

DUST

HAWK

Early memory serves me well when it comes to Hawk. He was a full blood Cheyenne Indian from the Black Kettle tribe, and as far as I know he was their last warrior, at least the last one who rode in the Battle of the Little Big Horn against the Seventh Cavalry of George A. Custer, if you call a five minute fight a battle and a twelve to fifteen year old pony-boy a warrior.

White Shield (Hawk) was one of the last Cheyenne Indians to be born free of the white man's law. The last to follow the large thundering herds of American buffalo across the Great Plains from Texas, North to the border of Canada.

Like herds of buffalo that charged across the Oklahoma prairie disappearing in a cloud of red dust while racing for life itself to reappear again only in the history books, Hawk too had started life in a race across the prairie after the swift elusive buffalo, which to Hawk's people was life itself. Also like the buffalo, he too was quickly slipping into the past, but before he slipped quietly away, I was there, and fortunate enough to glean a rich page of history from history itself.

It all started early one November morning in 1941. That's when I first saw him and began a fifteen year quest to understand this strange old man who was most often seen standing by the side of the road wearing a black cap, an over coat, and whatever shoes he might have found, no matter whether it was summer or winter.

I was setting at Ma's table still half asleep looking at breakfast and wondering why Dad had taken me out of bed and brought me all the way out to my Grandparent's house for a breakfast that I really didn't want.

Ma, Mother, and Aunt Ethel [Hooper Gripe], were all busy getting out big pans, kettles, knives, and other cooking utensils.

BANG!

"What was that?" I ask.

Your Grandfather shooting his .410 gauge shotgun.

What did he shoot?

The butcher calf.

I started to climb down from the high chair.

"No! No! No! You can't get down." Aunt Ethel said, "You must eat your breakfast, if you want to be a big boy."

I'm not hungry. Where's R.E.?

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He's outside.

I want to go!

Marvell. I need your help.

Gary.

I don't like biscuits and gravy.

Gary, you always like biscuits and gravy, now eat your breakfast if you don't want to set there all day.

Taking the biscuit, "I'm going outside."

All right, but you eat that biscuit.

Outside I shoved the biscuit through the fence to Pa's old squirrel dog and went to the feed lot where Pa had kept his fattening calf. Climbing up on the pole fence so I could see what Pa, Uncle Dutch Gripe [Theo], and Dad were doing, Dad ask, "Does your Mother know you are out here?"

Yes. She said I could come out and do what I wanted to. Where's R.E.?

He's around here somewhere.

By the time they had the butcher calf hoisted up by the hind legs on to the tri pole to begin the knife work of skinning and gutting, I heard a voice behind me.

Hi-Ho.

Pa turned around, seeing who it was replied, Hi-Ho.

Looking around over my shoulder I couldn't see anyone only a shadow on the ground, so I climbed down off the fence to turn around and see who it was that had spoken only strange words.

Standing before me was the strangest sight I had ever seen in my life. I started backing up but the fence stopped me, unable to back up any further I wished I was at Ma's table eating biscuits and gravy.

"Hawk, we'll have your part in a little while." Pa said, from somewhere beyond the fence behind me.

"Uh." Hawk said, standing like a statue.

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In his right hand he held a tattered gunny sack, his left hand hung limp out from the sleeve of an old WWI army trench coat that hung off over the shoulders. Once it was a brown or green what had not been eaten by moths, but now it was neither color, the cuffs and collar were oil slick from many years of wear. Black trousers that were too big for him held up by binder twine suspenders tied through the belt loops, a yellowed shirt that was once white but now yellowed by age. On top of his head a black cap with the earflaps pulled down from under which hung long black braids of hair interwoven with bright red yarn and hackles of feathers. That was the only color about him.

Inside the frame of braided hair was a long thin dark brown face, with hollow cheeks, high cheek bones, and a Roman nose between two piercing black eyes set deep into the face, looking down at me, smiled a big gap toothed smile that revealed only about six long yellow teeth.

Papoose, yours?

Ninny Buck's (Little Boy's) Papoose, Pa replied.

Hawk looked at Dad.

Your Papoose?

Yes. His name is Gary.

Ninny Buck's Papoose Gary. Have white hair like old man.

Everyone laughed while I stood with my back to the pole fence shivering not knowing if it was the cold winter air or the fearful sight in front of me that caused my sudden chill.

"Your part." Pa said.

Hawk walked around me through the gate into the feed lot while I climbed back up on the pole fence to see what his part was.

Opening his gunny sack to fill it with the butchering scraps, Pa stopped him.

Nah. No good. This sack is no good. Wait here while I get you a sack that doesn't have holes in it.

Having a sack without holes, Hawk began to fill it with the head, lungs, kidneys, and other parts of the calf. When he had gathered into his sack about all he could carry he started to close the sack.

"Wait." Pa said.

Do you boys want this heart?

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Dad and Uncle Dutch replied, "No." Pa placed the heart into Hank's sack which brought a big smile to the old Indian's face with apparent excitement because of the heart, when he attempted to lift the heavy sack over his shoulder, Pa bent down and helped him lift, then Hawk bent over from the weighted sack started walking slowly away.

Hi-Ho.

After the old Indian had walked far out of hearing distance, Uncle J.E. came up to the fence to ask, "What did that old gut-eater want?"

"Food!" Pa replied sharply, without looking up, "And don't talk down on my Indian."

I had never heard Pa reprimand anyone before but it was obvious from his tone of voice that J.E.'s derogatory remark had displeased him. It was also apparent that Pa had respect for this strange man who had just gleaned the scraps from the winter butcher.

It would be fifteen years before I would learn the reason my Grandfather had so much respect for Hawk, but from that day I knew there was something about the old Indian that deserved my respect and I must be ever watchful if I wanted to learn the secret of this strange shy man.

During the fifteen years between the time I was two and seventeen my Grandparents died. Dad and Uncle J.E. bought the farm, then when J.E. was drafted into the Army, Dad moved our family to Pa's farm. So living less than a half mile from Hawk gave me the opportunity to watch him even closer, and since we were now leasing the Indian land from Hawk and his wife Nellie Cutter Hawk, I had ample reason to be around him often, hoping I might learn the reason for Pa's respect of this old Indian man who no one else seemed to have respect. There must be a reason! And I must know! Even though it would take a lot of patience on my part, especially since Hawk was very shy, could only speak a few words of English, mixing his words with Cheyenne and Arapaho words more often than not having to resort to using his hands to make signs or draw pictures in the dirt in order to get his point across to me, never the less I was determined to know the answer to so many why's about him.

Why, did some call him Hawk, some called him White Shield, and others called him Chief?

Why, when there was trouble in one of the camps did the women and children escape to his house?

Why, did the young and strong Indian men leave the women and children alone once they reached his house?

Why, wasn't anyone else curious to know about this old Indian who always seemed to be alone among men?

What, had he done in his past?

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What, secret did he hold?

The faith I had in my Grandfather as a judge of character compelled me to know the answers.

The greatest question of all, where's the key?

What will unlock the mystery about this old Indian who walks the dusty road alone?

Just be a friend and wait. Maybe that is the key Pa had found that no one else seemed to know.

As the years went by I often found myself with a day or two on my hands when it was too wet or too dry to work in the fields so I would have the opportunity to go fishing or hunting.

Mother would cook the fish I brought in from the creeks or river, but she had no taste for the wild game of the field such as squirrel, rabbit, or duck, so in the fall and winter I would hunt quail to take up the road to my Great Uncle Ike who was confined because of a stroke and could no longer hunt the little prairie birds he did so much enjoy.

