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From the Reservation to the Smithsonian via Alcatraz

GEORGE P. HORSE CAPTURE

I found myself once again leaving my beloved Indian reservation that blustery March morning, but an unspoken realization that my circle would soon be complete carried me forward. After saying the proper and sometimes emotional farewells to my family and the mountains, I climbed into the van and headed eastward across the rolling prairie to New York City.

Seeking a positive way in which to occupy the many traveling hours ahead, the historian in me began to record my perceptions and thoughts and to describe the beauty of our spectacular country. After a few hundred miles and many hours of constructing this journal, a theme began to emerge.

As various sites and geological features passed the van's windows, I noted and commented on them and fitted them into the grand scheme of things. For example, down the road are two rocks that have been moved to their present site from what is called the Cree (Indian) Crossing of the Milk River. They are shaped like kneeling buffalo and are part of a larger distant group. The sign by the road says "Sleeping Buffalo Rock." They are now considered sacred, and Indian people stop there and pray.

Further on are the two Porcupine Creek names that figured in determining the boundaries of the Fort Peck Indian Reservation long ago. Later, I passed the Garrison Dam, which flooded Indian land on the Fort Berthold Indian Reservation. Later still, I passed

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the Red River of the north, as well as the Sauk Centre, the Missouri River, Illinois, and so on; these names and places are filled with past and present Indian history. It became obvious that Indian people have been here a long time and that we have left our proud imprint upon the face of this continent. As I considered these things, it occurred to me that the eyes and mind that were observing these things now were not always so filled with Indian history and the pride such things evoke. Long ago, I was a markedly different person.

I have told this story before, but it is worth remembering, because it “grounds” me and keeps me stable in this chaotic world. My brothers and I were born here long ago when it was not popular to be Indian. In fact, it was quite painful. We were born on the Fort Belknap Reservation in northern Montana. For many reasons, both traditional and contemporary, my earliest thoughts are of my grandmother, Clementine, whose Indian name is Singing Rock and who was our parent in the early days. We lived on the northern edge of the reservation, right at the turn of the Milk River—where the thickets and mosquitoes were almost overpowering—in a place called Little Chicago because of the high death rate that occurred there.

It was a chaotic time for our people. Governmental and religious forces had been at work on our traditions for almost seventy-five years and had damaged them very badly, many critically. Our grandparents, who had experienced bitter discrimination by whites all of their lives, took steps to protect us from such pain by not teaching us our tribal traditions. We existed from day to day in our little world, with our grandmother keeping us away from town and white people as long as she could; in reality, they were only four miles away.

After all these years, I look back at those times with warmth and humor. Although a large interstate highway passed not too far from our place, it did not exist to us; it occupied another dimension. But whenever an automobile came down the gravel road at our cutoff, we stopped our play to stare. It always seemed like an outside threat of some sort. If the car slowed down and turned into our dirt road, a hundred yards down the gravel road from the highway, we kids scattered and hid in the high weeds, peering out like little frightened deer. Although the days were filled with hunger, they are but gentle memories now, and the great sadness caused by the outsiders has almost faded away. These early days with my brothers, cousins, and other relatives, shepherded by my

grandmother, are very precious to me. As we played in the bright sunshine, we all thought we were equal and free. We ran around barefoot, little knowing that we were setting the fashion trends of the future: We wore big, faded overalls, sometimes torn but never dirty; our hair was long and shaggy, but a quick swim in the nearby river would fix that.

One fall morning, our world changed. This was the first day of school. Slicked up as best we could, we marched onto the yellow school bus and headed to the nearby off-reservation school a few miles away. Although there were a lot of other Indian students there, we soon learned that we were in a totally different world. It was no longer ours, and we were no longer equal. We were in the white world, where we were viewed as subhuman. Our eagerness, our anticipation, our curiosity, and our naïveté quickly vanished. Our clothes revealed that we were poor; on Christmas we had no money with which to exchange gifts. We could not bring handkerchiefs every day, as some classes required. The school curriculum was barren of Indian people except as part of some distant history: Squanto (whoever he was) and Pocahontas (some fancy Indian woman to the east who married a white man). The non-Indian students and their parents taunted us constantly. Soon we began to withdraw into ourselves, drying up inside, enduring each day by waiting for that final bell when we could go home again. It was a painful, souring experience.

