she may have been the one who created the earth.

"I know what you saw," Big Mom said.

"We didn't see nothing," I said, but we all knew that I was lying.

Big Mom smiled at me, shook her head a little, and handed me a little drum. It looked like it was about a hundred years old, maybe older. It was so small it could fit in the palm of my hand.

"You keep that," she said. "Just in case."

"Just in case of what?" I asked.

"That's my pager. Just give it a tap and I'll be right over," she said and laughed as she walked away.

Now, I'll tell you that I haven't used the thing. In fact, Big Mom died a couple years back and I'm not sure she'd come even if the thing did work. But I keep it really close to me, like Big Mom said, just in case. I guess you could call it the only religion I have, one drum that can fit in my hand, but I think if I played it a little, it might fill up the whole world.