Early in the spring of 1955, I was able to harvest some young squirrel from the field.

Uncle Ike, the quail hunting season is over, however I do have some young squirrel out in the pickup if you would like them.

No son. I never did acquire a taste for squirrel, that was your Grandfather's game.

Mother won't cook field game, do you know someone who would like them?

Uncle Ike thought for a long moment, then with an expression of revelation on his face, he said, "White Shield! I saw him out the window just yesterday tromping out the fence row looking for terrapin, he's sure to want some young squirrel for his dinner table."

"His fence row?" I ask with a smile, then Uncle Ike and I both laughed because White Shield had taken all of his fence post out and burned them in his wood stove, so there was no fence row left.

OK Uncle Ike, I'll take the game up to Hawk for his table. Thank you.

Son, if you would happen to shoot some quail, by mistake, I'll be right here.

Driving around the road and turning into the dusty wagon trail that lead up to Hawk's house where there was one little Elm tree standing alone in the yard among the house, windmill, and faded red barn, I couldn't keep from chuckling out loud remembering how there once were several trees before Hawk started chopping them down for fire wood until there was only the one left. Nellie finally stepped in to save it from Hawk's ax, saying, "The whole year is not winter, remember the summer will come and we will want some shade!"

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But not to relax, Nellie had to keep constant watch over her precious shade tree every winter to prevent Hawk from chopping it down for firewood. I couldn't fault Hawk however, after all the old man was estimated to be one hundred years old and it was a long hard trip for him to go down into the canyon, chop wood, and then carry it back up the hill in the cold of winter.

Not far from the government built house on the hill I stopped my old pickup and stepped out so they could see who had driven into their yard, a blanket hanging over one of the windows was pulled back a little way and someone looked out while I held the squirrels up for them to see. Soon the door opened and Hawk came out with his big gap-tooth smile.

Meeting him half way across the yard and handing him the squirrel, I said, "For your table."

Hawk reached out to take the game with his left hand then stuck his right hand out to shake. Turning loose of the game, I took hold of his right hand to shake, astonished to find so much strength in those long, thin hands of a hundred years, then another surprise as I looked up and our eyes met, I had grown over the years enough that now we were looking at each other eye to eye.

You're Ninny Buck's White Hair?

Yes.

Hi-Ho.

Without another word he turned and walked back into his house leaving me standing there in his yard thinking perhaps I had found the key.

He had accepted my gift.

He had acknowledged who I was.

He had expressed his "Hi-Ho" of friendship, and most importantly, he had turned his back on me. No Cheyenne Indian who had been raised as he had been would ever turn their back to you unless they trusted you with their life, and until you earned that kind of trust. Their eyes were constantly on you anytime you was near.

The older squaws on the other hand was even more suspicious of everyone, all of them wore a blanket draped over their shoulders and pulled together in the front if you was near them or stopped to pick them up to give them a ride to town for supplies or home from town. When they set down in your car seat it was important to notice how they held their hands. If they pulled the blanket around them and had their hands out of sight you could bet they didn't trust you and their hand was firmly grasping a butcher knife. If on the other hand, when you stopped for them and they recognized you and turned their back to you then set down in your car with their hands out where you could see them, it was certain you had been paid a very high complement. You was a most trusted person and it would be all right to talk to them without arousing their suspicion.

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Driving back down the wagon trail I knew I would make more trips with offerings of wild game, but I would have to be careful to never ask questions. Maybe someday I would gain his confidence enough that he would talk to me freely. Maybe not.

For over a year I made countless trips to the field, hunting and fishing, then drive up the dusty wagon trail to the house on the hill. Each trip would bring Hawk out of his house sooner until he would be standing in the yard by the time I got there to see what I had brought from the field. Accepting the gift with a smile, a nod of his head, then with a "Hi-Ho" he would turn his back to me and walk back to his house leaving me to enjoy the privilege of his trust behind his back.

In the fall of 1955, Mother told me to clean up all the old fence post, boards, etc., around the farm buildings and haul them off to the canyon to dump them in a wash. When I had about all I could load on my pickup Dad came out of the house to say, "Gary, don't dump that stuff in the canyon. Take the wood up to the Indian for fire wood or he will burn all of our fence post this winter." Then with a big smile he added, "Take those old tires out or Hawk will try to burn them in his stove and end up burning his house down!"

So for the next two Saturdays I loaded every piece of old wood I could find and hauled it up the hill to Hawk's barn. While unloading some wood into his barn I noticed some of the inside boards were gone.

Hawk, if you take any more boards out of this barn it's going to fall down.

Then I burn it in my stove.

You wouldn't want to do that!

Why? I have no horses now.

But you would have no place to go when your woman gets mad at you. (Hawk has been dead for several years now, but the barn is still standing.)

The next summer after the wheat had been harvested it turned very hot and dry, the first plowing was finished. July in Southwestern Oklahoma is not the time to go fishing, but I hadn't been for such a long time that I decided to go anyway. Much to my surprise I did catch some real nice channel catfish, too many for Mother and I, so I decided to take some of them to Hawk.

Half way up the dusty wagon trail I could see him sitting under Nellie's lonely little Elm tree, coming to a stop in my usual place, I stepped out onto the hard, dry ground, holding a wet gunny with four catfish inside.

"Fish." I said, as he approached.

"Hi-Ho friend." he said with a smile.

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"Hi-Ho friend." I heard my voice say, while my mind was reeling with emotion. He had never said "friend" to me before. Only to my Grandfather and Dad had he ever said that. Could it be? Has he committed himself by saying what he did, and not only trusts me, but accepts me as a friend on his lonely hill? If so, I will be able to talk with him person to person, even ask questions, to which he will respond instead of grunting as if he doesn't understand or just ignore the question all together.

Hawk, why do you wear that heavy coat in such hot weather?

"To keep cool." he answered, as he took the sack and walked to the windmill to lay it down next to the well cap.

Looking back at me with those deep hollow eyes, he could see the question in my eyes about his reply.

Do you blow your coffee to cool it?

Yes.

Do you blow on your hands to warm them?

Yes.

"It works." Then he motioned for me to pull down on the windmill handle to start the mill pumping water.

I will bring a knife.

He intended for me to stay and talk with him or he would not have told me that he was going to return, so I tied the handle of the windmill down to keep the cool water running over the fish, then went over to sit on the running board of the pickup and wait to hear what he had to say to me.

Hawk soon returned with the knife. Setting down on the ground next to the well cap he started drawing the knife blade back and forth across the concrete of the cap to sharpen it for the task at hand while I set in the bright morning sun watching this ancient man with cunning hands sharpen the knife. With each pull across the stone the sound of the blade grew ever finer until you could hear the sharpness of the steel blade.

I began to be drawn into the surroundings of his hill until it seemed as if he and I were alone in all the world and I was the purpose for his being here and he had become the only quench for my thirst in this hot, dry, place.

Do you want me to bring a board from the barn for you to dress the fish on?

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"Nay!" Holding the fish in on hand he cut open the belly with one long pull of the sharp knife then removing the entrails careful to leave the liver which clung to the rib cage like purple glue, he threw the rest of the entrails onto a clean spot of sunburned brown grass where a very thin but patient dog had been waiting for just such a morsel to fall his way quickly gobbled it down looking back for more, but that was all he got from that fish because Hawk left the skin, head, and tail on the fish for himself, dropping the dressed fish into a dishpan of cool water. He retrieved another fish from the wet sack.

