

RED EARTH

PHILIP H. RED EAGLE was born in Tacoma, Washington, 16 February 1945. His father, also Philip, is a Dakota Sioux born on the Fort Peck Reservation in 1916. His mother, Marian (originally Mary Anne) Steilacoom was born at Keyport, Washington 1922. She is of Salish ancestry from the S'Klallam and Steilacoom Tribes.

Except for two hitches in the Navy, Phil was primarily raised in the Northwest, split between Tacoma, Washington and Sitka, Alaska. The family had moved to Alaska in 1959, when he was 14 years old.

He received his high school diploma from Sitka Senior High School on 18 May 1963. He was in and out of college for four years, finally enlisting in 1967.

After one WesPac tour on the USS Somers, DDG-34 in 1969-70, he made his next tour "In-Country" as a riverboat mechanic from August 1970 to January 1972. It is the observations and feelings from this tour that make up the background of his short stories.

His higher education includes two degrees from the University of Washington; a B.A. in Editorial Journalism (1987) and a B.F.A. in Metal Design (1983).

Phil began his fiction career after the first Native American Writers' conference, which took place at the University of Oklahoma in 1992. Inspired by everyone there he decided to start writing the stories he had been wanting to tell but could not find the voice. He found it in Oklahoma. *Red Earth* is his first effort.

Philip H. Red Eagle

RED EARTH

A VIETNAM WARRIOR'S
JOURNEY



CAMBRIDGE

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These stories are dedicated to all those Human Beings who served in and around Vietnam during that conflict.

Particularly the Native American Human Beings who served in and around Vietnam (all 89,000 or more from the various Nations in the western hemisphere, including those from urban areas, reservations and non-recognized tribes).

Especially

My shipmates, the men of the USS Somers (DDG-34, 1967-70), USS Decatur (DDG-31, 1972-73) and USS Tutuila (ARG-4, 1970-72)

And

The men of the Vets Center Group, 1991-2
Don Johnson, Ph.D.-Team Leader (deceased 1999)
Bill Brower, MA-Assistant Team Leader

Bob Anabell
Roy Barrington
Arsenio Creedo
Bruce Fosburg (deceased)
Dave Fryberg
Reynolds Lone Fight (deceased)
Calvin Masqua
Everett Margo
Jerry Peal
Elliott Peterson
David Washington
Reo Wise

I also dedicate this book to the memory of
Thomas Andrew Heidlebaugh.

Born: February 1, 1942, Seattle, Washington

Died: March 26, 1997, Tacoma, Washington

Lived: With great fervor, energy and love.

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FOREWORD

THEY WALKED A long way, these warriors. They made it through hell and they are still not home. They huddle in the cold, away from the village, away from the fire and the deer stew and the family blankets. They wait for the ceremony that welcomes them home. They know the elders are doing the right things to get them back into the community. The people need them back in the circle but the experience of thousands of years have taught them how to bring warriors in from the rage of battle.

Every First Nation had ways to bring men back from war. Fighting transforms men. The power they gain from counting coup, the roaring energy of their terrible act in killing other men, made them too dangerous to come home without a cleansing. If the rituals of cleansing are not performed, the songs of welcome should not be sung. Otherwise, the warrior walks through the longhouse, swaggers across the tipi circle, dragging ghosts with him.

Nothing is less predictable and more threatening than the ghosts brought home from war. Preparations are very carefully made to help the fighter find rest and to allow the vengeful spirits to take their own great journey onward. Ancient traditions included the chants of the Dineh Enemy Way, which cleansed the warrior, calmed their angry hearts, dealt with the souls of those they killed and washed them in the chants and smudgings that enabled them to come home without bringing

the sickness of war into every hogan they entered.

In the Pacific Northwest, the Hamatsa Cannibal Dancer and the Syowan singer are transformed in ceremony into healers who bring grace to the nation. The Lakotah journeyed through snow after one hundred years to Wipe Away The Tears of Wounded Knee. In Kivas the U.S. Army sergeant is cleansed with sage and sacred objects so he can participate in the holy life of his Pueblo. Everyone is grateful for what the warrior has done, but the wise culture knows that the warrior has sacrificed a piece of his heart to protect the people. This must be honored and dealt with so the man can return to the work of the real world without bringing glory and madness with him.

In countless AA meetings and traditional sweat lodges, Native American Vietnam Veterans have huddled, waiting for the ceremony that will bring them in. When one can wait no longer and falls into despair, suicide, stumbling drunkenness or violent battering at the walls of his cage, the rest of the brotherhood goes into mourning. At the Vietnam Vet centers, those who are able conduct healing circles, dealing with the suffering of men who have not been cleansed and called home.

Around these men swirl the ghosts of Viet Nam, demons of guilt and shame that have not been played through any vast ceremony of cleansing and forgiveness. In the sweat lodges, the men who are still struggling to build a life pray to the four directions, for the yellow and red and black and white men who died in an unwelcome struggle that only seemed to end over twenty-five years ago. As long as there are no formal means conducted to bring these men in, the story circles, the AA meetings, the sweats on the rez and in the backyards of the few men dedicated enough to take on the pain entailed in running a vet sweat will have to do.

“Grandfathers, we are suffering for the people. Open our minds so we can follow the paths of our hearts. We are honored with flags and dances at the pow-wows. We are known to the children as “the uncle who sleeps on the couch”. We live on our disability payments and our part-time gigs. Waiting. Grandfathers, let this pain we feel be of some use for the people.” These are the prayers of the Vet sweats. These are the roots of the dark night-

Foreword

mares when the Vet wakes up in the middle of the night sweating and afraid to look into the very darkness that was sanctioned for the healing by the sweat lodge.

