

Neewa the Wonder Dog and the Ghost Hunters!

Volume One: The Indian Medicine Woman's Mystery is Revealed!

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Prologue

Adventure and mystery in the uncanny spirit world captivate the young lives of fourteen-year-old Christina and her sister Jackie, eleven. When the family moves 1500 miles from their home in New Jersey to the desert of the American Southwest, they encounter many spirits—some good, some evil.

Out West the family seeks out the paranormal, hunting ghosts with the latest, most sophisticated devices. Their searches take them to several eerie places, including a remote forest, a ghost town and a sacred burial ground. They also explore an isolated Native American stream and investigate an Indian Pow Wow.

Not long after settling into their new home, Christina adopts Neewa, a half coyote female puppy with a mysterious secret. But when the puppy becomes deathly ill, the girl

is determined to find a doctor to save her pet. When a shaman vet miraculously turns up, he supplies a charm, a potion and an incantation for Neewa to save her spirit.

Danger lurks around every corner but the sisters surprisingly find protection in most unusual ways through a medicine woman, mythological animals, herbs and other mystical means.

Throughout their extraordinary experiences the young sisters face various dimensions of fear and joy.

Chapter 1 – Neewa’s New Family

Still can’t believe I moved 1500 miles away from our home and all my friends, this is a big mistake. If it weren’t for Dad I would be home right now. I’d be hanging with my friends and living in my house instead of this old broken down place.

I can’t understand why Mom moved to Canada either. It’s not fair that we are all so far apart. I miss her so much. Grandma and Grandpa didn’t want us to leave either. Everyone back home wanted us to stay.

Dad got this job with the government, that’s why we came out West. Monday through Friday he works calculating all kinds of stuff with very fancy instruments, electromagnetic field (EMF) meters, temperature sensors, static electricity & ionization detectors, motion detectors, listening devices, radio frequency detectors, even radiation monitors.

But on the weekends we take, or rather we borrow, this same equipment and use it. It’s a good thing the government doesn’t know what we do with their stuff. We

certainly can't tell Dad's boss that we hunt ghosts. That's right! We hunt ghosts, not imaginary ones, but ghosts and spirits that give off real natural energy, paranormal phenomena.

Dad says, "As long as I'm testing the equipment, the boss says it's okay to take the stuff home."

When we go on a ghost hunt, we also bring night vision goggles, a special infrared camera and a digital camera with sound recording capability to capture everything that happens in an investigation. Dad says, "If it gives off energy, it can be hunted."

The equipment is the same kind of high-tech gear used to hunt tornadoes, thunderstorms, or even criminals. I'm not exactly sure what Dad does during the day at work. He doesn't talk about it much. It's kind of funny cause when we have all of the equipment with us, Dad worries that someone might think we stole the stuff because of the labels that say, "*Property of US Government.*" He says we have to keep a low profile.

My goal is to be the world's most famous ghost hunter that ever lived. I'm talking about having my own TV show and everything, that's what I want.

My name is Christina, I'm fourteen years old and I hunt ghosts. Jacqueline, my sister, we call her Jackie, is eleven years old and she hunts ghosts too.

Jackie and I kind of look alike but we are so different. She has wavy auburn hair while mine is black and curly. Dad says I look really great with my hair up. That's how I hide all the curls that annoy the heck out of me. I get so mad cause my hair frizzes out all over the place. I spend so much time straightening it, I could scream.

And just about everything Dad says to me makes me freak out. If he says something I don't like, forget it. I fire right back at him. Then he says, "Stop it" or he'll punish or ground me. When he says that, I blast him, call him a name or tell him to shut up. By the time I think about what I've said, it's too late.

If he keeps his cool and says stuff like, "That's no way to talk to your father," he makes me feel guilty so I apologize.

But if he yells or says I'm mean, then I say more mean stuff and really get him mad. We won't make up till the next day. Usually I feel bad all night and that sucks, but that's what happens.

Jackie is more of a trickster type. Oh yeah, she'll start trouble all right and mostly for me. If she doesn't get her way, she goes into a major screaming tantrum until the roof is shaking and all Dad and I want to do is run away. But we can't because she just keeps coming at us until she gets what she wants. Then she blames me, saying I did it! Or, "What did I do?" Claiming her innocence.

What I hate most is when she blames me for something, saying stuff like, "It's your fault I'm late. I was supposed to be there a half hour ago! You're making me late!"

I tell her, "Go jump in the lake," or something.

Our fight goes back and forth and gets pretty ugly, if you know what I mean. It ruins the rest of the night unless someone apologizes, which only happens if the one who gets hurt stays calm and says things to make the other one feel guilty, but how often does that happen?

Jackie and I never dress alike although I borrow her stuff and she takes clothes from me when I'm not looking. It makes me so mad. I tell her not to take my clothes but

she ignores me. Acts as if I'm imagining it. Then she returns them when I'm not around. She thinks I don't know what she does.

Give me jeans and a Hoodie with a tight top and I'm happy.

Jackie and her friend Amanda are into designer clothes, chic tops, and name brands. She's wearing pink today with her favorite sandals. She even paints her fingernails different colors from one day to the next. My nails are always natural, never painted.

I'm taller than Jackie by about five inches, but she can put me in a headlock and make me say uncle, but I won't. Dad is like a foot taller than me. I'm going to be as tall as him someday.

Some day I'm going to be a writer. When I'm writing, I can make up stories and be sarcastic without anybody catching on.

Jackie wants to be an actor. She likes to take lots of dance and singing classes.

I tell her, "You already are an actress." She gets really mad.

My green eyes and long lashes are gorgeous, that's what everyone says.

Whenever someone hears my last name they say, "*Is your Dad John?*"

"Yes," I always say smiling, then they say, "*I know your Dad.*" I just grin.

One thing though, I hate my nose. It has a bump on the bridge from a couple of falls I took when I was little. One time I was walking up the slide and my feet slipped right out from under me, and BAM! I landed face first right on it.

Jackie's nose is perfect but she still has her braces. I had mine off last month, now I just wear a retainer every night.

I'm so excited I finally got my puppy, the one I've been waiting for forever. Dad has promised me I could adopt a puppy for the last seven years. Now I finally have one, but she has no name and I have to pick a really great name for her. I've been looking on the Internet, and everywhere for the perfect name, but I can't decide. Jackie thinks she is going to name her but that is out of the question.

Everyone is sitting in the TV room as I go through a box of stuff not yet unpacked from our move. Boxes are still in closets, bedrooms, and everywhere. At the bottom of this one box is a book I've never seen before.

"Hey, look at this Native American Language Book." I thumb through the pages to a section on names. They're in columns with the English word next to the Indian word. I read through name after name.

"Wow! I had no idea there were so many Indian names, page after page of them," I mumble spellbound reading one after another.

Suddenly one name jumps out at me. "Neewa is the word for snowberry, pronounced Knee-wa. Snowberry would be a great name for my new puppy. She's all white like a snowberry. That's it! I'm going to call her Neewa."

There is silence in the room. I think everyone likes the name.

Grinning, I look around. "So that's that, I've picked her name, it'll be Neewa."

"Wait a minute, wait a minute, I have some names for her," Jackie complains. "How come you get to pick her name anyway? What about Snowball, Ghost, or Snowflake?"

She stares at me, then Dad.

“Jackie you can’t name my puppy. I’ve waited years to get her. You can walk her, feed her, pet her, and love her. But she is my puppy, and I’m going to name her.” I stomp out of the room determined.

“What are we having to eat? I’m hungry,” I yell to Dad shutting myself behind the door of my room.

Dad is now darting around the kitchen answers, “Grandma’s Florida chicken, mashed potatoes and string beans. And Christina it’s your turn to set the table.”

I act like I didn’t hear him.

“Christina, NOW!” Dad adds.

“In a minute, stop bugging me, I will,” I shout knowing he’ll do it if I wait long enough.

Through the paper-thin walls, I listen to Jackie give a speech on why she should pick my puppy’s name. She makes me so mad as she continues her appeal to Dad.

“It’s Christina’s puppy so I should get to name her. This isn’t fair, she gets a puppy and I get nothing. I can’t even name it. I want my own puppy,” she complains.

After a good amount of silence, we all sit down to eat. The conversation continues about naming my puppy. Dad doesn’t really want to answer Jackie so he tells her the puppy is for all of us to enjoy. Christina has always wanted one and this is the way it turned out, blah, blah, blah, he goes on and on.

I’m really getting mad, “She’s my puppy Jackie! I’m naming her so get over it!”

Hum, let’s see, what can I say to send her over the edge, make her lose her temper and blow up? Hum, so many choices, let me pick one. “So Jackie, what song are you rehearsing for the talent show?”

Dad jumps in immediately, “Christina stop it right now! I know where you’re going with this. Jackie don’t listen to her, she is just trying to get you going.”

I glare at her from across the table. By this time my stomach is in knots, I can hear rumbling, gurgling, and I’m about ready to throw up.

“My mind is made up and that’s that. Why can’t you get it through your head?” I burst out.

Jackie continues to taunt me by suggesting silly names like Spot and White Fang. I ignore her. Those names don’t have anything to do with my puppy. Jackie always has to get her way, but not this time. She’s my puppy and I’m naming her, no one is going to change that.

Neewa is playing around the table trying to get my attention. Frolicking and jumping around, she spins and then leaps up. Quickly she circles me, bumping into my shin to make sure I reach down to pet her as she loses her balance and stumbles over her oversized paws.

Neewa’s nose starts sniffing the air. She smells dinner and sits perfectly straight at my side. Her tail is curled around her legs, occasionally thumping the floor. Her head is pointing at the food on my plate, eyes and nose focused, not even blinking.

“We can’t feed you at the table. You have your own bowls for food and water.” It’s Dad’s rule for now, we all agreed to it before picking her up at the pound. But I’ll have that rule changed in no time.

“You made me wait seven years to get my puppy,” I blurt out.

Dad answers in a serious tone, “Christina, you were not ready for a puppy seven years ago. I’m not sure you’re ready now.”

After dinner I fake a kitchen clean up so Dad will jump in and get it over with. I just want to slip into the living room and watch my TV shows. Never mind anyone else.

Jackie is looking for the book with the names but I hid it way in the back of the shelf where she will never find it. I'm not telling her where it is. I know what she's up to. Oh crap, that's it, she found it. She's looking through the pages for another name for my Neewa. I pretend to pay no attention to her.

Turning to Dad she says, "Here's the section on names."

She pauses, studying and turning the pages. "What about the name White Cloud or White Star? They are perfect names."

"Those are not Indian words you widget." She makes me so mad.

Jackie ignores me. When I call her a name, she usually goes ballistic, kicking, and screaming at me.

She snickers, "Hey look at this, they have a word for ghost. It's —*ha*, and more than one ghost is —*nee*."

Jackie reads a passage from the book, "Indians believe the Spirit lives forever. When the body dies, the spirit is called a spirit being and may take the body of another living creature such as a butterfly, a wolf, or even a bear. Or a spirit being may live in the wind or earth not taking any form at all."

Silence fills the room, even Neewa is motionless listening as Jackie continues reading, "The spirit being is seeking a resting place in the sacred burial ground, among all the others who have died. This sacred ground is the doorway to the spirit world, the final resting place where all the spirit beings gather and celebrate eternal peace and happiness."

“That’s creepy!” Smiling, I look at Dad and Jackie.

“Yeah, that’s really creepy,” Jackie adds, “Gives me the chills.”

“Do you believe that, Dad?” I look at him.

Dad walks back into the kitchen to finish putting stuff away, “I’m not sure I believe it, I wish it were true though. Most of the guys at work believe it.”

Jackie is so spoiled. Before Mom moved she would ask her, “Can my friend sleep over, Mom?”

At first Mom would say, “No, no, and no.”

Guess what? Later she always got her way and had her friend sleeping over. Most of her friends are odd, they love to sit around singing Broadway tunes and choreograph dance routines to the music of online karaoke websites.

I hate it when she sings off key. “You’re off key,” I yell from my room.

She gets so mad, really crazy, and even throws stuff at me. Except for maybe Dad, she’s got the worst temper of all of us.

At night I shut my door to get away from everyone. I need time to myself to read books and do things. My favorite authors are Stephenie Meyer and Dan Brown. But most of the time I’m online talking or texting to my friends back home. One of my friends, I met on line at FanFiction. It’s a web site where we write reviews of TV shows and movies. We all write stuff and then comment and critique each other’s stuff. I call my friend “Ohio,” because she lives in Ohio. She’s home schooled.

Jackie loves to read, mostly mysteries, and action-adventure like Harry Potter books and lots of other ones too.

“Good night Dad, love you,” Jackie says as she glides into her room.

Sleep, I need sleep. “Good night Dad, love you.”

“Goodnight Christina, night Jackie, love you.”

I stare at the ceiling in this ugly place. My new home is beat, it's an old one-story ranch in a neighborhood laid out in a perfect grid. Of all the houses in this part of town, ours is the oldest and the smallest. It's the worst looking too, never been updated like the other ones around us. I'll tell you one thing, I'm not planning on staying here long. I'm getting out of here as soon as I can.

The inside is just three small bedrooms and a tiny kitchen and living room. The front door and several old windows have plastic stapled over it to keep out the cold.

The outside is a mess. The driveway in front is full of potholes. We have to use a bumpy dirt path around back in the alleyway. The only good thing about it is the back pathway ends just a few feet from the side door, the only door we use to get in and out of the place. But watch out when you turn off the alley, there's a big tree right there. Dad almost hit it a few times.

Beige stucco covers the cinder block structure we call home. And burgundy red paint outlines the windows, doors and roof. The color of the house was white, but after years of harsh sun and wind, it's got a layer of encrusted dirt over the top. It's not white anymore.

An old wood fence around the front yard is falling apart. It has double rails made of 2 x 4's that run along the border between the neighbor's yard and ours. Oh my God, the railing colors alternate between burgundy and off-white, with dirt caked on to match the house, Yuck!

The painter must have run out of the burgundy and added white paint to make it go further to finish the job. You can see where the shade of burgundy gets lighter, turning into pink and fuchsia at the corner. His painting ladder, splattered with paint drips, still rests against the house where he stopped.

Flowerbeds on either side of the walkway haven't been cared for in years. They still have beautiful flowers blooming, attracting a tiny green and yellow hummingbird at dusk. The Iridescent tiny green bird hovers, while using its long beak to slurp the nectar from the flowers. I've tried to take pictures of him but he gets scared off so easily and flies away in a flash.

The landlord said we could rent the house for a few hundred dollars a month. That's if we take care of it until he gets out of the nursing home. Dad says he'll never get out.

My house back home was twice the size of this one and brand new. Bedrooms, living room, every room was bigger and it had lots more closets and big wide windows with windowsills to stack my stuff on. The kitchen had cherry wood cabinets, and bathrooms with satin nickel faucets and fake marble counter tops on matching vanities. The place was so cozy and the apartment downstairs was perfect for Grandma and Grandpa, with gorgeous southwestern motifs in the ceramic tile that covered the floor. Everyone was so mad when Dad said we were selling the house and Grandma and Grandpa would have to move.

It was on a dead-end street, the last house, and there were lots of kids. We played games, went fishing in the pond and had lots of fun. Jackie's friend, Debbie, who lived on our block had a swimming pool and we had a trampoline for everyone to jump on.

Grandma and Grandpa were always there on holidays and weekends and giving us presents, even when it wasn't our birthday. I miss my family and friends so much.

Sometimes at night I look at their pictures and cry myself to sleep.

Here, our new neighbors won't even talk to us. Worse than that one night when I was coming home, I saw one neighbor turn away from me as I went in my door.

One exception, the banker and his wife made an effort to be hospitable and welcoming. Hank and Jane Burns are very nice people. From time to time they come over to the house, talk to us, and even brought brownies. Meanwhile, they try to find out everything they can about us. Dad says Mr. Burns wants us to take out a loan or invest in cable TV or something.

Jackie started babysitting for their daughter, Brice. That gives Hank and Jane time to go out for dinner and a movie without having to worry. They trust Jackie and she is paid pretty well for her time.

Besides Brice, there are no other kids around here, it's like they rounded them all up and sent them away. Or maybe zombies came and took them. Whatever happened to them? I don't know. But the streets are deserted, no skateboards, scooters, or jump rope. This place sucks.

Chapter 2 – Yesterday Was the Happiest Day of My Life

It was early morning when Dad woke us up. Usually, when he tries to get me up on a weekend morning I tell him, "Leave me alone, go away, don't bother me!"

Yesterday morning was different. Getting up and dressed and being ready was easy. Finally we were going to the animal shelter to get the puppy I've been waiting for my entire life.

Jackie on the other hand was moving as slow as a snail. I stood at the door, tapping my shoe on the floor. Annoyed, I waited while Jackie had to have her morning bowl of cereal.

"Jackie let's go, we're late," I plead with her to hurry.

"Christina shut up! I can't hear the TV," she replied.

"Dad, Dad, Jackie is having cereal, tell her to leave it, I wanna go now," I begged Dad.

Finally after a lot of yelling, we got in the van and left.

After we drove a while into the desert from town I saw the sign, "County Animal Shelter." The arrow pointed up a long dirt road. At the end of the bumpy road was a dull gray building.

Around back was the kennel area. At this distance, the compound looked neat and tidy, with animal pens in rows. I could see some of where the dogs were kept. In the front were a few parked cars and a big front door with one window.

Loud sounds of barking dogs came from behind the building. No wonder they put this place way out in the middle of nowhere. But as we got closer, the noise got so loud it sounded like a fox hunt was going on in the back. And the building seemed to turn even grayer.

I was very nervous as I led everyone across the stone parking lot. Jackie and Dad followed close behind me.

After knocking on the steel door, a man in black coveralls, hair slicked back and parted down the middle, slowly opened the door. The barking got even louder and I was hit with a wave of the pungent smell of a dog pound. The old man with a kindhearted smile greeted us. My guess is he's the dog catcher. His appearance and pale face made him look like Dracula, lacking only the makeup and cape.

"Looking for a pet?" He grinned.

"Yes," I answer back.

"Right this way, you folks just look around," Dracula said.

"Follow me," I ordered.

I whispered to Jackie, "That guy looks like Dracula, look at his hair."

We laughed as we walked through the hallway into the inner chamber.

Dad reminds me, "Christina remember we want a nice, friendly, housebroken and fully grown dog."

"Poppy, Poppy, (I call Dad Poppy sometimes) I heard what you said, now stop with the pressure okay?" Hoping he will back off and leave me alone.

I wandered from side to side on the walkway between the large and small cages with big and small cats and dogs of all colors inside. Creeping through the maze, I looked left then right, checking each animal, yet passing one after another. Occasionally I hesitated for a moment to take a closer look, but continued my journey down the endless corridor of forlorn and cast-off pets. I was heartbroken looking at all the cats and dogs with no homes. Surplus animals, once loyal and loving pets, now no longer needed, discarded members of society wanting to be taken care of.

Dad whispered in my ear as if the animals were listening to him, "After sixteen weeks in the pound they will be put to sleep."

"Put to sleep? What does that mean?" I blurt out loud. Is he saying that they are to be killed, murdered?

"They have to be euthanized, destroyed," he finished his thinking.

Instantly I became flushed, face red-hot. Each one of them needed a home, to be loved, before it's too late. Gasping for air, I was horrified at the thought that any one of these animals would be destroyed.

Now my morning at the pound was no longer joyous and full of promise. It was more like a slow motion death walk in a horror movie. Frame after frame passing before me with animals being led to the gas chamber where they were to be "taken care of" all right.

The morning was slipping away, there seemed to be more and more animals, and choosing just one became more complicated. I wanted to save them all. Maybe even lead a jailbreak and set them all free.

Jackie followed me through the aisles of animals while Dad was left behind somewhere.

Nearing the end of death row, I became full of fear and anxiety. The animals jumped toward me as I passed their cages, wanting to be saved from their ultimate fate.

If I reached out to one, it lunged to the side of the cage, crashing into the wire wall, trying to kiss my fingers, as if I were Pope John Paul. And had the power to save them. It was as if they knew their fate and that I was their savior. But nothing could save all of these animals.

Unexpectedly, I spied a little white puppy curled up in a ball with its littermates. It looked up at me with pointed ears too big for its head and a shining black nose. It was the cutest puppy I had ever seen. It jumped up on the side of the cage letting out a yelp, calling me.

This puppy was so pretty, a German shepherd looking girl. She had the deepest steel gray eyes and a long snout on its big head. Her tail curled up over her hind legs like a Husky as she stood on her back legs up against the cage, nibbling on my fingers with her pointed white teeth. She was so beautiful, and had such soft ivory fur. And those big floppy paws were too big for her body, just like her ears. I hope she doesn't grow into those paws.

Jackie," I shrieked, "here's the one, here's the one!" Feeling joy that I have not felt for a long, long time.

Just then Dad caught up to us. I petted her through the cage as she ran around my hand like it was a toy to tease and chew on.

"Can we take her home Dad?" I looked at him.

"Hey," Dad moaned, "I thought we agreed on a grown dog, one that's already trained and house broken."

Jackie stooped down next to me and the puppy licked both our faces through the metal mesh. It was love at first sight for her too.

"Jackie you want this one right? Say yes," I pleaded with her.

"Dad let's get this one," she agreed.

"Dad, I want this puppy, she will be a good watch dog and protect Jackie and me. Grown up or not, please Dad," sounding like a beggar but not caring.

Dad was reluctant to commit, something about it being too much work, or some other reason. I didn't know and didn't care what he was thinking. A long pause followed. He seemed to be weighing his options.

I didn't see it as a difficult choice. On the one hand he could disappoint us and spend the rest of his days in hell, or take the puppy and win the Greatest Dad of The Day Award.

"Okay, Okay," he says as he steps up to the podium for the Best Dad Prize.

Jackie and I disagreed on almost everything, but not this. The puppy was coming home with us. This was the first thing we had agreed on all week, maybe all month.

Dad was surprised there was so little paperwork to adopt our puppy. He only had to sign a release and the puppy was free to go.

Holding her in my arms, we headed for the exit when Dracula, the dog catcher, came from his coffin to wish us well.

I stopped and looked at him, "Where did she come from?"

He replied as if he knew the origin of every animal in the pound. "That one came from the desert. Someone found the three of them roaming around and brought them in.

"They had no mom or dad with them. Not much chance they would have made it to sunrise out there in the desert. Something would have had them for dinner. I think your shepherd pup is a coy dog."

"A coy dog? What's a coy dog?" I inquired.

He answered, "A coy dog is half coyote and half dog."

Stunned by his answer, I feel my face flush and my eyes blink rapidly. Did he say coyote? Did Dad hear what he said?

“Thank you,” I hastily turned heading for the door.

Running, I cradled her in my arms and dropped my face into her soft fur hoping no one else heard what the dog catcher had said. They might want to take her away. I’ve never heard of a coy dog before, never knew such a thing existed. But the dog catcher said it, so it must be true.

After that, I don’t remember very much, just holding my puppy and running for the car.

“Hurry Dad, drive, drive,” I shouted, “I don’t ever want to lose her.”

He answered, “Don’t worry Christina, no one’s going to take her away from you.”

A few minutes later we were driving home. I keep thinking about the news of my puppy being only half dog. Even our drive through more desert wasteland doesn’t distract me from worrying about her.

I’m so tired of this place, nothing but desert everywhere.

The desert is a dangerous place compared to the place we used to live. Back East there is little risk of being killed by a scorpion, rattlesnake, or a pack of coyotes. Nor is it likely you will die from starvation, thirst, or exposure if you get lost. But out here in the desert you can die from any of these.

I can imagine how Neewa got separated from her mother. She had to go hunting for something to eat. Probably, all the puppies were running, playing, and wandering around before they realized they were all alone.

Neewa isn’t a regular dog. She didn’t grow up in a house with a picket fence and kids running around. Neewa may have a mom, dad, brothers, and sisters, but she’s part wild animal.

Wild animals have to eat raw meat and whatever their mom brings them to survive. I've watched programs on National Geographic and the Nature channel about how animals survive in the wilderness.

"Yuck," I say picturing Neewa eating raw meat, regurgitated from her mother's stomach onto the ground.

"Gross," comes out of my mouth as I try to shake off the disgusting thoughts I'm having, but they continue.

"She's a wild animal," I blurt out not thinking what I'm saying. Jackie and Dad look at me startled.

My mind continues to race. Maybe Neewa's mom was the alpha female in the pack. The other female coyotes took care of the litter. Neewa's mom did what alpha females do—whatever that is.

After a long silence, "Will a half coyote and half dog be a good pet? Content to live with us or will she run off into the desert to be with her own kind?"

Dad spoke to reassure me, "Yes that may be true but her natural instinct is to be loyal to man. I've read that coy dogs can be good pets. We'll see how it goes. Everything should work out fine. But if she's too wild, we'll bring her back."

Not another word was spoken the rest of the trip home. Everyone was in deep thought about my new puppy, our new family member.

That's what happened yesterday. Today Neewa is running and playing all around the house. Already she is settling into her new home.

She must be very confused from all the changes, too many for her to understand. I can relate to that, all the changes I've been through lately with Mom and Dad separating and selling our house and then moving way out here.

It was only a few days ago she was in the wide-open desert, happy and playing with her brothers and sisters. Then, wham! In the blink of an eye, she's in a cage, with no room to roll around and nowhere to explore.

"Dad look, here is the definition of a coy dog," I stare at the screen of my phone.

Dad and Jackie stop what they are doing. Everyone is silent and all eyes are focused on me. It is so quiet; you can hear the birds chirping outside our windows.

I read, "A coy dog is the hybrid offspring of a male coyote (*Canis latrans*) and a female dog (*Canis lupus familiaris*)."

"Poppy can we keep her? Coy dogs need to be adopted too," I plead. "Dracula will destroy her if we take her back."

Dad shrugs, "We'll see how it goes."

Neewa has checked out everything in the house, all the bedrooms, living room and the barely functional toilet and tub in the one and only bathroom.

She has bowls for food and water in our outdated kitchen. But her bed is in my room along with her toy box full of the latest squeaking playthings for her favorite games, fetch and tug of war. The squeaky toys that look like bones are her favorites, but she will spend hours gnawing on the real soup bones that Dad cooks for her.

As she lies under the kitchen table, I daydream of her fitting into our family. Her ears perk up, and she looks at me.

"Good girl, Neewa," I say to her.

I blink away the tears in my eyes, praying she will never go back to that dog pound.

In my new school, I walk into classrooms full of kids I don't know and who don't know me. Some of them look at me funny. One or two make comments, but I ignore them. If one of them tries to bully me I curse at him and tell him where to go. Honestly, I'm not going to be here long enough to become friends with any of them anyway.

I'm always online or on ooVoo with my best friends back East. Right now I'm telling them about Neewa my new puppy. My friends back home and I are always texting each other about everything in our lives. We talk about who's dating, who broke up, and who's drinking and drugging.

Dad and Jackie don't know that I stay up so late. They have no idea. But it's three hours later back East, so my friends there are up way later than me. It's already twelve midnight there when it's only nine at night here.

When I'm on my laptop, don't bother me. And if you do, I'll drop F-bombs on you till you have a stroke. When I was younger, I would have said I'll maul you like a lion if you bother me, ha-ha.

I watch movies, YouTube videos, and TV shows on my laptop. But my favorite thing to do is to stay up late watching horror movies.

What I really want to do is hunt ghosts, spirits, angels, and demons. They do exist, no doubt in my mind. They're everywhere. In the wind, earth, fire, and even in other living things. But they are not the only paranormal phenomena I hunt. There are orbs,

aberrations, and objects that move totally by themselves. While I'm out West, I'm going to hunt them down in haunted houses, deserted towns, everywhere.

The moon is full tonight and the sky is clear as I gaze out my bedroom window. The light reflects off everything in my yard, it's so bright out it looks like daytime.

Hey, what's that running across my front yard in the shadow of that tree? It looks like a dog or maybe a coyote. Whatever it is, there it goes over the fence, disappearing into the night.

Maybe it was a spirit? It was an Indian warrior wandering in the night. He was a brave warrior who died in a raid, a revenge attack of another camp. His soul took possession of that coyote. Now he returns to his camp. The coyote has chosen the path across my yard.

The Indians around here hide their sacred burial ground. I've heard some Indian kids whisper about it.

That would really be something to find one of those graveyards and capture one of their ghosts on film. I'd be rich and famous, move to Hollywood and have my own TV show.

Chapter 3 - Ghost at Donner Pass

Dad is reading the newspaper at the kitchen table when he bursts out, "Hey a ghost was seen at Donner Pass."

"What ghost?" Confused I ask, "What and where is Donner Pass?"

Dad looks over at me, “Donner Pass is in the mountains about three hours south of here and the Donner Party disaster was a historic wagon train headed west that got caught in a blizzard and most of the pioneers died.

Dad reads me the article. “Mrs. Eleanor Waldo of Phantom Hill, Texas, told her story. She said she and her husband were stopped at the overlook rest area, sitting at a picnic table when she saw it.

“‘It was a ghost all right. It looked like a thick cloud of smoke with a head. But it was a woman with a stone face and a broad smile. She hovered right in front of me, staring at me.’

“‘The ghost asked me, ‘Would you like to come to dinner?’

“‘I followed it up the mountain as it kept saying, ‘Come with me, I would love to have you for dinner.’

“‘Interrupting Mrs. Waldo I asked, ‘Wait a minute, the ghost said I would love to have you for dinner?’

“‘Mrs. Waldo looked surprised at the way I phrased my question as she replied, ‘Oh you don’t think she meant I am the dinner do you? Oh my, maybe she did.’

“‘Mrs. Waldo squealed, and continued with her story, ‘I followed it up the mountain and when we started down the other side, I saw an old rusted-out car with a skeleton sitting at the steering wheel, driving.’

“‘As I got closer and closer to the car, a great gust of wind blew right through me and kicked up so much sand, I had to close my eyes. When I opened my eyes I gasped, the skeleton was gone.’

“She said she heard her husband calling her to come back. When he caught up to her she told him about the ghost.’

“He exclaimed with frustration in his voice, ’that’s nonsense Elle, it’s the heat. It’s one hundred and nine degrees. You didn’t see anything.’

“She told her husband to hush up, then sat in the old nineteen thirty-five Buick for a while. ‘It’s a nineteen thirty-five Buick. My family had one of these when I was a child.’

“Mrs. Waldo continued her story saying, ’I checked out every nook and cranny of that car. My husband and I checked the car from its headlights to the taillights. Under one of the seats we found an old empty bottle of whiskey.’

“She said that she was feeling around under the dashboard and found that hidden compartment she and her sister had stored stuff in when they were kids. In the compartment were chips, poker chips, lots of poker chips.

“Her husband counted them up. There was twenty thousand dollars.

“‘Twenty thousand dollars!’ he said again and again.

“Mrs. Waldo cried out, ’Can you believe it?’

“The newspaper reporter called the casino manager and asked how much the twenty thousand dollars in poker chips are worth?

“The casino spokesperson said, ’The chips are worth twenty thousand dollars at our casino.’”

Dad puts down the paper saying, “Mrs. Waldo was lucky her husband followed her over that mountain and caught up to her. I don’t think it was a “good” ghost that appeared in front of her and wanted to take her to dinner. It was an evil ghost from the

Donner Party. I'm sure Mrs. Waldo saw something. She could never have made that story up."

Some people say spirits use ghosts to trick humans and take possession of their body and soul. After the body dies the spirit lives in the wind or earth and seeks the body of a human. That's when it possesses the body, returning from that supernatural world to the natural world.

I have read about people who imagine seeing ghosts. But in fact they saw moonlight reflecting off a rock or a broken piece of glass. What they saw might have looked like a ghost to some people.

People high on drugs or alcohol have vivid imaginations when it comes to seeing ghosts. There are always stories in the newspapers about people seeing ghosts out in the lonely desert or isolated mountains. They see a shadow and think it's a ghost. Their imagination causes them to see things that are not there. They make mistakes, people always do.

Smiling I give Dad a hug, "Dad can we go to Donner Pass and find that ghost? We have to go right away while the trail is still fresh."

Dad seems distracted as he replies, "Oh, yeah that sounds good. I've been working with a brand new thermal scanner for the hurricane search planes. It's going to be installed in all of them, if we can only get it to work right. It'll read the temperature inside the storm within a hundredth of a degree. I'll bring it home on Friday, we can use it for the weekend, but I have to return it by Monday morning."

Dad always tells the boss the truth, he tells him, "I'm bringing this equipment home to run some tests." But he doesn't tell him what tests we are running and he especially won't tell him we use it to hunt ghosts.

Later at dinner we plan our upcoming trip for this weekend. I'm so excited, this is going to be so cool.

Oh no, I just realized we're all gonna be in the van together for three hours.

Dad tells Jackie and me, "Okay this is the plan. We'll camp out Saturday night at the Donner Memorial State Park. Before sunset we set up the equipment where Mrs. Waldo saw the stone-faced lady. I think that is the most likely place to catch that ghost. By the way it is also where the Donner Party was trapped in the winter of eighteen forty-six."

"Okay Dad, Jackie, and I will pack our stuff, you make a list of everything we need and we can check it before we leave," I add.

When we go on a hunt we bring all kinds of equipment. Not all of it is ours. Some of it comes from where Dad's work.

An absolute must is the electromagnetic field meter (EMF) and the infrared thermometer, which detects infrared energy and converts it to a temperature reading. Two more devices measure the electricity in the air, the electrostatic field meter (ESF) and the air ion counter. We also have a radio frequency (RF) field strength meter that detects electrical fields like FM radio and microwave transmissions as low as .5 MHz, all the way up to 3 GHz, and expresses the strength as power density (.001 to 2000 microwatts/cm²). It measures the electricity given off by stuff like transformers, computer screens, telephones, electric motors, and yeah, spirits too. For extra safety we

bring a Geiger counter or radiation monitor that detects deadly alpha, beta, and gamma rays.

I ask Jackie, “Did you pack the motion detectors? We need them for the cameras we will set up on the trail. If anything moves in front of one of them, the camera will turn on and, Wham! We will catch that phantom.”

My new digital video camera has audio capability, which records every sound. The recordings are important because we can capture electronic voice phenomena (EVPs), or footsteps, knocks and banging during the hunt.

Temperature changes like uncommon cold or hot spots can be detected with our infrared thermal camera and the infrared thermometer. Both of them will detect variations in temperature and signal the presence of a spirit.

Difficult to document events like telepathic communications, odors, and scents like sulfur, ammonia, perfume, and flowers are written down in my notepad. I take a writing pad with me on every investigation.

If I’m checking out a house haunting and someone is still living there or a past resident is nearby? I like to interview them to find out if they’re having nightmares, apparitions, seeing moving objects, or even just having simple electrical problems. All the notes from my interviews are written down for later comparison.

“Jackie, you packed the anemometer? That’s the weathervane looking thingy with the four cups. It spins and records wind speed.”

“I’ll get the spectrometer which analyzes light intensity and somehow figures out what an object is.”

This weekend we are bringing the cameras, motion detectors, EMF meters, digital thermometer, night vision goggles, light meter, anemometer, radio frequency field strength meter, and a spectrometer.

Of course we always have flashlights, cell phones, a laptop to view the video we take, and our camping stuff. We try to bring all our equipment, but it doesn't all fit in our backpacks. It makes no sense taking more than we can carry.

Hunting the Donner Party ghost is going to be risky for two reasons. First, this ghost is active. It's trying to lure someone for some reason. Mrs. Waldo almost fell into its spell. Who knows what would have happened to her if she had followed it to "dinner?" Second, some of those people in the Donner Party died horrible, agonizing deaths. I think this ghost is still in pain and therefore wicked and dangerous.

I learned about the Donner Party in school. They were settlers headed to California in a wagon train in eighteen forty-six. There were about ninety people of all ages. Winter came early and heavy snow trapped them in the mountains. Not all of them lived through it.

The wagon train didn't have enough food and blankets, and many of the settlers died of hunger, exposure, and frostbite. Those few settlers that did live, told stories of terrible hardship and horrible acts. They did things that people are not supposed to do.

I'm pretty sure this ghost we are going to hunt is not resting in peace, if you know what I mean.

Finally it's Saturday morning. We are packed and ready to go. A three-hour ride will give me plenty of time to do my homework. I have to finish writing a book report about ghost hunting. I'll do my math and chemistry after that.

Let's see, I have Neewa's bowls and a chain to keep her tied up. I'm sure Neewa will love hiking the trails, camping, and ghost hunting. She loves to run and play with me—this trip will be fun for her too. I feel so much better, just having her around.

As I carry the last of our gear out to the van Dad announces, "Okay we're ready to go, all aboard. Jackie you sit in front, Neewa and Christina in the back."

"No Dad, I'm sitting in the front, I called it. Jackie, you get the front seat on the way home."

Jackie scoffs, "You always say you called it, but I never hear you. That's okay, I get to sit next to Neewa, ha."

We all get in the van and drive off to Donner Pass on our ghost hunting adventure out west. Driving on the interstate is fun because the speed limit is eighty miles an hour. This is so cool. We will be driving over mountains, through deserts, and valleys. Small towns about the size of a swimming pool dot the highway as we speed by.

When we get to the Sierra Mountains it's going to be just like back East, all green with lush meadows and streams. Not like this boring desert where everything is flat and faded beige with nothing but empty wasteland full of sand and sagebrush.

As we drive along the highway, I get to see a lot of places I want to visit. There are huge cattle ranches and casinos near every gas station and rest stop. Located about half way to Donner Pass is a gold mine where you can take trips into the mine and see

just how it was a hundred years ago. And near that is a secret military base where they supposedly keep the bodies of aliens that have crash-landed on Earth.

After driving for hours and sleeping most of the trip, I realized we had gone almost two hundred miles through the desert. Ahead in the distance, I see the majestic Sierra Nevada Mountains. Peaks the size of Mt. Everest jutting into the blue sky. Donner Pass is right under one of those peaks.

As we near our destination I see small meadows hidden here and there, fluorescing green, blue, and yellow. Then we pass an amazing huge marsh that seems to go on and on forever to a distant mountain. The whole swamp is blooming purple right at this moment. Deep lavender flowers on pale green stems blanket the landscape. Endless colors as far as the eye can see. Miles awash with heavenly violet flowers so thick they look like a carpet extending into forever.

We've left the desert and start our way up the lush mountainside, entering a steep gorge, the only route in. The two-lane road leading up to Donner Pass goes through a gorge so narrow the road has no shoulders or anyplace to pull over and rest. Just a tiny gap in the between mountains squeezing the roadway into a thin passage the switches back and forth, meandering up, rising steadily, disappearing before us into the forest.