Having his appetite awakened by the morsel of fish the dog stretched out his neck to look into the pan where the fish had been dropped.

"Nay!" Hawk said, with a harsh snap.

The dog cowered down to wait for whatever Hawk offered him knowing better than to challenge the master of the hill or he would cease from being the guard dog, instead he would himself become meat for Hawk's table.

"The water looks cool." I said.

"Yes, drink." he said, pointing at the end of a rusty pipe with the point of his knife.

Walking over to where the water was pulsating from the pipe in a slow rhythm with the windmill pump I bent over cupping my hand to make a small pool from which to drink.

"Nay!" He said, with a large gap-tooth smile. "Here."

In his hand was a long necked gourd which had been fashioned into drinking dipper. Reaching out I took the dipper with reluctance then rinsed it out with fresh water.

(Lord, you promised if we should drink anything poison it would not harm us. This living by faith is sometimes more difficult than one might imagine.)

Having drank all I could around some kind of lump in my throat about the size of a watermelon, I hung the dipper back on the windmill tower where it belonged. Then spotting an old rusty bucket laying not far away I retrieved it turning it upside down to sit on with my back to the morning sun.

I'm sorry those fish are all I have been able to bring for a while.

You must work. One man cannot fish, hunt, and work, all the time.

There isn't much game in the field this year.

Not much for many grasses.

Did there use to be a lot of game in the field?

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Hawk stopped cutting and with the knife in hand he swung it in a wide slow circle, saying, "Everywhere."

Where did all the game go?

Like my people and the grass, all of the game fell to the gun and the plow, so now there is no buffalo or deer, there is only fish and rabbits.

I looked at the dry plowed ground. Embarrassed by the words he had just said.

Was you born here?

"Nay. I came out at the salt water." Looking up from his cutting he pointed North in the direction of The Great Salt Plains Lake, about a hundred miles North, near Jet, Oklahoma, where the Salt Fork of the Arkansas River would spread out over the flat land during high water of the spring floods. When the water receded, salt deposits would be left on the top of the flats, turning several square mile of sand white as if it was covered with snow in July. During the winter months natural chemical reaction would cause the salt granules to form into crystals of salt, most of the crystals formed were about the size of a man's finger but they have been found to be as big as one hundred and twenty pounds. I had been to the Salt Plains Lake with my family on a fishing trip and had dug the crystals out of curiosity, so I knew of the place which he spoke.

Did your family live there for many years?

My people lived there many times.

If they liked the place, why did they leave?

To follow the buffalo, but we always returned with the grass and the snow.

Why?

To live you must have salt. So when the grass was new, we would follow the buffalo North and camp there at the salt, then when the North wind turned cool, we would follow the buffalo South and we would camp there to gather salt for the winter.

Shocked to suddenly realize that Hawk had been born wild and free, hunting the buffalo to survive, something I had only read in the history book, how had he been gracious enough to accept my puny offering of fish, with a smile, and a thank you? If I had been him I would have thrown them in my white face and set my mangy dog on this imprudent white boy who had insulted me with leftovers taken from my Father's stream. I set in silence there was nothing for me to say. My people had taken his freedom from him, that way of life, the buffalo, land, wood, and waters, yet he thanked me for returning such meager fare for his table. (I have never received so much grace from any man.)

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My Grandfather's secret of love, understanding, and respect, for this strange stone age man was about to be revealed to me here on this hill of red dust.

A stone age man? Yes a stone age man who had survived only by his ability to hurl spear or arrow tipped with stone, or fell a prey with the stone ax, to cut, skin, and scrape with a piece of stone, laboriously chipped to sharpness, with fire and water, and yet this same man stands at the base of a windmill while overhead a jet airplane breaks the sound barrier making swift vapor trails across the blue-white summer sky of his ancient land. A stone age man who had seen the atomic bomb detonated.

(I no longer wonder that he's a strange shadow on the land as we know it today in the twentieth century, he had leapt from millennium past from a time before the Empire of Egypt and the Pharaohs. In his lifetime he was yet to see a man walk on the moon.)

Hawk, how did you get from the Salt Water River to the top of this hill?

Why do you want to know? It won't change anything.

Maybe it will change me.

His ancient and knowing eyes looked past my face deep into my soul itself. He must have seen a thirst for the truth.

I will tell you but first I must take these fish into my woman so they won't spoil out here in the hot morning sun.

Hawk soon returned to take a seat on the well cap where he began a long discourse with his limited English, his words would turn into Cheyenne, or Arapaho. Quickly catching himself he would resort to hand signals, if that didn't get the message across to me, he would bend over and with a small stick, start drawing pictures in the red dust, while the relentless hot summer sun rolled across an endless blue-white sky. I set on the rusty bucket drinking in with my eyes and ears a page of history from a living history book in the long trench coat that looked so out of place everywhere in the world except on top of this dusty red hill. I had never been one to listen too intently to a school teacher but Hawk was no school teacher. He was a living subject.

Like I said, I came out (born) at the Salt Water.

How many years ago?

"I'm not sure. It was about seven, maybe eight grasses (holding up eight digits) before Yellow Hair came to kill everyone at the River Camp on the Washita (Wash-a-taw)." (When the U.S. Cavalry under the command of George A. Custer massacred the Black Kettle camp, it was November 1868. So Hawk was born about 1860.)

When I came out, Mother first saw my Father, White Shield. So that day I was named Little White Shield, but the white man calls me Hawk.

DUST

Why did they change your name?

"I will tell you." he said, with a look that let me know I had broken his concentration.

(I must be quiet. This is his story and with a little patience he will be gracious enough to tell me.)

There was no fighting among the many camps that set by the Salt Water, because it was Holy Ground. All living things lived by Salt, and all tribes must come to this place to get salt, so it was a place of life and peace. A good place where the people could trade for horses, women, or flint. Sometimes French traders were there with iron knives, kettles, and beads, even horses if they were young and needed a good woman, but we only traded them the women who could have no children, that was our funny secret, but it didn't always work.

Big Hump once traded a squaw who was childless for ten grasses, but when she returned with the Frenchman at the time of the new grass, she had a Papoose at each breast. Big Hump was very unhappy when some of the young braves would laugh and call him names.

When the trading was finished and our squaws with the children had gathered all of the salt we would need it was time we had to take up camp and move on, each tribe following their own herd of buffalo, we could not camp there for many days because the land and game could not hold up under so many people for a long time. By the time we returned with the cool North wind, the land had been cleaned by the sun, the rain, and the wind, and wild game had returned to lick the life giving salt, so the land was new again, and the game was fat from the summer grass.

When the North winds drove our people back to the Salt River camp ground, it was a good time for everyone. The summer hunt was full of fat and the white traders had went back down the Salt River to the Army's Camp Smith (Fort Smith, Arkansas). With the cool nights it was a time to set by the campfire and tell about the summer hunts or hear about the deeds of our Fathers from many grasses past.

I stood up from where I set on the bucket, stepped forward to Hawk, and offered him a cigarette from my package, which he took, pausing only long enough to say, "Thank you."