Now Phil Red Eagle has written a rare book. It initiates that process of healing. He has ended the waiting of the warriors as if the elders have come to the edge of the fire circle and beckoned the men back into the village. In these two novellas the story that is told in the kiva and the hogan, the long house and the smokehouse is brought forward to the world. The story is needed to open the doors.

Phil has paid the price so this story can become a ceremony. There are people who need this confession so they can feel listened to. Ghosts of the war years have cried for a way to be released. Phil uses the magic of the storyteller to fix what was irreversibly ruined in this war. With this book, a series of relief maps have been drawn, a means for the warrior to backtrack through the events that seem insurmountable in their initial horror. The path of the heart is cleared of brambles and despairs.

The warrior-storyteller guides us all to that place where the ceremony begins. As you read this book you receive the gift given at the end of the journey. You get the gift of coming a long way home, across magic emptiness, through fear and silence. When you put this book down, you are able to stand up, to stand for your people, to stand up for that high, sharp-drawn chant coming off the red dawn of the endless plains, coming off the red leaves of late summer, coming off the red earth from which our songs and our healing have always come and to which we are taken back when we have been accepted, by ourselves and our people, back into the circle.

TOM HEIDLEBAUGH (1 February 1942–26 March 1997)

PREFACE

Some people say that war is all glory. I say that war is all Hell.

SHERMAN

WE HEARD JOHN Wayne say it, “War is Hell”. It came to us in the movies and television. The strange thing was that our parents weren’t telling us that war was Hell. In fact, they told us war was great. We had just been liberated from the likes of Hitler and Tojo by a terrible, but good, war. The Free World was free again, and we could just forget all about that war thing. So, we sat in front of our little black and white screens and soaked it all up and learned about denial.

War became Fiction. That’s it. That’s better. War is Fiction. That makes more sense, at least until you find yourself in a war zone. That little black and white world does not make any sense there. Bullets hurt like Hell. Losing friends, and yourself, hurts like Hell. Watching this peculiar change overcome your buddies hurts like Hell. Something you can’t quite figure out. You ditch it, but it comes right back. A friend told me this story in 1991: “I was on R & R in Bangkok, Thailand and had just checked into a hotel there. I was on my way out to the bars and go-go joints and was walking down this hallway. I had just stepped into the main hallway and looked left because I saw movement in the corner of my vision in that direction. I jumped because I was so startled. There was this guy standing there looking at me. He was the

meanest looking son-of-a-bitch I had ever seen in my life. I thought for sure that I was going to have to fight him. This guy's face was all scrunched-up and his eyes were so dark and intense. Jesus Christ, I thought, where the fuck did he just come from. Then it dawned on me. I had just stepped in front of a full-length mirror in the hallway. That guy down the hall was me. I stood and stared at me for a while. Soon the elevator door opened and I automatically turned and stepped in. You know, I haven't really thought about that moment until just now."

In Native American tradition, we would know whom that guy in the mirror was because we would understand where he had gone. We would have also understood who we were, individually, and culturally. The old people understood what war would do to a person. They understood the sacrifice that was being made on their behalf. Each "warrior" was prepared in a long known and sacred manner. That person, man or woman, would be purified and prepared for what was to come. Each "warrior" was given the knowledge of the dangerous transition that he would be making.

Native American men and women who wound up in Vietnam were very different from these traditional warriors. Many had been removed from that traditional culture as many of these warrior traditions had been removed from these new societies and the old traditions had been replaced by Christian practices of various types. The sacred preparations were no longer practiced and the warriors left vulnerable and lacking pertinent knowledge. They were also lacking the homecoming ceremonies. These ceremonies would take place after the warrior was kept from the main camp for four days. In those four days they would fast and purify themselves. Once they returned to the village the warrior was given the opportunity to tell his story in a healing ceremony. His immediate family would be near, or surrounding him. Around them would be the next level of family. Around them would be the remainder of the tribe. Everyone would listen, and remember. That was their duty to him, to listen, and to remember. Each warrior was given this opportunity.

After this ceremony it was understood that this person was now different and would be treated so from then on. This "different" person was now accepted as having been permanently

Preface

changed. What had happened to him would never go away. His people knew this and they would never go away either. The relationship was understood and bound.

The Vietnam “warriors” were afforded none of these opportunities. They were essentially on their own. For example, when I returned, my unit landed at McChord Air Force Base near Tacoma, Washington at midnight in the winter of 1972, and released for leave; Sprung upon The World. My sister picked me up at the base and we went to downtown Tacoma and had a pizza and a several beers before going to her home. A cousin-by-marriage, whom I had met and served with In-country, was with us. We stayed with my sister for a few days and eventually I went home to Sitka to complete my 45 days leave. My cousin left for his home in Canada at the same time.

This story is repeated over and over again by most everyone that I had a chance to talk, or listen to. In many of these cases, the Vietnam Vet was released and sent home to resentment and hostility. He was not listened to and what ever was expressed was not heard. Many went home on drinking binges that started on the plane or as soon as they were off the plane. No comfort given, not a friendly ear was to be found. At most American Legion Posts beer was free for a while, but after it was determined “these new guys” were really different, the free drinks stopped. What little comfort was given was soon withdrawn.

Soon, the prisons began to fill up with the “new guys”. Violence had become the major expression of this generation of warriors. So many of these new guys were dead, or in prison, not long after their arrival “home”. It was, and still is, a national tragedy.

What has all this to do with “Red Earth”. Becoming a fiction writer was one of those dreams that lurked in the far, dark, outer reaches of my mind. I had taken writing courses from Leslie Silko, James Welch and others in the late 70s, but in the 80s serious writing never crossed those dark reaches into reality. In 1990, in a P.T.S.D. (Post-Traumatic-Stress-Disorder) related angry fit, I wrote a 500 word fictional piece and published it under a pseudonym. That little piece was titled *Red Earth*.