Behind us the desert colors are so dull and blurred, with beige sand and brown dirt all muddled together with an occasional clump of pale olive sagebrush. Except for a rare grove of green scrub pine, there isn't any color to see back there.

If I want to get away from that wretched house where we live now. I have to travel twenty-five miles to a nearby canyon to find a lush mountain stream, with quaking aspen, and green thick mosses that smell like morning dew.

Only after it rains on the dessert does it come alive with budding flowers, grass shoots, and the wonderful desert smell of wet sage and sand. Only problem is it only rains a few times a year.

Dad points out the window, “That road is for runaway trucks. It’s an escape ramp for heavy eighteen-wheelers if they lose their brakes and can’t stop. Sometimes the trucks can’t stop when they are coming down the long steep mountain roads. The escape ramp is there for them to exit onto the or they will lose control on the turns and crash.”

Sure enough I spot a road that goes to into the forest, basically nowhere. It shoots off of this side road onto a path along the rocky ledge. It’s a mile-long ramp carved into the mountain and its slope up. Slowly the grade of the road starts rise, then the angle rapidly increases until it ends abruptly in a pile of sand and a railroad tie barrier above the trees.

“That ramp saves a lot of lives,” Dad adds.

“What do they need that for?” Jackie asks.

Mocking I answer, “Jackie, if a truck is coming down the mountain and loses its brakes, it can turn onto that ramp. The ramp is so steep it slows the truck down, even if it has no brakes!”

“Yeah, so what does he do when he starts to roll backwards toward the road?”

Jackie counters.

“Yeah, that would be a big problem. Hopefully, he slows down enough that he is able to stop his rig somewhere on that ramp,” Dad chimes in.

“Yeah, hopefully,” I comment.

Red cedar and white pine trees reach up into the blue sky. I can see the sap leaching onto the bark, reflecting the sunlight. Little bubbles of the stuff drip down the tree creating a stream of light reflecting juice that eventually forms a droplet. The dribble grows until it is a blob, and the blob to a glob of sap so oversized it drops to the ground. Plunk.

The steamy air carries the fragrance of pine to my senses. Little evergreen needles float down to the ground in the wind. Layer after layer fall, creating a soft bed of yellow and rust covering the clay soil.

Higher and higher we go. The forest begins to thin out. Only small clusters of trees dot the rocky terrain. We are at the timberline, above which little grows. A huge mountain peak with a waterfall pouring over its rock face is revealed as we climb to still higher elevations.

Nearing the crest of the Sierra Nevada Mountains, we are about to enter Donner Memorial State Park. At the entrance stands a statue in memory of the settlers who lost their lives on that fateful wagon train trip west to the Promised Land.

Dad pulls over near a sign on the side of the road that reads, "Elevation 10,000 Ft." We get out to stretch and have a look around. Neewa runs into the woods for a quick sniffing adventure.

It's ninety degrees, unusually hot for this late in the afternoon. There is little breeze to cool us down and an unusual amount of humidity in the air.

My face is flushed and red from the heat. I always turn red when I'm out in the heat for a while. It would always happen when I played tennis back east and it took forever for the redness in my face to go away.

Dad gets all paranoid, “Tina your face is red, do you have a fever?” He touches my cheek and forehead with his lips to take my temperature.

“Dad stop it,” I tell him, “I’m fine.”

I look up at the fifteen feet of statue depicting three pioneers: a man, a woman, and a child. The embossed bronze plaque on the monument reads, “The Donner Party Memorial.”

I wonder if the ghost that Mrs. Waldo saw is the woman in the bronze sculpture? Tonight we will be looking for her.

It’s peaceful around the monument. Whispering breezes curve around the contours of the statue as a trickling stream in the background is fed by the snowcaps still remaining on the highest peaks. I hear a woodpecker tunneling in a hollow tree, consuming its bugs.

After exploring around the monument, we drive to the camping area. The Donner State Park campground is about a half-mile in the opposite direction from Donner Pass, where we are setting up our equipment to catch that rogue spirit. Entering the park we pull up to the large wooden welcome sign for a paper copy of the layout with all the rules, regulations, and warnings to campers on the back. The picture of the campground depicts a circular dirt road with forty campsites. And in the middle of all the numbered areas is a common bathhouse with showers.

Picking a campsite is not easy. There is a lot to think about.

After parking in one of the driveways, we walk around the circle assessing the pros and cons of the available camping spots. About three or four of them are taken and have tents already set up. There’s not that many people up here for some reason.

Each site has a driveway that leads to a small flat picnic area with a table, barbeque, tent platform, and a sunken campfire surrounded by rocks.

Jackie, Neewa, and I pick out the site with a view of a small meadow and the most shade trees. Dad begins unpacking and setting up the tents, while Jackie and I unload the rest of the stuff.

Next to our picnic table is a sign with the word "Warning" in big letters across the top. Below that is a picture and description of the many possible visitors that might be lurking around the park during the night. I'm least concerned about bears because Neewa will bark at them and keep them away. Besides, we'll put our food in the metal bear-resistant food locker provided at the campsite. But the scorpions—they give me the creeps. Good thing our tents zip up tight. Funny thing though, the sign doesn't say anything about ghosts.

It's still light out, time to go exploring for the best location to set our trap to catch that phantom.

Chapter 4 - Fetch

Neewa loves to play fetch and run like the wind to get whatever I throw. It doesn't matter if I toss rocks, small logs, old rag dolls, shoes, or anything.

She makes me laugh so hard when I play with her. She scampers about and circles me. And if I've been away from her for a while she's really glad to see me, jumps up in the air and spins around too. Even after I take out the garbage and gone for a few

minutes, it's as if I've been away forever. When she first sees me or hears my voice she barks and growls playfully. It even seems like she is commanding me, saying, "Play with me now," or "I'm ready to play, let's go out and I'll run around and you can watch me."

I throw a stick into the driveway of our campsite and she is quick to fetch it. Then she frolics around me teasing me keeping it out of my reach. She crouches down with her front paws stretched out in front of her and drops the stick between them, watching my every move.

"Give it here girl," I request.

But she won't give it to me. It's hers now. Instead she grabs it and shakes it vigorously while staring at me, begging me to chase her.

Standing about ten feet away, she drops it, "cluck," and barks while looking at me as if to say, "I dare you."

The game is on, if I make the slightest move or even just flinch, she will run.

Contemplating my next move to distract or divert her attention, I dive at the stick trying to steal it from her.

Lunging forward, she easily beats me to the stick and runs off holding her head up proudly, snarling in an affectionate way.

As usual Neewa has decided not to give the stick to me and runs around challenging me to snatch the prize from her.

She struts by me like a matador circling a bull. I reach out to grab it. But she only lets me put a fingertip on her trophy and quickly pulls it away, positioning herself just out of reach.

Neewa is so fast I can never catch her. If I'm lucky enough to get hold of her toy—she pulls me down onto the ground, yanking it away and leaving me there tied up in a knot. Playing fetch with Neewa is more like playing tug of war.

My only chance to regain possession of her toy is to trick her. To do this I have to convince her that the game is over. Make her believe I'm no longer interested, so she doesn't need to hold on to the prize.

To do this I turn my back on her, walk away, and act as if I'm no longer interested. She doesn't want to miss going with me, so she drops the stick and runs after me.

This is the crucial moment. Not a muscle in my body can hesitate—I can't change the gaze of my eyes or alter my breathing for fear of alerting her to my deception. I must be sure she has taken the bait and wait till the very last second before I sprint back to regain possession of the trophy.

Suddenly, I pivot and sprint for it. Ah ha, now she is on to me. She sees through my guise as we both dash toward it. My body tightens as I extend my arm, diving through the air.

Damn, she gets there first, beating me again.

She looks at me, with the stick clenched tightly in her mouth and barks as if to say, "Hooray I won, throw it again."

I reply, "I'm tired girl, you win, I'm going to sit and rest."

Is it over? Neewa watches me intently, on guard for another trick. Following me no matter where I go, she makes sure I don't double back and grab the stick.

It doesn't matter if I go for a hike or just lie down in the tent. She is there by my side.

"I love you, Neewa," I sigh.

Jackie is hanging out by the tent and throws a stick way out into the open desert. Neewa scrambles toward it, running at full gallop down the hill, overshooting her target, she sprints into the valley surrounded by rocky peaks on all sides.

"Wow, look at her run," Jackie says in awe.

Neewa gallops past large clusters of scrub brush and desert flora dotting the landscape. While passing a tiny lush upland meadow, she sniffs the grasses and flower patches.

Jackie and I watch her cross the valley at full gallop heading up the opposite ridge. I gaze at the rocky crest above her as it disappears into the blue horizon. She darts toward a summit covered in fractured rock and shale, peeled from the heights above after frosts and blistering sunshine. Rising above the tree line, she sprints through the barren moon-like landscape.

We both call her at the same time, "Neewa, Neewa."

She continues, eyes straight ahead, following a scent, tracking her prey. Her white silhouette moves over a background of dark shadows and gray.

Fear grips me for a moment. Will Neewa run over that summit? My heart beats faster as she approaches the apex. I can feel the blood pumping and the sweat on my brow.

"Neewa! Neewa!" I strain my voice calling before she disappears, "Come, Neewa!"

We watch waiting for her to turn, make a move, and begin her retreat. Finally, she relents her direct ascent upward and circles behind a gigantic boulder, disappearing from sight for several moments. Then she appears from behind the rock and races full speed down the hill straight for us.

Reassured I exhale, “Here she comes.”

Running down the ridge and back across the valley she arrives where we stand and drops the stick on Jackie’s foot. I reach out to cuddle her.

“AHHHHHHHH!” Jackie screams jumping backwards, “That’s not the stick I threw... that’s a leg bone.”

“Don’t touch it,” I step back, then move forward and stoop to examine it.

Looking at the bone on the ground, “If this is a human bone, it’s going to ruin our ghost-hunting trip.”

We are going to have to call the police. They will tell us we found a body—a murder victim. Maybe it’s the bones of someone from the Donner Party who was never recovered?

“The police will have to call the crime scene investigation (CSI) team. Who knows they might have to take all our stuff, tents and all,” I mutter in a hopeless tone.

Jackie looks at me horrified. “What about whoever it is? They deserve better than having their bones scattered all over the mountain?”

Acknowledging Jackie, “You’re right, I’m just thinking of myself and my ghost hunting trip. We’re finally here and I want to catch that ghost so bad, I don’t want to go home now.”

Dad comes flying down the trail, “What was that? Who screamed? Are you all right?” He takes Jackie by the shoulders and looks her straight in the eye.

Jackie rambles, “I threw a stick for Neewa and she brought back this bone. Look!” She points.

He hugs her saying, “You alright, you're all right.”

Dad hesitates, “It could be anything, where did she get it?”

“Across the valley and up on that ridge,” I motion.

Without hesitation Dad walks out into the valley headed up the hill. On the steep incline he takes shorter steps, working his way over the rocks.

Dad calls me on his cell phone, “Where? Where?” He waves his arm looking at me.

Directing him to the location where Neewa was sniffing around I bellow, “To the left, left. No not that way, the other left.”

“Am I getting closer?” He yells into the phone as he works his way, slowly moving closer and closer. Inspecting the area, kicking rocks and dirt, he stoops down.

Jackie and I hold our breath anticipating identification of the victim.

Dad shouts into the cell phone as if he is yelling across the valley. “Here it is, I don't see hooves or a skull.” Breathing heavily into the phone, “The skull will tell me if it's a human.”

Seconds pass like hours, Jackie and I stare, waiting for confirmation that our trip is ruined.

“Here are the hooves!” Sounding relieved, “It's a deer all right and the skull's over there, no antlers though—must be a doe.”

“T M I, Dad,” Jackie says after hearing every word.

Jackie shakes her head to get rid of the thought of a dead deer laying a few hundred feet from our campsite.

I hang up and turn away grimacing, wondering how it might have died. Maybe it was thirst or starvation or maybe a coyote attack?

“I’m just glad it isn’t human bones. We probably would have had to go home. And just when we’re about to have some fun.” I hint at my excitement.

“Yeah, real fun Christina, what are we going to discover next?” Jackie raises her eyebrows, “Hope no more dead bodies, no matter if it’s a deer or not.”

Neewa has been following Jackie and I around since she dropped her new found bone, “No more playing fetch, you are going on your chain. That deer could’ve been poisoned. You could die from chewing on that bone.”

Dad returns huffing and puffing.

I question, “Did you set the ghost traps at the exact spot where the settler’s wagon train was stranded, you know—where it happened?”

Dad smiles, “Yup, right where Mrs. Waldo saw that spirit last week too. Everything is on the trail ready to catch that ghost. I have all the equipment set up. One of the motion detectors is connected to the digital camera and the other is attached to the thermal infrared camera. The anemometer is right next to them and the electromagnetic field meter is on the opposite side of the trail.”

“Jackie you keep the light meter and the spectrometer (determines the composition of the object) with you in case that ghoulish visits us here at camp. Dad will be

carrying the radio frequency field strength meter (detects electrical fields) in his backpack. I'm in charge of the night vision goggles, compliments of Dad's boss, ha ha."

"All right, we're ready," I continue, "now all we have to do is wait for this phantom to show up. These banshees will do anything to lure a human being into their trap. They want to take over your body and soul and this fiend is no different."

As we sit around the campfire, Dad begins to tell a scary legend. He always does this especially when we're in the middle of nowhere.

Neewa lies by my feet, her chain still clipped to her collar. Occasionally she looks up at me with her steel gray eyes. She checks in on me, she always does.

Dad speaks with an eerie shiver in his voice as he begins to tell a story. "People and pets disappear in the desert all the time. Usually they are found dead, near the place where they were last seen."

"She lived deep in the forest in a tiny cottage and sold herbal remedies for her livelihood. Folks living in the town nearby called her Bloody Mary, and say she was a witch. None dared cross the old crone for fear that their cows would go dry, their food-stores rot away before winter, their children take sick of fever, or any number of terrible things that an angry witch could do to her neighbors.

"Then the children in the village began to disappear, one by one. No one could find out where they had gone. Grief-stricken families searched the woods, the local buildings, and all the houses and barns, but there was no sign of them.

"A few brave souls even went to Bloody Mary's home in the woods to see if the witch had taken the children, but she denied any knowledge of the disappearances. Still,

it was noted that her haggard appearance had changed. She looked younger, more attractive.

“The neighbors were suspicious, but they could find no proof that the witch had taken their young ones.

“Then came the night when the daughter of the miller rose from her bed and walked outside, following an enchanted sound no one else could hear.

“The miller's wife had a toothache and was sitting up in the kitchen treating the tooth with an herbal remedy when her daughter left the house. She screamed for her husband and followed the girl out of the door. The miller came running in his nightshirt. Together, they tried to restrain the girl, but she kept breaking away from them and heading out of town.

“The desperate cries of the miller and his wife woke the neighbors. They came to assist the frantic couple.

“Suddenly, a sharp-eyed farmer gave a shout and pointed towards a strange light at the edge of the woods. A few townsmen followed him out into the field and saw Bloody Mary standing beside a large oak tree, holding a magic wand that was pointed towards the miller's house. She was glowing with an unearthly light as she set her evil spell upon the child.

“The townsmen grabbed their guns and their pitchforks and ran toward the witch. When she heard the commotion, Bloody Mary broke off her spell and fled back into the woods.

“The far-sighted farmer had loaded his gun with silver bullets in case the witch ever came after his daughter. Now he took aim and shot at her. The bullet hit Bloody Mary in the hip and she fell to the ground.

“The angry townsmen leapt upon her and carried her back into the field, where they built a huge bonfire and burned her at the stake.

“As she burned, Bloody Mary screamed a curse at the villagers, ‘If anyone mentions my name aloud before a mirror, I will send my spirit to revenge myself upon them for my death.’

“When she was dead, the villagers went to her house in the woods and found the missing children the evil witch had kidnapped. She was draining their blood and using it to make herself young again.

“From that day to this, anyone foolish enough to chant Bloody Mary's name three times before a darkened mirror will summon the vengeful spirit of the witch. It is said that she will tear their bodies to pieces and rip their souls from their mutilated bodies. The souls of these unfortunate ones will burn in torment as Bloody Mary once was burned, and they will be trapped forever in the mirror.”

“Thanks Dad, I’m going to sleep in a tent in the middle of nowhere and you tell me this chilling story. Now stop it, I’m not kidding. You’re going to give me nightmares.”

“Come Neewa, you’re staying in the tent with Jackie and me.”

As I lay down all kinds of thoughts run through my head. Thoughts about ghosts and the Donner Party’s terrible tragedy flood my brain. I look through the nylon tent at the glowing fire. Shadows of the campfire flames dance on the tent like a movie screen

displaying a slide show. The shapes dwindle and shrink smaller and smaller, it's the fire's last dance.

Listening to the quiet, there's nothing out there. A few crickets, a frog or two but mostly the crackling fire. Drifting into sleep,

I know bodies are discovered in the desert all the time, I've heard stories. One time a four-wheeler found a human skeleton near here in an old deserted mine. Imagine that, going into a cave and seeing bones lying there. Now that's scary. I'd explore an old mine, but I'm not going first.

Sometimes a newspaper reporter will get an anonymous letter telling where a dead body can be found.

Local police receive tips too. People are afraid to come forward, so they call or write anonymous letters, revealing where a corpse is. Usually all that's left of the carcass are bones. Most of the time no one can figure out who it was. Out of respect, the police give the remains a name—John Doe if it's a man and Jane Doe if it's a woman.

Tonight we are going to catch that ghost. Then I can tell all my friends back East. They will think I'm so cool, the most famous ghost hunter ever. But right now I'd better get some rest before we hike up the trail. I need sleep now. My eyes are heavy and begin to close, then open and close again.

Chapter 5 - Dream (Dreaming)

“Dad, I have to go find Neewa's mother and father.”

“That's a good idea,” he moans still asleep. “Are they still living in the desert?”

It's dusk and I'm in the middle of the desert, walking along an endless wall of sand.

I call out to Dad, "Are they dead?" He doesn't answer.

Maybe they are lost somewhere, or they were killed out here in the middle of nowhere. Does Neewa look like her mom and dad?

"Hello, hello," my voice echoes through the vast wasteland. I pick up a newspaper lying on the sand and begin to read aloud.

"A hiker discovered a skeleton in the desert last week. The police are investigating the circumstances of the death. CSI has been called in to analyze the evidence and the coroner performed an autopsy.

"The victim was last seen a month ago playing cards at a downtown casino," Detective Kelly said. "Apparently he was followed out of the casino and shot three times in the chest. An ace of hearts was found in the dead man's pocket."

"The hiker, who would not give his name, found the remains near the den of a family of coyotes.

"Animals dug the bones up," the hiker said. "Oddest thing though, several of the pack looked like white German shepherds."

"Detective Kelly said, 'Our detectives also found a Native American Indian tomb near the shallow grave of the gambler. The Native American appears to be over a hundred years old.'"

"Kelly added, 'We have sent for a forensic anthropologist from the University to document the tomb. We will know more when we have that report.'"

Chapter 6 - Ghost Hunt

After running into camp, Dad is out of breath and shakes me, “Wake up, the camera started, wake up. Get your sister, let’s go.”

“Wake up who?” I ask sitting up, startled.

Neewa slides out of the tent opening following Dad as he gathers some stuff and starts up the trail.

My mouth starts to form words, who was the dead gambler? Then I realize it was just a dream.

Shaking Jackie’s shoulder and arm, “Jackie wake up, wake up, the motion detector went off.”

“What time is it?” Rubbing her eyes, she tries to sit up but falls over and back to sleep.

Putting on my boots I reply, “Three AM, and it’s cold out. Get the flashlights.”

In seconds Neewa and I are jogging up the trail with great expectation of what we will find.

By the time I get halfway there I’m out of breath, gasping for air. Neewa circles me as I stop and stand on the side of the path to catch my breath. I wheeze for more thin air. At this altitude my asthma could kick in at any moment. As I catch my breath, Jackie the cross-country runner passes by.

“Meet you up there, Christina,” she huffs.

Neewa runs to her side as she passes, Jackie pats her head. They run together for a few strides, before Neewa turns and comes back to my side.

There's no one else out on the trail, no barking dogs or roaring car engines speeding by. Other than our flashlights streaking through the air, the stars and a half moon illuminate our path and reveal the dark silhouettes of the mountains around us.

I inhale the scents of the sage and lichen-covered rock moist from the morning dew. Mist hangs over the trail and disappears in the darkness.

I hope that she-devil doesn't show up now.

A breeze whistles through the dry grasses and rock crevasses nearby.

Neewa and I sprint up the hill and finally arrive at the stakeout. Breathing heavy, I put on the night vision goggles and check for red or purple shapes moving in the sea of darkness around me.

"Yo, Poppy, no heat-emitting bodies giving off infrared thermal energy out here," I report.

Dad is fidgeting with the cameras. "The digital camera ran for one minute and ten seconds," he says. "But the infrared camera didn't even turn on at all?"

"Why didn't the motion detector turn on the IR camera?" I ask.

He shakes his head. "I don't know, we have to check it out when we get back home."

I suggest, "Jackie, check the radio frequency field strength meter."

Jackie displeased replies, "Dad kept it in his backpack at the camp, it wasn't even here."

"My bad," he says. "Check the other meters."

"The light meter and the spectrometer are still in the tent in Jackie's backpack," I add with a bit of sarcasm.

“We’ll have to put them out next time,” Dad says.

Digital camera in hand, he rewinds the tape back to the beginning. As it plays we all squeeze together to watch the screen. Our faces are motionless, like children peering out of a window watching the first snowfall. Excited we watch, nothing, nothing, nothing.

Whiz! Something flies across the screen at the speed of light. It looked like a giant pair of wings. Losing my balance I fall backwards onto my butt.

“What is it?” Jackie exclaims.

“I don’t know. Neewa, stop licking my face, Yuck!” Her tongue swipes my cheek and eye.

“Ha, ha,” Jackie and Dad stare at me as I scramble to my feet.

“What was that?” I ask laughing, getting between them in front of the screen.

Disappointed, Dad replies, “Looks like a big old owl to me.”

Jackie sighs, “That’s no ghost.”

He rewinds the tape, playing it back in slow motion this time. We watch the screen anticipating the flying object.

Swoosh! It passes from one side of the screen to the other in a second.

“It’s a Western Screech Owl,” he mumbles.

An owl is not a ghost and an owl is not going to get me my own TV show.

“The meter is reading twenty-two milliguass (MG) of electromagnetic waves at the same time the owl flew past the camera,” I say.

“How do you explain that?” Jackie asks.

Dad is busy adding up all the EMF given off by our equipment.

“Let’s see, if we add up all the EMF from our stuff? Three MHz for the one cell phone, and about one and one half MHz for each camera and the other stuff added in we have a total of about eight MHz for everything. That leaves fourteen MHz unexplained, which is equal to the electromagnetic field given off by two televisions and a microphone,” Dad concludes.

“I don’t see any TVs here, do you?” I add.

“This is curious. If there were electric lights, wires or some other source of this energy, that would explain the fourteen MHz? But I don’t see anything that would give off that much energy,” Dad questions.

Determined to account for the discrepancy he explains, “I checked the electromagnetic field on the trail before I set up our trap. It was less than one MHz, which is the normal level anywhere on Earth. If it was the owl that caused it to jump to twenty-four MHz, then maybe the owl was not an owl.”

“Check the other meters. Did the aerometer register anything when the owl flew by?”

I read the meter, “The wind thingy says seventy miles per hour. That’s pretty fast for an owl. How fast do owls fly anyway?”

“Well if that owl caused the increase in wind speed, then that would mean it was an owl and not a ghost. Or the ghost could have taken the shape of the owl,” Dad ponders aloud.

I add, “I don’t know, it doesn’t make sense? We will have to double check everything again when we get home.”

Slowly the dark sky is filled with the new light, giving way to pink and fuchsia rays as the sun begins to rise. To the west is darkness, stars, planets, and the Milky Way. Like jewels they are dazzling, glowing, as we stand between night and day.

New light colors the mountains ruby red as it peeks above the ridge highlighting the jagged edges.

Warm colors of orange and purple radiate onto the soft blue horizon. Light pushes away the night, darkness fades into the light of day.

Dad and Jackie begin to pack up our stuff for the trip home as Neewa and I play a game. The game is I pet her with big strokes along her back, neck, and behind the ears. When I stop, she jumps up on me, begging for more. It's Neewa's favorite game.

On the way home Neewa and Jackie are asleep, but I'm awake thinking about that ghost. I was sure we were going to catch it. I wonder if we did?

I don't know, having a video of an owl traveling at seventy miles per hour and a reading on one meter of twenty-four megahertz (MHz) of electromagnetic field doesn't prove we captured Mrs. Waldo's ghost?

But I know ghosts are real, they are. And I'm going to catch one.

We have the latest ghost hunting stuff, better than all the other ghost hunters. All paranormal investigators have equipment that detects different types of energy including magnetic, microwave, and wind as well as electrical, sound, and light.

Some scientists say these types of energy are white energy. They say white energy can be seen, touched, and measured. These same researchers say white energy makes up ninety-eight percent of all the natural energy in the universe.

A small group of scientists see galaxies moving in ways that can't be explained by normal laws of mechanics. They theorize it is dark energy that comprises ninety-eight percent of the energy in the universe. Dark energy cannot be seen, touched, or measured. Nobody seems to know very much about it.

Drifting in and out of sleep, I wake up and fall back again as we travel the long trip home from Donner State Park.

I didn't get the proof I needed to prove that the ghost exists, but I'll capture one yet, you wait and see.

We arrive home too tired to unpack everything, so we take in the cameras and the most of the important meters inside. Then after walking and feeding Neewa I drop into my bed.

"Good night, Dad, love you."

"Good night, Christina, Jackie, love you."

"Love you, Dad," Jackie says.

"Good night Neewa."

Neewa cuddles up near my feet. She looks up at me, content. Her gray eyes stare back at me, looking for attention. She rolls to her side and takes a deep breath. Her rib cage rises and falls as she lets out a slight snort and closes her eyes.

When Neewa dreams she rolls over and lets out a yelp at the same time. Then she talks in her sleep in doggy language. I wonder what she's talking about? Do all dogs dream? Do they all talk in their sleep?

Chapter 7 - The Illness

It's evening and Neewa hasn't eaten all day. She is exhausted, not herself at all, and she is not drinking her water either.

Her black nose is dry and she is coughing. On top of that, she has brown stuff in the corners of her eyes.

Panic grips me as I look at her. "Dad, we have to take Neewa to the vet right away."

Dad has noticed the change in her too. He looks at me, then her again. Moments later we are carrying Neewa to the car. We jump in and drive to the veterinarian.

After waiting an hour, we are shown into the examination room. The vet enters and takes a quick look at Neewa's eyes, ears, and nose.

He looks at her concerned. "She is very sick with a disease called distemper, a deadly canine disease."

"There is nothing I can do for her, she will not make it. I'm sorry." He shrugs his shoulders and walks to the exit adding, "Please see my secretary on your way out."

My head falls into my hands and I burst into tears, sobbing uncontrollably I'm unable to stop trembling.

"Dad, don't let her die! Please!" I cry.

The vet stops, turns, and walks back toward us, "There is a remote chance she will recover but it is not likely. When dogs are born they must be immunized for distemper. It's serious and can spread rapidly through a kennel, especially if unvaccinated individuals are present. Not all patients die, however a significant number do. Dogs of every age are susceptible, however, the very young and old have the highest death rate, as

high as seventy-five percent. Patients that recover from distemper may suffer permanent damage to vision as well as the nervous system. Puppies can have severely mottled teeth, losing many of them due to abnormalities in the developing enamel.”

He leaves the room. Dad, Jackie and I carry Neewa to the van. Once inside the van, I weep all the whole way home.

“I can’t just watch her die, we have to do something.”

I look at her on my lap, motionless. “Neewa, don’t die.”

When we arrive home, Dad goes to the phone and calls everyone we know, most of whom are his Native American friends from work.

I sit crying in the corner with Neewa next to me. She looks at me pathetically as if she is about to die.

Jackie begins to sob and slams her door, locking herself in her room.

Neewa has more brown sand in the corners of her eyes and is coughing a high-pitched cough. Dad says she sounds like me when I was a baby. I used to have asthma attacks.

Dad exclaims, “Everyone I’ve spoken to is talking about a vet named Cuthberson. He’s the best one around, they say if he can’t save her, no one can.”

Dad finds his number in the old gray phone book in the kitchen drawer and calls. The office answering machine picks up the call and a voice says, “You have reached the office of Doctor Cuthberson. We have no appointments available. The doctor is at the county fairgrounds all week. Please call back after Saturday. Thank you.”

“He is the official county fair veterinarian. Tomorrow is the last day. The doctor will be there all day,” Dad declares.

I announce, "I'm going to find that doctor and he's going to save Neewa."

I wake up early Saturday morning. Dad and I are on our way to the fair to find the doctor. Jackie is staying behind with the Burns family for the day. She can take care of Neewa, look in on her, and give her water while I'm away. Though she hasn't drunk any in a while.

Dad and I arrive at the fairgrounds not knowing where Doctor Cuthbertson is. The circumstances look hopeless. I'm searching for a doctor I've never met, nor do I have any idea what he looks like.

Inside the razor wire topped fence that surrounds the fair's compound, we try to comprehend the impossible task ahead. The fair is huge. You can't even see the other end of it. It appears to be miles in every direction.

Dad and I go straight for the First Aid tent, he must be there. Upon arriving, the tent doesn't appear to be busy at all, but with this heat wave we have been having, it will be.

I question the attendant, "Is Doctor Cuthbertson here?"

"No," he replies. "He spends most of his time by the stables. He works out of his mobile hospital parked at building number two."

Dad and I decide to split up, taking different paths to cover more ground. We look into each other's eyes. My eyes are watering up, but he looks determined and I pull myself together as I hug him once.

"Meet me at the fair information booth," he shouts, as we run off in different directions.

I'm going straight to the mobile hospital to check and see if he is there. Dad is going to try the vendor area and talk to some of his friends who are volunteering at some of the concessions.

The hot breeze swirls through the grounds laden with the smell of farm animals. There are barns full of cows; Guernsey, Friesian, and Jersey. Pigs too, of every variety and more, so much more. I pass corrals of horses: Arabian, American Quarter, Thoroughbreds and more. And 4-H club exhibits with sheep, rabbits, and chickens of every variety, size, and shape.

I'm walking aimlessly in ninety-degree dry heat and it's only eleven o'clock. My clothes are sticking to my body like plastic wrap.

When I was little I loved to stop at the hatchery where you could watch the baby chickens hatching from their eggs right in front of your eyes.

Events like steer wrestling and horse jumping are going on in the two side arenas. Acres and acres of competitions, booths, games of chance, and even amusement rides surround me as the sun beats down from above as it approaches midday.

I stop to sit in the shade and sip my water bottle for a moment. In the background the roller coaster screams, and the Himalaya circles one way, stops, and then reverses, while the riders cry out for more. Those are my favorite rides. When I was little, Dad took us on all of the best rides back home in our county fair. We rode the highest and fastest roller coasters on the East Coast too.

Hours pass and I still haven't found him.

Desperate, I ask a family sitting by their animals at a 4-H exhibit, "Have you seen Doctor Cuthberson?" I sigh.

“No, haven’t seen him,” someone in the circle responds.

Further down the dirt walkway at the end of the barn, I ask a group of trainers standing at the horse stables, “Can you tell me where Doctor Cuthbertson is?”

“He hasn’t been around yet today,” one of them replies.

I would never ask strangers questions before this. I’m too shy to talk to people I don’t know. I would rather die than walk up to someone. But this is different. I have to save Neewa. And if it means asking people questions I’ve never seen before? Then I’ll do it!

Suddenly the loudspeaker blares, “Attention, attention, five minutes till the start of the chuck wagon race.”

The main arena for the race is just down this walkway, the sign says. Stopping near the pig-racing track, I look around to get my bearings. I have no way of knowing where he is in this gigantic carnival.

I catch a glimpse of the information booth out of the corner of my eye.

The man inside the booth begins another announcement, “Dr. Cuthbertson, paging Dr. Cuthbertson, please report to the chuck wagon race starting line.”

I sprint to the announcer at the booth.

“Where is he? Where is Dr. Cuthbertson?” I screech.

The man points into the massive crowd of people walking in every direction. His finger guides my eyes across the huge public walkway packed with people.

Strollers are speeding everywhere—doublewides, tandems, and triples.

Grandmothers cuddle crying babies. Vendors sell their wares up and down the pavement.

Clowns with huge red, green, and blue balloons amuse the children. People rush in every direction.

“There he is, right there,” the announcer points.

“Where? Where?” I shout.

“The tall man with the black hat and red neckerchief” The broadcaster holds his raised arm steady pointing in his direction.

I'm mesmerized, frozen as I stare at Doctor Cuthberson for the first time. The crowd seems to part for the six-foot tall lanky figure, a head above the rest. He strolls toward the arena dressed in blue jeans and a western shirt with the collar open under his stubby, unshaven chin. Suddenly he disappears into the crowd, swallowed up by the masses.

Scrambling into the mob, I push through the heap of humanity struggling to get to the opposite side of the pavement where he walked just a moment ago.

“Shoot! Lost him,” I moan finding myself standing where he stood.

I run in the direction he took, jumping up to see above the crowd, straining to locate him. But he's nowhere to be seen.

I decide to race him to the chuck wagon race starting line. Zigzagging and crisscrossing through throngs of people, darting between bodies, I arrive at a dead end.

In front of me is a stadium full of people dressed in cowboy hats and multi-hued tops, waving colored bandanas, standing and cheering for their favorite teams. The roar from within is deafening as the crowd pulsates, forward and back.

At the starting line of the oval dirt track are chuck wagon teams lined up four across. Each team has six horses decorated with the team's colors, matching blankets, and

blinkers. Every horse is decked out with a classy harness, collar and bridle, and tethered by leather straps to its wooden wagon.

Horses are snorting and stomping their feet, anticipating the start of the race. Arabians, Paints, and Appaloosas stand side by side. Their brushed coats glisten in the sun, while rigging of polished golden wood, frames their grand physiques.

Seated behind each harnessed team of horses are a driver and passenger—adorned with color-coordinated bow ties and silks. They wear cowboy hats, vests, chaps that cover their blue jeans, and custom leather boots. They wait on the edge of their seats with reins in hand, listening for the starting gun to fire.

Behind each double wide seat is a fifteen-foot high covered wagon painted with the logo and the name of their ranch. The colors of the drivers' shirts match the canvas covering the wagons.

The track reminds me of back home and the many trips to the horse races with my Grandma on Thursday nights. I loved those nights with grandma, cheering for our horse to win. Yelling for my team to come in first, just being with her. She hugged me so good.

I exhale a deep sigh and take a bench seat in the “no charge” viewing stands at the far end of the arena. The paid seats in the center of the stadium are packed, not an empty spot in sight.

Chapter 8 - The Starting Line

“On your mark, get set...” The starter's words ring out over the public address system, “Bang!” He fires his pistol into the air.

Drivers snap their reins, sending a clear message to the teams. Shaking the ground, they sprint away from the starting line, twenty feet of horses followed by twenty more feet of iron, wood, and canvas.

Racing into the first turn, wagons squeeze together as drivers lean to the inside to keep their balance, each expert coachman controlling ten tons of flesh and carriage, thundering down the track. Racing through the turn, the wagons reflect the light of the setting sun behind them. They pass the shadows of shade trees under Western blue skies. Into the straightaway they sprint, a continuous stream of dust kicks up into the air behind them. Maneuvering for position, each team tries to take the lead.

The announcer calls out their order as they enter the last turn. "It's the Hawker Ranch in the lead, followed by the Bond Farm, La Rosa Ranch is third, and bringing up the rear is the Quest Group!"

Coming through the backstretch and heading for the finish, the teams gallop four abreast. A mountain of wood and animals roar past the grandstands.

People are jumping up and down, waving colored bandanas and hats. Everyone is standing, electrified, as the teams stampede by.

My seat vibrates as if a clap of thunder has just struck nearby.

All of a sudden, Crash! Boom! Bang! Comes from the finish line in an explosion. Clouds of dust the size of hot air balloons rise above, obscuring the finish, silencing the arena. Air currents scoop up the dust and carry it away, revealing a mound of wagons and horse teams in chaos.

Horses are tangled, trapped, raising their heads, straining to be free. Two teams of horses are knotted together, amid the pandemonium, and two lone horses are ensnared by wagons, held captive by their harnesses in the mangled wreckage.

What once were horse-drawn wagons are now twisted metal, torn canvas, and splintered wood.

The crowd, already silent, lets out a collective gasp, "Oh!"

A man behind me sighs, "They are going to have to destroy that horse." He points at a trapped horse.

I leap from my seat, cross the blacktop, and climb to the top of the arena fence.

A grisly sight, horses are whinnying and snorting, struggling to be liberated, gasping for freedom.

"Looks bad," a man nearby whispers to his friend.

It's a miracle; all the drivers and passengers seem to have escaped injury. A few can be seen, in shock, eyeing the devastation, not knowing what to do first.

Trainers, bronco riders, and calf ropers are risking their lives running into the wreck to rescue the teams of horses.

Men brandishing blades of steel cut agitated horses from their harnesses.

Spooked, shaking their heads, one Appaloosa and an Arabian dash in opposite directions.

They run erratically through the arena, each turning at different intervals, only to dart back from where they came.

More men rush to help, carefully crossing the track, glancing in every direction, not wanting to be trampled by horses running wild in the arena.

One team of six horses, wagon less, is careening around the track eerily holding their heads high—manes blowing in the wind—bodies sweating—eyes bulging.

Someone shouts in amazement, “There goes Doc Cuthbertson! Look at him climb into the wreckage!”

Another man yells, “He’s fearless!”

Before anyone can blink an eye, he’s in the middle of the debris grasping the reins of one ensnared horse, pulling it to its feet. Reaching to untangle another, he coaxes it to his side. Everyone in the bleachers is in shock, motionless, eyeing his every move.

Horses are still running loose in the stadium. Cowboys, with lassoes in hand, are chasing them down. Wagons from the massive wreck are being hoisted and towed from the pileup by teams of men with trucks and chains.

Holding the horses, he perilously stands his ground, ordering the cowboys, “Pull there! Push that wagon! Now that one!” He yells, “Hurry boys, hurry.”

Cowboys are yelling, shouting orders to untangle the wagons surrounding Doc and the two remaining horses. Working feverishly side-by-side, they thrust and heave, determined to free up the wagons. Finally, untangled, they are swiftly pulled away.