Before the white of snow came over the land for the long winter sleep, we would pass through the valley of flat top hills (Cheyenne Valley between Enid and Woodward, Oklahoma). Then we would travel South and cross the big dry river (the South Canadian River), sometimes passing this red hill before we turned West to the River of Flowing Water (Washita River) where we would camp for the winter. We never went as far as the Muddy Water (Red River) because that was the Kiowa and Comanche hunting ground. We did not like them because they would not trade, they only wanted to steal our horses and women, so we stayed in the center of our winter hunting ground because the Kiowa and Comanche raiding parties would not come that far from the protection of their own camp.

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The Washita Camp was a good place for a winter camp for other reasons. If we had to be gone for many days hunting the winter game there were large holes of water in the River where the women and old people could find fish to eat if the food ran out before we returned.

When I was about six grasses old my Father started taking me with him on the hunting trips. I was his pony boy. My job was to hold the ponies while he slipped up quietly on the most alert of game, Deer or Turkey.

I always enjoyed the winter hunts the most they required more hunting skill. My Father and I did most of our winter hunting alone then return to the hunting campfire where the other hunters would be gathered, many of them with their sons, who were being taught to hunt the way my Father was teaching me. When we had all the game we could carry we would return to the River Camp where the women, children, and old people, were waiting for us. If anyone started a fight, caused trouble, or stole during the hunt, he would not be allowed to go with our hunting party the next time we went out, so he would have to beg his way into another hunting party if he could. That way we had very little trouble out on the hunts.

On my first winter hunt my Father shot a very nice deer. When we rode near to the River Camp White Shield told me to stop my pony then he put the deer over on my pony. That was a proud day for me, setting tall on my pony I rode through the camp in front of all the people many squaws looked at my deer with envy while I rode to my Mother's tee-pee to present her with the good meat of my hunt.

That night many small boys came to the White Shield campfire to hear me boast of how I brought a nice deer from the field to my Mother. In the red-yellow glow of our campfire, my Father's eyes looked at me with pride and my Mother set behind him looking as if she was very fortunate to have such a son who had learned to provide for the family with his skill.

After that night my Father was never able to leave me behind with the women and children again because I was convinced the hunt could not proceed without my experienced skill.

When we were out on our hunting trips we often saw parties of hunters from other tribes, if they had boys with them we knew they were hunting parties, but if they were all braves we would know that it was a raiding party. When that was the case, we would quickly return to the River Camp to protect our family and property until the danger was past.

When Dog Warriors were on the move we would often see many Blue soldiers (U.S. Cavalry), but we were not afraid of the Blue soldiers, because our Chief Black Kettle had signed many papers of peace with them and they also knew that when we had boys with us we were peaceful hunters so they would let us pass in peace. If the Blue soldiers had been out in the field for a long time chasing the Dog Warriors, they would send a rider out to us to see if we had been successful on our hunt, if we had been they would want to trade with us for fresh meat sometimes they would trade us iron for arrow points, rope, wagon sheets, or other items, but the young men always wanted beads and mirrors. Our young women liked mirrors and beads.

Hawk smiled when he remembered how much the young women liked mirrors and beads.

DUST

We did not like the Dog Warriors very much but we tolerated them because they camped between us and the Comanche and Kiowa. the Dog Warriors always kept a lot of dogs in their camps to guard them at night, like the Osage tribes did, they were always looking for trouble and usually they found it. When a fight did not go their way they would slip into our camp for protection and we would give it to them. It was not wise to make the Dog Warriors angry, because they would always return.

When I was about eight grasses old we set our camp beside the River of Flowing Water at the time when leaves fall. After a few days our ponies were eating grass all day long so we knew there was a big winter cold on the way. The men setting around the council decided we would send out a big hunting party to bring all the meat we could catch so the camp would not go hungry if the cold should stay for a long time. If we could have a good hunt returning with much meat it would keep well in thin strips when salted down and we would have a long time to set by the camp fire listening to stories of our people or lay under a warm buffalo robe dreaming of the fast spring hunts while the women made moccasins from hides, or arrow points from the flint which we had traded for.

We had been hunting for a few days but the hunt was not going well so my Father stood up at the camp fire to speak.

We should return to the River Camp with what we have, when we have rested for a day or two we must hunt in the other direction.

Another hunter replied, "The game has also noticed the change in weather, they have surely went to the Muddy Water."

Then when we leave the River Camp, we will hunt toward the Muddy Water.

If we hunt to the Muddy Water, we will be sure to see parties of Kiowa!

This is true what my brother has said so we will have to hunt close together, then if we meet Kiowa braves our party will be strong with numbers. They will not fight us for nothing more than our ponies.

The other hunter sat down satisfied his advise would be heeded during the hunt for game when we went South to hunt near the Muddy Water.

Of all the men who set around the hunting fire that night, my Father alone was standing. I was very proud of him that night because he had planned the next hunt and when his plan had been challenged he was able to remain standing until no one stood with him, so it was that my Father would lead the next hunt a responsibility that was not taken lightly.

If the next hunt was successful he would be recognized as having a pure heart and in favor with the Spirit over the land, but if the hunt was not good or if any man was killed on the hunt it would be a long time before White Shield would be allowed to lead another hunt.

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My Father spoke one more time to the men around the campfire.

"We will rise up with the early light. It is one days ride back to the River Camp." Then he turned to me. "Come with me we must see to our ponies before we sleep."

We went out into a grassy spot where our ponies were to see if the hair ropes were tight around their legs.

My Father put his hand on my shoulder.

The hunt will be on the Kiowa Hunting Ground, so you will stay in the River Camp.

I protested, "But Father you are leader of the hunt. If I stay in the camp everyone will think that I'm a Squaw boy and you are afraid."

I could feel him looking at me for a very long moment from the tall black figure against the cold night sky.

You'll go on the hunt Little White Shield. You'll be my pony boy if the hunt is slow, but you must listen to my voice like you have never listened before.

When we ride near the Kiowa hunting ground you must stay within my reach both day and night. When we rest at night we will not tie the ponies legs with the hair rope and allow them to graze on grass away from us. Instead we will pull our ponies down on the ground in the tall grass and sleep across their necks with our buffalo robe over us and the pony's head. We will tie the nose rope around our wrist holding our knife in the other hand. You'll be with the ponies all the time. If I'm away from you and the ponies on a slow hunt and the Kiowa attack our hunting party, do not come to me. Take the ponies and ride as fast as they will carry you to the nearest Dog Warrior camp. I will return alone on foot in time. If I don't, you return to your Mother when it is safe.

I did not sleep that night at the hunting camp. Instead I dreamed with my eyes open how will I sleep over my ponies neck, tied to his nose rope, with a knife in my hand? What if I go to sleep and drop the knife? Or the Kiowa attack while we are at rest and my pony throws me with my wrist tied to him and I have no knife to cut myself free?

Suddenly my buffalo robe was gone! Someone had taken it away! Standing over me was a tall figure. My Father was speaking to me.

Catch your pony. Take this meat to eat while we ride to the River Camp.

My Father's voice had a new tone of authority. Not the authority of a Father. No! It was the voice of a leader of men who were in a desperate search for survival.

DUST

I went out to the grassy spot where the ponies were. It was cold in the morning air and my body ached from the night without sleep. The ponies did not want to ride, one of them reared, pulling the rope through my hand making it burn like I was holding a thousand stinging ants in the bitter cold morning.

Riding our ponies up out of the river bottom so we could make better time it was even colder, the wind bit into my hands and face as if the skin was being stripped away to the raw flesh. Even the meat my Father had given me to eat was cold and chewing it was like having a ball of leather in my mouth, we rode into the morning sun until we could no longer see the place where we had been camped.