After a few years of such treatment in school, our future course seemed set. There was little at home and nothing in school. As we grew older, each of us developed ways of coping with this stifling situation. Some withdrew into themselves, some opted for geographical isolation and seldom left the reservation, others became belligerent toward the forces that had inflicted this damage on us, and still others tried to assimilate into the outside world. Our parents chose the latter course. My father, Joseph, was always a bright man, seeing further than many others could. So when World War II happened, he joined as a volunteer, along with thousands of other Indian people, to protect our country as Indian warriors have done since the beginning.

While honorably serving in faraway countries, my father's generation of Indian people saw a whole new world. In many places, there was no discrimination, and everybody had plenty; most even had inside toilets. When my father was honorably discharged, he came home and took us off the reservation to live in the town, where he could work and make money for our future.

We had a good life for many years; a few photographs have survived the years, attesting to this fact. But slowly my father became depressed, perhaps because he was in the city, away from home. Eventually, alcohol controlled his life and our family disintegrated. We children were rescued by our grandmother, who, in a brave, desperate action, ventured forth from the protected reservation, across Montana, to bring us home to sanctuary. Over the years, we went back and forth: from city to reservation, grandmother to parent or parents, always on the edge.

As we got older, we stayed with our mother and stepfather in the city and tried to fit in there, but it never did work. Again, racism followed us; we were teased about our long hair and our shyness. Although we had one or two close friends, we never really fit in. The situation only became more aggravated in high school. I was living in the white world, but I was never accepted when everybody else took part in school activities or chased girls. A barrier always kept me out and made me feel bad and ashamed.

Soon after high school, I fled Montana and joined the U.S. Navy, where personal accomplishments were more important than race. For the next four years, in the closed fraternity of the military, I began to achieve some success. Rising through the ranks, I achieved the highest level an enlisted man could attain during that four-year time span. Upon my honorable discharge, I settled in the San Francisco Bay Area. My string of good luck continued. I landed a good job at the San Francisco naval shipyard, advancing from welder's helper to metals inspector and then to state steel inspector for California. My second wife and I were flying pretty high by then. We had our two boys, and we lived in a nice apartment (with an indoor toilet), owned a used but reliable automobile, a clear and sharp television, decent clothes, and a fourteen-foot motorboat. Together we enjoyed movies and picnics, went to zoos and an occasional powwow, and visited my parents.

Every summer, I would try to return to my reservation to see my grandma. She was getting old now, and her blindness caused her much pain. I especially remember one visit. She was sitting in a darkened room on the edge of her bed, among all her bundles and things. As soon as I said, "Hello, Gram," she greeted me, and I sat down beside her. We hugged and sat in silence for a while, as Indians often do. Then she leaned over, reached under the bed, and pulled out a big package, which enclosed a beautiful star quilt, saying "I've been saving this for you." I guess she gave it to

me because I was her oldest grandchild. Later I wondered, How long was that package there? She was quite a lady.

Our lives seemed to level out. I wasn't really happy, nor was I sad. We lived on a long, even plateau of "success," but it was all empty and lifeless. There was no joy of victory. I had climbed the white mountain, looked over its summit, and found nothing. We might have stayed there forever and eventually bought a house, but something came up that changed my life and the Indian world.