Smiling, almost laughing, Doc emerges from the chaos jogging toward the main gate with the two horses in his grasp.

Concerned owners and trainers run to him, eager to take their horses and calm them with familiar words and comforting strokes. Cautiously they inspect them for injury, and then whisk them away to their stalls for further care.

Many in the crowd sigh, one concedes, “I’m glad that’s over with.”

Another exhales, “That was a close call.”

“Were any of the horses hurt bad?” I ask.

“Won’t know till Doc checks them out,” someone responds in a hopeful tone, winking and holding up two crossed fingers.

Now is my chance to see Doc Cuthberson—to save Neewa. I jump from the corral rails and sprint to the stables to find him.

Arriving in moments at a gigantic wooden barn between the arena and stables, I hesitate before entering. Slowly I peer around the corner and inside. Thick wooden timbers climb from the floor to the crossbeams that traverse its length and width above me. Dim sunlight shines through a few tattered boards protecting the loft full of hay from rain and wind. Bowls of milk for the cats sit on the floor near more hay and next to the green poison for the unwanted rats that will soon prowl here in the night.

On the hay-covered dirt floor, horses held by their trainers wait their turn for the vet’s assessment of every bump and bruise. Everyone is talking about the crash. Their voices are laden with concern. That’s when I see him, kneeling alongside an Appaloosa gelding of at least fifteen hands, examining, and gently patting his side.

Tears stream down my cheeks as I stagger up to him and cry out, “Dr. Cuthberson, my puppy has distemper—she is going to die—you’ve gotta save her!”

I plead, “Can you help her? Please?”

Perplexed, he looks up at me as he gets to his feet. Stepping away from his patient, he takes off his big hat and with one great swipe brushes off his jeans. Staring at me, he circles around the far side of the horse and continues his evaluation, checking head, front quarter, hindquarter, and legs.

At last he looks at me and says, “Little girl, what the heck are you doing here?”

Glancing away he spits a wad of chew onto the dirt floor and then observes the tears streaming down my cheek.

He leans over the horse between us and with a thick Western accent whispers, “Bring ‘er to my office tomorrow morning, I’ll take a look at ‘er, we’ll see what we can do.”

“Thank you, thank you,” I blubber wiping tears from under my eyes, standing, staring at him, in shock.

The concerned owner of this horse peers over Doc’s shoulder at me. Many others owners stand there among many horses patting their steeds, waiting their turn.

Doc turns to the man and says, “This one will be all right. Wrap up all four ankles good and tight.” He nods to a man in a white coat to his right watching every move.

The horse’s owner exhales in relief.

Turning on his heels Doc walks away, headed for the next one in line. A rancher walks up to him. Doc recognizes the man and smiles.

“Doc, I need you out at my ranch right away. I can fly you out in my plane,” the rancher says sounding troubled.

“I hardly use a car anymore,” Doc says as he walks alongside the rancher. “I have to check on the rest of these horses first. Then we’ll go.”

Both men have serious expressions on their faces as they go separate ways. Again Doc Cuthbertson disappears, this time swallowed up by a swarm of horses and their care givers.

I am overjoyed. All I know is he’s gonna see Neewa tomorrow. He’s going to save her. I know he is.

I turn and run toward the main fairgrounds leaving the chaos at the stables behind me. Sounds of whinnying horses being tended by worried trainers fade into the distance. While the cheerful sounds of the fair, come back into focus. I'm back in the hustle and bustle of the carnival and beside myself with happiness. Trying to hold back my sobbing and regain my composure, I stop near a bench along a walkway and sit.

Below the evening sky are the bright lights of the fairgrounds. The Ferris wheel turns against the star-studded backdrop. Riders scream as they reach the top of its great circle and then descend back to the ground. In the distance the Egyptian Boat rocks one way and then the other, increasing its arc, higher and higher with every to and fro.

I'm up and jogging again, encircled by people strolling, laughing, eating, and rushing to their next thrilling moment.

Vendors hawk their toys, beckoning would-be buyers to come forward.

The fair will be closing down later tonight, it's over until next year.

I run to Dad who is sitting at the information booth where we agreed to meet.

"Christina, I haven't been able to find him," he blurts out.

"But I have," I shout. "I found him and we can bring Neewa to his office in the morning."

"He's going to see her on a Sunday morning?" His voice gets louder in disbelief.

"Yeah, I got it covered. I'll tell you all about it, but right now all I want to do is go home."

Heading for the exit, with everyone else going home too, I spot Doctor Cuthberson being driven through the fairgrounds to the airport. He'll soon be flying out to that ranch.

“He is going to see a sick horse out in Winnemucca,” says one man to another walking next to us. “The ranchers depend on him to care for the large animals in this county.”

“He’s the only one in these parts,” a woman chimes in.

“Yup, he travels miles to care for the horses, cattle, and sheep around here,” another adds.

Working my way through the crowd toward the van with Dad, my thoughts wander. No one told me he doctors only large animals. He’s different from the other veterinarian in town who cares for dogs, cats, and smaller pets. He stays in his office and has the animals come to him. Dr. Cuthberson flies across the county to take care of all the ranchers’ large animals.

Once in the car, I tell Dad the whole story. How I first laid eyes on him through the crowd of people. Where I ran to find him at the chuck wagon race, and all the riders and horses that barely escaped injury in the terrifying accident. And about witnessing all the people running to the rescue, and the Doctor in the middle of the wreck saving the trapped horses. Lastly, I tell Dad how I found him at the stables caring for every one of those horses.

We arrive at home and I run to check on Neewa. She is not well, about the same as when I left her this morning, maybe worse. She tries to drink some water from the bowl I raise to her mouth, but only takes a little. Her nose feels like dried leather. Trying to greet me, she shakes as she stands, then collapses down to the ground in a ball of white fur.

I cry as I tell her, “You have to hold on, I’m going to take you to the doctor tomorrow. He is going to save you!”

Neewa looks at me as if she understands. But her look tells me, this had better work, because I’m not gonna be able to hold on much longer.

I sob and tell her, “Tomorrow everything is going to be better. I know Dr. Cuthbertson will save you.” I hold her close to me. “You have to make it through the night! You have to, you hear me!” I pull her face into mine. Her dried nose against my cheek.

“I can’t keep you inside Neewa, you’re too sick. You have to stay outside again tonight.” She looks at me with her sagging big gray eyes. I clean the crusty discharge from the corners and hold her close to me as she closes her eyes and falls asleep in my arms.

Chapter 9 - Doc’s

It’s morning and we arrive at Dr. Cuthbertson’s ranch. Dad and I carry Neewa into the office.

His assistant, the one in the white coat at the fair, comes to meet us. “I’m Lyle, the doctor is helping one of his mares give birth. Do you want to come watch?”

“Bring your puppy, she can’t hurt any animals here,” Lyle says as we walk through the empty waiting room.

Mumbling as we walk, “I don’t want to see this, I really hate blood.”

Jackie follows the assistant saying, “I want to see.”

Dad carries Neewa in his arms. She is limp, not at all the same frisky puppy we adopted at the pound months ago.

Keeping my head down and hiding my eyes, I enter the barn. The faint scents of manure and hay hang in the air. Every stall is clean, with a layer of fresh hay and a bucket of oats hung on the side. Colorful blankets are draped over the sidewalls of each stall, and a wooden name placard prominently hangs above each gate.

“Where are all the other horses?” I ask Lyle the assistant.

He answers, “They are out in the pastures for the day, we bring them in around five.”

Unsure of myself, I lag behind everyone as we enter the fifth stall. The mare is lying down, breathing heavily. Her foal is beginning to show. I can already see the foal’s legs outside of the birth canal. Above the stall’s entrance is her name, “Queen Ann.”

Doc says, “It’s her time to give birth.”

Jackie’s eyes are wide as she and Dad watch.

I decide to leave and maybe come back later, when it’s all over. Dad holds Neewa as I duck into the next stall, hoping I don’t puke.

“Is it a filly or a colt?” Lyle excitedly asks the Doctor.

As I peak around the corner, the sounds of water gurgling and suction emanate from the stall.

Sweat drips from his forehead as he answers, “Don’t know yet.”

I stare as he helps Queen Ann. He gently pulls the legs of the foal, who is born a few seconds later.

“It’s a filly!” He exclaims.

Slinking back into the birthing stall, I watch the newborn lying on the hay next to her mother.

My stomach begins to settle. What a great movie this would make, someone should videotape this. But it isn't for the fainthearted.

Doctor Cuthberson says to his assistant, "Lyle, you watch the filly. I'll be back after I take a look at the puppy."

We follow him into the examination room near the front office. Dad places Neewa on the stainless steel table in the middle of the room. She collapses into a white lump.

Ammonia, strong enough to cause me to tear, permeates the air in the clean and organized room. I gaze around the room at locked medicine cabinets. Under the large windows is a row of glass cases. Inside are Native American artifacts and artwork, with pottery, baskets and weapons labeled and dated just like in a museum. Woven blankets and oil paintings of fierce-looking Indian chiefs cover the walls.

Doc Cuthberson turns from the sink and begins the examination. Methodically he looks at her eyes, nose and mouth, quickly completing the procedure.

His voice is confident as he quickly speaks, "I wanta give her a shot of the live distemper virus, maybe jump start her immune system. It's not the usual treatment, but it's her best chance to live. It could kill her too. If I don't give her the shot she'll die for sure."

Swiftly and just as convincingly I reply, "Give her the shot." Dad nods his consent.

Doc doesn't say a word as he leaves the room, returning in seconds with the shot. He grabs a hand full of her butt cheek fur and skin and sticks the needle in. She yelps.

Without delay he says, "Leave her here overnight. Pick her up after school tomorrow. We'll keep an eye on her."

He politely says, "Good luck," and hastily heads back to his new filly.

I look at him, "Thank you for helping Neewa."

Doc looks at me with piercing blue eyes surrounded by dark skin and a furrowed brow. The door slams closed, locking behind him.

Neewa is still on the table. "You have to stay here tonight," I hold her. "The doctor will take care of you."

Tears run down my face as I squeeze her close to me. I feel so helpless. There is nothing I can do but pray.

Moments after Doc leaves, Lyle the veterinary assistant enters the room.

He looks at me saying, "The doctor gave her the live virus in hopes that her immune system will strengthen and fight off the disease. Don't worry, we will keep an eye on her for ya."

He gently takes her from the table and my grasp. I lunge forward to give her one last kiss and hug.

Lyle walks us to the exit. The door shuts with a bang. I walk away sniveling.

Jackie is upset and puts her arm around me as we walk to the van.

Dad embraces us and says, "She'll be fine, you'll see."

Driving out of the Doc's driveway, I look out the window. Somewhere on this ranch, Neewa is lying helpless in a cage, alone in the desert again, just like when she was born.

Jackie all excited says, "Christina! Look at the K-2 meter. It's flashing like mad."

I look toward Jackie, tears still welling in my eyes. "I can't think about that right now."

Dad gushes with excitement, "Did you see those masks on the wall? One was labeled, 'Sun Dance Headdress' and another marked 'Shaman Spirit Mask.' And there were ancient medicines and powders in that other glass cabinet in the corner."

Jackie adds, "I saw a scepter that had some kind of hair on it. I hope its not human hair, eek!"

Dad turns toward me with a glaring stare, "Doc Cuthberson is either a collector, or a shaman. I'll bet they have secret ceremonies out here."

Jackie shrieks, "I brought the pocket spectrometer and the radio frequency meter too. The readings are off the charts!"

"What's going on out here?" Jackie yells.

Dad eagerly says, "Let's do an investigation when we come back here tomorrow to pick up Neewa. We'll bring the cameras and take video of the ranch. I'll bet this place has all kinds of paranormal activity."

"Christina, what do you think?" Jackie asks, trying to distract me from Neewa's critical condition.

"I'm worried about Neewa. I pray she lives."

Chapter 10 - Back to Doc's

I'm waiting at the curb for Dad and Jackie to pick me up.

"Let's go, Dad," I demand, jumping into the back seat. "I have to go get Neewa."

The ride out to the Doc's ranch seems never-ending. I twitch and move around in my seat but I can't settle down. Finally we arrive.

Dad points to some boxes in the back seat. "We have the cameras and some of the other equipment for our investigation of the Doc's ranch. I'll set everything up in the back of the van before I go in. Jackie, you stay in the van and watch everything. Make sure the cameras are running."

Jackie moans, "I don't see why I have to wait out here and take the video while you guys go inside."

Jackie smirks, "Yeah, yeah, okay I'll stay here and sweat to death. No, I'm going for a walk around the ranch till I find a nice cool shade tree to sit under."

Dad whispers, "Okay, but keep everything in sight. I don't want to get caught snooping around."

In the waiting room, I clench my sweaty fists and pace from wall to wall. "Our Father who art in heaven, hallowed be thy name..." I pray Neewa will be all right.

Dad is walking around the room looking at all the artifacts. He's taking notes as he goes from one display to another.

"Here she is," Lyle boasts, walking her through the door into the waiting room.

"Neewa's walking," I exclaim, jumping to my knees to embrace her.

She is wagging her tail. That's good, really good. Even her nose is a little wet. I hold her close as I feel the thump, thump, thump, of her tail on my ankles.

Dad gets his traditional sniff and lick on the hand. In return, Neewa expects and gets a scratch on the head, just behind her ears.

"Is she okay? Will she live?" I stutter, blinking my eyes, anxious to hear his answer.

He kneels next to me, stroking Neewa's ivory white coat, scratching her behind the ears. "Doc thinks she is going to make it, but she's still in danger."

Walking us to the front of the building Lyle says, "The doctor said give Neewa plenty of water, dry food only, and one of these pills every six hours. You have already given her the best chance to live."

I stare at the sign on the wall, "All Doctor's Fees are Payable on the Day of Examination."

Lyle sees me and says, "We will take no money from you and Neewa." He hastens, "Doc wants her back here in two weeks. Oh, and he had a question... where was she born?"

I answer, "The dog catcher said she was born in the desert, just outside of town. We adopted her at the pound."

"Oh," he nods closing the door behind us.

Neewa walks across the parking lot. Excited to be free, she tenderly frolics around us on the way to the van. She runs to Jackie who hugs her, and in return gets a lick on the face, from eye to forehead.

"Neewa your breath stinks," she says.

I'm so thrilled to have her back. At last, I can laugh again.

Neeva hops gingerly into the van and stands on the back seat waiting for me.

Watching me, she tilts her head the way she does. She looks so much better.

All the ghost-hunting crap is in my way as I squeeze into the seat next to her.

Finally I shout, "Get this stuff out of here, it's in Neeva's way."

I hand Jackie a meter, camera, and begin to lift up piece after piece of equipment.

Reaching, Jackie looks at the meter and shouts, "This one is stuck at forty-eight MHz. That's twelve higher than the reading we got the other day at Donner Pass, the highest reading I've ever seen."

Dad asks, "Jackie did you look around for anything that might give off an electromagnetic field? Like a transformer or an air conditioning unit?"

"No, I was busy with all this stuff. Then you guys came back too fast. What am I, a magician?" She blurts out sarcastically.

Dad looks around and exclaims as we pull away, "This place is loaded with spirits. I can feel it. As soon as we get home we'll check all the cameras, meters, everything."

We drive out the rutted driveway leaving the Doc's ranch. He has a huge place full of all kinds of animals, the smell of them permeate the hot air. Several barns, two houses, and fenced corrals dot the landscape. He has cattle, horses, and sheep too. There are a couple of ponds. Some ducks and geese rest on the shore while others are dipping and diving in the fresh water. They probably get their water from those spinning windmills; it looks more like an oasis rather than a ranch.

The main house has many windows, two big chimneys at each end, and a long porch that runs all the way along the front, side, and across the back. Clotheslines traverse the yard running from the house to the back fence. There's one set of clothes already dry from the hot desert sun.

Neewa will live. I know she will, although I can still see the disease in her yellow-tinted eyes. And her breath smells really bad. Sitting in the van, I daydream about giving her food and water, lots of water.

After getting home I give her one of the pills. The only way to be sure she swallows it, is to push it down her throat and watch her neck bulge as it goes down. She walks away and goes into my room where she curls up in a ball on her bed and goes to sleep.

I tell her, "Go to sleep, girl. It's time for you to rest. You're home now."

In the living room, Dad and Jackie are looking at our cameras and meters. They are in our paranormal lab, at least until we can figure something else out. I call it ghost-hunting headquarters.

"Did the camera get anything?" I ask Dad and Jackie.

Dad replies, "We are looking at the digital file now."

"There, there," Jackie exclaims, "That's a floating orb! There's another and another!"

"This place is paranormal central!"

"Did you see that?" So excited, Jackie sprays spit on me.

The hair on the back of my neck stands up. "What are they? And what do they do? Why would anyone call floating bubbles, orbs?" I sarcastically add.

“Christina, cool it! Give me a second. I’m watching this,” Jackie says perturbed by my interruptions.

Staring at the screen, she finally answers me as if she is reading from a textbook. “The orb is energy being transferred from a source such as power lines, heat energy, batteries, or people—to a spirit... or orb, so it can manifest. It may not even be a conscious act. The spirit is doing what it does. It’s the way they get their energy.”

Really excited Dad jumps in, “Finally we got something on film.”

“Look! Six floating orbs! It’s an orb hotel out there!” Jackie shouts, “Dad, they could be animal spirits. They don’t have to be peoples' spirits, especially since he’s a vet. I’ll bet a lot of animals die out there. And the ones that haven’t crossed over yet, well they are still there,” Jackie whispers.

Standing behind her, I visualize cattle and horses floating through the air.

She pulls herself closer to the laptop, focused on the screen. “I’m going to import this video into my movie maker program. I’ll be able to look at the video and audio tracks separately. Maybe we captured one of those orbs trying to speak with us.”

Dad warns, “Jackie, make a backup copy of that file right away, and put another on a DVD to be safe. And by the way, we can’t tell anyone about this, at least not until we get back East. First we have to get as far away from here as possible. Then we can report our findings to the National Paranormal Society. I’d probably lose my job if we made this discovery public now. Besides, there is a lot more ghost hunting that still needs to be done before we disclose what we do.”

“I want to go back out to Doc’s ranch again. We have a good excuse, Neewa’s follow up is in two weeks,” Jackie adds.

Dad guesses, "I bet we find their secret Indian burial grounds out there."

"I've had enough for today," I close my door.

I'm finally away from all the ghost talk. Collapsing on my bed, I think about Neewa's pills. They look like horse pills, an ugly gray and brown color, and they are so big.

Maybe they are horse pills? I just hope they work.

She is lying down in her own bed now and will probably sleep through the night. She's stretched out her feet up in the air as usual, the way she always does. When she dreams in that position her feet move back and forth as if she is running, I laugh at her.

I'll have to wake her and give her another pill in a few hours. I hate pushing it down her throat, but I have to make sure she swallows it or she'll never get better.

"Good night Dad, love you."

"Good night Christina, Jackie, love you."

"Love you, Dad," Jackie says.

"Good night, Neewa."

Chapter 11 - Neewa's Tongue

Waking, then falling back to sleep and waking again. I look at Neewa lying, helpless. There is nothing I can do for her but hope she recovers or dies without pain.

Doctor Cuthberson said he thinks Neewa is going to make it.

I repeat his words softly, over and over again. “She’s going to make it. She’s going to make it.”

Finally, I fall asleep at 5:00 AM, only to be awakened by my alarm a half hour later. Dragging myself out of bed, I’m so tired, and so not into going to school.

Wagging her tail, Neewa gets to her feet and wobbles across the rug to her water. I smile guardedly.

“Dad, she’s drinking,” I holler into the kitchen. “She’s drinking.”

He answers, “Great, Christina. Don’t forget to give her a pill.”

Giving her today’s first pill I tell her, “Girl you have to eat and drink today. I’m putting you outside with plenty of food and water.”

Snapping the chain to her collar I tell her, “I’ll be home early, only a half-day of school today, Yea!” She pulls away and licks my chin.

“Oh, Neewa, don’t lick me, yuck!” We look each other in the eyes as the bus pulls up. I turn and run to catch it before it drives away. A cloud of dust billows over her chain as she drags it across the yard till it snaps tight, stopping her. Staring, Neewa watches me disappear down the street. Looking back at her standing there, I sigh. Today she will lay in the shade, drink plenty of water and sleep.

I’m still the new kid at school. I don’t really know anyone. Most of the kids I meet live on the reserve and go to high school far away in Arizona. The kids here figure I’ll only be around a little while anyway, so why bother. I feel the same way. No need to get too friendly, I’ll be leaving soon. It’ll be good-bye to this place.

One of the kids on my bus is a real troublemaker. He came up with this harebrained scheme to steal his own girlfriend’s stereo. Then he tried to frame me. Said

his girlfriend saw me looking in her bedroom window. He was going to rob his own girlfriend! She caught him handing her stereo out the window to one of his posse.

I denied it, told them I was at home all night. The cops didn't believe him.

They were already following him and his buddies for drinking and drugging. He was arrested and I was cleared, but can you imagine the trouble I could have been in?

"Ring, ring, ring," that's the final bell. Am I glad this day is over. I'll jog home instead of waiting around for the bus.

As I run to within a few blocks of home I yell, "Neewa, Neewa!"

She replies, "Woof, Woof," in a deep-throated bark. As I enter the yard she is waiting for me, staring with tilted head, listening to my footsteps approach, and wagging her tail.

I sprint to her and unclip the chain from her collar, telling her, "Good girl."

"I'm so glad to see you." I stroke her neck and shoulder as she leans into my hand, panting.

She circles me, jumping and barking for me to get a toy and play. Then she sprints around the whole yard, as fast as ever.

"Calm down Neewa, take it easy, you have to get better first."

I look around for the water and food dishes that I put out this morning. All the water is gone. She might have drunk it? Or maybe she knocked it over? One of the bowls of food is empty. That means she ate her first meal in days, unless of course the squirrels got to it first.

I run inside and return with fresh water. She drinks, and looks up at me. Eagerly, she slurps up more and dribbles it all over my shoes. Her black nose is shiny and moist

again, not the cracked, dried up, flaking tissue it was the other day. I squeeze her and we both fall over onto the dry dirt that covers most of the yard.

“Yuck! Neewa your breath stinks!” I cry out scrambling to my feet.

Grasping her snout and holding her head steady, I peel back her black lips and peek at her teeth for the first time since her illness. Quickly she shakes loose from my grip.

Goose bumps explode on my arms and legs. Cringing I cry out, “Oh my God, Neewa, your teeth are green, and some are missing.” I stagger away from her feeling like I’m going to throw up.

Just then Dad and Jackie arrive home in a whirlwind of dust, as the van pulls up the alleyway drive.

“How’s Neewa doing?” Dad asks with a genuine look of concern.

“She seems okay, I think she’s doing better,” I mumble.

I get chills thinking about her awful teeth. The first veterinarian warned me about this. He said she would lose some teeth. Thankfully, she hasn’t lost all of them. All of the top and bottom premolars are gone, which are the ones between her canines and molars.

Neewa is panting, gnawing on one of her soup bones while she lies on the only patch of grass in the yard. No problem with her front teeth. She cleaned all the meat off, not a speck is left on that bone.

Crack! She splits the bone wide open and feverishly slurps out all the tasty marrow. I guess there’s nothing wrong with her back teeth either.

Neewa runs to Dad, prances around him, encouraging him to grab one of her toys and play.

Dad smiles, “Hey what is that pink thing hanging out of Neewa’s mouth?”

Embarrassed for Neewa I defend her. “Dad, get over it. That’s her tongue. She lost some teeth, okay, so her tongue hangs out a little.”

“A little,” Dad chuckles, “Her whole tongue is sticking out of her mouth.”

“Stop, you’re making a big thing out of nothing. It’s just the tip that hangs out the side cause her premolars fell out.”

Without those teeth, Neewa’s pink tongue slips out of the toothless gap. This small swatch of pink against her black lips and white face gives her a funny, almost hysterical look.

In fact, Neewa’s tongue has become the family joke. I’m always saying, “Neewa stop sticking your tongue out.” She looks at me and tilts her head to one side. Then I burst out laughing.

Everywhere we go people ask, “What is that in her mouth?” Or someone might inquire, “Is that her tongue hanging out?” “Yes,” we say, and everyone wants to know why.

One time, a kid walked up to her and pulled on it. Surprised, the little girl exclaimed, “Yuck! It’s her tongue?” We all laughed... and Neewa handles it all with great dignity.

Neewa loves to run around the yard, but if I don’t watch her she disappears. Sometimes she can be blocks away in just seconds. I don’t even know where she goes. Dad says she visits other dogs, but I think people invite her into their home. I bet they feed and play with her.

When I realize she has vanished, I call her to come home. Sometimes she barks and runs home like the wind. Other times, it takes hours of searching the neighborhood, calling her name, again and again before I find her.

When I find her, I ask, “Where have you been?” But she won’t tell me. Sometimes when she runs away, I think she may never come home, but she always does.

It was right around this time I started keeping her on the chain more, and that’s when things got weird. Neewa began to dig holes in the yard. First, she dug a hole over by the steps of the house near a cement wall. No one took much notice, until she dug two more holes by our fence. It wasn’t long before the yard was full of holes, a dozen or more. Soon the place looked like the desert in the movie, Holes. . . . Everywhere you looked there was another and another.

Her favorite holes are the ones that are as big as a cave. She crawls down the entrance on her belly and turns around inside. Then she pokes her head out to watch, smell, and hear everything going on around her. The dirt she digs out of each hole is left in a pile at the opening. She rests her head on this mound and keeps her nose in the air, sniffing the wind, on guard for any intruders.

When our neighbor Jane saw all the holes Neewa dug, she was totally shocked. She thinks Neewa digs the holes to stay cool and away from the heat during the day and at night when it is cold she can stay warm inside.

In high mountain deserts, summer days and nights have a wide range of temperature. The days are ninety to a hundred degrees, but the nights are cool, sometimes even cold.

Tall Bristlecone Pine trees shade most of our yard and Neewa's play area. The trees keep us cool during the day, especially if there is a breeze.

We don't have to worry about cutting the lawn. Ha-ha, the grass just doesn't grow in a place that gets so little rain and sunshine. Dad likes that just fine. One thing he hated back east was cutting the lawn, leaf clean up, and all that stuff.

Flowers in the front of the house attract lots of bees and birds. The bumblebees buzz like little chain saws. And at dusk I've seen hummingbirds hovering around the honeysuckle and lilac bushes that crowd the house and give off sweet fragrances.

Chapter 12 - Rodeo

Dad walks in and trips over one of Neewa's soup bones. "Whoa!" He shouts sliding several feet across the room, barely regaining his balance. "What the hell was that?"

I laugh, "You have to watch where you're going."

Dad kicks the bone out of the doorway and chuckles.

"Hey I got an idea, let's all go to the rodeo. Can you believe it, a rodeo here in town?" He exclaims.

I ask myself, go to a rodeo? No, I don't think so. They torture those animals, don't they?

"I'm not going," I say.

Dad answers from his room, "It's the Women's National Championships. The main events are saddle bronco riding, barrel racing, bull riding, calf roping and steer wrestling."

“I wanna go,” Jackie shouts from her room.

“All right I’ll go,” I say reluctantly, knowing Neewa can’t come with us. “But we can still bring her and keep her outside, right Dad?”

Dad puts on his best jeans and is stomping his feet into his boots, “Bang! Bang!”

“What the hell are you doing?” I ask.

“Bring the ghost hunting equipment,” he reminds me. “We can test it out at the rodeo. We’ll see what kind of readings we get from the riders and horses.”

I have to remember to bring along Neewa’s corkscrew stake and chain to keep her from running off. As long as we park in the shade, she will be nice and cool. She can take a nap under the van. I’ll make sure she has plenty of water and food.

Arriving at the arena, I jump from the van and prepare a place for Neewa to stay in the shade while we are in the arena. I secure her to the chain and fill her bowls.

While waiting for Dad and Jackie to gather the stuff, I survey the surrounding area with its rippling sand dunes and sagebrush scattered over the stark desert. Tumbleweeds blow across the landscape driven by scorching hot winds. Each new angle of the sun’s rays paints the serrated rock on the distant mountains bright rust and amber. Towering peaks rise over shadowy crevasses under the cloudless blue sky.

Scratching Neewa behind the ear, she leans into my rub for a deep massage. “You stay in the shade Neewa. And don’t pull your stake out of the ground. Here is your lunch and water. We’ll be back in an hour or so, I promise.”

The rodeo has already started. I throw my backpack full of ghost hunting stuff over my shoulder and run for the main gate.

The parking lot is full of trucks with license plates from every state. I see Idaho, Wyoming, California, Iowa and Arizona to name a few, even Canada is here.

As we walk through the entrance into the arena, the sound of the crowd is deafening. The fans are cheering and clapping for one of the competitors. Dad and Jackie are talking to me as an announcement is broadcast over the public address system.

“I can’t hear you!” I say.

A woman on horseback, wearing chaps and a hat pulled down tight on her head, disappears into a tunnel at the far end of the arena. The barrel racing competition has just ended. A hush comes over the crowd as staff rush in and roll the bright red barrels off the main floor, preparing for the next event.

Spectators are perched on railings and fill the bleachers. Families huddle together to support their daughters, mothers, and sisters. Most are wearing blue jeans or silk jackets with logos and of course cowboy hats and boots. The older folks have on the traditional dungaree or corduroy jackets or vests.

As we search for seats, I look at the spectators who fill the bleachers.

The Native Americans bring their look. It’s more of a hybrid between a Western cowboy and American Indian. The blue jeans and boots are about the same, but above the waist are Indian blankets or deerskin jackets with fringe. Their beige stoic faces are draped in characteristic jet-black shoulder length hair or framed in marine style crew cuts. And topped with ten-gallon hats with colorful beaded headbands.

Mexican Americans have come to compete too, with multi-colored ponchos, gaucho hats, and short hair. In the crowd are a few sombreros with red and yellow trim, and gold tassels.

Finally we find empty seats at the far end of the arena. Dad sets up the tripod in the aisle with the infrared camera. Jackie is getting readings pointing the infrared thermometer toward the nearby competitors who are warming up for the next event. I raise the digital camera to my eye and zoom in and out on the spectators across the way. The K-2 meter, Ghost Hunter's favorite device lays quietly next to me on the seat, no lights flashing detecting any EMF here.

No one sitting around us will ever guess we're paranormal investigators disguised as rodeo fans. They have no idea what we are doing, nor do they care.

"Next event Calf Roping," the announcer's voice blares ceremoniously. "The first contestant is Josie Sullivan riding Sissy, representing the Sullivan Ranch, Gunstock, Colorado."

While cheers radiate from the stands, a horse and rider stampede into the rink, galloping from the tunnel at a furious speed. I jump up in my seat at the sound of a Bang. The metal gate flies open releasing a calf from the pen near the tunnel. All three of them sprint straight at us at lightening speed, nostrils flared, hooves kicking dirt up in every direction.

The calf, fearing for its life, desperately tries to escape the horse and rider thundering toward it, squeezing the terrified animal closer and closer to the rail.

Suddenly, the cowgirl hurls her rope high into the air. It soars, as if in slow motion hanging above the ground, circling toward its target. Whoosh! As if by magic it falls around the neck of the calf's head. Josie pulls the reins of her horse and the team skids to a stop. As the rope slices the air, it snaps tight around the calf's neck. The calf

spins a hundred eighty degrees, lands on all fours in shock, and rolls its eyes back and moos.

Jumping from her horse to the ground, she swiftly follows the taut rope with gloved hand to the calf's neck. She then hoists her cowering prey off its feet and drops it to the ground on its side with a thud. In seconds she ties three legs of the bewildered beast together and steps back throwing her hands high into the air in triumph.

Everyone applauds and looks at the clock and standings to gauge her performance. All of this takes place in about fifty seconds, the amount of time it takes to inhale and exhale ten breaths.

For the next hour, horses and riders sprint up and down the arena, pounding their hoofs, flexing their muscles and snorting in the air. Again and again the challenge plays out, woman vs. beast, beast vs. woman.

At intermission everyone scatters to buy food, programs, and souvenirs as a big tanker truck applies water to the arena floor to keep the dust down. The wet dirt's pungent fragrance filters through my nose to the back of my mouth. I can taste the floor.

"I wanna use the thermal infrared camera. Dad, let me have a turn, you always get it," I demand.

Handing my camera to Jackie I say, "Here you take the digital, I'll use the infrared."

Infrared pictures are called thermo-grams. They display the heat given off by the horses, riders, or cattle in colorful shades of red, purple, and blue on the screen. The colors are representations of light outside of the visible spectrum called emitted radiation.

Wow, those horses are so beautiful all dressed out with elegantly braided tails and manes, and shiny coats sparkling from a recent brushing. Silver studs adorn the embossed saddles with strands of rawhide hanging down and their bridles and halters glisten from the lights above.

The women riders are dressed in colorful tops, jeans with chaps, and boots with imposing spurs. Adorned with just the right amount of makeup, bright red lipstick, and rouge on their cheeks. They are objects of beauty as well as power.

Jackie whispers, "I'm taking a close-up picture of that horse over there with this sixty X zoom lens. Wow, it feels like I'm riding on the horse myself, this is so cool."

That was the last event; it's the end of the rodeo.

All the awards and prize money is being handed out. Cameras are flashing as the press scrambles to interview the winners and console the others.

I hang out and get some autographs on my program. One of the girls who signed my program sat near us in the stands. I saw her chewing tobacco.

She asked me, "Did you have fun at the rodeo?"

I tell her, "It was really something to see you girls riding, roping, and wrestling." She laughed and said, "We are good, aren't we?"

"Yes you are," I said.

As I walk to the exit I hear a woman's voice, "Let's go to that ghost town, the one just west of here."

That was all I needed to hear. I turn to her smiling, "Excuse me Miss, where is the ghost town?"

We all shuffle along together to the exit.

She replies, “Ah, it’s only about five miles from here. You take the main highway west to a sign that says ‘Automotive Shop’ and points to the left. Turn right at the sign and take that dirt road to the end. It leads to a box canyon where the town is. We’re going there now. Do you want to follow us?”

“Can we Dad?” I say with a look in my eyes that fully explains the consequences for a wrong answer.

“Yes, Yes, definitely, we are going,” Dad says while trying to balance all our stuff, some strapped around his neck and the rest under his arms.

“Great,” I declare, “We’ll follow you.”

“We have a red pick-up truck with a horse trailer that says Rayburn Ranch on the side,” she replies.

“Okay, we’ll be right behind you,” I add.

I run to the van, hurrying to walk Neewa and throw all her stuff into the back of our van. Dad and Jackie pack the rest of our gear and get in, while I scan the parking lot for the Rayburn’s red truck.

Catching a glimpse of their trailer I yell out, “There, there they are!”

Chapter 13 - Ghost Town

I’m nervous as we turn onto a dirt road at the sign that says “Automotive Shop.” The lonely trail has desert on both sides, and those amber and rust mountain peaks I saw from the arena glimmering in the background are right in front of me.

Neewa whines as our van slows down. Dad cracks open the door just enough for Neewa to push it open with her head and jump out the door. Leaping onto the ground, she runs alongside of our van and then into the desert kicking up sand, her nose just a hair off the ground. She stops short, checks out a prairie dog hole and continues searching for any other scents.

“Run, Neewa, run!” I cry, inspired by her energy and ability.

My attention quickly shifts to a faint image of the discarded settlement coming into view. I silently stare at the eerie-looking scene. It looks staged, like a miniature playhouse dropped from above. Surrounding the forgotten colony are steep canyon walls on every side, and ten-foot high sand dunes block the only road leading in and out.

Main Street, if you want to call it that, is the one and only street with a small row of buildings on either side. The dwellings once bustling with people are now empty.

It’s a forsaken town, a ghost town. Nothing else is visible anywhere around it. No electric wires, streetlights, or government building proclaiming ownership. No abandoned wagons or cars lie about, nothing. Nor is there anyone to be seen, except the Rayburns and us.

Parking our van alongside the Rayburn truck, we all get out as Neewa catches up. She prances around, circling us wildly, jumping, excited that we are going on a hike. Jackie, Dad and I gather up our backpacks and begin the hike into town.

Taken aback, I see a cemetery in the foreground, just about five hundred feet from where we stand. It is small, filled with knee high weeds and surrounded by a faded, mostly broken picket fence.

Mr. Rayburn points at the cemetery. “Places like this were called boom and bust towns, and they all had their own cemeteries. When someone died, they were buried with everything they owned. Most people had very few belongings, so the undertakers left their boots on. That’s why all the towns out West named their cemeteries Boot Hill. That accounts for the “Boot” part of the cemetery name. The “Hill” piece of the name can be explained by the fact that the location picked for the burials was the highest ground near the town. That was in case of a flash flood. The town folks didn’t want bodies floating all over the place after a storm.”

Mrs. Rayburn adds as they walk off together, “Many of these boom towns lasted only a few years or until the gold or silver ran out. After that everyone left town, well almost everyone. None of the inhabitants of Boot Hill ever did, I hope, ha ha ha.”

I look at Dad and Jackie, neither of them is laughing.

Inside the cemetery I find grave markers so battered by the wind and weather they are blank. The names and dates have worn off. Others have only faint impressions of the letters and numbers that once spelled out the name, date of birth, and when the occupant died. If we’re lucky we might find an epitaph saying something about the deceased or maybe how they died.

I exclaim, “Wow check this out, Tabor, Agnes P., Pioneer, Wife, Mother.”

Moving to the next grave, I can hardly believe my eyes. “Dad, Jackie, look. Seaborn Barnes, Sam Bass Gang, Texas Train Robber, shot in the legs during the Mesquite Train Robbery!”

Dad walks from the middle of the cemetery and whispers, “Getting any readings on the K-2?”

“No, nothing yet.” I kneel down and touch the brittle grave marker, wood flakes away from under my fingers.

“Christina, this is so cool. Get a picture of that one with the infrared camera—I mean the camera.” Jackie looks around as if she let our secret out.

Dad says excitedly, “There has to be something here. We will know if one of these graves gives off infrared or electromagnetic energy.”

“Don’t worry about the Rayburns. They’ll never figure out we’re hunting ghosts,” I say.

Dad and I are first to turn and walk toward the gate to exit the cemetery.

“Hey wait up, I’m not staying here alone. I’m finished with this place. Let’s get out here,” Jackie calls out running to catch up to us.

We only have a few hours before dark, so I’m taking thermo images as we walk into town.

The Rayburns are already leaving, heading back to their truck. We meet halfway between the cemetery and town.

Mrs. Rayburn says, “We’re headed back home to California.”

“Once many years ago, there were gold and silver mines all around this town,”

Mr. Rayburn adds.