Stopping to rest the ponies while some of the men went to see if there might be some game in the next valley, I took the buffalo robe off the back of my pony to drape it over my back against the cold dry wind while at the same time drawing heat from the pony underneath me, thinking this is going to be a long day, and if the cold stayed, it would be a long hunt down by the Muddy Water. I had no idea how long the day was going to be, neither did I know how long my Father's hunt was going to last! It was all together a very bad day.

When we were remounted and riding toward the River Camp again, I started thinking how I wanted to sit by my Mother's cooking fire inside the tee-pee eating her boiled meats with the dried vegetables she had gathered during the summer when the land was fat, but I would never tell because it was time for my Father's hunt and my pride of him was stronger than the chill of winter winds.

When we rode around the bend of the river near the River Camp we were suddenly confronted by Black Face [Mother of Baby Face] sitting on the ground throwing dirt into the air and weeping the death weep of the squaws. Thinking something must have happened to one of her babies we rode up to her to inquire as to her distress and why no other squaw was with her in her time of trouble.

Woman why do you trouble the dust and wind?

"The Osage came with Blue Soldiers. The whole camp is full of death! And Black Kettle is no where!"

When we left the River Camp for the hunt Black Kettle left the camp to go to the Army camp called Cobb (Fort Cobb, Oklahoma) where he ask the Indian Agent for cattle to feed our people, but when he arrived the Army Chief accused him of making war.

"Nay!" Black Kettle told him. "My braves are out on a hunting party and the buffalo are far away." But the Army Chief said, "No! Your braves are not hunting meat for your women and children. They have left your camp and went to the Dog Warrior camp of Tall Bull to make war, because my soldiers have seen Dog Warriors in your camp. Now you want us to feed your camp while your braves make war on us!"

DUST

Black Kettle came back to the River Camp without cattle. He was very angry because the Army Chief had accused him of making war.

"The Blue Soldiers have seen Dog Warriors warm themselves by my council fire, and now they say I make war! How can I make war when I do not have enough hunters to feed my people after the Blue Soldiers have shot so many buffalo?"

Black Kettle had only just returned to the River Camp the day before our return.

Black Face had left her tee-pee early in the morning taking her babies with her out to where the women go. While she was there she went down to the river to fill her water gourds, where she bent down to fill a gourd from the river next to a bush that hung over the water. From under the bush she saw an Osage Scout crossing the river. It was too late to warn the camp that an attack was about to start. Quickly she dug out two small places in the sand of the river with her hands where she could lay her babies covering them with sand except for their faces. Then hiding herself under the bare bush by pulling its leaves over her she took the butcher knife from her waist band sticking it in the sand by her side then placing some leaves and her hands over the babies faces and mouths she waited for the horror that was certain to come.

All too soon the first shots rang out in the cold morning air. At first there was a strange silence from the River Camp as if the gun shots hadn't awakened the sleeping camp then like the gun shots, all at once screams filled the air and just hung there refusing to fall to the ground and be silent.

Soon after the opening shots from the Osage rifles, Blue Soldiers appeared on the opposite side of the river and started shooting into the camp.

Old men from the camp came out to challenge the intruders coming from the river while the women and children ran for safety to the other side of the camp. But the men with only spears and stone axes fell on the cold ground dying without striking a blow in defense.

Soon women and children were all that was left of the camp, running in the direction away from the river they were met by Blue Horse Soldiers charging down on them with their long glistening knives cutting through the air leaving the cold ground soaked with an innocent red. By then the Blue Soldiers at the river had mounted and were charging across the river mounted on their horses with the iron hooves.

Black Face looked out from under the bush again but all she could see was one Blue Soldier standing on the opposite bank with his rifle butt setting on the ground. He looked out of place weeping in the midst of such slaughter. Black Face turned her face back to the sand wishing she could take her hands away from the babies mouths and place them over her ears to block out the sounds of her family dying. Trembling with fear she thought if the Blue Soldiers discovered my hiding places they will kill my babies and me but if the Osage Scouts find us ... ? Her whole body began to shake out of control.

DUST

Later, she looked up hoping the weeping soldier was gone but he was still there and a new fear came over her. The water gourd she had been filling was floating down the river to where the weeping soldier was now on his knees with head bowed. If he looks up to see the gourd he may wonder where it came from and if he looks up stream closely he will see our hiding place. But he just knelt there, head bowed, while the water gourd floated on by unnoticed.

Black Face lay quiet for a long time, there was no gun shots now, no thunder of iron hooves. Looking up one last time from under the overhanging bush she could see that the weeping soldier was gone.

(Who was this weeping soldier? And from where had he come to this place of dreadful sorrow? Was he a farm boy who had tired of plowing his Father's field and sought the adventure of military life in the wild west? Then suddenly found that his distorted ideologies had been awakened to the reality of why there are in this world horse soldiers, cannons, sabers, forced marches, and shooters. Could it be possible that he's a religious young man who had rejected the call to become a messenger of love and life, but understands only now that he has come to the Washita River Camp as a messenger of prejudice and death. Maybe not long ago he was a young boy standing to watch smartly dressed Union soldiers marching off with pomp and praise to the War Between the States, thinking it to be a glorious life. But only now realizing that there is no glory in war. Weep for yourself young man. Weep not for the dead for their time of trouble is past.)

Distant sounds of crying and pain. The weeping of death by a few squaws who had somehow managed to escape the carnage as Black Face had. Perhaps by craft. Maybe by fate.

Black Face dug her babies out of the damp river sand. Carefully she crept back into The Camp of Death.

In the River Camp I found my Mother where she fell, but my brother (Black Robe) was not with her. Father began to search for him. He was only four grasses old, maybe he had wandered off somewhere, maybe he was with one of the surviving squaws. Possibly he is frightened and hiding under one of the tee-pees, or a buffalo robe somewhere out in the bushes.

While my Father looked for Black Robe hoping to find him hiding somewhere, I sat at my Mother's side, the ground was cold, and the blood stayed red for a longtime. When the sun went behind the tree tops the air became even colder, so I took my buffalo robe and spread it over Mother. She was cold.

Setting there on the ground by Mother's side there was not yet anger. My mind was filled with WHY? WHAT did she do? WHEN will I wake up from this bad dream to warm myself by Mother's cooking fire. See her eyes looking at me with pride because she has such a good hunter for a son. WHO will care for her when she is old? WHEN will I awaken to hear her voice saying, "Little White Shield. Go bring fire wood that I might prepare meat for your Father, The Good Hunter?"

DUST

"Little White Shield" from somewhere I heard my name being spoken. By who's voice I don't know.

Looking up I saw my Father. In his arms was the lifeless body of Black Robe.

White Shield had found my brother just as I had found our Mother. My Father's eyes were vacant as he walked toward the center of where the River Camp had been.

Standing up I followed him wondering, "Why is he going to the center of the Camp?" I felt very guilty for being alive and Black Robe was dead. I could not even cry, my eyes were dry already, burning as if they were filled with salt.

White Shield laid Black Robe's body on the ground at his feet in the center of our camp ground. Black Robe had been found by my Father in the river bed where he had been tromped to death by the iron hooves of the Blue Soldiers horses.

In the center of the camp my Father began to speak.

Oh Great Spirit of my people. Spirit of all seeing eyes that looks upon our camp by light and by darkness. Still my raging heart that I might lie down among my people that are still. My heart was once pounding with joy because of them, when the spirit within me saw their beauty, heard their voices, and watched them gathering around the camp fire. Why have you brought me to this valley of running water, peaceful grass, trees for fire, fat with meat, and lay me down with a young woman to seed her with this child that I might live on. Then show me this day? Am I a man that you hate? Then lay me down with my people in my Father's peaceful valley of red earth.