In late 1992 and early 1993, *Red Earth* found a bigger voice in a series of short stories. The original story was expanded into a

7,800 word piece with other subsequent stories constructed out of its themes. The impetus behind all of these stories was born out of my desire to heal myself and the energy and support from the Returning the Gift Writers's Conference in Oklahoma the Summer of '92.

Back in early 1990 I had begun to take on changes that I was not aware of. Friends were saying, "Jeez Phil, you look a little stressed." Some suspected that it was the Gulf War that was "triggering" me. Later, I realized that it was "my time". Seventeen years being the sacred number. Seventeen years after returning from my final tour overseas I hit the wall; the seventeen-year wall. For some reason it takes that long for the trauma to emerge.

In the late summer of 1990 I fell into depression. By the time the Gulf War broke out, in the winter of 1991, I was well on my way to a breakdown. By the summer, with the help of my buddy Ed Orr (a white guy, by the way), who saw what was happening a whole year before, I was in a therapy program at the Vets Center in uptown Seattle.

That Summer the learning and healing began. From this healing, the talking out of my "warrior" adventure in Vietnam, came this book. In it are the ideas that came from the stories I heard from others in my therapy group. Their stories do not belong to me but several of the ideas contained in the book came from these sessions. They are backed by impressions from my own experiences on the river.

Also contained are some of the healing processes that I learned from this "talking out" and the actual pursuit of Native American practices of healing. This includes Inipi Ceremony, or the "sweat ritual" (which you find out is only partly about sweat), and other Native American healing philosophies and actual spiritual journeys of healing.

When you are in pursuit of this healing and on this spirit quest it is said that you are on the Red Road. On this Red Road are many trials and many rewards. That is what Red Earth is about, the journey to the heart and the healing spirit. There are many trials and encounters with the spirit world. Here, is found the "magic" of healing, self-knowledge and a feeling of completeness and belonging.

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Red Earth

CHAPTER ONE

1954

RAYMOND CROW-BELT SAT cross-legged next to his pile of dirt, moving his little green soldiers around at the base of the hill he had just created. It had to be just like Uncle Willy told him it had been on Iwo Jima. Uncle Willy talked a lot about Iwo Jima and the 5th Marines. Raymond adjusted his position and went down on his belly to get closer in, to be really down low, looking up that great mound of rock. “Quew, quew,” he clicked from the back of his mouth. One of the little green men at the top of the hill fell over with a quick flick of his finger.

The air rumbled and he looked up from his war game to see where the storm was coming from. The sky remained clear blue with no sign of clouds. He continued his play. Grandpa’s friends must have come to visit again, he thought.

Later, when he happened to look up at Grandpa’s house, Raymond saw Grandpa and a sad man with a floppy hat looking at him through the kitchen window. Grandpa smiled and they both disappeared from view. In a moment Grandpa came out the back door and walked over to him. Grandpa towered way above the hill at Iwo Jima.

“Grandson, how are you doing? Who’s winning?” Grandpa asked.

“I’m okay, Grandpa. We are. You know,” He replied as he

squinted up into the afternoon sky to make eye contact with Grandpa. “Who was that man, Grandpa?” Raymond asked.

“Oh, that was a friend; a close friend. He’s your friend too. He came over to tell me about this little war that’s going on in a far away place,” Grandpa answered.

“Why was he so sad, Gramps?” Raymond asked.

Grandpa Crow-Belt turned his head and gazed at the little window for a moment and turned his head back to Raymond. “Wars are sad, Raymond. You’re only nine. When you get older I’ll tell you about war,” Grandpa answered.

“Can Uncle Willy tell me how sad war is, Gramps?” Raymond persisted.

“I don’t think so, Raymond. Sometimes it’s so sad that you can’t even talk about how sad it is. You’ll learn soon enough. When you get older. Then I can tell you about magic too,” Grandpa answered.

“Magic, Gramps? You said there was no such thing as magic. There’s just *Wakan*. You said there was just *Wakan*,” Raymond answered back.

“*Wakan*? You’re right again, Grandson. There is no magic. Just the mystery and power of what is,” he said. Grandpa raised his head, placed his right hand up to his brow to shield his eyes against the sun, and scanned the western horizon. He reached down and smiled and ruffed Raymond’s hair. He unbent again, turned and headed back toward the little house. Suddenly he turned and spoke again, “I gotta finish nailing something down, Grandson. Pretty soon you come in and eat.” He turned one last time and went back inside.

AUGUST 1969

Sergeant Raymond Crow-Belt squatted on the edge of a great red circle. He pulled out his Zippo lighter and lit up a cigarette and stared across the expanse. He blew a stream of smoke out of the corner of his mouth. It was almost over for him here. Maybe, one

more trip into the field, one more tour of the local village. Then, it would be time to go home at last, back to the World.

For now he was still stuck in this red earth country, in this red earth place, in the red sky world, far from home, far from life, far from anything. On top of that he felt slightly worn, slightly old, now. More than slightly seasoned. And, more than anything else, used up.

Changed. That's what they would say back home. "My, Raymond, you certainly have changed," they would say. He smiled to himself.

He reached down and moved some red dirt with his hand. It reminded him of the land south of his own Dakota country, in that other time, that other world. One spring, on school break, he had traveled from Kansas down to Oklahoma with his friends. There he saw the red earth in places where the ground had been broken for highway work. He was surprised that the ground could be that red.