“Thanks for the tip on the ghost town. It’s really awesome,” I reply.

Jackie agrees, “Yeah, this is so cool.”

“Watch out for Sally Ann,” Mrs. Rayburn says laughing.

I look at her— “Sally Ann?”

Mrs. Rayburn replies, "She's the ghost that lives in town. There is a legend about her and her brother. He was very ill and she, although dead for years, came back from the other side to encourage the doctor to help him."

Mr. Rayburn looks us in the eye and begins to tell the story. "About one hundred years ago the circuit doctor was in town and was awakened from a deep sleep by a bright light shining right in front of him. He sat up quickly, shading his eyes.

"At first he thought that he had overslept. But the glow was not coming from the window. As his eyes adjusted to the brilliance, he saw a woman dressed in white, standing at the foot of his bed. A heavenly light surrounded her, and she glowed from within as well. The doctor gasped in fear and huddled underneath his bedclothes.

"Do not be afraid,' the spirit said in a kind gentle voice.

"The doctor took heart in her words. He withdrew his head from the covers and looked right at the glowing woman.

"I come to you from another world,' the woman said.

"Who are you?' the doctor asked.

"In life, my name was Sally Ann. I was sister to Simeon Carter.'

"Why have you been sent here?' asked the doctor.

"I'm here to tell you that my brother Simeon will die of strychnine poisoning if you are not more persistent.'

"The doctor swallowed his guilt, remembering his pride in having thought he cured Simeon.

“One of the earliest lessons he had learned in medical school was how such pride could cause him to be too confident with his treatments. A patient could die if the doctor was not thorough. The doctor was falling into this trap with her brother Simeon.

“He thanked the ghost for her warning and promised to go to her brother at daybreak. Satisfied, the ghost vanished and the room was in darkness once more.”

After those words, the Rayburns walk toward their truck. Mr. Rayburn turns and says, “I ought to know, Sally Ann was my Grandmother.”

Seconds later they drive off, leaving Neewa and the three of us in the ghost town, alone with Sally Ann.

Within seconds of their departure, out of our knapsacks comes the paranormal stuff we have been concealing from them.

“Okay let’s go to town,” I say.

Dad warns, “We have a lot of ground to cover and not much time till sunset. Better get a move on it— our best chance to catch Sally Ann is at that hotel.”

It’s around eighty degrees, warm for this time of day. I can feel the nearby canyon walls radiating the day’s heat absorbed after many hours in the sun. There is little time before it drops from the sky and disappears. Then it will get cold and dark, fast.

Neewa runs off into the canyon, as if destiny was calling her.

“She can’t disappear in that box canyon, unless of course she can fly over those cliffs, ha ha ha.” We all laugh, although I am a bit nervous at the thought of it.

As we enter town, I stare at the faded gray structures that line each side of the street. The wobbly buildings, one and two stories high, have shadowy alleyways between them.

The entire town looks like it's ready to collapse, complete sections of several roofs are torn away. Railings and steps on the front porches are crumbling and decaying. In the same condition are the wooden walkways connecting them. Splintered planks lie in the once muddy paths, left to rot. Long ago these paths connected the town's bustling traffic of ladies in puffed-out dresses and feathered bonnets and men wearing vests, suites, and wide-brimmed hats to shade them from the hot sun.

Hollow openings are all that's left of the windows and doors, blown out by the harsh windstorms that frequent the canyon. Several doors dangle by a nail or a hinge, still in place from the past. About the only things moving in town are a couple of shredded raggedy curtains fluttering about, still attached by a thread to the once modestly decorated second floor boarding rooms of the day.

Bang! Bang! Echoes down Main Street. The sound comes from somewhere and ricochets off the back of the canyon. I snap my head up to look for its origin, but I can't tell which direction it came from.

"Jackie, make sure you don't put your finger over the microphone. I want the audio recording of this ghost town to be perfect. It may be the only one ever made here."

Dad whispers, "Be quiet, we might capture an EVP."

I ask softly, "Jackie, what's an EVP again?"

"Electronic Voice Phenomenon? It's a captured recording of one or several disembodied voices. Most times the voices are not heard as they're being recorded. Only when you play back the digital file can you hear them," she smiles.

"Nobody go inside any buildings, they might fall apart at any minute." Dad is repeating himself again because he's stressed out about it.

“Chill, Dad, I heard ya! Stop with the crumbling buildings already, we’re not going in. You are so annoying.”

Jackie points, “Hey look! That was a dry goods store and over there the saloon, and there’s the hotel. What’s that other one?”

Jackie and I walk side-by-side, photographing the few signs still legible on the front of the buildings. One says “Sheriff’s Office,” another “Blacksmith.” We work our way around the back of town with my thermal imaging recorder in hand. I begin to tape the details of the back of every building. Jackie raises the digital camera with its sixty X zoom lens to her eye and scans through a door and down the hallway of a building. With that camera lens, it feels as if you are walking down the hall yourself. Next she zooms into each room through the outside windows.

“Christina, look! That door, it’s got a bright light around it,” she turns her head toward me with a chilling look on her face.

I walk to her and stare at the door. It’s glowing around the edge, and seemingly pulsing. An intense halo surrounds the border of the door.

The weather-beaten cedar door has deep silver and gray vertical ridges. The glass doorknob is missing, probably taken by a treasure hunter who didn’t have enough room or strength to take the door.

“I’m going in,” I whisper to her.

“No, Christina, Dad said don’t go inside.”

“I’m just going to check that door.”

“Don’t go,” she whispers.

Before she can finish her words, I climb in the window and walk at a snail's pace down the hall. The door frame shimmers, and appears to pulse. A breeze in the air rushes by me as it is funneled from the flat prairie, into the building, and through the narrow corridor. Sweat beads on my forehead and drops down into my eyes and nose. I stare at the glowing outline of the door. Closer and closer I tiptoe until the finger on my sweaty hand glides along its edge. I'm about to push it forward when it swings open—all of a sudden bright light hits me square in my eyes, blinding me. Trembling, I slink inside and peer around the room expecting to see something.

The brilliant orange and yellow setting sun sits in the middle of the window opposite me.

“Christina hurry up,” Jackie implores.

The room is empty except for a broke chair and a three-legged table turned over on its side. Just bare floorboards, no ghosts, nothing. I turn and walk back to Jackie who anxiously waits.

Dad's gone over to the hotel with the K-2 and radio frequency field strength meter. He's at the hotel door when we come from behind the buildings.

“The K-2 is lighting up like a Christmas Tree,” he exclaims, holding it up for us to see. “Look!” The green, yellow, orange and red lights flash. “What do you think of this? It could be Sally Ann?”

“Could be,” I agree. “Dad we recorded everything.”

“Me too, Dad, I zoomed down every hallway and into every room.” Jackie backs up my account of our whereabouts.

“Okay, it’ll be getting dark, no telling who or what might be out here at night. We’ll check all the recordings at home, let’s get out of here.” Dad starts walking back.

If only the Rayburns stayed a little longer. We could have stayed into the night. With them here we would have found Sally Ann for sure.

But with only three of us out here, no thanks. Even the National Paranormal Society recommends a minimum of three adults at an Investigation. I’m not sure if that’s for verification, or just safety?

I fall behind everyone headed for the van as we exit town in a hurry.

“Hey, what is the name of this town anyway?” I yell to Dad and Jackie leading the way out.

“Don’t know? We should try to figure that out,” Dad answers.

“I saw it on the hotel, its Potosi, it’s spelled P-o-t- o-s-i,” Jackie answers.

“What kind of name is that? French?” I suggest.

“Maybe,” Dad replies.

As we make our way back toward the van we pass the cemetery. I stare at the forgotten souls piled up in neat rows, covered in weeds, forgotten. Abandoned in the middle of nowhere.

The cooler night winds are arriving in town. Dad hands me a sweatshirt from his backpack. I gaze back at town. It’s a real ghost town. The only thing moving in town is the tumbleweeds blowing down Main Street.

“Bang!”

“AHHHHH!” I scream, “What was that?”

That freaked me out, I'm getting out of here. Panic grips me, my heart pounds. Jackie raises her hand to cover her mouth, as if to catch a deep sigh.

"Relax," Dad utters. "That's the same shutter we heard banging on the way into town."

"It's a shutter? I didn't see any shutters anywhere in town. I'll check the video when we get home, you'll see, that was Sally Ann."

"It didn't sound like the one I heard when we first got here. That one sounded more like a gun shot?" Jackie recalls.

"That can't be?" Dad replies, "There isn't anyone around here for miles?"

"If it weren't for the chilly winds and whirling dust and sand, I might like this place. Ha-ha."

"Bang! Bang! Bang!"

"Not to mention the banging shutters and raggedy curtains in the windows."

It's just the wind, it's just the wind, I tell myself. The wind always kicks up when the sun goes down. It's definitely time to go.

Really loud I yell, "Neewa! Neewa! Come girl!"

"Neewa, Neewa, Come girl," eerily echoes off the canyon wall.

My heart races as I turn and stare, searching for her, straining into the twilight. But she is nowhere in sight.

"Neewa! Neewa!" I implore.

Sure enough the canyon answers in a fading reply, "Neewa, Neewa, Neewa, Neewa."

Where the heck is she? Seconds pass like minutes as all of us stare into the darkness.

I spot her faint image under a shadowy ledge. She's a minute speck of white sprinting in the dark shadows.

"There she is! Come on girl, come on," I beg her.

The canyon whispers, "Come on girl, come on."

Crossing the rocky terrain, she glides effortlessly down the slope. Her strong body and powerful muscles carry her over the rough landscape. She maneuvers around boulders and bounces all the way through the canyon.

Neewa is strong now and weighs more than forty pounds. She is over two and a half feet tall and when she stands on her hind legs, her black padded paws and ivory toenails reach my shoulders.

"Come on Neewa, let's get out of here, we've had enough excitement for one day. This place creeps me out."

After loading up the van we begin the drive home. I sit in the darkened van thinking what a great day this has been. First the rodeo with the cowgirls, horses, bulls, and steer. Then the ghost town and the Rayburn's story about Sally Ann and her brother. The best part was the ghost town. I finally investigated a real ghost town.

I can't wait to get home and check the video we took in the lab. If I captured Sally Ann, I will be famous. I'm going to tell everyone back home, all my friends will think this is so cool.

Neewa curls up next to me on the seat. The van's big seats have lots of room. But she is right next to me and rests her head near my leg like she always does. Her eyes close and she lets out a big sigh through her wet nose that shines even in the darkness.

"Christina, wake up we're home," Dad says.

"Oh my God, I'm too tired to do anything tonight."

I can barely walk inside to go to bed. Neewa follows me in and I stop in the kitchen to fill her bowls, which she quickly empties.

"Good night, Dad, love you."

"Good night, Christina, Jackie, love you."

"Good night, Dad, love you." Jackie says.

"Good night, Neewa."

As I crawl under the covers just as she catches up to me and jumps up taking her spot at the foot of the bed. Carefully she turns in a tight circle and lies down for the night. Now in her familiar white fluffy ball, she groans and places her nose on her tail. Then she sighs and watches me till I close my eyes. Then she closes hers.

Sunday morning and Jackie and I pull out the cameras and all of the scientific meters. I'm downloading the video files onto my hard drive using the firewire and moviemaker program.

"Click, capture, click, publish. I will have Sally Ann on this tape, I guarantee it, maybe even her aberration," I tell Jackie.

She answers, "Yeah Christina, sure, an aberration. I don't think so."

After an hour or so of reviewing the video I tell Jackie, “See, I told you there isn’t one shutter on any of those windows in the ghost town, not one! What do you say to that? Where did that banging shutter come from?”

Watching the last ten minutes of the video of the ghost town, suddenly I hear,
“%^&*(#@)&%%)@#\$(&^%\$\$#.”

“What’s that? Jackie did you hear that?” The hair fuzz on my arms stands up.

“No, I didn’t hear anything, just static,” Jackie replies.

“Play that back, the hotel part,” I shriek.

“%^&*(#@)&%%)@#\$(&^%\$\$#.”

“Wow! Did you hear it that time?” Convinced.

“I think I heard something, Christina, but it sounds like noise to me.”

“Play it again,” I demand.

“%^&*(#@)&%%)@#\$(&^%\$\$#.”

“I heard it that time, it’s static all right. Christina, you heard static, that’s all it is,” Jackie insists.

“No, that’s an EVP. We just heard a recording of the disembodied voice of Sally Ann. She was talking to us.” I jump to my feet.

“Christina, no one will believe that noise is Sally Ann?” Jackie adds.

“We need something else, and it has to match up the with the same time line when we recorded Sally Ann’s EVP.” I’m serious.

Running to my backpack for the other meters, “Let’s get the rest of the equipment and check everything we had at the ghost town. The approximate time of the encounter was at about one hour and fifteen minutes into the investigation.”

“I’m on it,” Jackie answers, doubtful.

In the next ten minutes we take out every piece of equipment we had there and check all the readings and cross-reference everything with the time line.

“Looks like the only device with a reading is the radio frequency detector. It recorded eighty MHz (Mega Hertz), whatever that means?” I say.

Jackie answers, “I’m not sure? It must mean something?”

One thing I know, the eighty MHz of electro-magnetic radiation had to come from something. That’s why Dad’s K-2 meter was lighting up outside the hotel. Sally Ann was there.

Sometimes spirits communicate in that frequency, or so I’ve heard. It could have come from the natural magnetic field in the atmosphere or a computer screen, electric motor, cell phones, or walkie-talkies.

I nod, “I’ll prove it to you, that was Sally Ann. Hold on, hold on. I got a text from Mike. I wonder if he got the cell phone picture I sent him yesterday? Remember when I went down that hallway inside the hotel?”

I read his text out loud, “Ha-ha, pls, u r trying to trick me! U think throwing powder in the air and taking a picture of it, will make me think it’s a ghost? Lol the picture you sent me is a fake.”

“What is he talking about, I didn’t throw any powder,” I scroll to the message I sent him and look at the picture.

“Oh my God look Jackie! It’s an apparition of Sally Ann in the hotel room! I caught her with my cell camera. She’s standing in the corner pointing her finger at something.”

Jackie looks at the picture. “It looks like someone threw powder into the air. How do you know that is her? It could be her brother?”

I inspect the photo. “It’s got to be her! She’s a little bit of a thing. Kind of cute, huh. First she talked to us and now I have a picture of her. I’ve got her now!”

Besides Jackie look at the time I sent the photo, it was taken at one hour and two minutes into the investigation The EVP was recorded at one hour and ten minutes in, remember? That’s around the same time.

It must have taken all of her strength to materialize and talk to us. I wonder what she is trying to tell us?

I continue checking all the meters and digital film from the ghost town, but find nothing else. “Looks like that’s it, the cell phone picture, EVP, and we got the radio frequency field strength meter that recorded the eighty megahertz (MHz), whatever that means?” I look at Jackie.

She replies, “I kind of know, it’s a magnetic field given off by stuff, just like EMF. The RF meter measures electro-magnetic radiation given off by objects like microwave signal towers, satellite television signals, or radio signals. And it’s all measured in megahertz (MHz).”

I pitch in, “Sometimes the radiation is just hanging around in the air. But it could be a spirit trying to ‘cross over’?”

Jackie wraps it up, “Or one trying to come back?”

Dad walks in the door after returning from his Sunday morning basketball game with the guys from work.

I jump at him, “We recorded Sally Ann’s EVP. And the RF meter had a reading of eighty MHz at the exact same time we heard Sally Ann. And remember the K-2 was lighting up by the hotel? I double-checked everything, every meter and all the stuff. There isn’t anything else. That’s everything we got at the ghost town. Oh, and we got the picture.”

Dad looks at me over the top of his reading glasses. “You got a picture?”

I reply, “Yeah, you know the one I took with my cell phone in the hotel? I sent it to Mike. He sent it back a text saying I tried to trick him by throwing powder in front of the camera. When I looked at the photo I sent him, I realized it was Sally Ann’s apparition in the picture. That proves she was there. I knew it.”

Dad motions for me to hand him my phone so he can see the picture, “Could be, could be.” He looks closer at it, “I’ll bring the picture to work and analyze it.”

I add, “I’ll send it to you.”

He answers, “I thought we agreed not to enter the buildings?”

I ignore him.

Dad says, “I’ll count up the electro-magnetic radiation given off by the stuff we had at the ghost town. Hum, let’s see, three cell phones, that’s five MHz and the cameras are about ten MHz. We have to add the radio frequency EMF and light meters, they’re about six MHz, so that’s twenty-one MHz. And the Altimeter, that’s another three, total twenty-four. That’s nowhere near eighty MHz, we have fifty-six MHz unaccounted for.”

Dad states, “I have to bring the EVP recording to work and see if I can enhance the file on the equipment we have there. I’ll give it a forensic audio treatment (FAT) and an acoustical signal analysis (ASC). The FAT will tell us any characteristics of the

recording—for example distortion, excessive noise, the speed of the sound, if the tape is demagnetized or if a dropout is present. The ASC will decipher hard to hear inaudible speech signals through forensic phonetic experimentation. If it is a recording of speech, the graphical representation or spectrogram can be printed out. That will give us a voice picture of someone or something. It's kind of similar to a photographic picture of a person.”

“Dad, I double-checked everything, every meter, and all the files on the cameras. There isn't anything else. We got the EVP recording of Sally Ann, the radio frequency reading of eighty MHz, your K-2 readings, and of course the picture. That's everything from the ghost town.”

I continue, “I think it proves there was something there? It's conclusive. I know it. I know we recorded Sally Ann or maybe her brother.”

Jackie adds, “I think it was her brother, Simeon.”

“Dad, ya know I've been meaning to ask you, what do you do at work anyway?” I ask.

“Oh, I just test stuff, different equipment, that's all.”

“I'll bring this recording of Sally Ann's EVP to work and analyze it when no one is around. You and Jackie check the Internet for information about anything paranormal that gives off fifty to sixty MHz of electromagnetic energy. See what you can find out. And remember, not a word to anyone.”

Chapter 14 - Chester's Gifts

Unexpectedly our friend Chester arrives at our house. He waits outside, doesn't knock on the door or anything. He just stands there leaning against his car, waiting.

Neewa who is outside on her chain, barks a few times and then sits down and watches Chester.

My Dad and Chester work together over at the government building. Sometimes they go fishing in the canyon outside of town. They walk up the canyon, in the water, fishing the pools as the water flows down through the rocks and gorges to the valley.

Dad took me horseback riding in the canyon once. It was so much fun, my horse was named Rosy. We rode across the desert and then up into the canyon. Rosy stopped and drank water from the stream. She pulled the reins right out of my hand so she could reach down to the water. I was almost knocked right off of her into the river.

The water is so crystal clear and clean you can drink it.

Everywhere in the canyon are quaking aspen trees with leaves that shake in the wind, as if they are dancing. That's why they call them quaking aspen. The sun reflects off of them making the leaves shimmer like stars shining in the night.

Chester is a Native American and he has a home in town. He's tall, with long straight black hair down to his shoulders. Usually he wears blue jeans with cowboy boots and a nice shirt with a collar, which is left hanging out, never tucked in. His stomach hangs over his belt buckle. Chester is an artist. He paints pictures of desert scenes and Indians doing stuff, worriers, and chiefs too.

His mother lives nearby in one of the oldest homes around. Heather is her name, and she is the tribal Medicine Woman.

Their Indian word for Medicine Woman is “newe pohakanten.” The Medicine Woman is very important in Indian culture. She gives remedies made from herbs and roots. If someone is really sick, she summons help from spirits to cure them. She also uses the same herbs and roots to protect you from evil.

I join Chester outside and let Neewa off her chain so she can run around.

He looks around at the yard, “Look at all the holes.”

Neewa is running around. Chester picks up one of her toys and throws it. In no time she brings it back to him and drops it on the ground near his feet.

“Smart little pup you are,” Chester acknowledges as he throws her toy again.

Chester watches Neewa go down into one of her holes to get a soup bone to chew on.

Looking at me, then at Neewa again he exclaims, “She’s a coy dog, must be a coy dog, look at those holes. I never saw a dog dig holes like that. Those holes are more like coyote dens. Look at that, she can go down into it and turn around inside, just like a coyote.”

He laughs watching Neewa closely, “You got a coyote there.”

“Hey what’s that pink thing in her mouth?” He reaches out to grab it.

Before he can get close enough to touch Neewa’s tongue, I shout, “It’s her tongue!”

The words came out of my mouth quickly from all the practice I have had.

“That’s her tongue?” He pulls his hand back just in time.

“Oh, I thought she had something stuck in her mouth,” he says laughing and shaking his head in disbelief.

“Chester, the distemper almost killed her, it rotted out some of her teeth. Now her tongue falls out,” I explain.

He laughs and Neewa looks at us. She tilts her head with her tongue hanging out the side as if to say, “What are you guys laughing at?”

Chester knows all about dogs and coyotes. He hunts deer and all kinds of wild game. He’s lived here all his life, he must know what he is talking about.

I ask him, wanting to know what the future might hold for Neewa and me. “Will she get vicious and bite? Or run back to the desert to be wild again?”

Chester says with confidence, “You don’t have to worry about Neewa. She will be a good pet. You’d have known by now if she were mean or vicious.”

“Most coy dogs are friendly and make good pets. My aunt has a coy dog and it’s good with kids and other pets too.”

“Are you sure she isn’t going to go back to the desert?” I ask him again for reassurance, even if it might annoy him.

“No, I don’t think so, but anything can happen.”

Chester shrugs his shoulders and then adds, “I brought Neewa a charm for her collar. Can I put it on her?”

“Sure, what kind of charm is it?”

Chester laughs, “It will protect her from evil.”

I look at Chester with questions written all over my face, trying to judge his seriousness. My mind flashes back to Doctor Cuthbertson’s office and the Indian Medicine Man’s mask and the artifacts. Then I think about the orbs we captured on video at his ranch the day we went to pick Neewa up.

My thoughts wander back to the dream I had about Neewa's family watching over the murdered gambler found in the desert, next to the old Indian tomb.

Why does Chester want to protect Neewa from evil? He did say evil, didn't he?

Finally Chester says laughing, "The evil dogcatcher, that's who." Now serious he continues, "I don't want Neewa to be caught by him again. The charm is kind of a tribal ID tag, most of our dogs have them."

"With this charm on her, the dogcatcher won't take her back to the pound again. He will recognize the tag and know Neewa is an Indian dog. Look, it makes a sound too, so you can hear her far away now."

He shakes the charm, "Jingle ding, jingle ding."

I breathed a sigh of relief, "Oh cool, I don't want her going back to the pound."

I talk to Neewa, "Did you hear that Neewa? You're officially an Indian dog."

"Where did you get it?" I asked Chester, wondering about the charm.

"Doctor Cuthberson gave it to me for Neewa. He told me to tell you that Neewa doesn't have to come back for her follow-up. But she should wear the charm so she doesn't go back to the pound."

Chester pulls a painting from his car. "John, I almost forgot why I came here. This painting is for you and your family."

Forgetting about the charm, ghosts, evil, orbs, the dog catcher, Doctor Cuthberson, and Indian Spirits, I look at Dad.

Dad looks at Chester, then at the painting, and back again at Chester.

Dad is noticeably surprised and shocked.

It is a beautiful painting. Its a black and white desert landscape done in acrylic paint.

Dad does not know what to say as he blurts out, “Chester, thank you, how can I ever repay you?”

“I want you and your family to have this painting. I don’t want you to forget us when you move away. We will not forget.”

Chester knew that most government workers move away after about a year. They go back home where they came from.

He adds, “John, Christina, I got to go, see you guys.”

I say, “Good-bye Chester, thanks for the charm.”

Chester replies, “Indians don’t say good-bye. The word good-bye is not in our language so there is no good-bye for Indians. We believe that when we die, we pass into the next life. We all see each other in the afterlife, the Spirit World, no need to say good-bye.”

He gets into the car and says to Dad, “Oh you have to bring your kids over to my Mother’s.”

Dad replies, “Sounds like fun, my kids know your sister, Diane.”

Chester adds, “Mom wants to meet all of you, Neewa too. She has some herbs to give you.”

“See you guys,” Chester waves and drives off.

Chapter 15 - The Tribal Historian

Jackie and I are grocery shopping downtown at the market. Dad is running some errands and will catch up with us later.

Unexpectedly, Chester and Marvin are over by the frozen food section. Jackie and I walk over to say hi. I met Marvin a while ago through Chester.

Marvin is the Tribal Historian, a Piute and Shoshone Indian and a cousin of Chester's. He is not the outdoors man type. He doesn't hunt, fish, or camp out. But he does want to be a lawyer.

Marvin works at my school doing I don't know what. And he is a student at the local community college. He's short and stout with short hair and a bubble butt. He always wears dress slacks, a pressed shirt, and a tie. The tie is always loose around the neck and the top button of his shirts is always left undone. He always wears a blazer even if it's too hot.

When we get closer to Chester and Marvin, I realize they are in a heated discussion. Marvin's round face is bright red and his mouth is going a mile a minute. He is mad about something, and he is telling Chester about it.

Marvin has kind of a different way about him. I don't care what people say about him, he's been nice to my family and me. But he always looks like he's in a hurry, or working frantically to meet some deadline or complete a very important project.

Jackie and I step up to hear what they are saying. Marvin turns toward us to include us in the conversation.

"Hey you guys, how you guys doing?" Marvin asks in his usual sultry whining tone.

Marvin and a lot of other people out West always say, “You guys”. It is the way people talk out here. It's always you guys this, and you guys that.

“Good, good, what’s up?” I reply.

Marvin answers in a harsh and disgusted tone, “My professor at the college is stupid.”

“What happened?” I ask.

“This teacher is giving me a hard time about me not knowing what a word means,” Marvin whines. He always whines.

“I never heard this word before. Where was I supposed to hear it? I don’t even know what that word means, and I’m the Tribal Historian. We don’t even have this word in our language.”

Marvin is so mad and he continues talking, spewing little drops of spit from between his oversized lips.

“Who does he think he is?” Marvin adds.

Jackie whispers to me, “Ask him what the word is.”

“No shush.” I look at Marvin.

Marvin continues, “That teacher makes me so mad, he didn’t believe me. He said I was lying and that I got the question wrong on purpose. I would never do that, lie like that. I could just scream.”

I can see that Jackie really wants to know what the word is. She cannot resist speaking up and asking Marvin.

“Marvin, what is the word?” Jackie asks with an impatient tone.

Marvin looks at us and then at Chester, then back at us again.

“That professor is wrong.” He is angry now, you can see it in his face.

“What is it? What is it?” Jackie says annoyed with the whole thing now.

Finally Marvin blurts it out, “Pedestrian, pedestrian!”

“Pedestrian?” I repeat, not knowing the meaning of the word either. “Never heard that word before either.”

Bewildered and at a loss for words, Jackie looks at me.

Marvin just shrugs.

“Marvin, I don’t know what that word means either, never heard of it,” I empathize.

Jackie whispers in my ear, “Someone crossing a street or walking.”

How would Marvin know what the word “pedestrian” means? Most Indians his age have never left this area except to go away except to go away to high school in Arizona.

I talk with Marvin for a while longer, trying to calm him down.

Chester finally adds, “That teacher is wrong, and not considering that we are different, we are not White People like him.”

Chester and Marvin start walking off into the market. Each says with a smile, “See you guys later.”

I reply, “Good-bye.”

Chester laughs, “Indians don’t say good-bye.”

Marvin raises his arm and hand as if to say wait a minute. “Christina, I almost forgot, how is that puppy of yours doing?”

I reply smiling, “She is doing really great, completely recovered. I thought we were going to lose her, but thanks to Doctor Cuthbertson, he saved her.”

“Oh, I know Doc Cuthbertson, he is a great doctor,” Marvin adds. “I want you to bring Neewa to our Tribal History meeting on Thursday night at seven o’clock. Give a little talk about how you adopted Neewa at the pound. It will encourage others to adopt animals. Coy dogs played an important role in the protection of our villages hundreds of years ago. They alerted our people to bears, wolves, and intruders approaching the villages. Come early so the kids can play with Neewa.”

“The meeting is for all ages, anyone can get up and give a presentation. It’s like show and tell, and everyone there is interested in our history or they wouldn’t come,” he laughs.

“Okay, I’ll bring her early. Dad will probably drop me off,” I answer, uncertain why they want me to give a talk?

Chester and Marvin are talking about something as they walk off.

I hear Chester say, “Neewa has spirit,” or something like that.

Marvin answers, “Does Christina know?”

Then they disappear down one of the aisles talking in their Native language.

Jackie and I are looking for Dad, he’s around here somewhere.

“Dad, what are you doing by the dairy products? I got all this stuff already, look.”

Aggravated, I point into the shopping cart.

We finish getting our supplies and go through the checkout.

On the way home, I tell Dad about Marvin and his problem, and Neewa's invitation to the Tribal History meeting on Thursday night.

Dad says, "I agree with Chester. Indians are different. Their culture is not the same as ours."

"I'll tell you a story about different cultures," Dad begins.

I interrupt, "Dad, I don't want to hear one of your long boring lectures. I'm not in school."

Jackie sighs, "No stories please, Dad."

Dad continues his story about different cultures. He begins, "It was about two months ago, I had a talk with the Tribal Chairman, Jake."

"No, No," I yell putting my fingers in my ears, "I don't want to hear your lame story."

Jackie has a change of heart, just to annoy me, "Go ahead Dad, I'm listening, but make it quick."

Dad continues with his story, "I saw the Tribal Chairman sitting in his pickup truck so I walked over to him.

"'Jake,' I nodded, 'Monday is Columbus Day.'

"'Jake is his White name, most Indians have a White name and an Indian name. They only use their Indian name when they are with Indians.

"'Yeah, so what does that have to do with anything?'" Jake laughed at me with a peculiar smile.

"'Jake continued, 'Columbus is the one who started all the trouble for Indians.'

'I stumble over my words a little taken back, but I finally say, 'Tomorrow is a federal holiday and I want the day off, I'm a federal employee.'

"You want the day off?' Jake laughed out loud.

"Some guinea (gi-nee) gets lost at sea and you want the day off?' Jake laughed a belly laugh. And he continued to laugh and laugh, and I started laughing too. We laughed together.

"Then Jake said, and I'll never forget his words, 'John, you can take off any day you want.' And he drove off without saying another word.

"Now that is a cultural difference," Dad grins.

I interrupt, "Oh my God, I'm so bored. If you don't stop with your dull stories I'm going to scream."

Jackie pats Dad on the shoulder, "Dad, you are done with the history lesson, too much is no good."

I hate listening to Dad's stories. He thinks he is cool. I tell him, "Dad you are not cool."

Dad sighs, "I felt a closeness with Jake for those few moments as we laughed together. I think he felt the same way."

"The next week I heard that Jake had died in a car accident. Too many accidents happened around here."

As we drive home, I think about Jake. It's sad to see families missing a loved one.

Jake was the Tribal Chairman and he was always making me laugh and tickling me. I hung out with him at one of Dad's "bring your family to work" gatherings. He was

always playing pranks on people and making everyone smile. He was so much fun to be with.

The Tribal Chairman of an Indian Nation is just like the Prime Minister of England. We are studying England in History. Both are the leaders of their governments and elected by the people. The Tribal Chairman is the leader of the Tribal Council just like the Prime Minister is the leader of the Parliament.

The government of England and governments of Indian Nations have a lot in common. In England the Parliament makes the laws. On the reserve the Tribal Council makes the laws. They are also similar because the Parliament is made up of elected members and the Tribal Council is also made up of elected councilmen and councilwomen.

But the biggest similarity is that the Chief of the Indian Nation is just like the King and Queen of England. He's a figurehead and has no official power, yet he has influence on everything. The Chief is a descendant of previous Chiefs of that Nation and has the same family bloodline. Similarly, the King and Queen of England have little official power, but lots of authority. The King or Queen of England also has the bloodline of the previous monarchs of England.

Finally we are home. I fly out of the car. "Dad, I'm taking Neewa for a walk, be back in a little while."

"Ok, don't go too far, it's late and you have school tomorrow," he agrees.

I laugh, "You worry too much, I have Neewa now."

Dad always used to say, "Don't walk anywhere alone."

Now he says, "Take Neewa with you wherever you go."

Neewa and I love to stroll around town looking at everyone's flower gardens and pretty homes.

It's warm tonight and I want to walk a while, just to get away from everyone. Neewa and I hike around ten blocks before we decide to turn back.

I tell Neewa as we pass a charming white Cape Cod, "I love that one. We had a house like that back home, but that was before Mom moved away. We had to sell it. I wish we never came out West. I miss my friends, Grandma, Grandpa and most of all, Mom."

"Oh, Neewa, you look so silly with your tongue hanging out the side of your mouth," I chuckle.

Before I know it, we are back home and it's time to go to bed.

Thursday already, and I forgot all about the Tribal History meeting tonight. Lucky thing Dad reminded me at breakfast. I have that English report to do, too. I'll worry about the Tribal History meeting later, after I do my report.

Meanwhile, I've got to get the bus. "Bye Dad, love you." I shout running out the door.

That night after dinner Dad is driving Neewa and me to the tribal building. As I get out of the car I tell myself not to worry, it's just like "Show and Tell." Anyway, I love talking about Neewa. But I don't like getting up in front of a group of people and talking.

One good thing, this presentation will get me an extra credit grade in History. My History teacher, Mrs. Bats, is a Washoe Indian. She told the class she is going to give extra credit for any presentation about history outside of school.

To qualify for extra credit my presentation has to be about history. Since Neewa is a coy dog, and coy dogs protected Indian villages hundreds of years ago, my talk about Neewa qualifies. I'll get an extra credit grade, not just a few points.

Right now, my History average is seventy-seven. If I get it up to an eighty, I can get a B. Dad pays three dollars for B's and five dollars for A's, nothing for C's. Get a D; you lose your laptop until you bring up the grade. Don't even think about getting an F.

The Tribal History meeting is in the new two-story building on the reserve. My eyes light up as I walk into the foyer. To my left is an enormous eagle in a glass case. Its wings are spread out and span five feet from wing tip to wing tip, showing all the beautiful feathers. Other displays of Indian artifacts, ancient tools, hunting points, and spearheads line the other side of the entrance. And original paintings of Chiefs, early villages, and warriors on horseback are hung on the walls.

A beading display with a loom and pictures of techniques are in the corner.

According to this directory I am looking at, offices make up the second floor, with offices of the Tribal Chairman, Tribal Council, a meeting room, and a recreation room. The other half of the second floor is a jewelry workshop where they make silver jewelry with turquoise and coral stones.

In another corner is a diagram with the Chiefs Family Tree. It displays the bloodline that starts around the 1400s and depicts all the descendants down through the generations to the present.

On another wall in big bold letters is, “Tribal Historian Members Project.” It is more like a tribal family tree, with the names of all the members that ever lived. The list dates back hundreds of years, showing all the different families.

Some of the living members have their White name under their Indian name.

Each member that is dead has a gravestone symbol and the words, “At Rest” or “Not At Rest.” What that means, I don’t know? Seems to me if you’re dead you’re at rest, like it or not, ha-ha.

I see Marvin who is in charge of the project.

I ask him, “What does the ‘At Rest’ and ‘Not At Rest’ mean?”

Marvin pauses, hesitating before he speaks. “‘At Rest’ means that the tribal member’s body is here on the reserve and therefore their spirit is here ‘At Rest.’

“After an Indian dies, we believe that the spirit lives on in the Spirit World. Members of our Nation who have died must be brought back here to our Indian burial ground to enter the Spirit World.

“If someone dies far away, or their body disappears, turned to dust, or was never found, their spirits are ‘Not At Rest.’ Those spirits ‘Not At Rest’ wander the earth trying to return to us.”

I remark, “Oh, I get it, you have to be buried here to be ‘At Rest.’”

“Yes,” Marvin nods, “but if your body is not returned here, it is possible for your spirit to come back in another living thing or being.”

“Oh cool, I get it.”

Mrs. Bats, my History teacher, walks over to talk to Marvin and me.

She pets Neewa, and Neewa wags her tail.

I blurt out nervously, “I don’t really know what I am supposed to say.”

Marvin replies, “Just tell that wonderful story about Neewa. Start with when she was a puppy, how you went to the pound and found her. Explain to everyone what the dog catcher said when you were leaving the pound. Then let everyone know how she got the name ‘Neewa’, and what it means.

“Chester told me about the holes in your yard. Everyone will laugh when they hear that story. You could explain how Neewa got sick with distemper, and how you found Doctor Cuthbertson.”

Marvin laughs, “Then give them some time to ask questions. That’s all, it will be fine.”

As I enter the room with Neewa everyone applauds. I am sure they are applauding Neewa. The little kids call Neewa to come by them and she meanders through the aisles getting pats on the head and smiles from the kids. She goes around the room to everyone in the hall as I speak. Everything is going just like Marvin said it would, and Neewa is a big hit as usual.

Standing at the podium in the front of the room, I talk about Neewa’s life. I start with when I got her at the pound and how I found her name in the book and what it means. Everyone laughs when I tell them about how she digs holes in the yard. And a few “Wows” come from the audience when I tell them about her close call with death, the disease distemper.

When I stop talking, I ask if anyone has any questions.

One person wants to know, “Where did you get the book on Shoshone Language? What is the name of the book?”

“I don’t know,” I say, “but I will ask my Dad and we will give the information to Marvin to give to you.”

A boy asks, “What is that sticking out of her mouth?”

Having forgotten the part about her teeth, I explain how distemper caused her to lose some of her teeth. I tell everyone that Neewa lost many of her teeth in the middle of the jaw. And that is the place where her tongue falls out the side of her mouth.

A little girl asks, “Do you know Neewa has a spirit?” Everyone laughs.

I answer, “No, I don’t know she has a spirit.”

An awkward silence hangs over the room for a moment.

With no other questions, everyone applauds. All the kids have already gotten up and begun calling and petting Neewa.

The presentation is over and it seems to have gone well. I finished the story in about ten minutes.

I wonder if anyone knows that I want to be a writer, I think to myself.

I can feel the cool air as Neewa and I wait by the door to be picked up by Dad and Jackie.

Marvin hurries from an office on the first floor and comes over to thank me. “Thanks for coming and speaking Christina. That was great! I am so glad you came. I have been so very busy with all my projects, school and the meetings.” He runs off directing someone to do something as he turns the corner and swaggers out of sight.

Mrs. Bats, my History teacher, comes over to Neewa and me as we wait at the front door.

She says, "You gave a very good presentation. Would you like to give the same presentation in History class tomorrow?"

I answer, "I don't know if they will let me bring Neewa to school."

Mrs. Bats laughs and says, "Without Neewa will be fine."