On the morning of 20 November 1969, fourteen Indian students, braving the choppy waters of San Francisco Bay in their rickety craft, landed on the rocky shores of the island prison called Alcatraz. "The takeover," as the action was later identified, made national headlines. It caught us all unawares; previous to this time, we had struggled quietly to survive as the government and state forces continued to take over Indian land or attempt to negate and abrogate our treaties. We had only just fended off termination, and suddenly the headlines screamed "Takeover." Wow! I remember reading about it at the breakfast table as I prepared to depart for work. I sat there stunned, unable to believe that we could get together and do such a thing—but here it was. The newspapers provided daily accounts of activities and statements by Indian people concerning the need for this action, and I remember one that said, "It's cold and bitter out here, there's no fresh water, no electricity, no sanitary facilities and everybody is unemployed, but we're not lonesome. This island reminds us of our reservations." So, on a daily basis, we kept a close account of what was happening, but at a distance.

It suddenly occurred to me that this was a key point in Indian history. No matter what happened, the Indian world would never be the same after this. Indian people were declaring their independence, challenging the status quo, taking chances, being committed, being warriors; none of these things is new to our race, but they have been absent of late, or forgotten. As each day passed, I became closer and closer to the situation, and I began to feel the superficiality of my present life. I knew it would be better for my children in the long run if I at least explored this "Indian" alternative. So, one weekend, I went down to the bay, where the boats from the island landed, parked my car, and walked over to the wharf. Because of my dark hair and skin, I was immediately welcomed and accepted. I jumped down onto the wharf and began to help the others move boxes of supplies and load the small

island-bound boat. Riding to the island, the refreshing spray of the bay splashing in my face, I felt, for the first time in decades, as if I belonged, as if I were home. There was no ridicule among us tribal people, only laughter. I knew I would never be the same again.

After landing, we unloaded the boat and hauled the boxes across a wooden wharf, up some stone steps, and into the guard house, or whatever it was called, near the entrance. When I took time to look around, I saw a sign on the big sterile wall that read, "This land is my land." My heart soared.

I will always remember my first night on the island. I arrived with my damp bedroll and no pillow. I did not know anyone, but everybody else seemed to be on their own, too, milling here, laughing there, going out to the fire in the exercise yard, or just walking around. I glanced up at the giant guard tower and wondered what it had witnessed over the years. Inside, my footsteps echoed around the main cellblock of the prison, attesting to its emptiness. I made my way through the labyrinth to a smaller section of enclosed cells that looked secure and secluded; there I made my bed. Listening to the clamor of voices and laughter in the night, I finally fell asleep. Later, I realized I had slept on death row.

Sunday night, I took the last boat back to the mainland, returning, at least physically, to my other life. But the next weekend, I took my sons and went back to Alcatraz. Although they were small, they helped as best they could with the boxes of supplies. They fit in well, running hither and yon, like all the other Indian children. Although they did not understand the full impact of the occupation, they enjoyed themselves. We brought along a small, cheap camera and two penlights, and, when the work was done, we began to explore the prison proper. The stairs descending into the dark dungeon were quite scary, because we knew that the basement had been the scene of evil and painful events. My sons stood at a designated spot, holding the light between them in the total darkness. Carrying the camera, I paced a distance away and took their picture. The resulting photo shows them with wide, apprehensive eyes, but unafraid. Later that day, we volunteered to cut wood—just as we did back on the reservation—bringing it into the yard and stacking it up where a communal fire was kept burning for cooking and other purposes.

One evening, after the chores were done, I stood looking at San Francisco. Nothing grandiose was happening; the stars were

making their appearance gently alongside the flickering lights of the distant city. While I was enjoying the view, a young Indian came up from the wharf. He had a bedroll on his back and was peering in all directions, filled with bewilderment and wonder. Knowing how disorienting the first visit was, I welcomed him and asked him how he liked his island. He replied that he couldn't believe it. He was a Navajo and had heard that Indian people had taken over this island for all the tribes, but he just could not believe it. He explained that he had taken a long weekend off his job to hitchhike across the Southwest, halfway up California and across this bay, just to see if it was true. He looked around and said proudly, "It is true." He had to leave early the next morning in order to go back to work on Monday, but he had had to come out and see for himself. I'll always remember him.