If I live and breathe, I will be a man with a weeping heart, full of vengeance forever! My joy has turned to hate. My life is still in death, because my people are not. How shall we return upon the land? We are a tribe of men and old women and children at the breast. How shall I draw my bow to bring meat for children that are not? I will draw my bow to send swift arrows that will seek the hearts of hateful men and upon the most hateful heart I will feed!

When my Father had finished speaking I looked on his face.

I had never seen this man before and in this man's face I never saw my Father again.

A rain cloud came over the camp that night and it seemed as if the whole world had come to weep over The Valley of Black Kettle's Death.

What did you do?

We mourned our families in The Valley of Cold Tears while Scouts were sent out to search for where the Osage and Blue Soldiers had gone.

DUST

Our scouts were gone for a long time looking for those who had done this hateful thing in our River Camp. When they did return we were told at the council how they had tried to follow their tracks but the rain and snow had covered the trail, so it was decided to continue North looking for them in the direction which they had gone. On the way they encountered some hunting parties who kept directing them on the trail until they came to an Army camp where the Wolf Creek water dumps into the Little Swift water (North Canadian River at Fort Supply, Oklahoma). There they learned that the Army Chief who had just come from the South with Osage scouts was Yellow Hair (George A. Custer).

Some of the younger men wanted to go after him but the older men prevailed against them saying, he will not come out until the winter is past. Now he is strong with many men behind walls of trees. He is in by the fire while we are weak with hunger, cold, and too angry to think. We will stay here to gather strength, by joining up with the Dog Warriors. We must not fight until it is our fighting ground if we are to have the advantage.

Before the snow had all melted we started to move. Spring rains would wash out our tracks so it would not be easy for the Army scouts to follow us. Now we were few in number so it was easier for us to travel without being seen. Keeping our scouts out all around us day and night we slowly picked our pathway North. When our scouts came back to tell us that there were Army camps in our path we would turn aside and go around because it was not time for us to fight. We had been peaceful hunters, now we were only trying to stay alive long enough to reach safety on the land of our Brothers to the North (Northern Cheyenne). Often we would travel by night and have a campfire by day so we could not be seen from very far away. When we came to the tall mountains it was a good place so we decided to stay. There was plenty of game for our small tribe but we were not use to the mountains. When the winter came some of the people died because the winter was too harsh even though we saw no soldiers, hunger is also a bitter enemy.

The new grass came and we moved on into the North lands where our brothers were. When we reached our brothers camps we told them about the River Camp and Yellow Hair who had driven us away and that we only wanted to stay until we gained strength enough to return and defend our camp. Our brothers said, "We have heard about the killings at River Camp and this crazy man Yellow Hair. You do not have to return. You may live here forever. He will not attack us here. We are too many. We are strong."

Our men said, "You are a brother. But when we are strong we will return and we will fight with these Blue Dogs who fight with children."

So we stayed in the land of our brothers, hunting, fishing, and living in peace under his strong arm of protection while we gained strength for a day when we would at last fight.

For how long?

Five grasses.

DUST

Hawk reached out to accept another cigarette, lighting his cigarette with my lighter. I watched him from atop my rusty bucket while he smoked in silence for a long time. I made no move toward my pickup, so when he had finished his smoke he started again.

One day some Sioux braves rode into our camp very fast and requested to speak to the men of the council.

When the council had gathered together they were told that many Blue Soldiers were gathering together in one place and one of their Chiefs was The Yellow Hair with his many horse soldiers.

Some men of Council said, "We are too many. Yellow Hair will not be so foolish as to attack us here."

But some of the older men said, "Yellow Hair is like a mad Coyote in the Sun, if he has soldiers, he will attack. We must prepare."

One of the young Dog Warriors stood to speak. "We will go out and fight this Coyote today."

One of the wise men of the council stood to say, "No! Yellow Hair has guns with many bullets, and cannons. His horses are big and strong with iron hooves prepared for swift battle, they are fed on grain instead of grass, and they are trained to ignore the sound of gunfire. We must not fight with him in the open field. He will out shoot us and then his horses will run our grass fed ponies down. That would be his advantage."

The Dog Warrior set down, very angry.

"You do not attack Yellow Hair. He attacks you!" The old man said.

Another young brave stood, angry faced. "If we sit here talking like a bunch of old squaws, he is sure to attack us!"

Yes! After you have taken all of our young men out there and been ran off by his guns and swift horses, then he will attack our women and children again.

Then tell me old man, how do you defeat the man that you do not fight?

My Father stood.

You let him run over you.

WHAT?

We lay down in the tall grass across the river. When he attacks we will raise up from under his horses bellies.

DUST

The council was silent. The men looked at each other in disbelief, wondering if White Shield had gone mad at hearing that Yellow Hair was going to attack again. But could it be done? Could Yellow Hair's Soldiers be drawn into such a trap? Is it possible to remain concealed in the tall greasy grass long enough for the Blue Soldiers to get in that close?

One of the men stood after a long silence. "White Shield. How?"

I told you how. Now you tell me, how you are going to pull Yellow Hair's soldiers into the Greasy Grass.

But he won't attack that far out because of the village downstream. He will attack there.

Move the village. Now!

The whole village?

NOW!

The men set in council all night planning for the fight while the women and children moved the village across the river putting all the tee-pees on one side.

Early after morning light, scouts returned to report that they had found out Yellow Hair's scouts were Crow Indians.

One of the men stood to inquire if they would attack soon.

There is no reason to think so. They are still gathering.

We have here in our camp three Crow Squaws with children. Bring them before the council.

When the Crow Squaws and their children were brought before the council one of the men spoke to the squaws.

Our scout will take you to the camp of Yellow Hair. We will keep your children here. When you are near the Army camp you will call the Crow Scouts out to you by night. You convince them that if they don't lead Yellow Hair through the tall Greasy Grass into our camp, when we are finished with this fight we will attack the Crow Nation. We Southern Cheyenne, our brothers The Northern Cheyenne, and The Sioux Nations.

If these Crow will do this thing we will let them pass through and they will live to return to their people with you and your children alive. If they will not, then when the fight with Yellow Hair starts we will spend many brave young men to take the Crow scouts alive!

Only one of the Crow squaws returned. The other two ran away leaving their babies.

DUST

The Crow squaw was brought before the council, but she would not talk until we gave her all of the Crow babies.

What did the Crow scouts say?

They will bring Yellow Hair.

So the plan was made and the trap was set.

The Crow scouts were to bring Yellow Hair and his Blue Soldiers into our Valley of Greasy Grass.

We were to send groups of men out to make a lot of dust for him to follow so when Yellow Hair thought our braves were running he would follow the dust cloud into the valley. When he got to where the dust was, our braves would not be there, but we did not think his horses could run so fast, so we had to send out fresh ponies to lead him out and then back again while the first group hid themselves in the Greasy Grass in front of the camp.

White Shield told me to sit on my pony behind a small hill while holding three ponies on each side.

Little White Shield, when the Blue Soldiers come into the Greasy Grass we will stand up to fight. As soon as you hear the fight begin you come out into the open and watch. If the battle is going in our favor, stand your ponies and do not come into the fight. If the battle is going against us, ride your pony as fast as you can through the battle turning the ponies loose as you pass through. Those of us who can will catch a pony and get away.