As Dad and Jackie pull up to the front door I say, "Good-bye, Mrs. Bats."

"See you, Christina," she replies.

I get in the car and we drive off.

"Christina, how did it go?" Dad asks.

Annoyed to have to talk any more, "It went fine Dad, I don't want to talk about it. I just want to go home, take a hot shower, and go to bed."

"I just want to be left alone," I tell him one more time hoping this will be the end of the conversation.

"One funny thing did happen. A little girl asked me, 'Did I know Neewa has a spirit?'"

Dad replies, "Yeah, that is a funny question. What did you say?"

I said, "No, I didn't know Neewa has a spirit."

Looking at Neewa, both Dad and I ask her at the same time, "Neewa, do you have a spirit?"

Neewa looks at me, tilts her head with her tongue hanging out, and then barks, "Roooof."

Chapters 16 to 43 ARE FREE CLICK ON THE LINKS TO DOWNLOAD FOR FREE!

Chapter 16 - The Pumpkin Pies

Our family is making plans for the holiday. This will be my first Thanksgiving with Neewa.

Dad wants us to visit our friends Manny and Margaret for the weekend. They live about four hours from here. I like the idea of going there for the holiday because Manny and Margaret are so much fun.

Manny is a member of the Gosh Ute Nation and he works for the government with my Dad. He and Margaret visited us a few times and stayed overnight at our house.

Manny, Margaret, Dad, Jackie and I have done all kinds of neat stuff together. We went on a roller coaster called Speed The Ride, which goes seventy miles per hour. It's at the Nascar Café and is one of the fastest and highest roller coasters in the world.

Another time Manny took us to a water park called the Wild Island Adventure. It has water slides, wave pools, and all kinds of fun rides.

Manny likes to have fun and that's why I like him. One time we went to this swimming club in town. Even though you had to be a member to get in, Manny got us in. We had a blast in the pools, water slides, and sprinklers.

Another time we went to a big barbeque with Manny. We played softball and met lots of people from where Dad works. He laughs all the time.

Grandma and Grandpa want us to come home to New Jersey for the holiday. But it is too far and costs too much money to go back East.

This year we will go home around New Years to see everyone, maybe. I want to go home for good. I miss everyone so much, especially my friends.

Tomorrow we will be leaving for Manny's Thanksgiving dinner. His home is about two hundred miles from here.

Dad and I are sitting at the kitchen table. "Can you and Jackie make pumpkin pies to bring to the holiday dinner?"

"Yeah Dad, I'll make them," Jackie yells from the other room.

I answer, "I'll help Jackie."

Actually, I want to trick Jackie into making the pies, while I just hang out and watch movies on my laptop.

We all decide that making three pumpkin pies will be enough. As soon as Jackie gets started, I will slip away without anyone noticing. They will no even have a clue that I am gone.

Dad is preparing dinner.

Neewa is staying under the kitchen table watching, observing everything that is happening. Neewa likes to smell all the foods being prepared and cooked. She licks her lips and stares at us cooking as we move the stuff from the frig to stove to table. If anything drops on the floor? She is there to clean up.

I help Jackie measure out the ingredients for the pies. The pies we are bringing are made from real fresh pumpkin. Dad saves the Halloween pumpkin, doesn't even make a Jack-o-lantern anymore, so he can use the pumpkin to make soup, bread, and especially pumpkin pie.

Each pie is made with three-quarters cup sugar, one teaspoon cinnamon, half teaspoon salt, half teaspoon ginger, quarter teaspoon cloves, two eggs, two cups mashed pumpkin and one and a half cups of milk.

The first step in the process is to cook the Halloween pumpkin that we saved since October. I begin by boiling two quarts of water on the stove. After cleaning out the pumpkin seeds and innards I cut the round orangey squash into cubes. Then I boil it for thirty minutes or until it is soft. Next I let the pumpkin cool, so I can peel and mash it.

I add the other ingredients to the mashed pumpkin and put everything into a big bowl for later.

After that I begin to make the pie crust dough. The dough is easy, just three-quarters cup of shortening, half teaspoon salt, one teaspoon milk, quarter cup hot water and two cups of flour for each crust.

Mix it all together and knead the dough for five minutes. I let the dough sit in the bowl for a little while, as I get out the wax paper and prepare the surface of the counter.

Now I roll the dough out into three big flat pieces for the pie crusts.

Jackie puts each piece of dough in a nine-inch round pie plate and cuts away the excess dough at the edges.

We are almost done as I pour the filling with the mashed pumpkin and ingredients into the dough-lined pie plates.

Pinch the dough around the edges, and put the pies into the oven to bake at three hundred fifty degrees for twenty-five minutes.

It doesn't take long for the pies to smell up the entire house. Pumpkin pie smells are everywhere. Yummy. Finally we are done.

"Whew, I'm tired, I'm going to lay down," At last I can disappear into my room.

Those are the best smelling pumpkin pies I've ever made. They are made the old-fashioned way from fresh pumpkin cooked in a big pot and mashed by hand. Even the dough for the crust is homemade.

The pies look and smell so good, way better than the frozen pumpkin pies from the freezer section of the grocery store.

It sure would have been a lot easier to get the frozen ones.

Dad takes the fresh pies from the oven and places them on the counter to cool.

After dinner we all want to go shopping for additional supplies for tomorrow's trip. Jackie and I are going to a couple of stores to pick up some things. We drive along the side streets avoiding the main highway as Dad talks about the trip.

Dad remarks, "We're going to Manny's house on his reserve. There are only about ninety people living on this one."

"Christina, read me the directions." He hands me a paper with scribbling on it.

As I'm about to read the directions he got from Manny ... Dad interrupts.

"The trip is going to take all day. Manny wasn't sure of the name of one of the roads. He said there would be a sign," Dad recalls.

We have never made this trip before. I'm looking forward to going on a new adventure.

I also want to see my friends Manny and Margaret because I have lots of fun with them.

Dad tells me that their Indian reserve is different from the one near our home. For one thing, it's in the middle of nowhere and far from any town. All of the land around it is government-owned, cattle ranches, or desert. The land doesn't grow anything but

sagebrush, cactus, and some desert grasses because it hardly ever rains. It's so dry you can't grow corn or hay or anything.

He says the land is so barren, it barely supports the cattle they raise on it. Once or twice a week the ranchers have to bring hay to the cattle so they don't starve. Dad says one head of cattle needs five acres of desert to survive for just one year.

There are no businesses near the reserve where we are going. A combination general store and gas station is about three miles away. And there aren't any doctors or hospitals for over a hundred miles.

The people out there have very little income. What they do make comes from ranching and government subsidies. Young families and older people are the only ones that live there anymore because most of the middle-aged people have left for better jobs in the cities.

They have a one-room schoolhouse for kindergarten to eighth grade. After that the kids go far away to high schools where you sleep there for months. I don't ever want to do that. It's bad enough I am away from everyone back home and Mom too. At least I have Dad and Jackie.

Dad says some of the houses on the reserve are made of railroad ties and some have no electricity or even bathrooms. Those people prefer to live without that stuff cause that's the way it was when they grew up. Usually the outhouses are located about twenty feet from the homes. The Indian word for outhouse is "gwida-gahni".

From what Dad has heard it has been a difficult year for this reserve. There were three bad accidents this past year. Two were car accidents, rollovers someone said. And

the other one was a young girl drowned at the swimming hole. Dad was told that a total of three people died. Some say it was bad spirits that killed them.

My Dad shrugs his shoulders and shakes his head. "It's tragic. Something needs to be done. That's more than three percent of the population in one year. If that continues, this reserve will be a ghost town in a few decades."

Our town is very different from where Manny lives. We have an interstate highway and a railroad going right through the middle of our town. There are lots of stores, gas stations, and businesses.

There is an ambulance squad, hospital, lots of doctors, and even a newspaper.

Income around here is mostly from tourism, fishing, hunting, and lots of people just passing through on their way to California or East. Dad says our town makes money from hotels, casinos, and special bars like Rosie's, Toni's, and Sue's.

We also have the county seat and that means lots of government offices and schools. It has the county fairgrounds, an airport, and a community college too.

On the outskirts of town there is cattle and sheep ranching, even mining.

The reserve we live near has just one home made of railroad ties. Most of the homes are newer conventional homes with three bedrooms and two baths and electricity.

Yet tragedy still strikes our reserve, too. I remember one day not too long ago a Tribal Councilman's wife went off the road, rolled her truck, and died. Some of Dad's friends at work whispered stories about what cause of the accident.

I remember when Dad heard about it he shrugged his shoulders and said, "Some say it is the evil spirits around here."

Chapter 17 - Neewa's Spirit Flew

It's late when we arrive back home after shopping. As I walk in the door Neewa jumps up on me to give her welcome home kisses and get scratches. This is not unusual. She always does this. Neewa misses me when I leave home without her. She does not like to be left out of any trips and she is always excited to see me when I return home.

Her tail is hitting the wall, thud, thud, thud. She jumps around and wags her tail continuously until I reach down to stroke her. I pet her and put my jacket on the hook near the door.

Jackie screams, "Dad, the pies are gone!"

As I look around for the thieves, I see no sign of anyone in the house. No door is broken and no window smashed in.

Dad comes bursting into the house and runs over to Jackie. "What happened? Are you all right?"

"Look at this, Dad. The pies are gone!" Jackie investigates the scene. "Empty pie plates are all over the kitchen floor!"

Dad and Jackie stand frozen looking at each other, perplexed.

Neewa looks different, a little funny. As I inspect her more closely I can see a small orange stain on the white fur above her black lips. I look at Neewa again, closer this time. There's another blemish on the top of her paw between her toes. And as I look down the hall, I see fresh paw prints.

I'm frowning and my hands are on my hips. "It was not thieves."

“Oh boy,” Jackie exclaims, “she ate all three pies and she didn’t even leave us one.”

“I can’t believe you did this, Neewa. You ate all of our pies. How did you get up on the counter?”

I hide my laugh, as I know Jackie and Dad are disappointed, but I burst out laughing anyway, “Ha Ha Ha, Neewa, how did you get the pies? You would have had to fly through the air to get up on the counter?”

I can hear Dad yell, “Bad girl, bad Neewa, go lay down.”

Neewa’s tail and ears drop down, but I don’t think she knows what she did wrong. I look at the aluminum pie plates scattered around the kitchen.

I’m very disappointed. I want to cry. We have nothing to bring to the dinner tomorrow. And all that work was for nothing. Well almost nothing. Neewa had a good feast.

Jackie is running to the door, pulling Neewa outside by the collar. “Oh boy, you are going to be sick.”

Dad sighs, “Make sure you get the chain on her Jackie, we don’t want her to get lost before the trip tomorrow.”

Dad exclaims, “Hey look, I left the digital camera on the counter. The motion detector started the camera when Neewa climbed up and ate the pies.”

I joke, trying to lighten up the situation a little. “Maybe we will see her floating up onto the counter like a ghost.”

Jackie laughs as she comes back in the door, “Ha, ha, she didn’t climb up on the counter, she flew up like a bird.”

We all laugh and then go back to cleaning up her mess.

All of a sudden Dad is running out the door.

“What’s the matter? Where are you going?” I yell to him as I sway back and forth and hang out the door.

His words are muffled as he closes the van door and drives off. “I’ll check the camera when I get back. You guys wait here.”

In just fifteen minutes he’s back at the house with two brown bags of groceries.

“Dad, where did you go? What in the world did you buy?” I ask him as he walks in the door.

Unpacking he declares, “I drove to the supermarket, ran in and got three frozen nine-inch pie crusts and six cans of pumpkin. Okay everyone, we are going to make three more pies tonight.”

I sigh, “Tonight?”

“You guys get out the bowls,” he directs us as he turns on the oven.

Jackie and I pitch in. I get out the bowls while Jackie gathers the rest of the ingredients that we already have.

Before I know it, we measure and mix the batter for three pies, pour them into the store-bought pie shells, and pop them into the oven.

It isn’t long before the house is filled with the smell of pumpkin pies, again. About thirty minutes later, we have three pies. But this time I put them right into the refrigerator.

I frown, looking out the window at Neewa. “Neewa, we are letting the pies cool down in the refrigerator this time.”

Neewa is still outside and probably will be till morning. I hope she's feeling better by then.

We're all relieved to have pumpkin pies to bring on our trip. Everything seems better now.

Chapter 18 - The Desert

I wake up early Thanksgiving morning and help Dad finish packing the car. We are ready to leave. Neewa is the last one to get in. She is so excited and jumps around the back seat like a jumping bean.

Off we drive with plenty of time to get there for dinner, at least that is the plan. During the first part of the trip we approach the beautiful Ruby Mountains. Deep in its canyons are quaking aspen trees, leaves quivering in the breeze. The leaves reflect the sun and twinkle like flashlights against the shadowy canyon walls.

The ruby red glow of the mountains is incredible. As we are passing through the gap on the only road that cuts through this range of mountains, blue skies hang above, not a cloud to be seen.

Soon after passing through the mountains we are on a flat highway, with neither a hill nor a valley before us. It's peaceful out here, amidst endless vistas packed with faded green sagebrush, tan desert sands, and dried gray grasses.

As usual the prairie dogs continue to run in front of our van, as though they are playing a game of tag.

Dad yells at a prairie dog as it runs out in front of us, “Watch out, get out of my way.” He motions with his hand to get them out of the way.

The prairie dog scurries across the road as we pass over him. We wait to feel a bump or hear a knock. Timidly, we look out the rear window anticipating the carnage? Miraculously, he’s not lying squashed on the road.

“How did he do that? I thought for sure I hit him?” Dad mumbles, perplexed at the animal’s reasoning.

More than halfway to Manny’s, we drive into town where if you blink your eyes you may miss it. We are supposed to turn onto another road somewhere around here? The directions say turn west and we do. Clunk, bump, we are now on a dirt road. I can tell from Dad’s reaction he doesn’t like this and he slows to a crawl.

This is really interesting, there’s little difference between the surface of the road and the empty desert that surrounds us. The road is more like a twenty-foot trail carved by a bulldozer. Windswept sand blurs the edges on either side. I can barely see the road, it’s more like a wide ditch in the middle of the desert.

Desolate roads can be treacherous because they can disappear into the dunes. People vanish on trails like these. If a sign blows down, a driver might miss a turn and drive right out into the desert.

To make matters worse he might go farther and farther, losing his sense of direction and get completely lost. That would be his last mistake. Once lost, he will never find his way back. Usually these unfortunate victims die slowly of thirst, or exposure, or both.

Dad frowns as sand starts blowing. “I’m trying to follow this ditch of a road.”

He shrugs his shoulders looking at Jackie in the front seat next to him.

“It is getting more difficult to stay on it,” he says, “and the visibility has gone from bad to worse.”

All of a sudden the wind starts blowing harder. Desert sand, dust, and dirt form a thick cloud in front of us. The storm is howling in the cracks of our van windows and doors making eerie sounds. Waves of sand are blowing across our windshield. I can barely see the road in front.

There is nothing to guide us down this dirt trail. No electric lines or anything else we can follow to help us stay where we belong, on the road. There is nothing keeping us from wandering into the wasteland. The road itself is covered with sand from the frequent dust storms. One more thing, we haven't seen another car on this road, not one.

“We have to pull over and wait out this storm,” Dad declares.

Dad takes out his map and looks for a better route. After several facial expressions, measuring distances, and looking at possible alternate routes, he looks straight ahead.

“This is the only road on the map that will take us to Manny's,” he declares. “The only other choice is to go way down south and then come back north over here.” He points to the map. “But that will take an extra three hours.”

After a few minutes the wind dies down and visibility seems to improve as the sky turns western blue again.

Jackie speaks first, “I vote we keep going.”

I add, “I second that.”

We drive on, more quiet and thoughtful than before.

Chapter 19 - Horses

Up ahead there is something on the side of the road. Neewa sees them, too. She is pacing from side to side in the back of the van.

About a hundred feet in front of us are a herd of about ten horses. They don't look like they belong here. Whose horses are they? Are we near a ranch? I don't see any.

The horses that make up this group are all different sizes and colors. Some are large, a few are small and one appears to be a donkey.

As we drive closer, I see their long tails and manes are knotted, frayed, and have burrs stuck in them.

The leader of the group is a black stallion, and he's watching us and stirring to alert the herd. He's beautiful with a gray patch across his right rear leg and another small swatch on his forehead. His long black tail hangs down to the ground. Half his mane hangs on either side of his muscular neck. The steed's coat shines in the sunlight, revealing his powerful rippling body.

I can tell he's the leader because he put himself between his herd and us to protect them, turning sideways to block our view of his family.

"Snort," He violently blows air through his nose, signaling to the group.

Neewa is getting more excited, jumping from seat to seat. She wants to run and play with them.

"They are not dogs," I tell her.

She is making a high-pitched whinnying sound as if to say, "Let me out, let me out."

Jackie is getting trampled, and is quite annoyed with Neewa as she jumps from front seat to back, and then to the front again.

“Let her out Dad, she has to go. I’m getting stomped,” she exclaims.

Dad pulls onto the shoulder, stops the van, and opens the door. Neewa jumps out and runs up the road.

Neewa is running right at the herd. I hope she knows what she’s doing.

At that moment fear shoots from my brain down to my toes. The thought of Neewa running after them into the desert consumes me. It had never occurred to me until that second that I could lose her to them.

“Dad, drive, drive, hurry up, catch her!” I cry out hitting the back of his seat with my hands.

At that moment the herd spooks. Grunting a warning, the stallion and his family rumble into the desert. He follows his family, urging them into a full gallop toward the sand dunes.

Neewa is following them, running from one side of the herd to the other. As quickly as the horses appeared in front of us, they go over the hill. Then Neewa disappears, gone into the miles and miles of sagebrush and sand.

My heart drops out of my chest. Neewa is gone and I don’t know if I will ever see her again. I feel my stomach in my throat.

Dad pulls over and I jump out.

Jackie yells, “Call her before she gets too far!”

“Neewa, Neewa, Neewa!” I yell, hoping she will hear me.

Dad whistles his loudest two-finger whistle, “Whistle! Whistle.”

I form my lips to whistle, but nothing comes out. I can't whistle.

"Listen, stop!" I shout.

I never should have let her run out into the desert. She may never come back.

We all start yelling, "Neewa come! Neewa! Neewa!"

Again, we are silent. I listen for her to bark, or yelp, or something. Seconds pass like minutes. You can hear a pin drop.

"I hear something." I'm not sure what it is in the distance, is that her?

I cry out, "It sounds like Neewa barking, I hear her."

I call out, "Neewa, Neewa!"

I look at Dad, then Jackie. "I hear a jingling sound."

Jackie exclaims, "It's more like a jingle ding, jingle ding."

That jingle ding sound is coming from Neewa's charm, the one Chester put on her collar.

At that moment Neewa's head pops up over the sand dune.

She is sprinting for us. Sand kicks up into the air behind her as she makes her way up then down the soft sandy mounds. Then she jumps right up on me, pushing me backwards onto the ground. She licks my face and walks all over me.

Jackie and Dad come to my rescue, picking me up off the ground by my arms.

Neewa jumps up on me with her front paws stretching all the way up onto my shoulders while standing on her hind legs.

She pushes off me and her paws hit the ground, she wags her tail.

Hugging her, I stroke her neck and side and scratch her behind the ears.

"I thought I lost you, Neewa," I exclaim.

“You came back,” Jacqueline exclaims as she cuddles her.

She wags her tail, whines and lets out a “Yelp.”

We all jump in the van and off we go.

“They are wild horses and they run free in the desert. They belong to no one,”

Dad speaks.

“Where did they all come from? How do they live? What do they eat?”

Dad answers my bombardment of questions, one after the other. “They live out in the desert and they eat whatever vegetation they can find. Many years ago wild horses were rounded up and shipped to slaughterhouses. Hundreds of thousands of them were killed. Some were kept for work horses on ranches.”

Dad describes, “Wild horses lived all over North America, populating this continent before the Ice Age. They moved north across the Bering land bridge, and fanned out from Siberia to the rest of Asia, Europe, and the Middle East and then became extinct here. When Europeans reintroduced horses to the Americas in the 16th century, some escaped and formed wild herds. By the 19th century, there were two million wild horses in America. Their major predators, such as the mountain lion, were all but wiped out, and for more than a century their biggest enemy has been man. Horse roundups and massacres went unchecked for decades until Wild Horse Annie came along.”

Who was she?” Jackie asks.

Dad replies, “She was an animal rights activist who led a campaign to stop the removal of wild horses from public lands. She helped pass legislation to stop using planes to capture wild horses and burros causing their death.”

Chapter 20 - Antelope

Another sand blizzard like that could come along at any moment. One more dust storm and we could vanish out here, never to be seen again. Left to die a torturous death, alone, in the desert. I tell ya, I don't feel very safe out here. The visibility is so bad we can barely stay on this dirt road. Can you imagine trying to ask someone for directions? Ha-ha, There aren't any other human beings out here. I'm glad our van is running good, at least right now it is.

As we pass a mountain range, I read one of those Federal Park signs, "National Forest."

Dad wants to stretch, so we pull over to the side of the road. Neewa jumps out my door while our van is still rolling. She loves to run alongside us and dash off into the desert to chase some poor unsuspecting critter. There she goes again.

As I get out and look around at the acres and acres of rolling dunes, I see four eyes staring motionless right at me. Two heads simultaneously follow me as I move around to the back of our van and open the trunk.

"Look, look, shush," I speak softly.

I point up on the hill, "There, on that ridge to the right, they are watching us."

"Look," Jackie whispers. "What are they?"

"Are they gazelles?" I stare.

I see two deer-like creatures. But they are not deer. Nowhere near as big. More like the White Tail we have back East, but White Tail Deer are not out here.

I freeze. “Look at the dark pointed antlers and the color of their bodies. Their fur has different shades of beige, brown, and white around the neck and on their belly.”

I question, “Their faces have a lot of white fur on them, but I don’t know what they are?”

Dad whispers, “They’re antelope, I’ve only seen them in books. Wow, cool, I’ve always wanted to see one in the wild.”

The two Pronghorn Antelope run for the hills. One stops at the top and looks directly at us, then turns and disappears over the ridge. In a few seconds they are gone, vanished.

I’m glad Neewa didn’t see them, she would have chased them and never come back.

We finish our rest stop and continue the voyage. For the next fifty miles, the only living things we see are prairie dogs and buzzards. No other sign of life.

Finally I see a sign, “Indian Reserve 1 Mile.”

It’s about three PM now and the trip has taken much longer than we planned.

Turning onto the reserve, we slowly ramble over the ruts and bumps on the road. A plume of dust rises twenty feet above our van, enabling Manny and everyone else waiting for us to see us coming a mile away.

As we get closer, I see maybe ten or eleven houses in a cluster in the valley. That’s it, that’s the whole population. Looking around, there’s not much happening here in the middle of nowhere. The place is isolated and boring, nothing much to do.

Neewa is barking to be let out of the van. Dad slows down and Neewa slithers under his legs and jumps out the door. Off she gallops down the road in front of us,

guiding the way. Occasionally looking back, she keeps the same distance between us, commanding the lead.

Dad says it's fine to let her run alongside the van. It's good exercise. As long as she keeps her distance from the wheels, she won't get hurt.

All of a sudden she veers off into the brush having spotted her favorite prey. She chases an unsuspecting prairie dog into its burrow. The poor little creature has barely escaped her jaws. She barks at the entrance to its home. Then she usually paws and pulls away large quantities of dirt from the entrance to its burrow, scaring the heck out of the poor little thing. After that, she prances off triumphant, catching up with us in no time. Neewa just cannot resist chasing those little critters.

When we arrive at Manny's house, all of his neighbors and relatives come out to greet us. Most of them already know everything about us. The Indian grapevine is very comprehensive and connects all the reserves. Everybody knows what everyone else is doing.

We're all talking at the same time. Jokes are being told and questions asked about what's going on up North. Mostly they ask about relatives and friends we know, well mostly Dad knows.

I'm shy and I kind of hide behind Dad and play with Neewa. Nobody knows anything about Neewa yet. When they hear me call her, they immediately ask me all kinds of questions about her. I tell the whole story about how I got her and everything she has done. Everyone laughs when they hear about the disappearing pumpkin pies and how she had to fly onto the counter to get them.

Jackie walks off with Manny's daughter to play. Soon after that I notice Manny's two sons leaving to go fishing.

The most exciting thing to happen out here this month was when a nine-year-old took his Dad's car for a ride. The father came running out of the house shouting, "Stop, stop!" Everyone came out of their houses to watch them go down the road. As he ran up alongside of the car his pants were falling down. He reached inside and shut the car off, stopping it cold. His kid thought it was funny and laughed. Since no one was hurt, everyone laughed.

Out here, it's an everyday occurrence to have cattle wander into someone's yard. After drinking their fill down by the stream, they find their way to the nearest grass. No one notices much. They are just grazing on the grass in what they think is their pasture, not knowing they aren't supposed to eat there. Manny says at least he won't have to mow the lawn, which is funny cause Indians don't mow lawns, wouldn't even cross their minds.

Cattle sometimes wander into the communal pastures, where the hay is grown as a cash crop. Those fields are off limits. Eventually the herd is chased back into the desert where the food is not plentiful, but free. Sooner or later they end up at the forbidden pasture where the grass is green and tender.

Dinner is about to begin, as Jackie and I unpack some stuff. We put the pies in the kitchen and our bags in our room. We'll be sleeping in Steve's room, he's Manny's oldest son.

Inside his room on the walls are pictures and posters. I recognize Geronimo over there and that diamond-shaped thingy is called a dream catcher. I think it protects you

from nightmares or something. On the windows instead of curtains are Indian blankets tacked up on all four corners to keep the hot sun out.

One old picture is of a group of Indians doing the Ghost Dance. Chief Wovoka began the Ghost Dance among the Piute Nation. Then it spread throughout most of the North American Nations around 1889. At the heart of the Ghost Dance movement was the prophet of peace, a man named Jack Wilson, known as Wovoka. Wilson, a Piute Indian, prophesied a peaceful end to White American expansion while preaching messages of clean living, an honest life, and cross-cultural cooperation. Perhaps the best-known fact about the Ghost Dance movement is the role it played in instigating the Wounded Knee Massacre in 1890. In this massacre one hundred fifty-three Lakota Sioux died. The Sioux's variation on the Ghost Dance was different from Jack Wilson's original teachings. Settlers became afraid of the dance, thinking it was a war dance.

The room has trophies from local rodeo events, as well as pictures from fishing trips and family gatherings. That one looks like a calf-roping trophy and the other one is a steer-wrestling award.

Looks like the whole family goes to Pow Wows? There are pictures on the walls labeled Ely Pow Wow and Duck Valley Pow Wow. What is a Pow Wow anyway?

“Dinnertime, dinner time,” Margaret rejoices as she strolls through the house smiling.

Everyone runs to the table. We sit down in the big dining room, chairs shuffle, and slide on the floor. Spoons and forks clang as the plates are scooped up and food plopped down. Voices ring out, “Hey pass me that.” Arms reach out over the checkered tablecloth filled with bounty.

Laughter, jokes and talking, then quiet, we say Grace. After which the feast begins with venison roast, corn, string beans, sweet potatoes, Mexican breads, and a big turkey too.

As Thanksgiving dinner ends, the joking and talking continues with the clean up.

Later on, I take a nap during the football game.

After waking up, Neewa and I go out for a walk.

The rest of the evening passes as we play games, nibble on leftovers, and chocolate cake. I love chocolate cake.

Exhausted after the long day, I crawl into my sleeping bag. Dad and Jackie are already lying down and settling into a good night's sleep in their bags on the floor.

“Neewa, sleep on my feet and keep me warm.” I’m so tired.

Chapter 21 - Fishing

“Knock, knock, knock, wake up.” I sit up stunned and look at Dad.

On the other side of the door is Manny, “Do you guys want to go fishing?”

“Yeah, we want to go.” Dad rubs his eyes.

In minutes I’m following Dad and Jackie out the door to get the fishing stuff we brought in the van. All of us are eager about going and Neewa senses our excitement.

We start out in our van with Manny leading the way in his car. Our destination is the other side of the mountain about twenty minutes away near a small pond on the reserve.

After the bumpy dusty ride we arrive, park our van, and get into Manny’s car.

“Dad, why are we leaving our van way out here?” I am puzzled.

Steve, sitting in the front seat, turns around. “We are going to fish our way up the stream to this pond. It will take about three hours. When we get here, we will be tired and hungry. Instead of walking all the way back to where we started, we can drive your van back to our car.”

Manny drives us all back to the starting point on the stream, the sun is now up for almost an hour. With fishing gear in hand, we walk a narrow path to the water’s edge. There we all get ourselves organized and ready to go.

We are standing in an oasis of green before swirling water with desert all around it. Before me is crystal clean water meandering slowly through the flatlands. In the distance is a mountain, a blue vein of bubbling white water raging down the middle. On one side are gray beige rock outcrops. On the other side of the stream has hundreds of meters of low-lying lime colored fertile farming pasture, surrounded by olive scrub pine and golden aspen trees shimmering in the dry breeze. Close to the stream are emerald stemmed cattails, and wildflowers nestled in swaying light brown grasses.

Neewa runs downstream, sprinting at full gallop, splashing water all over. Exiting, she vanishes in the tall hay about to be harvested, then reappears on a small hill above stream and fields.

We start out hiking at the widest section of the stream. That’s when I do something I’ve never done before. I wade through the chilling stream in sneakers and jeans. My body shivers as I adjust to the flowing tributary of frosty whirlpools and eddies.

We begin casting our lines upstream. Using homemade flies called woolly worms, we cast ahead and let the bait drift in the calm water.

As we walk, applying our fishing technique, the current lazily meanders around us, giving off cool breezes and glistening sunlight.

Next we enter swift-moving white water running over rock stepping-stones. Cascading water fills a series of pools between the rocky cliffs growing narrower, rising before us. Each pond of calm, undisturbed, blue-green water empties with each passing moment. Carefully, I cast my line into the next swirling pool to tempt my prey.

Silently I cast my bait and amble along the edge of this larger eddy. Standing at its shallow edge, I make multiple casts to lure my quarry. Gently I lift and lower my feet, careful not to disturb the pebbles that anchor the fine silt to the streambed.

Neewa follows our every move, and then darts by our fishing party to lead the way. I throw a biscuit to her and she catches it, chews, and swallows it down in seconds.

“Good girl,” I yank her close to me, but she pulls away.

Gently she wades into the stream and laps at the foaming bubbles passing by. With her nose just above the surface, she tilts her head and stares into the water. Her white paws are visible against the dark dirt bottom. After a few moments she jumps out, shaking the beaded water from her ivory coat.

We fish pool after bright, shimmering pool. Tired from the short night and long morning, I sit for a moment and stare into moving waterway.

It’s continually changing, never the same. Flowing from the mountains through the desert to who knows where, or how far its long journey to the ocean.

Dad and Jackie join me on the bank of the stream.

Dad says, "Fishing on a reserve for non-Indians is pretty much against the law and punishable by death."

Dad asks Manny, "What ever happened to the last guys from the city that fished here?"

Manny replies, "Oh they were hung up on a tree and gutted like deer, their dogs too."

Dad purposely did not bring his fishing pole. He already knows about the history of Whites stealing and taking just about everything from the Indians.

Manny's kids invited us to go fishing. Just us kids have fishing poles and that is supposed to be okay?

We are fishing for native trout, really big ones, on Native American land. It's fun fishing in this special place that Manny and his kids know. This land is sacred to them.

Rest time is over and we continue up the canal.

I become concerned about Neewa as I haven't seen or heard from her in a while.

To get a better vantage point, I climb to the top of the ravine and position myself facing away from the fishing party below. I am far enough away and above everyone, so I can yell for her without scaring the fish.

Shouting out into the desert, "Neewa, Neewa, Neewa."

I wait for her to answer.

Again I holler, "Neewa come, Neewa come," but nothing yet.

After a few minutes I hear her bark, and it isn't long before she runs to me at full stride, stopping in front of me for a pat on the head. We are perched on a cliff looking down at the stream; both of us lean forward to gingerly gaze over the edge.

Carefully we climb down past rocks and brush, returning to the stream.

“You stay with us now Neewa, enough running off into the wilderness, no more,”
I order.

As I hike and fish, Manny and his kids tell us Indian legends. First Steve tells the story of “A Man and His Three Dogs.” It is about a wolf that tries to become a human being, pretty cool. Next Manny tells us the legend of “The White Trail In The Sky.” This story is about a bear that takes another bear’s prey, and then the bear follows the Milky Way in the sky. Very cool ending.

We are in a narrow part of the stream. It is only about five or ten feet in width. Sheer canyon walls tower above us on both sides. Around us the steep, rocky cliffs allow a thin sliver of light down to the water’s edge.

Slowly, one by one we wade into the freezing water. Waist high, I push tall reeds to either side as I pass through, slipping by the curtain-like wall of cattails anchored to the gravel bottom.

Looking to either side of me, I stare at Indians naked from the waist up. Their long dark hair hangs down to their muscular shoulders. Handsome stoic profiles glide above the water like spirits suspended in time. They are at home here, like their fathers and their father’s fathers, moving effortlessly through the water as if propelled by magic. They don’t even look human.

With chattering teeth Dad remarks, “Manny, I should have brought waders?”

Manny replies looking at us, his expression serious, almost aghast, “Indians don’t wear waders.”

As we reach the other side of the gorge the stream widens again. The rock walls open up allowing the warming sun on my face and arms. The narrow grotto behind us, we walk on smooth stone banks surrounded by grasses with jagged rock just beyond.

I look up and see Neewa staring over the edge spying on us. I didn't even hear her sneak away.

Balanced on the rim of the gorge she barks, "Roof, roof, roof."

"Shush," I whisper. "Good girl, Neewa."

After watching us for a while, she turns and vanishes.

From down here by the stream, the sheer rock walls rise over me like skyscrapers. I jerk backward and look up wobbling, the rock appearing to be right over my head.

A tiny ribbon of water tumbles downward. The little waterfall cascades down smashing against the rocks. Glistening in the sunlight, the droplets glide toward me in slow motion, splashing on and around my feet, then trickle into the stream.

We have caught a half dozen Speckled Trout and finally reach the last pond. I have no desire to fish anymore, although everyone else is trying to catch just one more.

After some shouting back and forth we decide we are hungry, tired, and ready to leave. I'm so relieved as I walk straight to our van. It looks like a million bucks sitting there, right where we left it a few hours ago. This is a lot better than walking all the way back to where we started.

My clothes are dripping wet, I'm cold, starving, and tired. Finally, we are at the end of our fishing trip. I drip-dry for a while as I pack my stuff. I'm thinking about being warm and dry and having something to eat.

Just then Neewa comes running at full gallop and circles me, thumping my shins with her wagging tail, begging to be petted.

Steve is cleaning fish at the water's edge. Neewa and I sit and watch.

“Speckled Trout don't have scales, no need to scale them,” Steve instructs.

Neewa ogles Steve as he gathers the fish we caught today. She is begging for a taste and of course her tongue is hanging out the side. Both of us stare at Steve as he takes his hunting knife and cuts the chin of the lower jaw of each fish, creating a V-shaped flap that hangs down. Next he cuts an incision along the soft white belly from the bottom fin up to the mouth, just below the flap he just cut. With the belly opened up, the guts, stomach, and everything are exposed. Like an artist painting a picture, he clasps the hanging skin flap under the jaw in his fingers and yanks toward the tail.

“Crackle, crunch, squish,” out comes the jaw, throat, gills, intestines, stomach and everything inside, in one big clump of guts.

Tossing the innards toward the center of the pond he says, “Gutted, done, the turtles will eat that.”

Smiling proudly he dips the limp carcass in the water, “Shake it around under the water and this fish is ready for the frying pan.”

Steve cleans and rinses each of the fish caught, rubbing out any blood or other remains stuck inside. Turning to me as I hold a plastic bag open, he puts the cleaned fish in one by one, saving one in his hand.

Looking at Neewa he asks, “Hey, what is that pink thing hanging out of her mouth?”

I reply, "That's her tongue. She lost some teeth when she had distemper as a puppy. Now her tongue hangs out the gap left by the missing teeth."

Steve cuts a little piece of sushi filet off the fish and throws it at her. Neewa catches it in her mouth and swallows it down in one gulp. I doubt if she even chewed it at all. She stares at him for more, but we get up and head for the van.

We all gather around, packing up everything. Dad, Manny, and Steve are guessing the weight of each fish. The rest of us are talking about where each fish was caught and who caught it.

My clothes are wet, and when a cloud blocks the sun, I start to shiver. I rummage through the trunk for my sweatshirt and coat and put them on over the top of my wet stuff.

That's when I heard it. It came out of nowhere. Clear as a church bell on a Sunday morning.

Chapter 22 - Bang, A Shot Rang Out

"Bang!" A single shot rang out, one bullet hit the dirt sending a mini-mushroom cloud of dust into the air about fifty feet away from me. "Bang." The sound echoes off the mountains and returns. I stop, frozen, the world around me seems to stand still. Looking at everyone, their faces are blank with strange contorted expressions. Manny and his sons scramble to my side of the van and take cover. Not knowing what else to do, each of us stoops down to hide.

Steve is mad. "What was that, Dad?"

Manny shrugs, "It came from up on that ridge. I guess it's one of the old timers letting us know we are being watched. Guess he sent us a warning shot, doesn't like strangers poking around."

Steve sarcastically replies, "A warning shot?"

"Yeah, you know, fishing on the reserve is for Indians only," Manny answers.

"Dad you know John didn't fish, he just came along to watch us have fun," Steve reasons.

Manny replies, "I know that. But the old timer doesn't know that. I'll talk to him. Next time no shooting."

Steve sighs, "Ok Dad, but I wish you'd have talked to him before we went fishing."

Manny and Steve look at each other and chuckle. We all laugh, although it is a nervous giggle from me as we jump in the van and drive away.

Down the road is a general store where we can get something to eat. It's the only store around for twenty miles. We arrive after a short ride over a pothole-riddled side road.

The general store is also the gas station, hardware, feed, grocery, and liquor store, as well as the U.S. post office. Most of us get egg sandwiches and milk or coffee at the counter.

Something is weird here. It's only 11:00 AM and there are two boys drinking beer. I don't know what the drinking age is here, but they are definitely not old enough. They look like they could be in middle school.

Neewa runs through the store looking around for something to eat. Animals, especially dogs, are treated differently out here. They are allowed to run through stores and people don't mind, they even like it. Already she is being petted by the cook and welcomed into the kitchen. She disappears, no doubt they have both made new friends.