On subsequent days, while helping with the boat, I saw a new manifestation that would eventually grow to gigantic and menacing proportions. As the dark-skinned, identifiably Indian people moved supplies for the island, white people would come up and ask if they could help, and we would gently reply, "No, thank you. This is an Indian thing, and we really couldn't have non-Indians participate at this level." But then they would suddenly declare their Indianness, stating that they were Cherokee or Lumbee or something else, even tribes we had never heard of before. We would all sneak glances at each other, silently thinking, "Oh, sure." Often they would furnish documents to us to prove that they were enrolled somewhere in Indian Country as tribal members. They seemed to be waiting eagerly for an opportunity to become affiliated with some Indian action. Today, this category has grown to a point where pretenders don't even have documents; they say they prefer not to be involved in the enrollment system, but they still claim Indianness. Of course, we all know about "wannabes." They have no identity of their own, so they conjure up a fantasy that they are Indian. Eventually, they believe it themselves. Some even move to Indian Country and marry Indian men or women. I pity them, for they are lost, but I also resent them, because they replace real Indian people who desperately need the jobs and benefits these impostors may take. I wonder, too, where they were twenty or thirty years ago, when we were in deep trouble and needed help. I'm sure that, when the interest in Indians swings the other way, when being Indian is viewed unfavorably again, they will desert us and go back to being French, Armenian, or Turkish, anything but Indian.

For historic reasons, media interest focused on Alcatraz during the first Thanksgiving after the Indian takeover. When we went to the wharf that day, we noticed much activity: Boats laden with photography equipment were heading for the island; the camera crews came from around the world—Italy, England, and elsewhere. The Indian leaders apparently thought this exposure was good, and they welcomed everyone. A major restaurant in San Francisco—I believe it was Giovanni’s—donated forty or fifty cooked turkeys; they were still warm when we off-loaded them, with all the trimmings. Apparently, Robert Vaughn, a popular TV hero of the time, rented a barge, filled it with fresh water, and had it towed to the island for our use. I have always appreciated what these people did, because they made that day special.

We had our “first Thanksgiving” dinner in the exercise yard. Because of the media, we saw Indians there whom we had not seen before. There were “chiefs” bedecked in their finery who went back to the Mark Hopkins Hotel to sleep at night, but that’s okay. It was a good time, and word got out to the world that the Indians were alive and well. The media attention had an effect on all of us; I know it affected me. I began to understand that I was not a white man, and then, with deeper understanding, I realized that I did not want to be one; I only wanted a fair shake. As an Indian person, I was visibly different from white people, but, in the Indian world, I was fully accepted and welcomed. And I learned that Indian people cannot operate individually; we have to come together as a group, because only then, through unity and cooperation, can we attain political and social strength. I learned all of this and more on the island.

The movement called for 110 percent from everyone, and that was impossible to give over a long period of time. After a year, the spokesmen moved on, having turned down several offers from the government to build an educational or cultural institution on the island. With the quality of leadership diminished, the movement fizzled out. But, like a nova, its force and brilliance had exploded and reshaped the psyche of the Indian world, and the force generated is still being felt today. Our real strength now lies not in the San Francisco Bay Area but in the hundreds of reservations that dot our country from coast to coast.

As for me, my leave expired eventually, and I had to return to work. Sadness filled me when I saw the movement diminish on the island, but I knew what had taken place and what that meant for me. My non-Indian wife and I discussed my feelings and our

future, and we agreed on a bold, new direction. I quit my job and enrolled in junior college full time to learn skills that would be helpful to Indian communities.

Going from the youngest steel inspector to the oldest student in one fell swoop was a bit of a shock for me, but I found that I could think and write along with the best of them. With assistance in the form of grants, I was able to transfer to the University of California at Berkeley, one of the most respected academic institutions in the country.