He was interested in that red earth and continued to gaze at it as they drove on to his friend's reservation. He made a mental note of it and returned his vision to the front again, after all he was not down there to see the red earth, but the red clay girls with the dark eyes his friend had told him so much about.

That was a great time then. After high school he hung around and drank on the buttes and the hills with his buddies around his reservation. Once in a while they would go into the local small towns and cruise the main streets looking for action and party girls. His father was not happy about that activity. He said, "You're wasting your lives running around and drinking like that."

Raymond said, "It's just a good time Dad."

His father advised, "Learn a trade, Raymond. An education is important to make it in the white man's world."

His grandfather had different ideas about all that education stuff. His grandfather had taught him to follow the old ways. Through his grandfather he learned that there was more to the world than what Raymond thought he saw in front of his eyes. "You must listen; to the land, to the animals, to your heart, to your dreams," Grandpa said. "Remember the sacredness and the

power of the circle. The Great Mystery influences more than you know, Raymond.”

His dad won. Or, more accurately, his mother won. The education talk was mostly his mother’s idea. His father merely spoke his mother’s message. His father had persisted in bugging him about school and that’s why he finally took the bus to Haskell. That’s how he wound up in Kansas for his short stay at Haskell Indian School. He saw that red earth on that trip and here it was again in the Hell country of Vietnam.

It was much different here in Hell, the same red earth and even some red clay girls with dark, dark eyes. But here the red ground becomes the enemy, especially during monsoon when the rain comes down by the barrel and you can’t see past the length of your arms. The red earth turns to red mud and gets into every-goddamn-thing. Weapons get dirty and jam, and you have to spend all your damn time cleaning your shit, to say nothing of trying to stay sane. During the dry season, like now, the red mud turns to red dust and it still . . . still gets into every-goddamn-thing.

Then there was Victor Charlie. Charlie didn’t give a damn about nothing, not even the rain. He kept on Raymond’s unit like stink on shit. Tough little fuckers, Raymond thought. He also liked to think that this red earth got to Charlie too. But it was Charlie’s red earth. It was Charlie’s red clay girls with dark, dark eyes. That made all the difference.

Grandfather didn’t tell Raymond about this place. Who could have? “The power is everywhere on this red man’s earth. The power is in everything, Raymond,” was Grandfather’s advice.

Raymond remembered those crazy men that used to hang around the reservation bars. He’d see them when he and Grandfather would go to town to buy supplies and groceries. Many had scars from the battle at home; their broken-bottle and knife fights and brawls. Grandfather said they looked twice their age. Raymond didn’t know what that meant. The others would say, “Oh, they’re just the Vets.”

I should have known then, Raymond reflected. His uncle Ollie was one of those Vets. He blew his brains out one fall day when Raymond was nine. Raymond remembered that sadness in his

uncle's eyes. He almost asked him once. His father put his hand on Raymond's shoulder and shook his head, no. It bothered him to see those men so sad; so beaten; all that sorrow. Uncle Ollie didn't tell him about this thing, this war thing. Those other men didn't say a damn thing either; at least in words. That was it: the silence. It was all in the silence.

Raymond blew a stream of smoke against the sky. The red earth in this spot had been molded into the shape of a chopper pad. Soon, more ammo would come in. Soon, there would be mail. Soon, someone would live, or die. Just like Private Armstrong died. The chopper would soon take the private out; out to sanctuary.

Raymond's cigarette burned down to his lips. He spit it out and licked off the remaining bits of tobacco and spit them out. He looked over at Armstrong who lay on a stretcher, covered with his own poncho.

Raymond lit another cigarette and smoked to Armstrong. He smoked to the four directions. Armstrong was his man. *Raymond smoked to the East.* He died on point. *Raymond smoked to the South.* He wasn't thinking. *Raymond smoked to the West.* Walked on a mine, and it cut him off at the knees. *Raymond smoked to the North.* He died there in the field. *Raymond smoked to himself cupping the smoke and pulling it to his head and shoulders.* Armstrong was leaving now; going home; going home without a care. Going home without the fear of dying haunting him every minute, every hour, every day. Armstrong was free and with his grandfathers.

Raymond finished smoking and put the cigarette out and crumbled the remaining tobacco between his fingers. He threw the tobacco with an upward stroke of his right arm. It scattered and spread across the red earth pad.

The chopper that would come and get Armstrong brought Raymond out here: out here to Hell; and, everyone here for that matter. Well, maybe not this particular chopper, but one of the many. Maybe, not this hill. It was another hill, but the same Hell. Raymond remembered how much of a "boot-camper" he was then and how he stumbled coming out of the door. He landed right on his face. The others laughed. His gear was spread out

before him. He tasted the red earth and spit it out.

That was three years ago. That other hill was out here somewhere. Somewhere poking out of this carpet of green. We gave it up. The brass gave it up. All the hills out here are the same anyhow. Now he was a short-timer again. His second tour was nearly at its end.

He remembered coming down on that other great circle from that clear, blue, sky onto the red mound in the middle of the rolling green jungle. That red earth pad was defined by a circular mound of red dirt made when the pad was graded and leveled to allow the choppers to land on an even and well-defined surface.

Life and death shuttled in and out of these circles. He understood that even then.

Since, the great circles, all of them, belonged to Raymond Crow-Belt. It didn't matter what hill these circles were on. They were his. They were his link to home, his link to the other, his link to the rest of the universe, the one he couldn't see, only feel, like when the hair stood up on the back of his neck. The circle was the stuff of dreams and visions and his link to life. This is where those alive came into this world of the dead and only the dead left.

Raymond came to the circle when he thought he was going to crack, to break into the pieces that he saw other men break into. When they broke, their life was no more. Those who have seen a man broken know what it means. This country will take a man's life, his soul, the moment he steps into it. From then on he is screwed. He is dead until he can find his soul again and that might be never.