At the other end of the store is one of the local ranchers getting supplies. He is about five feet tall, cowboy boots, and frail looking. He's wearing an old straw hat, beat up jeans, and a snap button plaid shirt. Sticking out of his shirt pocket is a bag of chewing tobacco. Smiling, he reveals a total of three teeth in his entire mouth. I look at his face, old, wrinkled, and unshaven for weeks. He guzzles down the rest of his beer and tosses the crushed can into the trash.

I don't like the way he's looking at me. Two other girls in the store don't like him either, I can tell. Instead of walking past him, they circle around him, staying far away.

He wheezes, "George Spahn's my name and my ranch is the Spahn Ranch." He grins wickedly at us with an evil beam in his eye. "Come on out to my ranch, we're having a big party tonight, it's out that a way. I have lots of friends out there staying with me and they like to party."

Dad nods, "Thanks but we are leaving for home in a few minutes."

I tell Dad, "That guy gives me the creeps."

Dad agrees whispering, "I don't like him either and I wouldn't trust him, he's evil. That's the kind of party people never come back from."

Neewa walks slowly between him and me and growls.

"Good doggy, ha-ha." He turns and walks to the warehouse supply counter to finish buying his provisions.

After saying our farewells on the front steps of the general store, we get in the van and drive away waving and yelling, “see ya, see ya, see you guys.”

The dirt road and surrounding desert seem kinder, more peaceful. Dad isn't as nervous as he was on the way here. Although, I'm sure he's concerned about the dirt road and the possibility of it being obliterated by a single dust storm.

We drive for a few hours as the sun starts to set and the desert sky begins to change colors. Sunset in the desert is the most beautiful time of the day. A wide array of cloud formations and spectacular hues highlight the horizon. The pinks and yellows change with each passing minute, trying to out do the shades of blue and purple. No two sunsets are ever the same in the desert and the next one is always better than the one before.

“How much longer till we reach the paved road?” I ask.

Dad replies, “Any minute now. We should be on the pavement before it gets dark.”

Jackie, Neewa, and I are falling asleep. Neewa puts her head on my leg. Her cold, wet nose shines against my pant. She is tired from all the exploring today, resting so close to me, I can feel her heart beating.

A thud jars me awake. I look ahead where the headlights shine. We've reached the pavement. The tires begin to hum as they glide over the silky blacktop signaling our arrival back in civilization. Everyone lets out a collective sigh of relief.

“I'm going back to sleep, wake me when we get home,” I mumble.

Dad drives into the night for hours as we sleep. Then without warning we hit a bump, we've turned into our backyard.

“I call shower first,” I yell.

Frustrated, Jackie bellows, “Christina you always call shower first, you can’t do that.”

“Yes I can, and I did,” I declare.

We’re home, boy am I glad to be home. I never thought I’d say that about this old place. I’m exhausted and that shower sounds better and better. It’s going to feel so good. Then I’m going to sleep. Well maybe not right to sleep, I might read for a little while, I want to finish my book.

“Good night, Dad, love you.”

“Good night, Christina, Jackie, love you.”

“Love you, Dad,” Jackie says.

“Good night, Neewa.”

Chapter 23 - Heather’s House

After school Neewa and I walk to Heather’s house on the other side of town. Heather is the tribal Medicine Woman and very powerful, maybe the most powerful person in all the reserve. She called yesterday to say she is expecting us at four o’clock.

Dad and Jackie are waiting in front of Heather’s house as Neewa and I turn the corner onto the dirt path that leads there.

“Neewa, Neewa,” Dad shouts as he sees us walking.

She runs like the wind to Dad and gives him a welcome lick on the hand. As he pets her she wags her tail, thumping his shin, “Thump, thump, thump,” and circling him

in delight. After which she jumps up and puts her paws on his shoulders, stretching her body out. Pushing him backwards, she jumps down on all fours and puts her cold, wet nose in his hand, and steers him to Heather's front door.

Watching the whole thing I say, "Dad, she's leading you towards the house. What does she know about Heather's house? She has never been here before?"

"Nothing that I know of," Dad shrugs.

Heather's place is the oldest home in the colony. It is one level and made of railroad ties with cement plastered in between the rows to hold it together and keep the cold out. The flat roof is tarpaper, with extra tar spread on top of that. It looks very humble with dilapidated front steps, only three small windows, and a front door with deep gorges and peeling paint.

Her compact yard is overgrown with plants and vegetation and has footpaths worn down over many years leading to every section. The outhouse is in the back, just a quick walk from the door. Beyond that is desert, sagebrush, and sand as far as the eye can see.

Diane, who is Heather's daughter, told me at school that their burial ground is underneath her house and that spirits visit them all the time. I don't know if I should believe her or not? She is a nice girl, but that seems a little too far-fetched. A burial ground under your house? Why would anyone put it there?

I did believe her when she told me she was apprenticing to be the next Medicine Woman. After all her Mom is the Medicine Woman.

Diane told me herbs and plants grown throughout the front and back yards. She says the plants are used for healing ceremonies to treat illness and rituals to keep away

evil. Each plant has a particular purpose such as the treatment of headaches, stomach problems, or arthritis, while other plants are used for incense or sweat baths.

Stepping up to Heather's door, Neewa is at my side as we follow close behind Dad. As he raises his arm to knock on the door, it opens, and she appears smiling.

"Come in, come in, I've been waiting for you," she grins.

Before I walk in I order, "Neewa stay here, wait for me."

Quickly Heather asks, "Can Neewa come in? I would like that. We don't have a dog or a cat and Neewa can go wherever she wants."

"Sure," I reply to Heather.

I walk into the dimly lighted home, barely able to see. It feels damp, but that is due to the dirt floor covered with wooden planks that creak and squeak as we walk.

Heather ushers us over to the kitchen table with a single light bulb hanging just above. Near by is a big sink with a hand pump for water. We pass a wood stove that seems to be in the middle of the main room with the stovepipe above it. The wood stove provides badly needed heat and light.

As my eyes adjust, more of her home comes into focus. Oversized woven rugs separate the one-room home into three sections. Her two daughters each have one area and Heather has the rest.

It looks like a museum inside. In the front room there is a frightful mask all painted in red and black. It looks creepy. Nearby is a beautiful headdress made of lots of eagle feathers, with a colorful yellow and red beaded headband. On one wall is a robe with intricate hand-sown bead designs of animals and hieroglyphic symbols. I can make out the symbol for the sun, and the other symbols might be water and fire.

The darkened ceiling is open and made of thick timbers with planks resting on them. Two more electric wires hang down with light bulbs on the ends that seem to sway ever so slightly.

Neewa runs around the house following her nose into the corners and along the walls, then positions herself at Heather's side. As Heather moves around the house, Neewa follows her like a shadow. If Heather sits down, Neewa rests nearby on a rug and seems to be looking all about the house, particularly Linda's room. Linda is Heather's oldest daughter who is away at college.

Heather speaks, "On the table are packages of herbs for each of you. They are from my garden, take them now and put them in your pocket."

"Thank you," Jackie and I say in unison.

"The herbs will protect you from evil," Heather adds.

I look at Dad and Jackie and they look back at me, and then at each other. None of us know what to say to that.

Heather is quite old, maybe eighty or eighty-five. She is about five feet tall, stout, and steady on her feet. She has a round face with light brown wrinkled skin. Her long silver hair is held tight in a bun by a handmade beaded bun cover. She is wearing a gray wraparound housecoat covered by a long woolen beige sweater. On top of that, she wears a handmade bandolier bag of the finest quality.

I have no idea what her last name is, so for now I will call her Heather. What do you call a Medicine Woman anyway? "Hey Doc?" No, of course not.

"Heather," at last I say, "where is Diane?"

“Go into her room, Christina, she is doing her homework. Perhaps you can check it for her?”

“Okay,” I say as Jackie and I walk toward the single light in her room. Pushing aside the vertical rug that separates her room from the rest of the house, we enter.

Heather starts talking to Dad about the history of her people. My guess is they will talk about some of the events that have happened here over the years.

“Presently,” I hear her say in the background, “everyone on the reserve has a new house except me. My new house is coming, they say it will be here soon, but other families need one more than me. They have young children, so I let them get their homes first, before me. I only have Diane now. My oldest daughter, Linda, is always away at school and Chester has his own home for a long time.”

Jackie, Diane, and I emerge from her room.

“Let me show you my garden,” Heather motions with her hand.

All of us step out the back door of the house as the wind begins to blow sand around. As we walk around, the gusts begin to get stronger and stronger. The wind is whipping around as we make our way to the back steps.

It reminds me of the storms we had down the shore. The winds were hurling the sand sideways and the ocean waves crashed against the breakers.

Chapter 24 - The Storm

“It’s howling,” I remark.

“Whew, Whew, Whew,” the wind whistles.

Heather and Dad join us outside to see what is going on? The force of the wind continues to grow. It sounds like a train rolling down the tracks.

As I stand at the back of the house, a distant cloud of dust and sand is coming straight at me from the desert. A wall as tall and wide as the eye can see. Sand and tumbleweeds zip by us at lightning speed. Suddenly, fierce blowing currents of air and sand hit me square in the face pushing me back. I cover my face and turn away. I'm almost knocked to the ground. The giant dust cloud is so thick I can hardly see. The storm is raging now, sending sand flying sideways as the wind screeches in an unnatural way.

Neewa lies down and gets into a tight ball with her tail covering her face. She seems to know exactly what to do. It's as if she's already been in a storm like this before.

Diane, Jackie, and I kneel down next to Neewa. I cover us with my jacket and we huddle close to the house for protection.

Sand bounces off of my jacket making pinging sounds, and strikes everything around us. My exposed skin is getting a peppering, actually stinging me.

I peek out from under my jacket, looking in the direction of Heather and Dad. They are covered by one of Heather's handwoven ceremonial blankets.

The wind-driven earth engulfs them as Heather steps out from under cover of the blanket. She puts her arms straight out as if to embrace the squall. Eyes closed, she looks up into the sky and smiles.

What is Heather doing? Why is she looking into the sand storm? If I didn't know better, I'd think she is communicating with some power beyond the ordinary, a spiritual, supernatural force.

I look away and take cover under my jacket with Diane and Jackie while Neewa remains at our feet. Neewa is still curled up in a ball as sand continues to pile up on her back and around her head, everywhere. I have never experienced this before. We don't have storms like this back home.

Thankfully the howling winds are beginning to subside. The blowing sand is settling as the eerie screeching sounds dissipate. As quickly as it came, the storm exits in silence continuing on its path across the desert.

I take my jacket off of our heads as sand falls to the ground in sheets like the syrup on the side of a stack of pancakes. I look at Neewa, now covered in a layer of sand from head to tail. She gets up and shakes it off. The sand cascades to the ground around her like a waterfall.

As the storm departs, the bright sunlight returns from west to east. The back of the sandstorm continues east leaving us behind. I look out over the desert, nothing but western blue sky dressing the heavens. Silhouettes of distant mountains frame the desert, while wispy white clouds loiter above.

Newly created waves of rippling sand cover the desert like furrowed water above the shallow sand at the ocean's edge. The sand dunes sparkle like diamonds reflecting tiny rays of light. I stare into its depths, as if gazing into the bottom of the deep blue sea.

We walk out onto the desert, its surface more like fresh fallen snow. The sun begins to set into an orange and yellow blanket on the horizon. Before getting very far, we are ankle deep in fine granules deposited by the storm. My sneakers fill and become weights on my feet. The rolling dunes summon me forward. I'm being pulled out into the desert, not forcefully, but compelled to continue nonetheless.

“Come on, Neewa, let’s go,” I command.

I spot something as we gallop over the sand. It is out of place, an object lying on top of the undisturbed desert skin. It’s about the size of my fist, rounded, perhaps three inches wide. A cylinder-shaped piece of whatever it is? Lying next to a half-buried stick. I reach down and pick them both up, concealing the one, and waving the stick around like a wand.

I throw the stick for Neewa, who runs down the dune laboring in its depths, kicking sand into the air.

Sneaking a peek at the heavy hidden object, I see parallel markings on the light beige rock. Its texture is like the bark of a tree. And it looks a lot like a section of a small log, cut straight on either end. The shape of a jellyroll, about five inches long. The sunlight reflects off the shiny dark core resembling black quartz.

I know what this is; I’ve seen it before. It’s petrified wood!

It must have been lying just under the sand, exposed by the powerful dust storm winds. I’m not supposed to remove it, and it’s against the law to keep it, especially if it was on an Indian Reserve.

But I won’t consider that for one moment. I stick it back in my jacket pocket, like a hungry crook would steal a package of bologna at a grocery store.

Neewa returns and we have a tug-of-war with the stick she has returned. She eventually gives in, wanting to play fetch more than tug-of-war. I throw the stick further this time and she runs to fetch it.

Chapter 25 - Devil Spirits

Heather is grinning as she points her finger out into the desert, “Look, I see the devil out there.”

Anxiously, I turn and look. The soft and soothing blue skies surround the silhouette of a gray funnel-shaped cloud. It’s fifty feet high and twenty feet wide, twisting and moving across the horizon.

Fearful, “What is it?”

“It’s a spirit being. You call them dust devils, but Indians know better.”

Turning to Heather I say, “It looks like a mini-tornado.

“I’ve never seen a dust devil. We don’t have them back East.”

Heather speaks, as she looks deep into my eyes, “Spirit beings are the supernatural energy of the dead. There are good ones and bad ones just like people.”

I feel her stare go through me and exit the back of my head.

“Heather, how does the dust devil become a spirit being?”

Heather replies, “Legend has it that the dust devil passes over the dead body of an Indian. Then it lifts its spirit from the Earth into it. The spirit inhabits the dust devil. Now the spirit being can travel the Earth and look for a living creature’s body to possess. After having done so, it shifts its shape from the supernatural to the natural and is reborn, reincarnated. In its new body it must complete the mission. Which is to return home to its place in the sacred burial ground of our people. That is its goal, to be with its own kind in the Spirit World.”

Heather continues, “We call our sacred burial ground the Spirit World. It’s a place hidden from everyone but us. And where Indian spirit beings can be ‘At Rest.’ That is where all the spirits go when their human bodies die.

“Ghosts can materialize, move objects, and scare people. But they cannot take a body or soul, or return from the supernatural world to the natural world like spirit beings.”

Whistling sounds come from the dust devil. Its shriek gets louder and louder as it moves closer to us. The shrill sound is like an old factory lunch whistle piercing the air at noon.

The dust devil advances across the desert, kicking up clouds of dust, brush, and lots of sand.

“The dust devil is coming,” I screech.

The Medicine Woman shouts a warning, “It is an Evil Devil Spirit, a shape-shifting demon. It will destroy your body and your soul if it takes you.”

Jackie and I look at each other in disbelief.

Heather continues, “Evil spirit beings are devils spirits wanting to reincarnate in the mortal body of a human or animal. They are not my people trying to return home to us to be at rest in our sacred burial grounds. Evil spirit beings are the bad ones who destroy the soul they possess and cause the body to die.”

I almost fall over the steps and onto my head. My body stiffens as an array of goose bumps rise on my skin like chicken pox. The fuzzy hairs on the back of my neck stand up like soldiers at attention.

Jackie and Dad look at me, speechless.

Chapter 26 - Spirit World

Heather speaks, "This evil devil spirit is moving like a tornado, a violently rotating column of air with the power of the wind, earth, and moon." Heather is determined, "That one is a strong one and it must be stopped. I will vanquish this evil devil spirit back to the supernatural, back to its eternal pain. My battle with evil will be to the death."

Heather reaches into her bandolier bag and throws a handful of yellow powder into the air. It blows right past us giving us a light coating.

She explains, "The powder will protect us from this devil, but we must seek sacred ground."

Everything is happening so fast. Now I'm in shock and I don't know what to say. Jackie hugs Dad and Dad embraces us as we stand shoulder to shoulder.

"Look!" The Medicine Woman exclaims. "That evil devil spirit is seeking a body and soul to possess, don't let it be yours."

I'm gasping for air, "It sounds like a screaming banshee and it's headed right for us."

"Hurry up, come into my home, it is sacred ground and the evil one cannot take you here. Quickly, quickly," Heather implores.

We duck inside her house and go by the light of the wood stove. Heather throws blue powder into the fire. It contacts the flames and blue smoke rises up the flue. The stovepipe glows for a moment as the smoke ascends up the chimney.

She yells, “Go demon, leave us evil devil spirit.”

Huddling together around the wood stove. Only our faces illuminated, the rest of our bodies surrounded by darkness.

Heather looks at each of us. “Families of those who have been taken by an evil devil spirit will not even notice a change. They will not see any physical difference in their loved one. No one will guess his or her body and soul have been taken.

“Evil devil spirits are amongst us, you know who they are. You have met them, someone who has become evil, a problem to the rest of us.

“Everyone who knows one will say, ‘It’s not like him, he was so nice, but now he is different.’

“A friend of one who has been taken might confide, ‘I don’t know what has happened to her, she’s gone bad. I don’t know her anymore.’”

No one moves or speaks for what seems like minutes, but is only seconds.

Heather speaks, “It is safe now, the evil one is gone.”

Silence hangs over us for a few more seconds, none of us know what to do or say.

Finally Dad says, “Okay it’s getting late guys, let’s go home. Thank you Heather, for everything. Good to see you, Diane. Ready Christina? Jackie? Neewa?”

“Yeah, Dad, ready,” I reply.

Neewa wags her tail and runs to my side.

“Me too, Dad, I’m ready,” Jackie adds as we file out.

Safely in our car now, questions flood my head faster than terabytes on high-speed broadband. Did that really happen? What was Heather really fighting? What is an evil devil spirit?

But not one of us actually has anything to say. We just stare at the road and drive the half-mile to our home.

I ask, “Dad are you thinking what I’m thinking? Heather said that her house is sacred ground. And Diane told me at school that their burial ground is underneath her house and that spirits visit her.”

“Yes, Christina, what about it?” Dad doubts my testimony.

“We’ve found the Indian burial grounds, that’s what! Now all we have to do is figure out how to get our equipment into that house without being discovered.”

Dad cautions, “I don’t want to disrespect Heather, not to mention the entire Indian Nation. Trespassing is against the law, and Whites going on an Indian Reserve is dangerous. You remember what happened to those diaboos (non-Indians) who went fishing out at Duck Valley? They were found hanging from a tree, gutted, and their dogs too.”

“Dad, I have to film that sacred burial ground and capture a spirit. There has to be a way to get our equipment in there without getting caught? But how can we? I can’t think of a way without being seen.”

“Who says that evil devil spirit is still there?” Jackie questions. “And besides I’m not going back there, that place scared the heck out of me.”

“But seriously, Dad, there’s something going on here. What about those Orbs at Doctor Cuthberson’s ranch? And how about all his artifacts? And remember Chester put that charm on Neewa and said it will protect her from evil? Chester had a strange look in his eyes when he said that. I stared back at him. Then he said laughing, ‘The evil dogcatcher, that’s who.’

“He wanted to tell me something, but he couldn’t. Something about Neewa, but it’s the Indian way, he can’t possibly tell.

“And what about Heather giving us each a bag of herbs to protect us from evil? And now this dust devil possessed by an evil devil spirit chasing us. She vanquished it with colored powders thrown in the air and into a wood stove. A Medicine Woman! Something is going on and I’m going to get to the bottom of it.

“And did you forget what that little girl at the Tribal History meeting said? She asked, ‘Do you know Neewa has a spirit?’ And what about when Neewa flew up on the kitchen counter to eat the pumpkin pies? Neewa can fly.”

Dad replies, “You have a vivid imagination Christina, we have no real proof Neewa flew onto the counter to get those pumpkin pies.”

I pause for a moment to catch my breath and gather my thoughts.

Giggling nervously, “I have an idea, we can put a backpack full of equipment on Neewa and mount a camera on her. I’ll send her into Heather’s sacred burial grounds to hunt those spirits. Neewa can film and take readings with the meters in the backpack. I can show the film on my own TV show. I’ll call it ‘Doggie Ghost Cam.’”

Laughing, “Wait, wait, I got a better name for my TV show. I’ll call it, ‘Flying Doggie Ghost Cam.’ Neewa can fly in and out of haunted houses, sacred burial grounds, boot hills, and such.”

“Ha ha, good Christina, that’s one of your better jokes,” Jackie smirks.

We arrive home from Heather’s. My head is full of devil spirits, charms, stories of evil, doggie ghost cam shows, and terror, all thrown together.

On my way to bed, “Neewa, you are sleeping next to me tonight.”

I jump onto my bed and pat the comforter a couple of times, “Come on girl, jump, jump up.”

Dad will have to spend some money on heat. It’s really getting cold at night. But Neewa will keep me warm. She stretches out her long body and legs next to me as she lies on her side, keeping me warm.

“Good night, Dad, love you.”

“Good night, Christina, Jackie, love you.”

“Love you, Dad, Christina,” Jackie says.

“Good night, Neewa.”

Chapter 27 - Cowboying

Last night Jackie was asked to babysit and slept over our neighbor’s house, the Burns. She went to school from their house this morning. And after school she had dinner with them and waited for Dad and I to get back from our long day of cowboying.

After cowboying all day, I come running in the door trying to contain myself. It’s around nine at night and I try to act casual, but I am bursting with excitement from my unusual day.

Trying to contain myself I say to Jackie, “How did baby sitting go last night? Did Hank and Jane get home late?”

“It went good. No, not too late. Brice and I designed clothes. Then we had a fashion show and put on matching tops with boas and stuff. It was a lot of fun.

“I got to sleep in Brice’s room. She has two twin beds, really awesome. It was more like a sleepover But I made some really big bucks babysitting, twenty dollars,” Jackie says with a sassy tone.

“Very cool, that’s a lot of money. You want to hear my amazing cowboying story?” I screech.

Jackie knew we had gone cowboying. It was all prearranged, her staying with the Burns’s overnight. They live right across the street. Jackie did not want to go cowboying. She thinks it is barbaric to eat meat. She’s a vegan.

We had left really early in the morning and we knew we wouldn’t be getting home till late. Besides, Jackie couldn’t go cause she had talent show practice after school and she didn’t want to miss that.

This whole adventure began a few weeks ago when Chester called and asked us all to go cowboying with him on his cousin’s ranch.

Dad asked, “What is cowboying?”

Chester explained, “Cowboying is when you round up cattle and drive them to wherever you want them to go.”

Dad repeated to us, “Christina, Jackie, you guys want to go cowboying on horses on a ranch?”

I took the phone right out of Dad’s hand and shouted, “Can Neewa come?”

“Yes Neewa can come, if she can ride a horse?” Chester laughed.

“When? When?” I asked him.

Chester replied, "It depends on the weather. I'll call you the night before. We won't go in the rain or bad weather."

Chester finally called yesterday afternoon, "Do you still want to go cowboying?"

"Yeah," I told him.

Chester said, "Okay, pick me up at four in the morning."

I cried out, "Four in the morning! Wow, okay we'll see you at four."

I shouted to Dad, "We are going cowboying tomorrow, the weather is supposed to be good."

Dad replied, "Yeah, tomorrow is good. I'll call the Burns's and ask if Jackie can stay over their house tonight."

"Jackie, you okay with this?" Dad asked, not completely convinced Jackie did not want to go cowboying.

"Yeah, Dad, I'm not going cowboying, it's barbaric," she said again.

"So anyway, Jackie, listen. We picked up Chester at four, and we all arrived at the ranch before the sun came up. We met Chester's cousin, Dave at his house and he drove us in his pickup truck to the barn. Dave was surprised when Neewa jumped up into the back of his pickup.

"'Cute dog you got there, can she stare down a steer?' Dave looked at her smiling.

"I answered proudly, 'Neewa can do anything, just tell her once and she is good to go.'

"Neewa was an instant hit with everyone.

“She loves to be petted and play fetch,’ I told him as we drove down the dirt road. ’She can do anything. It’s as if she is human.’

“Right from the start Dad and Dave had an issue.”

Jackie sighs, “Oh boy it figures. Dad, what did you do?”

He doesn’t answer, just continues tinkering around the kitchen.

I continue my story, “We’re getting in the truck. Dad just walked away from our van and Dave asks, ‘Why did you lock your van?’

“Oh, did I?’ Dad answered surprised.

“I didn’t even realize I did? Where we come from you have to lock your car. I guess it’s a habit,’ Dad shrugged.

“Dad and I could tell Dave was insulted. He thought we didn’t trust him and that we were afraid someone from his ranch would take something from our van.

“Dad confided in me, ’I know there is nothing I can do to take back what I did. I feel terrible that Dave thinks I don’t trust him. Guess we started off on the wrong foot.’

“Dad tried to explain to Dave again by saying, ’Dave we just moved out of the city. I picked up the habit of locking the van. You have to lock it or someone will take it.’

“Dave shrugged his shoulders, ’Oh, is that right?’

“Dad sipped on his bottle of water as we arrived at the barn. Two of Dave’s ranch hands have already saddled the horses and getting everything ready. They nodded to us.

“We each had to check our own bridle, cinch, and reins ourselves to be sure they were tight, so we didn’t fall off the horses, Dave insisted.

“He told us, ’My herd of cattle roams government land all year long. They eat whatever they can find, mostly sagebrush, but some grasses and new plant shoots if it

rains. But it's not enough, so we bring them hay to add to their diet. Mostly, the cattle live off whatever they can find. If it were not for the stream running through our land, there would be nothing for them to eat, just more desert.'

"We have about a dozen fields of grass and hay that belong to the reserve. Those crops are sold for cash and the money goes to the old ones who can't work.'

'I got the gentlest horse Dave had, her name is Stork. Dad got a horse that likes to throw you off onto the ground. Its name is Mac.

"Dave said laughing under his breath, 'Be ready to land on your feet when that one throws you off.'

"Dad replied, 'Yeah? Ok? I'll be ready, I hope.'

"Next we rode out onto the desert. It was so quiet and the sun was just coming up. You should have seen it when the early morning light hit the mountains. They turned a brilliant ruby red color.

"Chester gave us our coyboying instructions as we rode. 'I will tell you guys where to stand. We will drive the cattle toward you. You guys will be like bumpers in bumper pool, guiding the cattle. Don't get off your horses or you will get trampled for sure.'

"He asks, 'Did you ever play bumper pool?'

"Yes,' we both say.

"I play all the time,' he says, 'at my friend's house.'

"Chester continues, 'the cattle will turn away from you when they see you. Make sure they turn the right way. Just raise up your arm opposite the direction you want them to go. Don't worry, they spook easy.'"

I looked at Jackie who is hanging on my every word, “That was the extent of my cowboying instructions.”

Chapter 28 - Cattle Drive

“I’m not sure if they were speaking Shoshone, Piute, or Washoe, but no one spoke English as we headed out to the desert.

“You should have seen it Jackie, cattle everywhere. It felt like I was with Billy Crystal and Daniel Stern in the movie City Slickers. I was on my horse the whole day. It feels like I’m still on that horse, my legs are killing me.”

“Yeah, Christina, you smell like you’re still on that roundup. I hope you’re taking a shower,” Jackie wrinkles her nose.

“Yeah, right after I finish the story,” I warn. Besides that’s Neewa.

“Neewa was running around the cattle like she knew how to round them up. She nipped at the cows’ tails to get them to move faster. Once when a cow stopped right in front of her, she looked the cow straight in the eye and barked. The cow turned and ran to escape her glare. If a cow turned in the wrong direction, Neewa circled around and brought it back to the herd.

“Someone would give a command in Shoshone, Piute, or Washoe. Dad and I would look at each other with a blank stare. Chester translated only if it was something we needed to know.

“Chester would yell, ‘Stay by that sage brush,’ or ‘Don’t move,’ or ‘Move to the left.’

“Dad and I learned a couple of Indian words, 'Stop,' 'Go,' and 'Don't move, you diaboos.'”

Dad, excited, continues the story while I go take a shower.

“We rounded up all the cattle in the desert. That took almost all day. It had to be after two in the afternoon before we stopped for a drink of water.

“Then we drove the cattle down a long dirt road, with a fence on either side, to a corral. That was the easy part cause all we had to do was stay behind them and keep moving.

“Occasionally, a steer would break away, get through a broken part of the fence and run for the hills. One of the cowboys would have to go round up the cow and drive it back to the herd.”

Dad laughs, “Neewa ran off into some trees. It was the perfect place for her with a shimmering stream, shade from the sun, and plenty of water. She probably wanted to get a drink or go for a swim and cool off. I saw her chewing on the green grass on the bank.

“Then she started rolling around on the ground scratching her back. Dirt and dust rose all around her as she wriggled around. I didn't know what she was doing.

“We continued down the road with the cattle when Neewa returned from her break. As soon as she got close to me, I realized what had happened. She had been rolling around in cow manure and she was covered in it.

“Ha-ha.”

“Oh my God, you stink!” I yelled.

Returning from my shower I interrupt Dad, “I told Neewa, 'You smell so bad you are going to have to stay outside on your chain and sleep in one of your dens.’”

“When we passed the next pond, I took her for a swim. We played fetch and she swam across the pond a few times, but that didn’t get all the smell off.”

Dad butts in, “We finally arrived at two big corrals that were in the middle of this wide-open field. Some how we were going to get all the cattle inside. Christina and I were assigned to guard the gate and we positioned ourselves twenty or thirty feet away. Our job was to guide the cattle into the corral and keep the ones inside from coming back out, which is exactly what they wanted to do.

“The only way to do this was to yell and wave our arms in the air to spook them in the right direction. Sometimes just raising an arm would scare the cattle enough to keep them from running back out.

“When Chester and Dave herded a whole bunch of cows in through the gate, the cows inside tried to escape. Again and again the cattle got spooked and ran in every direction. Sometimes they ran right at us, and then it was impossible to keep them all from escaping while driving still more cattle in.

“If you let one get by you, and it was your fault, the other cowboys gave you a look. That would be your signal to go and get the escapee and drive it back into the corral.”

Jackie’s eyes are fixed on us as she listens to every word. “Next we separated the calves from the cows and put them in a smaller corral. The calves screamed when they were taken from their moms. Some of them were not even weaned yet. It was sad, cows were mooing for their young. I wanted to die. They tried to get back to each other, crying, and blaring, ‘Moo! Moo!’ The calves kept running out of the corral and back to their

moms, only to be separated again by one of us on horseback. That was the worst part. I don't ever want to do that again," Tears welled up in my eyes remembering the sadness.

Dad jumps in as I try to compose myself, "Cattle trucks arrived just when we finished getting the cows and calves separated. Finally the calves were all in the small corral. They were staying on the ranch and will be Dave's herd next year. The rest of the cattle were loaded into the trucks.

"But in order to get the cattle into the trucks, they had to be chased through this chute that led to the trailer. The chute is a four-foot wide corridor in the corral with fence on both sides. It has drop down doors to control the number of cattle passing through. After that, they go up a ramp into the truck's trailer."

Dad adds, "The truck drivers have to get the trailer door really close to the top of the chute. If not, the cows jump between the trailer and ramp to freedom. Several cows made the four-foot jump and ran to the other corral to be with their calves. They mooed and mooed until they were roped and dragged back to the chute by a cowboy.

"Then it was done, finally they were all loaded and two trucks full of cattle headed for the auction."

I continue the story, "At this point I want to go home. I feel like I'm going to collapse from emotional and physical exhaustion.

"I rode Stork back to Dave's barn. I took her saddle off and put away her blanket, bridle, and all her stuff. She walked back to her stall and started eating oats. I went straight to the van.

"Dad and I followed the trucks into town. On the way, I could hear the cows screaming and mooing for their calves. Their cries are still ringing in my ears."

Dad chimes in as I pause to go get some water, “Today was auction day and the buyers and sellers were ready to get started. We followed the trucks to the market right in town near the railroad. The auction is enormous with dozens of corrals full of cattle. Each rancher’s herd of cattle is put in a different corral where they are sold.

“Sounds were coming from everywhere in the huge railroad yard. Railroad car wheels squealed and train whistles blew. The auctioneer tested his mike getting ready to start the bidding. Cattle were mooing, cowboys yelling orders to each other as cattle hooves stomped up and down ramps.

“Finally, all of Dave’s cattle were unloaded from the trucks into a corral.

“The auctioneer went around to each herd yelling into his microphone for an opening bid.

“Quickly he began his chatter into the microphone, ‘Do I hear fifty cents a pound? Fifty? Fifty, give me fifty cents? Do I hear fifty? There ya go, I have fifty cents, do I hear fifty-five? Fifty-five? Fifty-five? Give me fifty-five cents.’

“The auctioneer walked from corral to corral and the bidding continued until all the cattle were sold to the highest bidder.

“The auction was over, trains were loaded with cattle and off to the slaughterhouse they went.

“Dave went to the cashier and picked up his check, and we came home.”

“That was my cowboying experience. I’m going to remember this day for the rest of my life. I’ll probably never do it again, ever. I’m going to bed after I take a nice hot bath. You did save me some hot water? Didn’t you Jackie?”

Jackie looks over at me and says, “Christina, you probably used it up when you took a shower before.”

“Cool, sounds like you guys had a good time. I’m going to bed. Brice and I stayed up late last night, good night.” Jackie walks to her room, returning to her TV show.

I whisper to Dad, “My legs hurt pretty bad, my thighs are burning from holding onto that horse. It feels like they are going to hurt for a week. Tomorrow is Saturday and I’m staying in bed all day, so don’t wake me. I mean it. Don’t wake me up.”

“Did you have fun?” Dad asks.

“Yeah, I had fun, but it was so sad separating the calves from the cows. I cried. They were calling each other, it was terrible,” I mope off to the bath.

Dad reminds me, “We are going to leave Neewa outside tonight even though it will be cold. She can sleep in one of her caves or dens or whatever they are to stay warm. I will feed her and give her water. Hopefully, she won’t smell so bad tomorrow. If she rolls around in the dirt a few times she’ll get most of the smell off, or else you’ll have to give her a bath tomorrow.”

“Yeah, sure, I’ll give her a bath tomorrow,” I agree.

I lay on my bed, reliving the day.

It was nice of Dave to take us out to dinner at the restaurant. The place was downtown, a few blocks from the train yard. As I walked along Railroad Avenue the bright lights of the casino downtown flashed, “Jack Pot,” “Jack Pot,” alternating with yellow, red, and orange. One casino’s flashing lights depicted a twenty-foot high neon cowboy with a cigar in his mouth and a fist full of dollars.

Jogging across the tracks, we put the bright lights behind us as we pass a movie theatre, bank, and a pawn shop.

We arrived at the restaurant. From the outside it looks like it was probably built a hundred years ago. Walking inside, the left wall had cute little booths with tall chrome coat racks at each chair back. On the other side was a long counter, bordered with metal-rimmed stools topped with cushioned green vinyl. I walked by, spinning several of them. They glisten in the bright fluorescent lights from above. Then I collapsed into a green vinyl bench seat with a squeak and puff of air. Each booth just big enough for two people on either side.

The twelve-foot high restaurant walls were green too, although a different shade. Or maybe they were just covered with a coat of grease from the fryers and grills. Above them the fans turned lazily under the embossed tin ceiling, painted white.

Behind the restaurant counter was all the action. One cook on the grills, another busy at the sandwich board, and yet one more chatting with the cute waitress that helps bring in the regular customers.

Conversations were plenty as I quietly listened to those around me. Charlie seems to have lost most of his stake in the casino and doesn't want to go back to the ranch. Randy is sitting at the counter after having drunk too much, and isn't sure if he should go back to the Pioneer Bar for a Bud, or stay here and have another cup of Joe.

The waitress bounced from table to table trying to cover up any mistakes the cooks may have served up.

She politely smiled at each patron, "Is everything all right? Can I get you anything dear?"

Families were interspersed throughout the dining room. They're traveling long distances and have stopped to eat and shake off the road.

Someone asked in a tired and road-weary voice, "Is there a good motel nearby? Clean, with plenty of hot water?"

I wouldn't touch that one, the motels here are known for problems with their hot water supply. Well-meaning locals suggest a variety of motels for the weary traveler.

Smiling, the waitress asked enthusiastically, "What'll you have, sweetie?"

"Burger, fries, and a Coke please." I looked up at her as she wrote on her pad of checks, ready to hand in the next ticket to the cook.

During dinner Dave told his story. "I borrow money to buy and raise cattle just like any other rancher. The price of cattle has gone down, it could go down even more. If that happens I'd get an even lower price than I got today. I had to sell my cattle now because there is no telling what the price is going to be tomorrow. I'm not going to make much money this year. But I can't take a chance that the price will go down even more. Then I'd lose money. So I have to sell the herd now. At least I'll have enough money to raise another herd. I hope to get a better price next year."

Dave continued, "I'm going to keep my calves and buy more with the money from the sale today. I'll feed them all year and then sell them next year. If my bull is healthy, I'll have a lot more calves in the spring. I'll brand those newborns and let them out into the desert to graze."

After I had enough to eat we were ready to leave. I said, "Good luck, Dave."

Chester said, "See you guys."

Dave said, "See ya."

Dave and Chester were staying at the restaurant to have some dessert and coffee. We were ready to go home. Dad and I walked back to the van.

Neewa was resting on the back seat and jumped up as we approached the van. She was glad to see us. But I was not so happy to smell her. The whole car stunk of manure.

Usually Neewa jumps all over me when she sees me. But because she smelled so bad, I didn't let her near me. I told her to get in the back. Then I gave her the rest of my cheeseburger, which she gobbled down in under three seconds.

I held my nose, "Neewa you smell."

Chapter 29 - On the Reserve

The girls basketball game is an away game about a hundred miles from here. My Dad is one of the coaches for the team and we are going with them. We don't know what to expect on the overnight trip, so we are bringing our sleeping bags and stuff. Besides, Dad doesn't like motel beds. He would rather sleep in his sleeping bag on top of the bed. We laugh at him.

We're not taking any ghost hunting stuff to the game because it would definitely blow our cover. Right now nobody knows we hunt ghosts. And Dad wants to keep it that way.

We get about a half hour from home when the snow starts coming down, heavy. It's an unusual time of the year for snow, unless you are in the mountains where we are.

There is still another fifty miles to go to the little town up north. But we are too far to turn back and just close enough to make it there before the snow gets too deep.

Pulling over on the side of the road is out of the question on this road. If we slide off the edge, we will have to walk to town or stay in the car all night and risk freezing to death.

The snow is really dry and powdery. It's so light and dry the van swishes it right off the road as we go by. This is so coolio (the coolest,) it falls silently, slowly. On the side of the road it's already about four inches deep.

Finally we arrive at the motel just outside of town. When we get to the front desk we find out that all the rooms are taken.

Dad knocks on one of the team's rooms. Edwin, one of the other coaches, answers the door and Dad explains our situation.