UC Berkeley was a whole new world, filled with mental riches I had never known before. It opened a thousand intriguing doors. The Indian students gathered daily at the Indian Studies Department, part of ethnic studies, and all of us took on this institution. We developed our own classes on Indian singing and art, and we volunteered at the local friendship house as tutors and summer camp counselors. It was a dynamic, enriching life.

On campus, all the classes we took were Indian-oriented in some way. For example, if we took an anthropology course, it would have to focus on Indians in North America; or if we took archaeology, it would have to have something to do with North America. We took linguistics to learn about the languages of American Indians. One of the most interesting courses I took was bibliography. In order to make it meaningful to me, I focused on my tribe, commonly called the Gros Ventres of Montana, even though our own tribal name is A'Ani, which means "White Clay People." I spent the next quarter researching all of the newly located works in the prescribed manner. In the process, I learned all sorts of things unknown to me before. I had grown up in an historic and cultural vacuum, because my reservation had no libraries, no lecture halls, one Catholic school, and no cultural studies of any sort. Here on campus, I found "mind food" beyond my wildest dreams. In my research about my tribe, I found relevant monographs, printed long ago and forgotten in an archive. Photographs, secured in their wooden drawers, came to light at last. Together, all this information gave me a view and a knowledge previously impossible to obtain.

My research attested to the fact that, beyond doubt, we were a great tribe. We even burned three forts; few Indian tribes can claim that fame. Our area extended from mid-Saskatchewan down to New Mexico. We were well known and very much feared by other tribes and non-Indians alike. Among the photographic works of Edward S. Curtis, I found my great-grandfather, Horse

Capture, whom I had never heard of before. He was a great leader and a member of the Frozen Clan, the clan of chiefs. He conducted the last A'Ani Sun Dance in the late 1800s and was the last Keeper of the Sacred Flat Pipe, the holiest item in our world. There were many other great leaders among our tribe—our George Washingtons and our Thomas Jeffersons. With each discovery, I made a xerox copy of the printed material for myself and sent one to the reservation.

My search soon extended beyond the written word to photographs, then to audio, then to ethnographic art. In Indiana, I found songs recorded long ago to preserve the sounds of our early people. I located art pieces as far away as Germany. Piece by piece, our history took form for me. And what started as a simple college course began to take over my life. I eventually received a small tribal research grant from the Rockefeller Foundation that allowed me to visit the sites of our history in Wyoming, Montana, and Saskatchewan. So, for the first time in at least 150 years, a tribal member visited Pierre's Hole in Wyoming, where we had early encounters with white fur trappers. In Canada, at the South Branch House, Pine Island, and Chesterfield House, I found the locations of the forts we burned.

The search was thrilling. Each new success added to my confidence and abilities, making the next step easier. Eventually, I developed enough confidence that I stopped caring what people thought of me. I knew that I had accomplished respectable work and that my activities were helpful to American Indian people—to my tribe in particular—and perhaps allowed others to understand us better. As for the few ignorant non-Indians, I really did not care about them. As I grow older, this view becomes more firm.

After I finished my B.A. degree, my wife and I decided to move back to Montana, hoping to work on the reservation. We packed a U-haul and headed for Indian Country. In Dillon, the first Montana town we entered, we stopped at the local A&W drive-in for something to eat. A little white girl immediately began staring at me and my wife, making me uneasy because I know Montana contains many racists. Being somewhat bold, she eventually came up to us and, with a sneer, asked my wife, "Are you married to him?" Inwardly I groaned, "Oh, no. It's not happening already." After my wife answered affirmatively, the little girl looked at me and then at my wife and, with disbelief, said, "But, he's so . . . so . . . short!" I burst out laughing, because my wife was at least two

inches taller than I. That incident taught me a very good lesson: Don't prejudge.

My life was truly changing, and I no longer wanted much. What other people thought of me had ceased to matter. I just wanted to learn more, produce more, and write more. I hoped that my work might make life easier somehow for those Indian children who would follow the direction I took. This became my goal in life.