Most of the men who came here killed themselves off at some point: not a real death; a spiritual death; an act of kindness to one's self, an act of survival. A man was required to die here, to stop thinking and feeling. It was the only way to beat the fear, the frustration and the insanity of this crazy war.

Raymond found another way. He found the secret in the circle. It was the beginning of the rainy season just before that terrible Tet. He had just received his sergeant's stripes, Buck Sergeant Crow-Belt. It was a place just like this one; before the hospital, before Phoung. It was that dream.

In this dream there was a young Indian woman in a blue, shiny, silk-looking dress with a woven rainbow belt around her waist. Her sparkling black hair flowed down almost to her knees. *Geez, she was beautiful*, he thought. To him she felt like the blue sky on a spring day on the plains. Later, he began to think of her as Blue-Sky-Woman.

In the dream she drew this little circle about three yards across with a long staff. The staff was pretty plain looking; maybe cottonwood or something. Maybe willow. Four eagle feathers hung from the top end. She drew the circle from the outside, around a small fire, and then stepped in. She placed short sticks with colored flags, more like streamers, in each of the four directions. She returned to the center and knelt facing east. She raised her arms and disintegrated into a waft of smoke, which melted into a cloudy sky. The dream ended.

One morning, several days later, after feeling enormous guilt for not responding, Raymond finally followed the dream. He went out just before sunrise and etched his little three-yard circle inside the great one as the young woman had taught him. He burned cigarette tobacco in a used ration can. He placed the incense they used here in this world around the can in a small circle, one for each direction; streamers of smoke. He lit them and watched the smoke trail off and mix with the misty sky. On his knees he prayed to the Grandfather, the Sun, *Wi*, when he rose in the east, and to his Grandmother, *Maka*, the Earth. He lit a cigarette and smoked it and prayed to the four directions. He had no pipe. This would have to do, he thought.

When he was finished he got up and walked toward the edge of the great circle to leave. Behind him a soft and beautiful female voice spoke, clearly. "Wait," she said. He turned and looked back towards the center. There was no one there, especially not the speaker of that beautiful voice. Only the sun was there, rising through the rainy haze.

Shortly after that moment, when the company sergeants were gathering to smoke and talk about the other men and their duties, the new Lieutenant, the new Platoon Leader, approached and spoke to Raymond. "Good morning, Sergeant," he said, "Shouldn't you take a patrol out this morning?"

Raymond thought about the incident on the pad. "I don't think so, Sir. It's not a good time," he said.

"It's not a good time, Sergeant? What does that mean exactly, Sergeant? It's not a good time?" He stared at Raymond, puzzled. He blinked a few times. He was green and still did not understand who was in charge of this war. After a long silence the green lieutenant turned to Sergeant McGinn, a tough, seasoned black man from Detroit.

"Is it a good morning for you, Sergeant?" he asked. McGinn looked at Raymond, who shook his head, no, almost imperceptibly, while looking McGinn in the eye.

McGinn trusted Raymond. "Sir, I think it's a terrible morning for a patrol," McGinn said. The lieutenant stood stunned for a moment. He wasn't used to this. He finally spoke one word, "Well." There was a long silence and he spoke another, "So." He looked at the ground and then at each man. He turned abruptly and left. The sergeants heard him say to himself, as he strode away, "There is no order here. There is no order here. There is no order here."

Later that morning Intelligence reported major movement in the area. As if waiting for that report, suddenly, the mortar rounds and rocket-propelled grenades started coming in and a major siege began. It lasted many lifetimes. In the time of the other World it was two months plus and was called Tet. If the patrol had gone out it surely would not have returned.

Raymond went to the circle every morning after that, mortars and assaults permitting. He prayed and lit at least one cigarette and smoked to the four directions. Once, he looked over his shoulder and saw several men kneeling at the edge of the circle. They were praying with him. As he rose they crossed themselves and left silently.

The new Lieutenant died during that siege; he was replaced. That one died and was replaced by another. In the jargon of this hellish place the men called the dead, "Believers". Now, the green lieutenants were Believers.

Sergeant Crow-Belt was a Live Believer. He had come to know certain truths during that first year. These three truths kept him alive. One, Spiritual Truths: Listen to the wind and the jungle

and your dreams and other soft voices. Two, Innate Truths: listen to your instincts; they'll give you good common sense advice. Three, Practical Truths: duck, stay down, be quiet, run like hell, never volunteer.

Once, when he was still green, during the first part of that first year, he drew a strange patrol and encountered other stuff no one had told him about. His squad went into an area that had just moments before been raked by "Puff the Magic Dragon", "Spooky" to some. Puff circled above the jungle canopy in the shape of an old C-47 with a powerful Gatling guns hanging out through its door. When it breathed, it breathed out fire, a cone of flame reaching out about three yards. That airborne Gatling gun, with its many barrels, would spit out thousands of rounds per minute. An area the size of a football field would be saturated with bullets; inches apart, if that. The jungle and the ground would be severely torn.

But it wasn't the torn jungle that was the problem. When you went out to check the torn area you had special company, much worse than Charlie. Tigers here grew fat on freshly killed human flesh left in the carnage of modern warfare; seven hundred pounds of four-legged death. Normally they took only the dead. Once in a while they would take the living while they slept. The victim would not know what hit him. His life would be squeezed out with one solid grasp of the throat by powerful jaws meant to bring down large animals. Death, some people said, was quick. Someone said that the victim would simply never wake up to realize his own dying. Raymond had his doubts.