We don't want to cram into one of the team rooms because they're already crowded.

Edwin says, "There's no room here. Why don't you guys stay at the jail. You and the girls will be welcome there."

"The jail," I exclaim.

"They always have plenty of room," Edwin adds.

After slyly looking in the room Dad replies, "I think that's a good idea."

Standing outside all this time while they talk, I am almost frozen. Foggy white air comes from my nose and mouth as I breathe. Finally, we get back in the warm van and drive on toward town.

Dad tells me that there will be trouble on the Reserve when we get back home. He was looking in the door of the room and saw beer, coaches, and some of the team.

I ask, "Are you going to tell?"

“No way, I won’t have to tell. The girls will tell without any encouragement from me.”

Dad warns, “Heather will have something to say to anyone who gets out of line. She protects everyone, but especially the young girls. Chester is there and he will try to keep things from getting out of hand. But, they say when Edwin has too much to drink, he becomes a different person, evil.”

Arriving at the north end of town, we park near the jail.

“We’ll be better off in the jail where we can’t get involved in this,” Dad mutters.

The building is rectangular with steel bars on the windows and doors. It stands alone, by itself, with vacant lots on either side.

The downtown district is full of businesses and stores. Rows of two-story buildings line Main Street going toward the center of town. It looks like a typical Midwest town with angled parking up and down the street and tall curbs along the sidewalks of the storefronts. Lights from the storefronts illuminate the snowy sidewalks.

Walking back to the car after taking Nee wa for a run, I marvel at how busy the downtown area is.

A casino at the end of town has so many blinking and flashing lights it looks like Christmas in New York City. There are lots of fancy cars parked under the marquee out front, and people are coming and going through the revolving doors. You’d think they were giving something away.

Also within view are the souvenir shops the locals depend on for survival.

Various Indian Nation buildings such as the community center and several schools are also located in the opposite direction. One of them has a gym attached where the teams will be competing tomorrow.

Suddenly, I look up. Out of nowhere comes Edwin's truck speeding down Main Street. In the front seat, next to him, are three girls waving at us as they go racing by. I wave back in dismay as the truck passes us out of control. I can see more girls in the back of the pickup sitting on thirty packs of beer they just picked up at the store.

Dad, exasperated, says, "It's against the law to give alcohol to anyone under the legal drinking age. Some of those kids are fourteen. They are heading back to the motel I hope," Dad says in disgust. "That is, if they don't kill themselves before they get there."

Chapter 30 - Go to Jail

Walking into the jail and right into the Sheriff's office gave me a weird feeling.

Dad explains the situation to the Sheriff, "We are here with the basketball team. The motel has no more rooms and we can't afford the casino hotel rates."

The sheriff is very understanding and accommodating. "You and your kids can stay here. It's not much, but it is dry and warm. You are welcome to stay in this cell."

"Sheriff," I ask, "Can I bring my dog in? She is very good and she won't bother anyone, I promise."

He says as we walk through the jail, "No problem just keep her in the cell with you."

Sheriff Sam is a tall man, soft-spoken, with brown skin. He has all the stoic features of Cochise and Geronimo combined, with high cheekbones, a broad forehead, and piercing brown eyes. His shiny brown western style boots match his official khaki uniform looks like a policeman's uniform, but beige instead of blue. The shirt has western style pockets, collar, and short sleeves. On his forearm is a tattoo of an eagle, globe, and anchor.

His leather belt has his name, "SAM," in capital letters on the back. The one and three-fourths inch finely tooled letters are carved into a two-inch by ten-inch strip of tan leather. That two-inch by ten inch piece is sewn to another two-inch wide strip of blue suede that is double-stitched to an equal width leather backing that completes the three layers of his custom belt. Sheriff Sam's belt buckle is a status symbol. It's sterling silver with a raised brass bronco rider in the center.

As he lets us in the cell he laughs, "Don't worry I won't lock you in."

There doesn't seem to be anyone else in any of the other three cells.

As I stand in our cell and look around, I feel much better about this whole thing. The room looks more like a tidy youth hostel. It has double bunks on either side, with mattresses, sheets, and comforters turned down at a corner. In one area is a color-coordinated bathroom with a door. Colorful curtains cover the barred window, and a nice woven rug warms the floor. On the beige painted cinder block walls are pictures of peaceful lakes and streams.

After running out to get Neewa and our stuff, Jackie and I return to the jail with Neewa in tow.

I then throw my sleeping bag onto a top bunk and shout, "I got this bunk."

Quickly Jackie throws hers onto the other top bunk laughing, “Dad, I guess you’re on the bottom.”

Dad replies, “No problem, I’m better off on the lower bunk.”

Really, I didn’t care where Dad was sleeping as long as I got a top bunk.

Neewa jumps on the other lower bunk and curls up into a ball like she always does.

“I’m sleeping in my clothes,” I announce.

“It’s obvious we’re all sleeping in our clothes, Christina. This is a public place,” Jackie sarcastically replies.

It takes a while for me to get settled in our unusual surroundings. Jackie and I talk about telling everyone we know that we stayed overnight in jail.

“I’m going to tell all my friends back East, they will go crazy,” Jackie says.

“I can’t wait to tell Grandma and Grandpa,” I say, thinking the shock value of this is sure to worry them into begging Dad to bring us home.

Dad nods, “Your Mom would not be happy about this, and when you tell Grandma and Grandpa, explain it very, very slowly. Just tell them the truth, the motel had no rooms and it was the only place left in town.”

I laugh nervously, “This is so awesome.”

“Good night, Dad, love you.”

“Good Night, Tina, Jackie, love you.”

“Love you, Dad, Christina,” Jackie says.

“Good night, Neewa.”

Of course, Neewa is under the opposite bunk, watching everything. Then she disappears out of the cell door for a while. I let her go explore, hoping that after she investigates everything, she will settle down.

Later she comes back with a police escort. The Sheriff just couldn't get enough of her. He tells us she has a good appetite. I guess he shared his lunch with her. Probably gave her most of it, as well as any leftover in the refrigerator from lunches interrupted.

I wake up at about three in the morning. The Deputy Sheriff is bringing in a man and everyone is talking and hollering.

Someone tells the man, "You have to stay here and sleep it off."

"I'm not staying in this damn place," the man yells back.

"Oh yes you are," the Deputy laughs. "You are not getting behind the wheel of that truck until tomorrow. Now quit complaining and get some sleep before you wake up the whole jail."

After the cell door closes, I hear the lock turn, "click" and the keys "clink." It's quiet again as the new guy mumbles for a little while longer and then falls asleep.

Dad and Jackie sleep right through the whole thing, they don't even stir or turn over. Neewa woke up and looked at me. If I had gotten up to go somewhere, she would have gotten up too.

I say to her, "It's okay, Neewa, go back to sleep."

She watches me until I close my eyes. I peek at her through my squinted eyes and she closes her eyes and falls back to sleep.

Morning sun barges through the barred window into the cell. We are up and packing, having gotten up as the day shift Sheriff came in and the night shift Sheriff is packing up. Sheriff Sam is going home.

Sheriff Sam walks through the jail with the day Sheriff and points at the man they brought in late last night. "Let him go when he gets up."

Sam and the day Sheriff turn and look toward us. "Hope you slept well?"

I answer, "Everything was fine, thank you for having us. I never slept in a jail before, it was great fun."

Dad nods, "Thank you. Is there a place close by for breakfast?"

"Marge's Corner is just outside to the left," he replies with a smile.

We gather our stuff, make the beds, and walk out the front door. It feels just as weird walking out of jail as it did walking in.

Two more inches of fresh snow have fallen since we arrived and the plows have already pushed it into piles.

As I walk to our car, I can see it isn't snowbound. I throw my stuff in and walk Neewa around the block.

Dad starts the car and leaves it idling so it will warm up for Neewa. With the sun out, she will be as warm as toast in the van.

We walk over to Marge's Corner for breakfast. Of course, I leave a window cracked open, and some food and water for Neewa. Later, the car will be warm for her while we are at the game.

Chapter 31 - Basketball

After breakfast I hurry to let Neewa out of the van so she can go for a run. Dad shuts off the engine. It'll be nice and warm for her while she waits for us.

"I promise I'll be back in a little while," I tell her, as I get ready. "I swear, Neewa, I will come back after the game." She doesn't seem to mind and lays down for a two-hour nap.

All the players meet at the school gym for the big game. This game is between the girls' team from our Reserve and the girls' team here. The coaches and the team members are all Native Americans except for us. In fact, everyone in the gym is Native American but us.

I'm sitting in the first row of the bleachers, which is the team's bench. I have the best view of the game. All around me are the players. Some of them are suited up and ready to play and others are not. Our girls know everyone on the home team and are talking with the fans, many of which are friends and relatives. Some of them know each other from having gone to residential high school together. And many come from the far corners of this Reserve. Some have traveled as much as thirty miles just to get here.

This Reserve is very big, about twenty miles wide and fifty miles long. It is located on the borderline of two states, and has over a thousand residents. The main industries here are tourism, gambling, and ranching. Near the Reserve is a big lake for fishing and lots of forests to hunt game in. And the casinos are right in the middle of town.

I'm having fun people watching. Native Americans don't look anything like the people back east. Some of them are full-blooded and others have only one-eighth or one-sixteenth Indian blood, but they are all Native Americans nonetheless.

As I look around the gym I see many different styles of dress. Some dress in Western clothes and a few are in business suits. Many of the men and women have cowboy boots and hats with beaded headbands. And others have moccasins, deerskin pants, and ponchos. Some of the men have long straight hair and others have short hair like Sheriff Sam. Many wear silver, turquoise, and coral necklaces, bracelets, and rings made on the reserve by us.

The game has started and everyone in the bleachers is cheering. This is a fun game, competitive but fun. The girls around us are having a good time cheering and hollering for their team.

One yells, "Shoot it!"

Another girl screams, "Defense! Defense!"

One of the girls sitting with us turns to my Dad with a big bag of Redman Chewing Tobacco in her hand. She holds out a pinch of the tobacco in her fingers and looks right at Dad.

"You want a chew?" She says flashing her big blue eyes.

Dad hesitates, he isn't even sure if she is talking to him.

Another girl sitting next to Dad elbows him hard in the side and motions with her head toward the girl with the chew. Now Dad knows she is talking to him all right.

He stutters, "Ah, no, no thanks, I don't."

Dad doesn't even know how to chew tobacco. He'd probably choke if he tried it. They will laugh at him if he does.

The girl who spoke to my Dad and all her girlfriends are giggling and looking at him. Again, she looks him in the eye.

She smiles and says, "I'm Linda."

Dad says, "Hi, I'm John."

She says smiling, "I know who you are."

Turning back toward the game and her friends she giggles and puts a tiny pinch of chew in her cheek.

Linda is a stunning looking woman who isn't more than twenty-seven or twenty-eight years old. Her long silky straight black hair falls softly around her shoulders. Her piercing sky blue eyes are set perfectly in her high cheekbones and petite nose surrounded by soft peach skin.

She has a perpetual smile, gleaming white teeth, and rose-colored lips.

She wears leather boots embossed with intricate designs, tight jeans, and a Western shirt. On her head is a cowboy hat with a beaded headband. Wow, she is a knockout with a slightly mischievous look in her eyes like a Frank Rinehart photograph.

Dad can't stop looking at her, and she is definitely flirting with him.

I find out from one of the other girls that Linda is a college student in Denver and studying to be a doctor.

Then I heard another girl mention the party last night. It comes up a few times in conversations taking place around me in the bleachers. I hear a comment or two and a few details slip out of their lips.

I listened to the girls recount who was with who, and doing what.

One of the girls who was only one year older than me asked, “What did I do wrong? We were all just having fun? I did not do anything wrong.”

She was unsure of herself and her voice trailed off at the end. It was not my place to answer her or even change my expression.

One of the older girls heard her talking to me.

The older girl frowned and angrily said, “Oh yeah, Edwin is in big trouble when he gets back. Heather is going to put a spell on him and turn him into a frog. Then she will become an eagle and fly down and eat him for dinner. That will be the end of Edwin.”

Another girl sympathetically says, “Edwin has changed. He used to be a nice guy and then all of a sudden he’s different. I don’t see what she sees in him anyway, besides he’s married to my cousin.”

Diane is here too and she adds, “He is evil, someone will have to put him down.”

The basketball game is coming to an end. The teams are tied and a shot is about to be taken. The entire gym is silent. Then a roar comes from the crowd as the ball hits net only, “whoosh.”

“Yeah! Yahoo!” The crowd roars.

The final timer sounds “Buzz Buzz,” and everyone is cheering. The home team has won.

We all move from the bleachers onto the gym floor. Walking out to the teams, I congratulate several of our players for their effort.

Linda and her friends are also out on the gym floor, talking, and fooling around with friends and teammates. Plans for the evening are being made around us and we decide to hang around a little while longer.

All the coaches are talking with each other. The coaches know Dad from work where they have their own company team. They compete against other corporations and organizations. They call my Dad coach because he's the oldest one on the team. It took a while for them to get accustomed to him, but now they are used to his ways and he's invited wherever they go.

Linda, the gorgeous maiden in the bleachers, walks up to us. "You guys coming to the Pow Wow later?"

Dad asks, "We would like to go? Where is it?"

She replies smiling at Dad, "Come to the General Store at three. I will take you guys."

Linda walks back to her friends. She waves at Dad as she and her friends walk out of the gym.

We are walking out behind them when I ask, "Dad, what is a Pow Wow?"

Dad has a dumb look on his face. "I have no idea, but I heard something about one once. I thought it was only for Indians. I didn't know diaboos could go?"

Jackie impatient asks. "Dad, what is a diaboo?"

Dad replies, "The word 'diaboo' is the Indian word for non-Indian."

The Chippewa word is waubewy'on.

I take off running to the van. Neewa sees me and jumps around inside, ready to get out.

“Neewa, good girl. Happy to see me?” I open the door.

She leaps out of the van and jumps all over me. I quickly take her for a run.

“Fetch,” I yell as I throw a stick into the snow.

“I hope she doesn’t bring back a bone again,” Jackie says laughing.

I answer, “yeah, that was too scary. I thought I was going to faint when she brought that bone back and dropped it on your feet, ha ha.”

Playing fetch with Neewa is good for her. She needs the exercise to keep her muscles and bones strong.

She can’t seem to find the stick? So I pick up another and throw it shouting, “Get it Neewa, go get it girl.”

She powers through the fresh powder to where the stick disappeared and plunges her nose down into a foot of snow. She somehow comes up with the stick. Then with her nose topped with a pile of the white stuff, she brings it back to me and actually drops it right on my sneaker.

“Ouch!” I yell.

She looks up at me with concern.

“I’m just kidding around Neewa.”

I take the stick off my sneaker and run with it and Neewa chases me down the street. We play for a while and then head back to the van.

“Neewa, later we are going to a Pow Wow and you are not allowed. You can stay in the van again. We are going to meet my new friend Linda. She’s taking us to the Pow Wow. I’ll only be another hour or so and then we are going home.” I scratch her behind the ear and rub her strong rib cage telling her, “good girl, good girl.”

Chapter 32 - Pow Wow

We are having sandwiches and sodas at the drug store after having shopped around at some of the local stores.

“Hurry, Jackie, finish your sandwich,” I say.

Just then Linda drives up. It’s three o’clock; she’s right on time. Out of the car she whirls dressed in a ceremonial costume.

Walking toward us she says, “Hey you guys. How’s it going? Are you ready to go?”

She looks beautiful, like an Indian princess. Dad looks at her all goo-goo eyed again, but says nothing.

“The Pow Wow is about to begin. It’s one of our oldest traditions,” Linda says as we compliment her.

“Your hair is gorgeous.”

“Linda,” Jackie gasps, “I want to borrow that dress. Is it real deerskin? And those beaded knee-high moccasins, oh my God, I want them.”

We gobble up the remaining bits and pay at the counter.

“Let’s go,” Linda says as we leave the store and get into her car.

“Pow Wows date back hundreds of years to my great ancestors. Many Indian Nations would come together to celebrate a birth, the harvest, or a victory on the battlefield.

“We fought with other Indian Nations for hundreds of years. They would raid our village and we would retaliate and raid their village. Then it was the settlers and then the U.S. Cavalry.”

Linda explains, “The Pow Wow is going to be in the Round Hall building, a special building.

“At the Pow Wow we will dance the Circle Dance in celebration of spring. I dress in traditional costume for the Shawl Dance. It is a dance that shows off a princess’s dancing skills.”

I interrupt, “Your outfit is so beautiful.”

“There will be other dances too, all of them have important to us.

“After the Pow Wow the Tribal Chairman, Tribal Council, and members meet in the business hall next to the Round Hall. Financial and cultural reports about the businesses and the reserve will be given.

“Oh, we’re here. I’ll drop you guys off at the door. Go in and get a seat before it gets too crowded.

“I’ll come and say hello after the Pow Wow is over. John, I will see you after the Pow Wow, right?”

Dad manages to get out a “yes”.

Jackie and I just look at each other and mumble, “Oh brother.”

I tell Dad, “You are not cool, you think you are, but you are not. Stop trying to act cool.”

We walk into the Round Hall building, a huge rotunda the shape of two half clam shells put together into a single round dome, but bigger.

Inside, the frame is made of mammoth tree timbers that go from the ceiling down to the dirt floor. A rock wall that looks like a natural stadium bleacher fills one side.

A couple of rows of wooden benches made of split trees line the rest of the outside walls. The sturdy benches have wooden legs made of small limbs cut from the forest a hundred years ago. The ends of the benches are decorated with intricately carved designs of animal heads and mystical-looking figures.

We end up with seats near the center of the hall but pretty far back. People are filing in, sitting everywhere and filling the place. I see many of the same people that were at the basketball game. One or two of them walk by us and recognize me from the game. They nod and I smile back.

“This place is full of Indians,” I whisper to Dad. “We are the only diaboos in the place.”

Dad replies, “Few Whites ever get to go to an all Indian Pow Wow on a reserve. We are surrounded by miles and miles of Indian land.”

Suddenly the Pow Wow begins with a single drumbeat echoing through the hall. It is a very slow, firm beat, very serene. Increasing in volume little by little, the drumbeat progresses to a more powerful, pulsating beat that reverberates throughout the building. Slowly more drums join in and the volume increases. Swiftly the musicians are in full swing, several more drums are added and begin different parallel rhythms.

I locate the musicians; their faces and traditional dress come slowly into focus.

I feel the vibrations hitting me, sound waves pounding my eardrums.

It sounds like a war rhythm. Maybe it's the same one Geronimo danced to the night before his band of Apache warriors went into battle. At a signal from the lead drummer, the drums slow way down to a whisper.

Indians dressed in regular street clothing and others in ceremonial garb cross the threshold from the seats onto the large dirt floor in the center of the hall. They begin to form a big circle, holding hands at first and then letting go after the circle is complete. Waiting patiently for the drums to get louder and to be joined by singers, the dancers pulse to the softly beating drums.

The Pow Wow has begun with the Circle Dance. Now the drums get louder and the singing begins as pounding feet of the dancers join in. The three together are a chorus like alto, soprano, and bass, all keeping rhythm. The floor begins to move as one. A circle made of Indians in step with one another, moves to the left two-stepping in unison, as if they are one. They circle in harmony looking to each other. Methodically revolving around the room a couple of times.

Abruptly the singing stops, the dancers become still, the Circle Dance has ended.

The drums begin again with little hesitation, missing only a beat or two. A single dancer takes the center of the great hall, turning, spinning across the floor, returning to the perimeter.

“Hey Ya, Hey Ya, Hey Ya,” echoes as the room becomes alive with the singers and their sharp voices. The sounds grow louder with a higher pitch in every resounding “Hey Ya.”

“Hey Ya, Hey Ya, Hey Ya, Hey Ya, Hey Ya, Hey Ya.” The singers are in rhythm with the drummers. I listen as the refrains repeat themselves. I’ve heard something like this before, in movies or news clips depicting Native American celebrations.

Five, six, seven drums pound, repeating two perfectly timed beats. The second strike of the drum is very sharp and heavier than the first; boom Boom, boom Boom, boom Boom, boom Boom, boom Boom, boom Boom. Faster they pound, putting us all into a daydream, a spiritual-like trance. The beat of the drums are synchronized with the high-pitched melodic inflections of voices that soften and then sharpen on cue as the rhythms change.

For at least fifteen minutes the singers call and answer, back and forth from singer to drummer, drummer to singer, as the dancers provide the tempo.

Roots used for medicine and to ward off evil burn like incense throughout the hall. The Medicine Woman showed me these plants in her garden. She said they are used for healing and in ceremonies. It smells like burning charcoal with a scent of sage and desert dew. Clouds of smoke hang over us suspended in the cold air in the hall that I’ve now forgotten about. Colored layers of smoke resembling the sandstone and shale of the desert ravines and hillsides swirl and complete the hall’s spiritual harmony.

Jackie, Dad, and I stare at the dancers circling one-way around the floor as more of the Nation’s People come from their seats to join in the Circle Dance. In unison they move, fluid and smooth, they step toe to heel, toe to heel.

The men, women and children straighten and bend to the pulse of the music. Dust from the dirt floor rises a few inches at the dancers’ feet giving the illusion that they have

levitated above the floor. Flowing strands of rawhide and silk threads hang down from their garments and sway back and forth in time with the drums and singers.

Chanting reverberates through the hall accompanied by drumming, piercing yelps, and the synchronized movement of the dancers giving the scene a surreal feeling.

“Hey Ya, Hey Ya, Hey Ya, Hey Ya,” again saturates the air.

Suddenly everything stops. Silence! Suspended in motion are the dancers, musicians, and singers. No one moves or speaks. Frozen in whatever position or location they are when the silence began. They are unmoving, as if in a still life photograph taken at this very instant. Not a muscle flinch nor the glance of an eye changes.

Abruptly the stillness breaks and the suspended animation ends. All who are frozen step quickly to the side, forward, or back to regain their balance before falling down in the circle. Each dancer smiles as he or she regains their steadiness, happy to have “caught” themselves. The “catching” of oneself is an experience practiced throughout Native American folklore. Something to do with holding your own spirit, it’s a secret, like everything here.

Everyone is laughing and greeting each other. Smiles, eye contact, and nods are exchanged amongst the dancers around the circle and with the musicians. They are one great people.

The drummers and singers are smiling and laughing. Each of us sitting in the room rises to our feet, smiling and nodding too. It’s contagious, traveling through the Round Hall like a “wave” at a sports event. Next a rapturous applause breaks out with high-pitched calls and cries echoing for seconds that seem like minutes.

“The Deer Dancer is next,” someone behind us whispers to Jackie.

Some kids sitting by her are playing with her coat and scarf. Jackie is chatting with them as they tell her about their uncle, a Chief, who will be dancing next.

Again, the circle takes shape with a mixture of new dancers and some of the dancers already on the floor.

“Shush, Shush!” One to another they whisper, “Shush.”

The great hall becomes silent. Softly the drums begin their familiar beat, boom Boom, one two, one two, boom Boom, boom Boom.

Surprising us, the Chief leaps into the circle. A gasp emanates from the crowd. The Chief has a deer antler headdress called a “Gast o hweh.”

The deer antlers of the Deer Dancer’s headdress are real. They are connected to the headdress by a small piece of deer skull and covered with buckskin. It’s small like a cap with two large antlers standing straight up like on a deer. One large eagle feather is placed in the middle, signifying there is harmony and unity in The Nation.

Linda was telling me at lunch that when the Chief dances with the Deer Dance headdress on, he’s transformed into the “Spirit Deer,” a mythological deer.

The Chief continues dancing alone in the circle as the outer circle and everyone in their seats watches for the transformation. Musicians are chanting, drums are beating.

One by one mythological animals enter the hall, pass through the circle and form a smaller inner ring. “Bear” steps forward into the inner ring and joins the Chief. Next are the spirits of “Stork,” and then “Beaver”. Stork is one of Spirit Deer’s closest allies, always watching out for him from the sky. Beaver too is his friend; he makes the meadows, ponds, and lakes for Deer and the others.

The drums are pounding in the background and chanting has grown even more powerful. All of a sudden, a great crescendo of drumming and chanting erupts as the Chief leaps high into the air and lands on his knees. Surrounded in the inner ring by his allies, the spirits that have joined him. He looks up into the heavens as everything stops. The Chief is transformed into the Spirit Deer. The mythological animals circle around the now transformed Spirit Deer. The Deer Dance is over.

The inner and outer circles open up providing an exit of enlightenment for the Spirit Deer who departs on a voyage, a journey to protect the worthy from evil.

Silence follows and then everyone in the circle begins talking while returning to his or her seats.

Heather, the Medicine Woman, will be next. I didn't even know she was at the Pow Wow. I learned after the basketball game that she would be performing the Bean Dance.

She steps onto the dirt floor wearing a large headdress that looks like a "Katsina" Doll. The Katsina, also known as "Katsinam," is sometimes called a Kachina Doll. They are representations of supernatural godlike spirits, Spirit Beings that live among the Indian people.

Heather is wearing the Katsina spirit headdress of Wuyak-Kuita. This spirit protects you from evil trespassers. Around her shoulders is a ceremonial robe called a Button Blanket. The blanket is dark wool and decorated with beads and paintings of animals. It has rows of seashells sewn onto it. One of the figures is a deer, another an eagle, and the third design is a bear.

A small self-contained fire is burning red-hot flames on the floor. Heather enters to some drumming. Very low chanting can be heard in the background. Heather walks around the flame singing and then reaches into her bandolier bag, which hangs neatly around her neck and shoulder. She throws a handful of powder into the flame. Red smoke rises straight up toward the ceiling and hangs in the air over her head. Another fistful of powder is tossed in the fire. This time yellow smoke ascends, like a signal, to the ceiling joining the red smoke hanging over us. Minutes pass as Heather completes the rest of the ceremony. Several more clouds of smoke rise up above the bleachers as she dances around the flames.

The drums and chanting grow louder, reaching a deafening volume. All at once Heather throws two more handfuls of powder into the flame and dark clouds of black smoke engulf her. The chanting and the drumming suddenly stops.

As the smoke clears everyone gasps, “Oh, ah.”

Some people and many children get out of their seats and look, straining to see.

“Oh, ah,” again comes from the throngs of viewers followed by “shush, shush!”

Heather is gone, disappearing into thin air. The Bean Dance is over.

Jackie and I look at each other as I whisper, “Did you see that?”

Dad whispers, “That was amazing, she just vanished.”

Jackie says in a soft voice, “That was no trick.”

My ghost hunting face becomes twisted as I try to form the words to describe my loss of fame and fortune for not having brought my camera to film the Pow Wow.

I stammer, “Dad, you didn’t bring any equipment at all?”

My discovery of real spirits will go undocumented again.

Jackie questions, “Nothing, Dad? We have nothing?”

“Brought nothing of what?” He asks innocently. “Oh that.”

Finally coming out of Heather’s trance he whispers, “No, we have none of our ghost hunting equipment. Sorry, couldn’t take the chance that anything from work might be misplaced or broken. Or worse, someone might find out about our hobby. Besides we were supposed to be having fun at a basketball game. How was I supposed to know we’d be going to a Pow Wow?”

Disgusted I throw up my hands, “Nothing, we brought nothing!”

Linda’s Shawl Dance is next. It’s performed to celebrate an occasion, entertain, or teach. This dance is done in full traditional costume and performed by a special maiden selected by the Pow Wow Committee.

Linda appears on the dirt floor dressed as we had seen her earlier in her costume. She wears a deerskin dress with beaded mythological designs sewn into the shoulders complimented by beaded knee-high moccasins. Around her shapely waist is a Concha belt made of silver seashells inlaid with turquoise and coral. The blue turquoise represents the sky and the red coral symbolizes fire. She wears a headband, not a headdress, with beaded designs and three eagle feathers hanging down. Her cape has eagle feathers along the entire hemline stretching from her left hand and across her back to her right hand, like wings.

Musicians and singers begin in unison as she starts turning and spinning, portraying the legend for all of us to see. She is spectacular, her footwork precise and deliberate. It is a beautifully choreographed five-minute celebration of the Shawl Dance.

Almost as quickly as it began, it is over. The music stops and Linda stands still. A roar comes from all the people in the hall. They are stomping their feet and yelling high-pitched cries, whoops, yips, and bloodcurdling calls. They continue for almost a minute until she leaves the dirt floor. Even after she left bedlam continues, and when she returns and waves to the crowd mayhem gives way to applause that thunders through the room. The place is shaking as she exits for the last time.

The musicians get up and begin to gather their instruments and belongings. They receive a standing ovation with whoops and calls acknowledging their contribution. Finally calm prevails.

People in the hall are filling out through the doors. Everyone is leaving the hall. We gather up our things and head for the exit. Around us everyone is talking about how good the Deer Dancer, Heather, Linda and the musicians were.

I'm thinking about the video I could have made of the Pow Wow. I could've had a complete documentary of a real Pow Wow and a Medicine Woman vanishing. As I ponder my lost fame and fortune I turn my thoughts to walking Neewa and the three-hour ride home.

Linda comes running over to us. I am so excited to see her. Jackie and I run to her and give her a big group hug. Energized from her performance she pulls Dad into our group embrace.

Linda gets eye-to-eye with Dad, so close I thought their lips touched. "I will be coming home next week."

Dad replies spellbound by the closeness of her body to his, "Oh you must come to visit us."

Linda answers, "I will come, it'll be great to see you guys."

After a last embrace she runs off with her friends giggling, "See you next week."

Dad motions writing on a pad, "We have to give you our number."

"I have it," she laughs as she is swallowed up in an ocean of long black hair, headbands, and cowboy hats.

Dad mutters to himself as we leave the great hall, "How did she get our number?"

Jackie and I look at each other, smiling.

I whisper to Jackie, "If Dad doesn't know that Linda is Chester's sister by now, I'm not telling him."

Jackie replies, "He is so dumb, duh."

We arrive back at the van after the ten-block walk in the freezing cold. We're packed and ready for the long ride home. Neewa is so glad to see me, she jumps all over as we gallop down the street for her last run before we hit the road.

"I missed you Neewa, good girl, good girl, run girl run. We are going home."

We arrive home in the middle of the night. The house and the neighborhood are dark.

After getting washed up, I'm in bed, ready to sleep.

"Dad, why does Jackie have to take a bath now?" I shout from my room. "Never mind." I'm so tired I don't even care.

She can use up all the hot water tonight. I'll have plenty for my morning shower.

Chapter 33 - Linda for Dinner

Linda calls us to say she is coming to town to visit her family and friends. She has this week off from school.

Dad is getting all kinds of special stuff out of boxes that I haven't seen in years. Out comes Grandma's set of Earthenware dishes. We haven't seen those dishes in two years. He also gets out the candlestick holders and is buying new candles. I thought we only use them during power blackouts? And he's putting placemats on the dinner table too. He's making a real fuss about Linda's visit.

It's early morning and Dad asks, "Hey you guys, I spoke to Linda and she asked if she can stay over here at our house a few nights? She said the spirits at her Mom's house are driving her crazy. So what do you think? Can she stay in one of your rooms? I'll sleep on the couch and whoever gives up their room can stay in my room."

"I got a better idea," I tell him, "how about you stay on the couch and Linda stays in your room. Jackie and I keep our rooms? Duh!"

Dad replies, "Ok, that sounds good to me, I'll run it by Linda."

"Did she say, 'The spirits in her house are driving her crazy?'" I laugh quietly.

"How about introducing us to those spirits? Ha-ha."

Dad answers, "Yeah Christina, we'll just walk in there and meet them."

"Well you have a better idea?"

"I will never get into that house again!" Jackie adds.

Unannounced Linda shows up at the door, earlier than anticipated. Dad is helping her bring in her stuff and puts it in his room.

Linda talks a lot about medical school, how much work it requires and all the time she devotes to it. She says she's been looking forward to time off and being able to think about something other than school.

Dad told us she would be in and out of the house since she has a lot of people to see and things to do. He said one night she might be here for dinner and the next morning, gone. She will probably sleep over a friend's house one or two nights, so we might not see her for a couple days. "Who knows?" He concludes at the end of his speech.

I show Linda around a little. She is getting a kick out of our lab in the living room. I tried to clean it up, but it's obvious something is going on there.

Inquisitively she picks up the EMF meter and looks at it, "What do you guys do with all this stuff anyway?"

Dad answers, "A lot of that equipment is from work. I bring it home to test it. We bring it camping with us and do field tests too."

"I think there's something else behind all this?" She picks up another meter and then checks out the thermal infrared camera.

Dad replies, "Well you'll have to come camping with us sometime and you can see what we do with it."

Linda brings most of her stuff into Dad's room, and hugs each of us before she says she will be back later. She drives off in her cute sports car.

The week is going by fast. We are sitting down to our last supper with Linda before she goes back to school in the morning. Linda wants to hear more stories about

Neewa and our adventures out west. She says I'm a great storyteller. Again I tell her how I got her at the pound and everything. I tell her about the Tribal Historian Meeting and when the little girl asked if I knew Neewa has a spirit?

Linda is all ears and laughs at the jokes I sprinkle in. She wants to hear all about Jackie and I and all about New Jersey and why I want to go back.

Jackie happily adds, "Me too, I miss all my friends and especially Grandma and Grandpa."

Linda tells us she is going to do her residency in New York City in eighteen months.

Looking at Dad with that twinkle in her blue eyes she inquires, "Are you guys going to be living close to New York City?"

Dad explains, "We're going to be pretty close to New York City. It's still quite a trip to travel back and forth every day. A lot depends on the time of day you travel and the traffic. It could take two hours each way.

Dad says, "We'll be going back East before you start your internship. You can come and stay with us."

Linda replies, "They have apartments for us at the university hospital, but I want to visit you guys, and you can show me around the city?"

Dad replies, "Yes of course, we will and you must come stay with us, it's settled."

It's been cool having Linda visit. She and Dad got along really well. Linda says we'll be getting together again soon. I'm going to miss her, though I know she has to go back to school. I hope she visits us. Maybe she will stay with us when we get back East? That would be so cool, as long as she doesn't mind my ghost hunting.

Chapter 34 - Camping

Spring is so close I can smell it in the air. I'm packing Neewa's bowls and chain for our camping trip to Ruby Lake Reserve, a National Wildlife Refuge. I'll be picking pine nuts, hiking, and fishing. Chester and his girlfriend Marlene have decided to come too.

We are bringing sleeping bags, tents, and all our stuff.

I ask, "Dad can we bring the ghost hunting stuff?"

Concerned about our safety and his job, "I'm afraid the whole Reserve will know if we do? It's not a good idea."

"Come on, Dad," Jackie breaks in, "we have to go ghost hunting out there."

Dad replies, "Can't do it, the guys at work are already suspicious about me taking equipment home on the weekends. And Chester will be there. Whatever we do will get back to everyone, including Heather and Linda.

"You know how the Indian Grape Vine works. Look what happened to Coach Edwin when he got back from the basketball game. Everyone knew what he did. I saw him at a softball game a week later. He looked like someone ran him over with a truck. You should have seen the look in his eyes. The whole colony shamed him. He has a long road ahead of him if he's going to redeem himself. I heard Heather almost got rid of him. No, we can't risk it."

Starting off early Saturday morning is Dad's idea. We all pile into our van and go get Chester and Marlene. Dad wants to get there with plenty of time to pick pine nuts. Or is it to go fishing?

Chester is six feet tall and he can barely get in or out of our front seat. Dad is five feet eleven inches and has to put his seat all the way back to fit. In the back seats are Marlene, Jackie, Neewa and I. It's a little tight but we fit.

Neewa is in the third seat with me and all our gear is behind us. She's able to jump around everywhere as usual, but lies down and rests next to me.

Chester and Dad love to fish the marshes. They talk about it all the time. It's Dad's all-time favorite fishing spot.

Chester displays a rare bit of enthusiasm, "There is plenty of pinyon pine trees in the mountains surrounding the marshes. The weather's good and it's time to harvest the pine nuts. We'll get bags of them."

Chester's girlfriend is Chinese American with long straight black hair below her shoulders. Marlene is very close to her family in California. She talks about them all the time and misses them terribly. Sometimes she just breaks down crying because she is so homesick. When Marlene and Chester are together they look like brother and sister. They have the same color skin, hair length, and both wear blue jean pants and jackets. I don't think they plan it that way?

I'm telling Chester and Marlene about Neewa and the pumpkin pies that disappeared, they laugh and laugh.

"We still can't figure out how she got up on the counter?" I say, interested to hear Chester's ideas.

Chester says, “Maybe she flew up onto the counter like a ghost.”

We all laugh and laugh as we travel down the road.

I have pine nuts dancing in my head as I fall asleep on a rolled up sweatshirt pushed up against the window. I think the real reason we are going to the marshes is because it has eight-pound brown trout all through its canals and ponds. People go there to camp, bird-watch, hunt, and fish.

The Native Americans that live around here call it the Ruby Marshes. That is what they called it before anyone else even knew about it. It was designated a federal park in 1938 by President Franklin D. Roosevelt.

But before that Indians migrated through the area for hundreds of years, hunting and gathering food for survival. They moved south to north with the good weather, following the seasons. Back then they were called hunter-gatherers.

The drive to the marshes will take four hours and we will be traveling through desolate, uninhabited barren desert.

You wouldn't know it if you didn't live here, but the desert is teeming with life. At first glance it looks like there isn't anything going on out here. But in the high mountain desert, life is everywhere, if you know where to look. There are prairie dogs, mule deer, and antelope to name a few. So far this trip I saw prairie dogs, rabbits, and a rare roadrunner. And there are insects, lots of bugs, mosquitoes, and beetles.

Beautiful birds are hidden everywhere in the desert. Hummingbirds drink the pollen from the desert flowers, while hawks circle above looking for prey. Eagles also patrol the scrub forests and the desert looking for dinner or a snack. And there are plenty of buzzards waiting to clean up whatever dead animals they can smell.

Predators like the coyote, fox and even wolves roam the desert. They look for deer, prairie dogs, and even little moles to eat. Animals in the food chain finish every morsel, they devour every last bit of food they find. Any carcass left out here is picked clean, right down to the bones. Even the flies and maggots make sure nothing goes to waste. And there is no time to waste in the desert. If you want to survive you have to be on the look out for your next meal all the time. It's first come, first served out here.

Many species of desert flowers grow here. There are Yucca, Buckwheat, Ruby Mountain Primrose, Monte Neva Paintbrush, Milk Vetch and Scorpion Flowers. After a rainstorm, the desert comes alive. Flowers bloom, new plant shoots color the rolling hills, and paint the desert landscape with all the beautiful colors of the rainbow.