My Father started out into the Greasy Grass then stopped to turn and look at me, saying, "My son, ride your pony low and fast, but don't look for me just ride!"

My Father had his hunt. He was stalking his prey and I was his pony boy.

What happened to the Crow Scouts?

They went back to their people.

That must have been a great victory.

Yes. But it was a battle we should have ran from.

Why?!

When we defeated the Blue Soldiers at Greasy Grass their Chiefs were very angry so they set down to take council against us because our people were one people. We were strong so the price of our buffalo range would cost too many Blue Soldiers, wagons, horses, and people, because of this they could not fight our strength.

DUST

To fight and win you must fight against your enemy's weakness, like we did Yellow Hair. He trusted the Crow Scouts so he followed. Where they would not lead he would not go.

Yellow Hair's other weakness was an open camp where he could see only women and children with no warriors to protect them, so when we took his Scouts under the buffalo robe and made him to think our camp was open because he saw the dust of many warriors running away he attacked straight into the camp and we defeated him from under his horses out of the blinding dust and the innocent grass.

Now when the Chiefs of the Blue Soldiers set down to council against us because they feared us, they too were looking for the weakness of their enemy and when they had looked at us for a long time they saw that our weakness was our life.

We lived because of the buffalo. From him we took hides for our houses, clothes, shoes, robes, and from his bone we took marrow to feed our babies, and ashes to make soft the hides, and from the leg we took strings to make strong the bow pull.

So it was decided by the Blue Soldiers Chiefs kill the buffalo, and this people will die on the open ground, hungry and naked. That was our weakness, so that is what they did.

One day my Father stood up at the council to say, "The buffalo are not enough to feed the people because we are too many on this land in only one place. Yellow Hair, our enemy at the River Camp by the Flowing Water is dead, so let us take our portion of the people and return to the hunting ground around the River of Flowing Waters and there we will hunt the buffalo.

All of our people gathered at the center of where our camp had been standing. Many squaws were weeping because some of the daughters were going with their new bucks, then we started out of the valley going to the Flowing Waters where we could camp and hunt the buffalo.

While we were going through the tall mountains a storm came upon us out of the North sky, so we could not pass because the snow was very deep and we could not go back because we had came too far, so we stayed for many days until there was no food.

The men of the camp came together asking, "What shall we do?" One of the men standing in the snow, said, "Kill the dogs and we will eat them, then we will go with what strength we have. If we stay here we will die. So we killed the dogs and with their strength we passed through the mountain."

Down from the mountain we found enough deer and game for all to eat to the full. Some of the young men said, "There is meat here, let us camp and stay."

But the older men said, "Nay, the hair on the deer is long. The winter will be harsh here. We must go to the Flowing Water."

DUST

In peace we came to the Flowing Water again, but we were not so many people as before and the buffalo was not to be seen for many days, so we ate fish and old horses while we waited for the buffalo to return. The grass grew tall and every day we looked, but still the buffalo never came.

When the women were no longer fat, my Father stood up at the council and said, "I will go to the Army Camp called Cobb and say to them, My people have no meat because the buffalo did not come."

The council of men said to him, "Do not go to the camp called Cobb. Black Kettle went there to ask for cattle when our people were hungry and when they heard that the people were weak with hunger they sent their Army after Black Kettle. When they had followed him to where the people were they came shooting and killed Black Kettle also the people with him."

If they come fighting, we will fight, and if we die, we die, but the cold wind is coming soon. If we have no meat we will die anyway.

Then one of the men in the council stood up with an angry face to say, "We are Cheyenne. The Blue Soldiers will be angry because we killed Yellow Hair and they will follow you when you have come again, they will come shooting because we are Cheyenne, and you are White Shield."

Then I will go as an Arapaho, and I will be called Hawk. I will take Little White Shield with me so when they see that I have my son, they will say, "He is not guilty. He is not afraid because he brings his own son Little Hawk within range of our guns, so we will give him meat."

The man with the angry face sat down, so my Father and I went to the camp called Cobb because the people were hungry and the North wind was already cool.

The ride from our River Camp to Camp Cobb was a four day ride because our ponies were poor from being rode every day hunting far from camp looking for buffalo that were not.

Riding down the river to Camp Cobb my Father stopped to rest the first night where a lot of Cottonwood trees had washed up into a large pile above the banks of the Flowing Water. We set up four long poles around a grassy spot so our ponies could feed without having their legs tied with the hair rope.

We set among the Cottonwood logs that were piled up with a small fire so if anyone came near we would not be seen. With the yellow light from the small fire on his face White Shield began to speak to me about his plan to get meat for our people.

My son listen to my words and remember because I am taking you to a place that is more dangerous than the hunting ground of the Kiowa and the meat we hunt is more precious than the meat from the Kiowa. When we come near the Camp Cobb it is said that there are Arapaho camped near there, they are our brothers, so we will be able to go in to them and they will help us. We will re-tie our hair, put on Arapaho clothes, and moccasins, then when we go to the man called Agent, I will talk, you will be there but do not talk to anyone just look at the ground.

DUST

When we went into the Arapaho camp by night they heard my Father speak. Some of them were afraid, but the Chief of the Council said, "These men are our brothers. We will do as they ask."

When we left the camp everyone was real quiet, then we went to the white house so my Father could speak before the white man called Agent.

"Who are you?" He ask.

I am the Arapaho called Hawk and this is my son.

What do you want?

We need meat for our people and the buffalo are few.

I have given your people cattle! You can't have more so soon.

My people have received no cattle.

Agent looked suspiciously at my Father for a long time, then ask, "Have I seen you before?"

No, we live a long way off.

Where?

Up the Flowing Water about four days.

The Army has brought all the Indians in from out there, how long have you been there?

We have not been there for long.

Where have you been?

Looking for the buffalo.

I'll have to ask the Army about this.

We set on chairs for a long time then the Blue Soldier came into where we were.

The Agent tells me that you have a tribe of Arapaho up the Washita River about four days ride.

Yes.

How many?

Thirty tee-pee.

DUST

That's Cheyenne country.

Yes.

Are there any Cheyenne with you?

Maybe ... they have come to us from many places while we were hunting, some from here, some from there.

If you want meat you will have to bring your tee-pees here so you can all be registered by tribe and number.

It is a long trip for hungry people.

I know but the Indian Agent must account for all of the cattle to the government, if we have so many Indians then we get so many cattle to feed them. If you are not registered, there is no cattle to give you. That is all I can do.

I will return to the council and tell them these words.

So we returned to the hungry camp without cattle. On the way back to the River Camp we would circle back looking at our own tracks to see if we were being followed by Osage scouts of the Blue Soldiers. When we reached the River Camp everyone was excited with fear, many of the people saying, "The Blue Soldiers will surely come now that their Chief knows we are here and that we are weak with hunger."

No fire burned in the council circle that night in case the Blue Soldiers came looking for us they could not see our camp from a long way off.

Most of the women and children did not sleep in the camp that night because of fear, so they slept under buffalo robes and bushes in the tall grass far from the camp.

Many men stood in the moonlight at the circle, some spoke very angry, but some spoke with calm and reason.

My Father stood to speak, first telling the council the words of the man called Agent.

This man called Agent told me that we must take our camp to where he is so he can count our people, only then will he know how much meat we will need.

One of the men stood to say, "When he has counted our people, he will tell the Blue Soldiers, and they will come to kill us."