It was getting to be dusk when the patrols went into the torn jungle. Raymond was point man, normal place for a "skin", they said. The rest of the patrol was slack about fifteen yards. Another unit was far to the right about a hundred yards. He heard some rounds go off from an M-16. A moment later he heard the jungle whisper. He turned to the right. A tiger, moving rapidly away from the direction of the gunfire, ran right over him and knocked him to the ground. Recovering, he found himself on all fours, with that big cat breathing in his face. Raymond smelled that awful breath. Maybe he would die quickly, he thought.

He looked into the eyes of the beast and said, "How *koda*. Hello

my brother.” The beast, now his brother, turned his head toward the direction of the commotion that followed him to this spot. He turned and gave Raymond one last puff of tiger breath, looked at him with what seemed to Raymond the eyes of kindness and sympathy and leapt into the darkness of the jungle. The tiger had let him go.

Raymond sunk to the ground shaking. His butt twitched like crazy. He had wanted to run in that moment. Only his butt twitched, indicating the immense desire to run.

Since then he had not encountered his brother again, but carried a tiger’s tooth as an amulet. He had purchased that tooth in Bangkok while on his first R and R. It wasn’t a real tooth. It was carved from elephant ivory. There was a little Buddha carved into the top third. He wore it on his dog tag chain to honor his brother the tiger, and maybe to garner some protection too.

Raymond heard the chopper now and looked up. It came in at a high angle spiraling down like a box elder seed. It literally dropped-in, crossing the firebase, raising that red dust everywhere. It reminded him of the dust storms he’d seen in the Badlands at home. Here the storm was red.

Now the red storm was upon him. It came out of the north and descended like a pestilence. The storm wailed like a turbine and clapped the air with the sound of a broken windmill in a wild mid-western storm. It whirled and swirled and created a great upheaval. Finally it touched earth, but stayed in high rotation. Raymond’s eyes squinted against the whirls of red dust, his arms went up automatically to protect himself. He stood, bent at the waist, placed his left hand on his hat to keep it from blowing away and walked into the great wind. Men rushed into the storm and carried away ammo crates. Others loaded Armstrong into the chopper.

Raymond arrived at the eye of the storm still bent. The messenger, in black helmet and aviator sunglasses that reflected the red sunset, handed him the sacred white package. Raymond turned and walked back to the edge of the circle. He turned again, stood fully erect and faced the machine.

The chopper lifted and hung suspended for a moment,

turning slightly toward the south. Armstrong came into view on the floor of the chopper. His head turned and he stared at Raymond; his arm rolled free from the poncho and pointed out of the door towards him. Raymond pointed back with two fingers in a peace gesture and blessed Armstrong. The chopper floated up and away, perhaps to sanctuary. Raymond turned and walked out of the circle. He had duties to perform. He and the messenger had their duties to perform. He walked down the hill to the men in his charge.

“Got anything for me, Crow?” said a familiar voice. Raymond sifted through the handful of envelopes and shook his head, no, to “B.J.”.

“Hey, Belt, my man, Wha’cha got goin’ there? Anything for me?” Raymond flipped a white square to Corporal Jones. He handed another to Ski, and another to Martinez.

Corporal Mecklenburg, “Mek” for short, taunted Martinez, “Dear Juan, I sorry, I got married, to José, your best friend.” It was all in fun, but Martinez was a serious man. Martinez stared stiffly at Mek and turned back to Raymond, “Thank you, Sergeant,” he said. Martinez was always that way, polite. He never called him Crow, or Belt, or Chief. The sergeant respected that. He nodded to Martinez and proceeded to hand out the messages from the World.

Moments passed and suddenly, behind his back, he heard a familiar sound; magazine load, click, tap the magazine, load, no lock. He hit the ground as the first rounds went off like in a firefight; full magazine; wide open. He turned over and watched Martinez looking for another magazine in his baggy trouser pocket. He got it loaded again. More rounds went off as Martinez fired crazily into the ground at his mail from home. Soldiers scrambled for cover; others watched with mouths hung open. “Putal! Putal! Putal!” Martinez screamed.

The weapon went silent. Martinez looked for more magazines. Jones grabbed Martinez from behind, wrapped his arms around him and lifted him just off the ground. Jones was a large black man; too big to overpower. Martinez didn’t resist. He hung there, limp and almost lifeless. He muttered, “Putal!” under his breath. Mek took the weapon from Martinez’s hands. Jones lowered

Martinez to the ground. Martinez stood there looking at the place where the earth ate his bullets, ate his heart.

That night everyone got loaded on herb and tried to console Martinez. Martinez got loaded too, but would have nothing of the consolation, especially from the white guys. He remained quiet and soon nodded off.

The next day, Private "The Head" Michalson walked up to Raymond and handed him two pieces of torn paper: A letter and a wedding photograph. "Men die out here, Chief," said The Head. Raymond nodded. He knew that too well. The Head walked away. The sergeant imagined Michalson's peace symbol necklace swinging with the rock and roll of his walk. Raymond put the papers in his upper left jacket pocket.

Martinez talked to no one over the next four days. He drank that rotten hot Miller beer and smoked some weed. He stared at Mek and some of the other white men. They looked back at him and said to one another, "What's his problem, man?" No doubt they'd gotten some similar messages from the World too. For now, they held no grudge.

Seven days after the letter incident, Martinez squatted down next to Raymond while they were on a routine check of one of the neighboring villages. In this jungle world they were known as "villes". A little something left over from the days of French presence. For the ordinary GI, this hostile world out here on patrol was known as "Indian Country". That name was left over from another occupation that Raymond would sooner forget. The platoon was strung out along a row of trees about 100 yards from the ville.

"He's a gringo," said Martinez with bitterness on his lips.