Although a relevant job on our reservation never materialized, I eventually found employment as a curriculum researcher at the College of Great Falls. We produced, among other things, a television program about the culture and traditions of Montana Indians, utilizing people from all the tribes of Montana. We knew it was a success when the local churches began to change their mass schedule on Sundays to avoid competing with our program.

It was quite an exciting life back in old Montana. I was lobbying for programs to make teachers more sensitive toward their Indian students; writing to congressmen about Indian affairs; creating Indian curricula; and producing Indian-related workshops. I located a tribal dictionary compiled by a Jesuit long ago, and, with the assistance of the Montana Committee for the Humanities, my colleagues and I assembled a group of linguists who had been studying the A'Ani language and asked them to meet with all of our living speakers on the reservation, in the town of Hays. Only a dozen native speakers were left, all over sixty years old. After seeing these elders so happy, sharing the language once again, I knew we had to do more to keep our language from dying. As a result of that gathering—with my encouragement and assistance—one of the linguists, Dr. Allen Taylor from Colorado, produced a massive two-volume dictionary this past year. Although our native language may never be spoken in the household as it was at one time, at least now it will not be totally lost.

Periodically, my anger still flairs when I realize that many bad situations of the earlier days really have not changed. We are still being exploited. First, our lands were taken, then most of our religion, most of our culture; now some non-Indians are trying to take whatever remains, whatever has survived. For example, a growing number of non-Indians make money from publishing previously recorded Indian materials, and the tribes do not benefit in any way. Worse still are the "wannabe's" who find that Indian-related writings sell, so they become "scholars." Since many white people trust other whites more than they do Indian people, white scholars easily become authorities on the subject of

Indians. No one thinks to consult the living tribes. These pretend-ers could really help Indian people, but money leads them astray.

A growing awareness convinced me that I should try to publish some of our tribal materials; it seems to me that it is usually the larger tribes that have books published about them. My first move was to arrange for publication of some WPA materials entitled *The Seven Visions of Bull Lodge*. The story of one of the great warriors of our tribe, this book is still used in some schools today. Developing a concept into something I could hold in my hands, seeing the book actually used in the schools, was a very satisfying accomplishment.

Over the years, my reputation grew and my luck continued. I became well read in the Indian world and was able to accomplish more. My list of publications expanded. I taught Indian studies here and there, began to lecture around the country. In 1979, I was asked to be on the advisory board of the Buffalo Bill Historical Center, which was putting together a new Plains Indian Museum. Several Indians from various reservations came together there to offer advice and counsel. One of the suggestions we made that we deemed extremely important was to hire an Indian curator. The BBHC made a great national effort to find one, but these animals were extremely rare. We were never really satisfied, so one day the museum administrators offered me the position, and I accepted. I was the first Indian museum curator in the country on hard money.

We tried to make the Plains Indian Museum the best in the world. It soon had its own publishing fund, its own advisory board, its own powwow ground, its own annual seminar, its own sacred room, its own open storage, and just about everything that was unknown elsewhere at that time. I met some great people and cranked out a lot of Indian exhibitions and publications on many subjects.

In 1990, after recovering from a heart attack, I began to think that I was not immortal. I wanted to devote whatever time I had left to something very special. We decided, my new wife and I, that I should resign and we should move back to the reservation, where we could live among my tribe, acquaint our children with my people and their ways, and, if we were lucky, perhaps establish a tribal museum.

We moved in January. Arriving at the house we had rented, we found that every drop of water in the place was frozen solid. We survived by hauling water in buckets for the basic necessities. My

oldest son laughingly observed, "Dad is really making great advancements in this world. Before he left forty-five years ago, he was hauling water to the house for the basic necessities, and today he is still hauling water to his house for basic necessities." Eventually, spring came; around July, the pipes thawed, and life was good. For the first time, I did not have to "punch a clock." I could fairly well do what I wanted, but we still had to make a living. Reservation life was both an exhilarating and a disappointing experience. My children got reacquainted with their relatives and made new friends; now they will always be anchored there.