The buffalo did not come. If we stay here without meat we will die in the cold from hunger!

More Braves stood to speak.

DUST

How do we know that they have meat?

Little Hawk and I went into the camp that is already there and they gave us the sweet meat of cattle to eat.

That camp is Arapaho, but we are Cheyenne!

I told them that we are Arapaho.

They will look at us and know that we are Cheyenne.

I told them that we are many who were scattered, but now we have come together to make one people and now we are one. Arapaho.

All night the Braves stood up with my Father. About daylight all the Braves set down and my Father stood alone. It was decided. We would take up our River Camp and go down the river to the Blue Soldiers camp called Cobb so the man called Agent could count the number of our people and we could have meat.

Hawk looked at me with a very humiliated expression in his eyes and added, "Once the buffalo ran through our pasture so wide the eye could not see all of them, and for so long they could not pass in one day. Our people were many and every one would eat the fat of the land until they laid down with the noon sun to sleep because their bellies were full from the buffalo and every man's woman was fat. But the buffalo did not come that winter. Like the River Camp of Black Kettle, they were there when we went out in the morning, but when we came back at night they were no more. Once we were many and still the buffalo kept coming. Now we are few and the buffalo stopped. When we went to Cobb there was not so much as one track of a buffalo."

At the Greasy Grass we defeated the best soldiers they could send against us, but they destroyed our life.

The Blue Soldiers took their rifles and killed the endless river of buffalo, then they said of themselves, "We are Sportsmen."

When we ask for one cow for food, they said, "You are beggars."

When we took a cow of theirs to feed our families who were starving, they said, "The Cheyenne are all thieves."

In winning, we lost!

Now the Blue Soldiers sons own the land, and they say, "It is true because we have paper!" Black Kettle had paper that said we owned peace, but it was not true.

DUST

We moved our camp to Cobb and all the people were numbered, then we were given some meat of cattle, but it was not like buffalo meat, it was sweet, and the people didn't like it very much. Some of the men wanted to go out to find the buffalo and went to the main Agent, saying, "We go out to find the buffalo!"

You can't go out. The buffalo are all gone. Your people will starve and the Blue Soldiers will call you Renegades and hunt you down to bring you back.

Most of the people stayed at Camp Cobb. Some of them went out. But those who went out were hunted down by the soldiers and brought back. Some in groups, some in chains and wagons.

One day, the Agent came to me saying, "Hawk. You must go to Concho so you can attend school and learn to read paper."

I went to Camp Concho where the Indian school was so I could learn to read, but before I learned they came to me again and said, "You are too old for school. You must go to the Camp called Cantonment (near Canton, Oklahoma). There I set on the ground eating bitter-sweet meat for many days."

One day they came to me again, saying, "You do not belong here. You will have to go to a place on the Washita River."

So they sent me back to the place of the River Camp (near Harmon, Oklahoma). While I was there I took to me a young woman from the Black Kettle Tribe who was Baby Face's daughter, one of the babies which had been buried in the sand when the Blue Soldiers came to kill Black Kettle with all of his people.

Nellie is Baby Face's daughter?

Yes.

I thought crippled Nellie was Baby Face's daughter.

She is.

Both of Baby Face's daughters are named Nellie?

Yes.

Why?

Baby Face liked the name Nellie, so when I took her for my woman they came to me again and said, "Go. Live on the Red Hill that is where your woman's tee-pee made of wood is."

So I came to live on this Red Hill. But there was no wood and only a little short creek of water, so I went to them to say, "There is no wood and little water."

DUST

Go back we will give you wood, but the wood did not come.

Then one day the town over there dumped into the water, so I went back to say to them, "Now there is no wood and no water because the town has dumped their toilets into my water."

Go back, we will give you wood and water.

So they sent a man here to dig this well and put this windmill up into the air. Now I have set here by this well for many years, but still there is no wood. I think they have forgotten.

What about your Father. "White Shield?"

He rides the wind.

Rides the Wind?

Yes. When the wind is restless and the sky turns dark. He tosses back his braids and rides swift to battle where the cannons roar, while flaming arrows fill the angry sky, with the flash of long knives everywhere. Only then can the storm clouds weep on this Red Land over which my Father can ride the gentle wind, with braids pulled down.

Setting there on that rusty bucket, I realized everything had been taken from Hawk that had been dear to him. From his Mother to a Red Hill that had no water and no wood. Now all he had left was the memory of younger days and pastures with no fences and I had purchased even those memories in the grass for four fish and a few cigarettes.

Hawk set quiet now looking at the dry red dust at his feet. The sun had crept up my back and was now in the afternoon sky peaking under the hat brim into my eyes. It must have been the sun's brightness that caused them to water, causing me to slip my hand up to secretly wipe them dry.

Standing up from the rusty bucket I walked to my pickup and opened the door sliding under the steering wheel and shutting the door behind me.

"Hi-Ho." Hawk said, quietly.

"Hi-Ho," I replied looking straight ahead through the yellowed glass of the old pickup windshield. Turning on the switch and pushing the starter button, the flathead V-8 engine came to life causing the tailpipe to start rattling under the floorboard as the transmission's gears growled at me for disturbing it's rest.

I looked out the side window.

Hawk set on the well cap so close I could almost reach out and touch him. He was looking out across the red plowed field in front of him, but his ancient eyes were far away. In them I could see that his ember heart had been set ablaze recalling his MEMORIES IN THE GRASS.

DUST

I wonder what do those old eyes see?

Perhaps a River Camp where men grow old before their heart dies? Maybe a buffalo hunt from many days gone by? Or could it be of a Young Red Man racing in the wind with raven braids blown long? Are they looking deep within to see a boy steeped in battle and the hateful slaughter? Perchance they see a young maiden, spring blossoms, tall grass, and cool clear running water? Could these be the things the old man's eyes see while overhead the rusty mill sings it's squeaky song to the ancient man and his dry red land saying, "I have life giving water"?

Etched into his face I could see the burden of innocence. A hundred years of history in a face that once was smooth with fat, but now a face that is furrowed deep like the red plowed land, both of them unable to forget the days of buffalo thunder over a green sea of summer grass racing across an unfenced land and drinking from the clean running water.

Several years later, when Phoenix White Shield (Hawk) lay on his bed knowing the time was near for him to "ride the wind" I was living in Tulsa, unaware of my friend's time of passing so I never had the opportunity to go see Hawk.

Dad did go to see him for the last time. An encounter which he relayed to me.

"Hi-Ho."

Hi-Ho. Is that you Ninny Buck? My eyes are dim.

Yes, it is me.

Ninny Buck. I ride the wind.

I know.

Ninny Buck, listen to me. I have fought a good fight, I have finished my course, I have kept the faith. Henceforth there is laid up for me a crown of righteousness, which the Lord, the righteous judge, shall give me at that day. And not to me only, but unto all them also that love his appearing (II Timothy 4:7-8).

After all those years, I finally understood what it was that I could see in Hawk, that I could not see.

The other day I went up to Hawk's abandoned house on the Red Hill just to stand there for a little while, then walking down the dusty wagon trail which has overgrown with weeds. I reached out just to touch the wind, and quietly say:

DUST

Little White Shield. You've tossed back your braids and rode the angry
wind, you've heard the cannons roar, and seen the sabers flash.

Now ride the gentle wind, Old Hawk, my friend.
Pull down your braids, and ride the gentle wind.

HI-HO, my friend.

Ninny Buck's White Hair.