Raymond passed Martinez a smoke and lit him up. "You and I are brothers, hey, *Ese*?" Raymond nodded, yes. That was the first time Martinez ever called Raymond anything but sergeant since Martinez came In-country, over eleven months ago. "Brothers of the skin, hey, man?" Raymond snapped his Zippo shut and nodded, yes, again.

"He's a fuckin' white guy, *Vato!*"

Raymond remained silent and looked over his left shoulder down the line of men. He and Martinez drew smoke together.

They drew in their smoke together and exhaled together.

Martinez continued, "She says, those white guys know how to treat a woman. He'll be somebody someday. The boys in the barrio are nowhere now and ain't ever goin' nowhere. Says, she loves him and wants to do it while she was still young and pretty."

Raymond and Martinez drew smoke together.

"Hell, man, she's got a degree! She didn't have to make that kind of decision. I've got two years of college. I'd be done if it weren't for this fuckin' war. Their fuckin' war, Vato. They're takin' our fuckin' women and we're fightin' their fuckin' war. Them fuckin' white boys just look too fuckin' good, man. Those fuckers got everything goin' for them. What am I supposed to do, man?"

Raymond and Martinez drew smoke together.

"Says, he's kind and patient with her. That fucker's got nothin' to do but be kind and patient with her. He's got all the time in the world and nothin' to lose. He's got all the opportunities, and now he wants my fuckin' woman. I love her man. And I'm fuckin' here, dying, man," said Martinez.

Raymond and Martinez drew smoke together, brothers.

At the moment they exhaled, a black cylinder about the size of a tall ketchup bottle thumped and rolled into the line behind Raymond. Raymond heard it hit the ground and turned his head to see the grenade. Small-arms fire started in that same instant that Raymond realized what was going on. Before Raymond could react Martinez pulled him back and away from the grenade and flung him. Raymond instinctively rolled; he knew the danger. He stopped rolling and lay flat on his belly head down, nose pressed to the ground, his arms wrapped around the jungle hat covering his head.

Raymond moved his nose from off the ground a little, peeked out, and saw Martinez move towards the device. He did not lunge for the device. He crawled to it on all fours, suspending himself over it for a short moment of understanding, prayer and commitment. He then lowered his body and placed his chest on the black cylinder.

Raymond continued to watch this strange act take place. A long moment later the grenade went off in a muffled explosion.

Martinez's body rose from the earth. Then, he descended to earth again, his heart surely shattered.

It seemed like a longtime as he lay there stunned by Martinez's action. But the soldier in him knew that in the time of that other World it was only a split second. He knew from experience that here, in the real world, in time of combat, time often nearly stopped. He noticed that he, and his combat brothers, would go into some kind of altered state fueled by a mixture of experience, fear, adrenalin and the desire to survive. The only time that mattered here, he thought, was the amount of time you could get one-up on Charlie. Charlie was going fast, you had to go faster. The winner got the prize: Life.

In what was left of that split second Raymond rolled over twice towards his rifle. He grabbed his piece and rolled up into a crouched position. He looked around to see automatic gunfire coming from the ville. Chuck liked to set these villages up this way. Rounds landed in front of him and a few whizzed like mosquitoes by his head.

He could see that he was in a good position to roll into the dry irrigation ditch and make a move to silence those guns. In the instant he thought of it, he rolled into the ditch, crouched low again, and ran down the ditch toward the ville. He looked back and around his shoulder to see Corporal Linwood Jones following him with an M-79. It was strange because Sergeant McGinn was usually there. McGinn was gone now. He took the bird home when Raymond was in the hospital. McGinn had sense.

Together they reached the edge of the ville. It too was formed in the shape of a circle. He admired the VN's for their insight when he first saw this circle many months ago as he flew over on his way out to his new hill. He wondered at that time if this ville had a medicine man to guide and heal them. He also wondered what Grandpa would think.

Raymond turned to Jones and said, "I'm going in, Jones." Jones said, "I'm right behind you, Chief." Raymond left the ditch and Jones followed. As he reached the exact edge of the ville he stepped over a piece of wood and leapt into the circle. There was a major explosion and a bright flash of light. "Shit," he heard himself scream.

Absolute darkness.

His brain flashed, "Booby-trap." He wondered why he was still thinking. He wondered why he was so stupid.

Hurting through the darkness.

His legs felt like they were burning up. His brain thought of Jones right behind him, dying with him.

Blinding flash of bright light.

Raymond opened his eyes and saw that he was hanging in darkness. Not like solid, absolute, darkness, but a very dark blue darkness. And hanging was not the right description of what was happening to him either. He was floating, as if in water. Yet, he had no trouble breathing. Two small, bright red, tracer-like, balls rushed from somewhere ahead of him and suspended themselves in front of him; side by side, within arms length. Instinctively he reached for them and grasped one in each hand. They pulled him up, as if by two ropes. He rose through the darkness like an eagle; like Superman.

Above him an orange speck of light appeared. He rose rapidly towards it. The two red balls abruptly left him, streaking off to his left and right. Momentum kept him moving upward and into the orange light.

As he rose through the orange light, he could see that he was rising out of a fire. Slowly his head emerged into a large tipi. Grandpa had always called them lodges. He continued to rise until he was standing in the fire. He began to feel the heat again at his feet. A beautiful young Indian woman who wore a brand new white deerskin dress and had long sparkling black hair, which was loose and wild, as if blown by wind, stood by the tipi door and beckoned him to follow as she bent and stepped outside. He stepped out of the fire and looked around as he moved toward the door to follow her. At the back of the tipi sat an old man holding two rattles in one hand and a stick with four eagle feathers in the other. His deer hide shirt and leggings were not new looking like the young woman's. Still he was very powerful looking. The old man gestured at Raymond with the stick and a nodding of his head. A slight smile crossed the old man's face. His eyes literally sparkled. Raymond turned his head back towards the door; he bent and exited the lodge.