With my wife's private conservation work and my lecturing and writing, we made a fair living, or at least we survived from check to check. But it was good: big, clean. About two years later, I had another heart attack that required surgery; that gave me a total of eight bypasses. Heart attacks are not unexpected for me. My grandfather died at fifty-one from heart problems and my father at forty-nine. So, at fifty-six, I am in the gravy part of my life. Such episodes cause one to be more appreciative of sunsets and spring flowers and the prairie wind and time, but I don't worry about it constantly; there are new pills, new regimens, and I'm not the only Indian to have experienced heart problems aggravated by diabetes and who knows what else.

For several years, I have been associated with the National Museum of the American Indian, having always believed in the benefits such a museum could provide to our people and others. Because there are no relevant, Indian-based curricula in the schools, we have to rely on museums and other alternative educational institutions to teach others about us. Education is the key to our survival. The Smithsonian Institution asked me to be the first member of the search committee for the new director of the museum. Later I was a cofacilitator for the consultation meetings that were held around the country. It was exciting to see a life-long dream begin to come true. Occasionally, a trip to Washington was necessary to meet with the administration, and I took it upon myself to give them counsel wherever I could. My hair was gray and I had a place to live, so I was free to say anything I wanted to. Remarkably, they often listened. It was very important to me that this new museum be established by Indians. When traveling around the country, I urged Indian people to become involved in the new museum. If we do not provide input and express our opinions, we cannot expect the museum administra-

tors to know anything in great detail. We have to help if this is going to be our museum.

One day, I read a notice about a job opening for a deputy assistant director for cultural resources, and the duty station was the Bronx, New York. I remember thinking, "Who would ever want to live there, working in an office all day?" But in talking with my wife and family and others later, I slowly came to realize that my dream for a tribal museum had never really developed. I was urging others to become involved in the National Museum of the American Indian, but I had not participated myself. So I submitted an application for the job, and, lo and behold, I made number one on the list. My mind had not really changed; I did not want to go back East and work in a big city. I would miss the meadowlarks. Then I figured, What the heck, I spent four years on a destroyer in the U.S. Navy; surely I could do two years in the Bronx. I believed that my experience, knowledge, and reputation could contribute significantly to the new museum, perhaps helping Indian people across the country also. It was a big decision, and we talked about it for some time.

One night, while sitting under the stars and thinking about my life, I remembered a day back in the sixties, just after the takeover of Alcatraz, when I realized the historical impact of the event and how dramatically it had altered my life. Now I recognized that another historical event was taking place: the building of a national museum dedicated to teaching the true story of the American Indian people. The opportunity to be a part of this action was real. Time was passing, but I was still capable of making more contributions. Alcatraz was the beginning of my awareness and involvement; a position with the National Museum of the American Indian could be the formal culmination of my cycle, the completion of my hoop, the renewal of the sacred circle. I accepted the job.

Looking back, I see our tattered, rugged beginnings on the reservation grow into a strong dedication over the years, one that has shaped our family and others as well. Many Indians have followed this way. My oldest son is now Keeper of the Sacred Pipe of our tribe; my second son is attending Montana State University on a presidential scholarship and working in their Museum of the Rockies, majoring in history and Plains Indian art. My daughter is planning to do the first of her four Sun Dances beginning next year, just as her father and two brothers have done before her. My youngest son is learning from all of us, and he will continue the traditions as well.

So the darkened world that I was born into is now a bright one. There is sunshine everywhere, and the pride, perseverance, and reawakening of our ancient Indian culture all started on that rocky little island in the middle of San Francisco Bay. Indian people should build their lives with this advantage; they should be dedicated and always relate to each other. They must do these things, or Indian people will once again fade away. They must keep the faith and find their own Alcatraz.