As he unbent he could see that they were on a wide plain. The sky was blue, just like back home. There were dark clouds off in the distance. Lightning flashed through them. Soon the rumble reached him. He could feel the vibrations go through his body. He immediately felt charged up, renewed. He took a deep breath and looked for the young woman. She stood at the door of another lodge not far away. She spoke, "Come in here." She smiled at him and beckoned with a graceful movement of her arm. He felt himself smile back. She then pulled the door flap back and gestured for him to go in.

Raymond walked forward, bent, and poked his head in to get a look-see. This lodge was much like the one he had just left, except that it was empty. A small fire was also at the center and he gazed at it for a moment. He expected this to be the waiting room, of sorts. When he did finally step in, he immediately sank into the darkness again. The floor apparently had no substance; at least for him. Maybe he lacked the power to remain afloat in that world, he thought.

Raymond looked up and saw the orange light above moving rapidly away. He glanced down and saw that he was moving quickly toward a door. There was nothing spectacular about that door. It was just an old door, he thought. Just as that thought passed through his head, he hit that old door with his shoulder, slamming it open. He hit the floor with his right knee and rolled over coming to a halt sitting up. His M-16 skittered away. His legs hurt like hell. His pants were smoking and were on fire on some spots below the knee. He patted madly to get the fires out. His legs felt like someone had hit the "crazy bones". He could smell rubber burning. His boots were smoking. He got the fire out and looked around stunned and amazed.

A voice spoke behind him, "What took you so long, Grandson?"

Raymond spun around. He was in his grandfather's old house back on the reservation. He used to play here a lot as a small boy. He stood up wincing in pain. "Is this Heaven, Grandpa?" he asked. He wondered because his legs still hurt like hell.

Grandfather smiled. "No, Grandson, we're far from heaven," he said.

Grandfather was down on his hands and knees putting a floorboard in place. He hammered one nail down in a few strokes. "That's for you, Raymond. Make sure you pull this board up and get what's yours when you get back from your war," he said, pointing at the floor. "Some things in a sugar can and shoe box. Grandma's sugar can. She wouldn't go for that if she were here now," he said. "Other things too," he added.

Grandfather got up slowly and finally gestured toward the doorway. He spoke, "That was some explosion that brought you here, Grandson. Sometimes it takes a blast like that. When I came through I landed in my Grandpa's old buffalo hide lodge. Landed right on some old buffalo hides with some hair still on 'em. Nice soft landing," he paused, and added, "Sorry about that hard floor, Grandson." A little smile crossed his face again. "My Grandpa liked that old tipi. He said that was the only place to do some truly good medicine. He had many allies in the spirit world."

"What's that?" he asked suddenly, gesturing with pursed lips and chin toward Raymond's M-16 laying next to the back door behind Raymond. Raymond turned his head in that direction. "That's an M-16, Grandpa," he said as he turned and picked up his piece and held it towards Grandfather for inspection. Grandfather squinted at it and gestured with arms the way you would at a bad smell.

"I don't touch them anymore, Raymond. Not since my war," Grandfather said. He turned and stepped to the window over the sink. He motioned to Raymond to come forward. "Look at this, Grandson," he said. Raymond went to the window. There was a young boy playing in the dirt, engrossed in his little toy soldier games.

"Remember that circle of cottonwoods and birch around the house, Raymond?" Grandfather asked as Raymond squinted out into the bright sunlit day.

"Who's that, Grandpa?" asked Raymond.

"That's you, Grandson," Grandfather said. "That's you," he repeated.

Raymond leaned forward to get a better look. He stared for a long moment. The boy looked up briefly, puzzled. His eyebrows

went up as he peered in. The boy looked in only for a moment more and went back to his play.

Raymond gazed at himself sitting out there in the hot summer sun. He thought about that day he heard that rumble in Grandpa's house. He didn't look up right away because there were always noises coming from Grandpa's house. There were always strangers. When he finally did look into the kitchen window, there was a tired man in a funny, floppy, hat standing next to Grandpa. They were both looking at him. Raymond realized now that he was that tired man in the funny hat.

"I saw myself back then too, Grandson," Grandfather said. "Really somethin' eh, Raymond?" Grandfather asked, not expecting an answer. "Do you want to talk to him, Grandson? Do you want to tell him about his future?" he asked.

"Yes, Grandpa. I have to warn him," Raymond said.

Raymond turned and headed for the back door. He arrived in three steps and pulled it open. The daylight flooded in. He stepped into the doorway and turned around to see if Grandfather was following. Grandfather wasn't there anymore. He looked around the room and saw that it was covered in dust and hadn't been used for some time. A breeze rattled a torn window shade that hadn't been there a moment before, through a broken pane that hadn't been there before either. Years had apparently passed in a millisecond.

He stepped back out of the doorway and pulled the door shut. The click of the mechanism sounded hollow. He turned and stepped into the yard.

Suddenly, there was that flash of bright light again. It was like a flashbulb going off in his face. It made that same popping and burning sound. Then came the blue darkness again. This time he was not just hanging there. It felt as if there was solid ground under his feet. The atmosphere around him became a fuzzy dark yellow turning to blood red. The two bright red balls appeared in front of him again. This time they just hung in front of him out of reach. From a point several yards in front of him a patch of solidness began to take shape. It was like a puzzle coming together from the center out. The solidness became the bunker. Standing there was Corporal Linwood Jones. Jones was facing the