Dad complains, "The prairie dogs run across the road just as I get close. Are they playing chicken with our van?"

"Squish, Splat. Oh no, I hit that one!" Dad screeches.

He looks in the rearview mirror. We all turn to survey the remains of the poor little prairie dog.

Chester says, "John, I'm going to tell you how to avoid the suicidal prairie dogs."

Everyone laughs.

Dad talks to the deceased prairie dog, "Just as I pass you, you run out into the road. You're crazy. You should have stayed on the side of the road! You nutty prairie dog."

Chester says, “You’ll never hit one if you don’t slow down or swerve to try to avoid them. That’s when you run one over. If you stay straight and maintain your speed, you won’t hit it. They run under the car and between the wheels. No one knows why?”

Chester warns laughing, “If you slow down, speed up, or swerve? Squish, splat, more food for the buzzards.”

We laugh.

From then on Dad doesn’t change direction or slow down when he sees a prairie dog run in front of the van. And amazingly, he doesn’t hit another prairie dog.

About a half hour away from Ruby Lake we see a sign for the park and turn onto the dirt road entrance. A marker says, “Ruby Lake Campground twenty miles.”

It seems like we are driving forever through the scrub forest and sagebrush on this endless dirt road. Dust and pebbles kick up into the air behind our van as we barrel down the road.

Finally we arrive in the park. I didn’t see one car the entire way here. We turn into the camping area that appears to be empty.

Dad declares, “Pick out a campsite or two if you want. We can take any of these.”

He pulls into the driveway of site number nine. I let Neewa jump out my door. She disappears into the brush. We all get out to stretch and look around. The afternoon air is crisp and clean and I can see the marshes stretching across the valley in front of me.

On a ridge looking out over the park Jackie yells, “Look at this, you can see everything from here, this is the campsite I want.”

“There’s almost nobody here, just a few motor homes over in the trailer camping area, but over here in the tent section, there are no campers at all.”

In the tent section you pay for the night by putting money in an envelope in a wooden box at the end of the driveway. It's self-service camping. The park rangers come around in the afternoon and pick up the envelopes in the morning.

We are surrounded by natural beauty and tranquility as far as I can see. I stare into the miles of marsh, with reeds and grasses blowing in the breezes that whip across the water leaving tiny wave trails. Mountains surround us glowing in crimson earth tones from the sun's rays beating down on the red clay. The marsh is an enormous meadow painted in soft pastel colors, purple, blue, yellow, and light green at the foot of these mountains.

Underneath the umbrella of flora and fauna are vast amounts of water. So thick only specks of green and blue are visible from our vantage point up on the ridge at tent site number nine.

Birds of all types pop up and then disappear as they skip from reed to cattail, flying to and from their nests. Like dancers they glide and leap about, taking different poses on the flowers and tall stems. Some just hover above the marsh looking for their favorite foods, waiting to dive, to make a grab. Others feed on a wide variety of seeds and bugs and return to their young, hidden and safe under the pallet of color.

Ducks and geese are departing while others commence their approach for a landing, "Splash, quack! Splash, honk honk!"

Like the runways of a modern airport, the many landing strips are all in use at the same time. Ducks, snow geese, and swan land and take off while a solitary great blue heron passes by above us. Gliding effortlessly he turns and chooses a hunting ground.

"Neewa, Neewa, Neewa!" I call her so she doesn't stray too far.

Galloping toward me from a nearby stream that feeds the marsh, she stops and shakes the water from her coat into the air like a sprinkler onto my legs and feet.

“You stay close Neewa, I don’t want you going too far,” I order sternly.

We unpack our tent and gear for the evening. I finally pick a spot to put up my tent and prepare for the night. It is still warm right now, but I wonder about the cold night ahead. We have two tents for the three of us. Jackie and I get the bigger one with the screen door and rain cover, and Dad gets the little one.

Neewa follows Chester as he walks over to me, “It will be cold tonight. Bring some of these large round rocks into your tent and put them in your sleeping bag. Here, take this one. The rocks are warm from sitting in the sun all day and they will give off heat during the night.”

Chester and Marlene want to sleep out under the stars in just their sleeping bags. I see Chester putting a lot of rocks in the two bags. Jackie and I gather rocks and put them in our bags.

The sandwiches we brought from home are in the cooler. They are looking mighty good right now. I’m ready to eat, but we are all walking to one of the ponds first.

Jackie, Chester, Dad, and I bring along our fishing poles as we follow the dirt trail through the tall grass down to the marsh.

As we approach the water all different birds come into view. Ducks are paired off and swim about. They have vibrant iridescent colors that shimmer in the reflected light off the water. Shiny black wings, fluorescent red heads, and glowing green and beige feathers. Every size and color of bird imaginable, bright orange, golden brown, and blue feathers are being dried and preened in every direction.

You can actually drive your motor home out on these access roads to the ponds. There are only two other families out here right now. One camper is parked on a canal with a solitary fisherman on the bank nearby. As we approach, he becomes excited and runs up to us with wild enthusiasm in his eyes.

Unable to contain himself he brags, "I already caught two five-pound brown trout."

Turning back to his rod and reel, he reenters the trance from which he had taken a momentary break. Totally under the spell of the challenge of catching the creatures that lie beneath the water, his singular transfixed gaze returns to the shimmering hypnotic water.

There is a second motor home further out on the bank as each of us begins to separate, picking a place to fish.

I love fishing, and this is the most exciting place there is. We are a hundred miles from any town, with thousands of protected acres of land around us.

Dad gets a hit, but can't set the hook.

"Damn, I missed it!" He grimaces.

The sun has already dropped below the mountain tops that surround the marshes. The sky darkens as we head for camp. Night comes as we reach the campsite.

I am worn-out from the long day, beat, and ready to finish my half-eaten sandwich, hang out by the campfire a little, and go to sleep.

Neewa's bowls of food and water are empty. I refill them and she lies down by my tent watching me.

Gradually the moon, once concealed behind the mountains, begins to light the panorama around us.

Bats begin to fly their night missions, scooping up their meal of choice. There are plenty of delicious mosquitoes, flies, and other insects to go around. Some bats eat as much as a thousand mosquitoes in one night. There are dozens of different types of bats out here, Silver-Haired, Allen's Big-Eared, Spotted, Western Red, Hoary, and Western Yellow to name a few.

Tonight the sky is clear and full of billions of stars. They look like candles burning, flickering in the night. I can see the Milky Way stretching from horizon to horizon. The planets are easy to pick out. They shine like spotlights. And spring and summer constellations extend across the sky like a bracelet around the heavens.

The stars are brighter because we are in the middle of nowhere. There are no towns, homes, or anything around for miles.

Chester, Jackie, Neewa, and I sit by the fire. Chester begins to tell a tale his Grandfather told him when he was a boy.

He looks at us and begins, "The name of the story is, 'Coyote and the Monster.' A long, long time ago, people did not yet inhabit the earth. A monster walked upon the land, eating all the animals except Coyote. The coyote was angry that his friends were gone. He climbed the tallest mountain and tied himself to the top. Coyote called upon the monster, challenging it to try to eat him. The monster sucked in all the air, hoping to pull in Coyote with his powerful breath. But the ropes holding Coyote were too strong. The monster tried many other ways to get Coyote off the mountain, but it was no use. Realizing that Coyote was sly and clever, the monster thought of a new plan. It would

befriend Coyote and invite him to stay at his home. Before the visit began, Coyote said that he wanted to visit his friends and asked if he could enter the monster's stomach to see them. The monster allowed this. Once inside the monster, Coyote cut out its heart and set fire to its insides. His friends were freed.

“Then Coyote decided to make a new animal. He flung pieces of the monster in the four directions. Wherever the pieces landed, a new Nation of Indians emerged. He ran out of body parts before he could create a new human animal on the site where the monster had lain. He used the monster's blood, which was still on his hands, to create the Nez Perce, who would be strong and good.”

Chester smiled, “That’s it.”

On that note I turn and walk to my tent. “And thanks for the bloody monster story just before I go to bed. Are you trying to creep me out?”

“Ha-ha, ha-ha,” we all laugh.

“Yeah thanks, Chester,” Jackie adds.

We get into our sleeping bags, zip.

Chapter 35 - Howling

I peer out of the screen door of the tent into the darkness of the marsh and beyond. A quarter crescent moon begins to pop up over the mountaintop, large and bright. It looks so close it feels like I can reach out and pull it from the sky. That’s when I hear it for the first time.

“Owww, Ow, owww.” The howling begins as if on cue, as the moon glistens on the waters of the marshlands. Just like in the beginning of a horror movie.

That first cry comes from the dark shadows of the mountains across the marsh, where the moonlight did not light up. That howl was not far from the shimmering reflection on the water just in front of us.

Suddenly another cry, more like a lament, comes from the north end of the marsh, “Owww, Ow, owwwww, Owww, Ow, owwwww.”

Neewa sits up and begins sniffing the air, her nose pointing straight up.

I think this could be the end. She will surely run away and go back to the wilderness. Fear spreads through my body, tightening every muscle.

“It’s as if they are asking each other questions and then answering,” I whisper to Jackie beside me.

I yell in the direction of Chester and Marlene’s sleeping bags, “What are they?”

Moments pass like minutes when Chester comes to the campfire near our tent. “They are coyotes. Don’t worry, they won’t bother us.” Chester hesitates and nods at Neewa laughing, “I wasn’t counting on having one of the coyotes here in camp, ha ha ha.”

It’s difficult for me to read Chester’s laugh. He’s not afraid, that I know. It seems like he’s always laughing at some irony in the world. Like it’s his destiny in life to look at things around him and see the humor, sadness, or joy in them. It’s as if he thinks he is here in this world temporarily, a kind of a layover.

The coyote’s conversation continues like a song, echoing in every direction, filling the valley with beautiful lyrics and me with fear.

My head is up, ears alert, and my eyes are as wide open as a full moon. I feel the adrenaline flowing in my body. I'm ready to run or fight for my life. But out here there isn't anywhere to run.

Sarcastically I grumble back at Chester, "Yeah right, I'm in a tent in the middle of nowhere, coyotes are howling all around me. Oh! 'Not to worry,' he says. 'They won't hurt you,' he says." I look at him. "Are you crazy?"

Chester adds, "They are far away, they only sound nearby. They won't come any closer. Not as long as we have this fire going."

Neewa raises her nose into the air, inhaling their scent.

"Owww, Owww Owwwwww!" Neewa let out a coyote howl the likes of which I've never heard before.

Neewa is talking with them using perfect pitch and tone. My eyes begin to blink nervously, uncontrollably, even faster than my hands are shaking from the panic spreading through my body. I will lose her. This is it, surely she will run away to be with her own kind.

I break down sobbing uncontrollably. Quickly before anyone sees, I gain control and wipe the tears from my eyes and cheeks with the sleeve of my sweatshirt wrapped around the back of my hand.

Neewa is chained to a nearby tree, stirring, and pacing. She stares into the darkness beyond the moonlight, as if she sees her cousins moving about, securing positions, surrounding us.

Shimmying over the warm rocks in my sleeping bag, I lift myself out of the tent and walk to her. I check her collar to make sure she cannot slip away. I pull her close to me to break the spell she is in, tears fall to my cheeks.

“Will she run away?” I ask Chester who is sitting by the fire, after having built it up for the long night ahead.

“No, she will not run away. Neewa will keep them away from us.” Chester warns walking away, “Don’t let her off that chain.”

After returning to my sleeping bag, I curl up with the stones, warm from the long day’s sun. The stars shine brightly around the glow of the fire. Jackie and Dad are asleep already. I toss and turn, and then settle down again, trying to sleep.

“Ah,” I sigh.

My eyes begin to close, then open, and close. Neewa howls a few more times in the background. A few more howls come from the mountains and across the marsh. But even that doesn’t keep me awake. Except for the frogs and crickets calling in the night, it is quiet again and I fall asleep.

Before I know it morning arrives and the sun, although not above the mountain peaks, illuminates the valley. I’m waking up on a hill overlooking the vast Ruby Marshes. The mist hangs over the water as the sun begins to unveil the ruby glow of the peaks to the west of the marsh.

Panicking I look over at Neewa, she is still here. She whines signaling me she is ready to get off the chain and go for her morning run.

“Neewa stay close, don’t go running off!” I demand.

I let her go with great apprehension as she disappears into the brush. I walk to the campfire, a deep frown of worry on my forehead. Watching and listening to her every move now, I make sure she stays just a few yards away from me.

“Dad, how long have you been awake?” Bread and coffee for breakfast, yum, that’s my favorite.

“Oh just a little while. Here, Tina, try some of this.”

“Hum, that is good,” I smack my lips.

“I call it campfire toast and jam. Can you go wake Jackie?” Dad asks.

“She’s up, on her way back from the outhouse,” I answer.

Jackie joins us, everyone sips coffee and munches on toast and jam.

“So, are we going pine nut hunting or fishing?” Jackie asks.

The fog is burning off the blue-green water.

Chapter 36 - Pine Nuts

“So Chester, where do you think we can start gathering the pine nuts?” Dad asks.

He answers, “On our way into the park I saw a pine forest about two miles from here. That’s where we can start.”

Piling into the van we drive a couple miles and stop near a hill dotted with dark green pine trees. After we pull the van off the road, we get out.

I look around, “So this is where we will find the pine nuts?”

Neewa runs off into the forest, she cannot help herself. She follows her nose to a nearby trickling stream.

All of us walk the hundred or so yards to the middle of this mountain and plan our strategy. Chester directs Jackie, Dad, and me up the ridge. While he and Marlene go toward the lower end of the mountain.

Dad, Jackie, and I start up the hill in front of us, headed for higher elevations. I'm in the middle of a deserted forest with no one around me for miles. Of course there are probably wild coyote, deer, lots of prairie dogs, and who knows what else is out here?

"I think Neewa is looking for her uncles and cousins," I huff and puff catching my breath as we ascend.

"What cousins?" Jackie asks.

"The ones she was talking to last night," I answer.

Dad is already ahead of us, leading the way up the ridge.

The trees are scruffy, short and in small groups of five or six. Pruned by the whipping winds coming off the flatlands, they resemble fifteen-foot high Japanese Bonsai trees. It looks like I'm entering a Japanese forest.

Walking on sandy dirt, ledge rock, and an occasional patch of moss or lichen, we march on. Between the rock crevasses are clumps of grass and wild flowers. Brittle and dry twigs crackle under my sneakers.

Seeds are brought here by animals or scattered about by the wind. Some fall on the steep slopes and sprout. While others end up in soil made of decaying pine needles and windblown dirt. Still others are brought here by the infrequent rain runoff.

The trees here seem to be able to grow precariously anchored to scraps of dirt and rock.

According to Chester the growing and harvesting of pine nuts is supposed to work like this. Each pinyon pine tree grows hundreds of pine cones with seeds in them called pine nuts. The pine cones mature they fall from the tree and open like petals of a blooming flower. Inside the pine cone scales are pine nuts ready to be eaten.

Jackie and I reach the first pine trees and run under them glowing with excitement and the anticipation of discovery. Beneath the trees are pine cones, spread about. We move quickly to pick up the cones on the ground and inspect them. But there are no pine nuts. Out of breath from the incline, I run to the next grove of trees gathering up more cones. As I break them apart with my hands, the dry scales yield nothing but dust.

“Jackie,” I question, “did you find any pine nuts?”

“No, no pine nuts, there are pine cones but no nuts in them.”

I pick up a couple of pine cones and squeeze them in my hands. They are brittle and crumple into pieces. The broken flower peddle like scales are about a half-inch long and a quarter-inch wide.

Looking over at Jackie, “Yuck! There are bugs in these cones.”

Dusting the bugs and scale flakes from my hands, I run frenzied to the next tree and pick up more cones. Breaking them apart one by one I expect to see beautiful pine nuts falling gently into my hands. But instead I get more bugs and toss them aside. Rubbing my hands till all the junk is gone, I stand still, exasperated, and stare off into the valley.

The sun is hot and there is little wind. The only relief from the heat is the shade of these trees. The sand and rock in the barren sections of the slopes around us reflect the sun’s rays at us. I feel the sweat dripping from my brow and beading up on my lip.

“Jackie, maybe we’re doing something wrong? What if we are supposed to pick the pine cones from the tree? Before they hit the ground and the bugs get them.”

“Maybe the bugs are eating the pine nuts?”

Dad walks by complaining, “I can’t find any pine nuts, you?”

“No,” we answer in agreement.

“Just bugs,” I add.

He walks away toward a stand of trees just above us on the sloping hillside warning, “Be careful climbing those trees.”

Lucky thing these are scrub pine trees. We are in a forest full of the shortest full-grown trees on Earth. The trees don’t grow more than fifteen feet high because the whipping winds prune the limbs and branches back.

With no ladder or anything to stand on, Jackie cups her hands together and gives me a boost up into a tree. This would never work back East where the trees are ten times bigger.

I pull myself up onto the first branch and sit, then reach down to help Jackie up. Perched on the lower branches, we start plucking pine cones and tossing them down on the ground. After a good amount of them land below us, we jump down from the tree. One by one we methodically bludgeon and pry open the new cones. I twist and squeeze them, anticipating finding what I’m looking for. Struggling, I fight to obtain the bounty of delicious oval white nuts.

“No pine nuts,” I frown throwing the remnants of the cones onto the ground.

“No pine nuts,” Jackie adds, disgusted.

It's clear to Jackie and I, there are no pine nuts here. Well, we're pretty sure there aren't any.

We give up on the pine nut hunt and sit in the shade, throwing rocks down the slope. They roll and bump over the outcrops of the ledge and fall over the rim, out of sight.

I've not seen or heard Neewa in a while as I get that sinking feeling in my stomach again.

I stand and cry out, "Neewa, Neewa, come Neewa," I call out.

After hesitating and taking a deep breath I shout, "Neewa, Neewa."

Jackie whistles, "Whewwwwwwww, whew."

"I wish I could whistle like you," I lament looking at her.

Waving my hands in the air at her, "Listen Jackie, stop whistling, listen. I hear something. It's her."

Her bark grows louder and louder, echoing over the mountainside. I anticipate her running over the ridge and jumping up on me.

"Come girl, come on girl!" Out of the blue she careens into us, stomping on our feet as she gallops by almost bowling us over. Her paws spread wide as she grips the dirt, sand flies up behind her. Her muscles tighten to control her stop.

I'm so happy to see her you'd think we were separated for days, not minutes. I cuddle her, patting her head and stroking her soft coat. She positions herself against my knee signaling me to scratch her behind the ears, which I do.

From the rock face where we stand, we begin walking up the ridge. Neewa quickly takes point, leading us along the rocky terrain. After a few moments she runs off

again, nose to the ground, having picked up a scent of something. She is on the hunt, sniffing along the surface of the dirt, stalking her prey.

We meander along occasionally checking a pine cone or two, not wanting to give up. Continuing on our hike, we are high above the road we left this morning. We decide to escape the heat and hike toward a grove of trees.

Chapter 37 - Juniper Berries

“What are those trees up there?” I point looking to Jackie for an answer.

“Juniper, they are juniper trees, a coniferous evergreen tree native to high mountain desert forests,” the botanist in the family explains.

We reach the shade of the juniper grove, finally getting out of the sun’s direct rays. Tired from the day’s events, I look for a place to sit and rest.

I pay no attention to Jackie as she inspects, shakes, and smells something in her hands.

“Look at these purple berries from these trees and the little beige and brown nuts I found on the ground. What are they?”

Jackie begins rolling the little round things in her hand. The purple berries from the tree are the size of green peas. She breaks one open and inside the berry is one of the beige and brown nuts that looks like a little acorn. The beige and brown nuts on the ground were once covered in a purple layer. But the coatings dry and fall off, leaving these little beige and brown nuts.

Jackie displays a handful of the nuts and giggles, “Dad look, I found these under the juniper trees over there, they have holes in one end.”

Standing shoulder-to-shoulder, each of us takes a nut from Jackie’s hand. A thorough inspection concludes that every one of the nuts is about the size of a pencil eraser, about five centimeters. And each one has the shape of a very tiny acorn or even an apple. We stand inspecting the little nuts.

“Jackie, your hands are disgusting,” we laugh, as I look down at my own dirty hands. “Yuck!” They are covered in pine tar with dirt rubbed in. It’s stuck to my skin like glue. I try to peel it off by scraping it with a stick, then a rock. But it’s no use, it is dried on to my skin like cement.

Dad has sweat dripping from his head, and his shirt is wet around the collar and back. By now Jackie and I are both wishing we had worn shorts. But it was so cold this morning, and who would’ve thought it would be so hot this early in the day and it seems to be getting hotter by the minute.

I check the back of my hand. One of the beige and brown nuts is stuck between my fingers. Scrutinizing it, I inspect the incredibly perfect round hole in the middle of the top. The opening is deep and goes almost all the way through to the bottom. I hold it up to my eye to see if I can peer inside. The curious hole in the nut makes it look like a tiny apple that’s been cored. But it’s not cored all the way through. Nope, instead the one-centimeter wide tunnel ends just before the bottom.

Strangely centered, the hole seems to be in the exact same location on each and every nut. Perplexed, again I hold the juniper nut to my eye, looking into the dark hole searching for a revelation as to how and why it is there?

“How did the hole get there, Dad?” I question.

Dad shakes his head, “I don’t know, maybe that’s the way they are?”

Jackie declares, “I’ll show Chester, he will know. I’ll collect a bunch of them. I’m sure they are juniper nuts but how the heck did that hole get there?”

Dad and Jackie begin gathering nuts sitting under the juniper trees. It’s too hot to be moving around now. Minutes pass as I gaze into the blue sky and flora-covered marshes in the distance. We share several gulps of water from our canteen and chill on the hillside.

“I’m going to look for Neewa,” I announce, walking away from them. “Where are you guys going to be?”

Jackie answers, “We’ll be right here under these shady trees.”

“Stay here,” I say, “so I can find you when I get back.”

Jackie calls to me as I disappear from sight, “Ok we’ll be waiting.”

Walking up the ridge, I feel the freedom of being on my own. I’m alone in the wilderness with no one else around for miles.

I wonder what happened here long ago? Could I possibly be the first human to walk through this forest in thousands of years? Maybe I’m the only human who ever traveled here. Most likely Indians trekked through here in the last hundred years. I’m not the first, nor will I be the last.

Neanderthal man camped here a hundred thousand years ago. He probably lived in a nearby cave and painted the walls. It would be so cool to find one of those caves and discover paintings never seen before.

Approaching the top of the hill, I call out, “Neewa, Neewa come.”

Slipping back into my imagination, I wonder if buffalo once roamed here. They came to drink water and eat the grass at the marsh. The buffalo could've been hunted right here where I'm standing. Maybe this was once a buffalo jump, where buffalo were herded together and then stampeded off a cliff.

Ancient man and the Indians used to kill the buffalo that way. They chased the buffalo around and around in the canyon getting them all worked up. As the buffalo got more excited, they were stampeded towards a cliff and then over the edge. They died or were so badly injured it was easy for the hunters to finish them off.

In a history book I read, it said as many as a hundred buffalo would go off a cliff at once. Indians waited near the bottom and killed the ones that lived with spears and knives. It was gruesome.

Indians used all of the buffalo for one thing or another. It was their custom not to waste anything. Clothing was made from the skins. Some hides were made into blankets while others were used to cover tipis. The meat was dried into jerky so it would not spoil in the summer. And in the winter, the meat was kept frozen and away from animals underground.

Rambling along I daydream about the Piute, Washoe, and Gosh Ute Indians that once roamed this region. I wonder how they survived gathering roots and berries, and hunting mule deer, and other animals. It must have been a hard life.

These mule deer out West are similar to the whitetail deer back East. Except the mule deer is bigger, much bigger, and their antlers are twice the size. Other than that they have the same colored fur and just about everything else.

Quiet as a mouse, I approach the highest rocky peak of this mountain. Leaping from rock to rock, I skip along forgetting about where I am and what I'm doing here.

All of a sudden, I hear a thud and feel a vibration under my feet. It travels up through my knees and legs.

Startled, I look up at the blue western sky dotted with white fluffy clouds. The sun glares back into my eyes.

Chapter 38 - The Ghost of the Mule Deer

Suddenly I focus on a pair of eyes looking right at me. Around those eyes is the face of a mule deer, motionless, just twenty feet in front of me. Surrounding the massive buck's antlers is blinding sunlight obscuring his body. His eyes are the color of rusted steel and his ears white as snow. His black nostrils are flared wide open in his wet shiny nose, dripping stuff. He exhales, snorting snot to the ground at my feet.

My heart pounds as he looks through me, neither of us can believe our eyes. I am frozen, unable to move for what seems like seconds, but is only tenths of an instant. Fixed on his eyes, I blink.

But he's gone. Disappeared as if by magic without a sound or a trace of his path. My mind floods with questions. Did I see what I think I saw? Where did he go?

He must have jumped through the air, soaring out of sight. I remain still, waiting to feel the vibration as he lands, listening past the hilltop breeze for the sound of his hooves striking the ground, galloping in retreat. But I feel nothing, only the wind softly whistling in my ear and the sun warming my flushed skin.

Was it an illusion? Maybe I imagined the massive stag with giant antlers and piercing eyes. Perhaps I did not see antlers at all; rather it was the branches of a tree hanging down. Possibly the deer head was a rock, shaped by the wind and rain to look like the head of a deer. Or maybe I just invented the whole thing.

“I’ll find out!” I streak to where he stood in a split second.

Atop the mountain’s highest point, I stare down from my new location at the previously unseen valley before me. No trees block my view. Nor is the scarce brush higher than my ankles. The wind-swept barren moonscape before me has little to obscure his escape route. There are no juniper or pinyon pine trees blocking my inspection.

Nothing is moving on the lifeless terrain. No rustling bushes, or dried lifeless grasses swaying. Nor is there dust in the air, kicked up to reveal his path of retreat.

“Where are you?” I shout, stomping my feet.

Scanning from left to right, then right to left, covering every possible direction of his getaway. I see no buck, no solitary deer on its way home from the marsh. No herd of deer feeding on the hillside to which he might have belonged.

“Nothing,” I repeat, “nothing?”

Even the wind that gives flight to the hawks and vultures is still. I kneel down for a ground level view to look out over the vista, but nothing stirs.

Maybe he’s hiding somewhere, like lions do in the tall grasses of Africa, blending in with the colors around them. Invisible I thought, just waiting for me to walk away.

Then he will continue on his path.

After a while, regrettably there is no living creature to be seen anywhere.

Whatever it was or is, it’s gone now.

That's when I spot them, on the ground right in front of me, right where he stood.

I whisper, "Antlers."

They seem unreal, out of place, as if they were put there, positioned upright, not shed or dropped naturally.

Again I glance back down the barren hillside straining to see that buck, but he is not there.

Quickly, I peek back at the antlers. Much to my surprise they are still there. I rub my eyes and focus, but the two perfectly symmetrical antlers do not disappear. They remain upright.

They are large antlers, maybe three feet across, and would only fit upon a great stag like the one I thought I saw.

I circle them, inspecting every detail, every sharp point. Unable to resist any longer I kneel down and touch one of the smoothest grooves on a shaft and run my finger up the edge jumping from tip to tip, counting eight points each.

Overcome with the desire to hold one, I lift an antler into my arms. The sheer weight and girth almost bowl me over. I have to quickly regain my balance to keep from falling.

Then it occurs to me, I couldn't just leave them here and walk away. They shouldn't just stay here where no one will see them. Someone should keep them for themselves.

Hum, then again maybe they were meant to be here in the wilderness with the wind, sun, and earth. After all, this is where they have been. They belong to no one. No one owns them. There are no possessions out here. OMG, I don't know what to do?

Suddenly, I hear the sound of something rushing straight at me.

Turning anxiously toward it, “Neewa! Crap, you scared the hell out of me!”

My eyes shoot from Neewa back to antlers and back to Neewa again.

“Neewa,” my voice loud, “where have you been?” I hold her face close to mine and look into her eyes. “Did you see that buck?” She pulls away and jumps up on me. I scratch her head behind the ears. She pushes her paws forward, shoves me back, and jumps down.

Walking by me she brushes her ribs against my knees signaling me to scratch her on the top of her head. I promptly comply.

In a few seconds she and I are side by side on our way down the mountain to find Jackie and Dad.

“Neewa, I saw this immense buck!” I tell her.

Our pace quickens down the hill. She runs out in front, leading the way.

Antlers are awkward to carry. I’m having a hard time not sticking myself in one place or another. Carrying both of them, I almost fall for the third time. It would be like falling on a bunch of sharp daggers. In no time I would bleed to death. Great! What an ending to our camping trip.

I can hear the reporter now, “Christina was mortally injured today when she fell on a deer antler while hiking at Ruby Lake.”

Yeah, Ruby Lake where no man has walked for ten thousand years, Ha!

Carefully, I meander to the grove of juniper trees where Dad and Jackie were last seen collecting nuts. They are still relaxing in the shade, waiting for me.

“Look! Look at these!” Neewa runs over to Dad and Jackie for pets and hugs.

“What are they?” Jackie doesn’t know what they are.

“Antlers, they are deer antlers,” I reply.

“Wow,” Dad cries out as he jumps to his feet. He takes one of the antlers off my hands before I impale myself.

I begin to recount the whole story as we walk down to the van. Nothing, not one detail do I leave out. I begin with how I felt the pulsation of the deer’s hooves through the ground. And then I describe the mule deer buck looking right at me, eyes bugged out, snorting snot. Then I explain how he vanished into thin air and how I tried to find him, but could not. Lastly, how I ran to the ridge, exactly where the great buck had stood and looked everywhere. And then I discovered the antlers, right where he stood.

After that, no one said a word or spoke of the antlers again.

Jackie is all excited about the juniper nuts and can’t wait to ask Chester about them.

I’m anxious about the antlers and whether I did the right thing by taking them? How will I explain it to Chester? And will Chester believe my story? What about how the buck vanished and the antlers remained where he stood.

This is really silly; no one will ever believe this story. I’m not sure Jackie and Dad believes it. Chester will think I imagined it for sure.

Dad, Jackie and I are next to the van when Chester and Marlene arrive.

Chester shrugs his shoulders, “No pine nuts, we didn’t find any pine nuts. We found empty pine cones and plenty of bugs in pine cones, but no pine nuts. How about you guys?”

“We didn’t find any pine nuts either,” I reply looking at them.

Jackie runs up to Chester with a handful of juniper nuts. “Look at these, we found them under the trees on the ridge.”

She holds out her hand for Chester and Marlene to inspect. They each take a couple of the nuts in their hands.

Marlene says, “I have no idea what they are. We don’t have them in Chicago,” she giggles.

Marlene giggles a lot.

Chester rolls one between his thumb and pointer fingers. “Juniper nuts, these are so cool. Look at the light beige color around the top and the deep brown color of the rest of the nut. It looks like a tiny acorn.”

Jackie impatient and overly excited, “The hole, what about the hole? How did it get there?”

Chester grins, “The prairie dog uses his hollow tooth to eat the middle of the nut.”

Dad exclaimed, “No way! That’s impossible, you are kidding, right?”

Chester continues, “No, no kidding, the prairie dog places the juniper nut in just the right position in his mouth. And then with his hollow sharp front tooth, he bites down into the nut. The hollow tooth takes the meat out of the center of the nut and the prairie dog eats it. Then he throws away the rest. That’s how the nut gets the hole in it.

Jackie looks perplexed, not knowing what to say. She just holds the nut up to her eye and looks at it.

Dad is still a non-believer and mutters, “I don’t believe that. It’s impossible, each hole is exactly the same.”

Chester laughs, “That’s how they do it.”

Jackie asks, “Why doesn’t the hole go all the way through?”

Chester laughs, he’s always laughing. “Their tooth is not long enough.”

Dad continues to be skeptical. “I just can’t believe it, I’ve never heard of such a thing.”

Chester makes his point, “I swear on my Chief.”

I have never heard Chester say that before. Though I can tell by the way he said it, he’s serious. The Chief is the most reverent figure, kind of like the Queen of England.

One time I was on the Reserve and a bunch of kids were playing football. An argument broke out over an out-of-bounds call one of the players made. The squabble was about to come to blows between two kids when the kid who called the ball out said, “I swear on my Chief.” Everyone looked at each other, stopped arguing and walked back to their positions to continue the game. The argument was over, no one even mentioned it again.

After hearing Chester say that, Dad stops his opposition and without hesitation says, “Wow! That is the most amazing natural freakiest thing I’ve ever heard of.”

I begin talking a mile a minute interrupting everyone. “Chester listen to this. I saw this massive deer, a buck, his silhouette was surrounded by the sunlight. He was only a few feet away from me. His eyes were locked onto mine. I could hardly believe it. I watched him stare back at me. We both stood motionless, eyes transfixed on each other.

“I blinked my eyes, still looking right at him, and he disappeared! Right in front of my eyes, gone, vanished.

“I thought he jumped over the ridge so I ran up to where he stood and looked everywhere, but I saw no deer and nothing moving anywhere.”

Chester's eyes become as wide as light bulbs as I pull the antlers from the trunk of the van. "I found these antlers lying right where he stood."

He cries out, "You found those, you lucky duck, all by yourself, no one else?"

"Yes, yes, no one else, all by myself," I exclaim.

Chester becomes serious. "This is a really important question. Were the antlers standing straight up?"

"Yes, yes, they were pointing straight up, as if placed," I reply, my voice shaking.

There is silence. Chester looks at each of us and then at the antlers again. He appears to be trying to make a decision as to whether or not to tell us what he's thinking.

Chester grumbles with his head down as if revealing a secret, "You saw the Spirit Deer."

"What is that?" I sigh knowing for sure that I had no business taking the antlers off the mountain.

"It's the Spirit Deer," Chester declares smiling. "He left the antlers to kill the bear. But not just any bear. The bear will trip and fall onto the antlers and die when the sharp points pierce his heart."

Chester continues, "Listen to me, I will tell you the Indian legend, 'A Buck And A Bear.' The story goes something like this. A bear with two cubs and a buck with two fawns shared the forest. The bear trapped the buck and ate it for dinner. The two fawns were angry at the bear for eating their father. To get revenge, the fawns tricked the bear into killing and eating its own cubs. Now the bear wanted payback for this trick and chased the two fawns into the forest.

“At this time the great buck’s spirit returned from the Spirit World as the Spirit Deer to revenge his own death and to protect his fawns. Spirit Deer appeared before his children, the fawns, and told them to lead the bear across a rickety bridge onto a nearby island.

“The bear followed the scent the fawns purposely laid down. On the other side of the bridge the Spirit Deer placed its antlers pointing straight up.

“Stork, an ally to Spirit Deer, stood in the water next to the wobbly bridge made from logs, sticks and mud. As the bear began to cross the bridge, Stork pulled a single twig from the bottom. The unsound bridge fell apart and the bear tripped, stumbled and fell onto the antlers. They pierced his heart and killed him instantly.

“It is the Spirit Deer’s alliance with the wise Stork that enabled him to kill the bear. Indian legend has it that the same Spirit Deer still roams this forest setting traps for the bear.”

“Chester, am I in trouble? Should I have left the antlers back in the forest?” I shudder.

Chester looking somewhat puzzled answers, “No, Christina, you are not in trouble. You came face-to-face with Spirit Deer.”

“Should I put them back now, the antlers? I can put them back. I know where I found them,” I propose.

“No, you must keep them. He gave them to you to teach you two lessons. One is not to be tricked by a bear. And two, make alliances with the Stork. That is what you must learn from the gift of the Spirit Deer.”

Chester spoke with a puzzled look on his face, “Maybe you will be a powerful Chief some day and wear these antlers at a Pow Wow in the Deer Dance.”

I slump down into a sitting position next to the car with one antler in my hands. “Chester, my head is spinning with spirits and legends. I saw the Deer Dance at the Pow Wow, a Chief turned into the Spirit Deer.”

Nothing more is said, we all get in the van and head back to our campsite. It is a quiet ride.

Arriving at our campsite, we pack up our tents and cooking stuff, and drive away headed home.

I’m still anxious about keeping the antlers. Maybe they belong where I found them, on that ridge overlooking the marshes and the valley. I should never have taken them. They belong in the forest. They are not mine.

Oh my God, I’m going to torture myself about this for the entire ride home.

When I get home I’m going to give those antlers a thorough going-over in the lab. They must have some kind of supernatural power. After all, that was a Spirit Deer.

I still can’t believe we came all the way out here with no meters or cameras. I should’ve at least brought an EMF meter or something, even the thermal infrared camera. Though I never would have gotten a picture of that deer, he was too fast. I saw him for not even a second. If I even saw him at all.

It’s late when we arrive back in town. We drop off Chester and Marlene first and then go straight home.

As we pull into the driveway I call out, "Shower." That's a signal not to mess with me as there is only one shower and I'm getting it first before Jackie uses up all the hot water.

With hot water pouring all over me, I begin to feel human again. There are no showers at Ruby Lake and the bathrooms are primitive, which means they are outhouses, pretty awful.

This time Jackie has to wait until I'm done, then she can take her bath. She loves her bath.

Chapter 39 - Going Back East

Oh crap, morning is here already. I sit on the side of my bed getting dressed. Then run out the door to catch my school bus.

Whew, I barely made it. Today is the last day of school for the year, thank God. Sitting in my usual seat, I look around at my schoolmates, all of whom are still strangers.

My stop is the last one before we get to school. Today I'll walk through all my classes, give back all my books, and clean out my locker. No parties to go to, no signing of yearbooks, and definitely no crying in the hallway. I've done all that. Then it will be time to go home.

I've been in this town for almost a year, it's time to leave. I really miss home, all my friends, Grandma and Grandpa too. Maybe Mom will be back from Canada when we get home. I can't wait to tell her all the cool stuff I have been up too. But first, California, I have to go to California and see the Pacific Ocean and San Francisco too.

We can do lots of ghost hunting on our way to California. It will be the adventure of a lifetime.

Dad has a pretty good job waiting for him in New Jersey. He says he'll be working by the Delaware Bay at a government office. But if that doesn't work out, his old boss in Maryland said he is welcome to come back there. Maryland is only three hours from home. At least I'll be a lot closer to home than we are way out here.

New Jersey would be all right for a year or two, but I don't want to stay in New Jersey for the rest of my life either. I'm not going to college in New Jersey, that's for sure, anywhere but there.

My plan is either to live with Grandma in Florida or my uncle in California.

"Hey Dad, did you ever check out that recording of Neewa eating the pumpkin pies?"

"No, I forgot all about it."

Dad asks, "What about the antlers, did you check them out?"

"Yeah, the antlers have nothing. I put the EMF meter on them and a few other meters too, but no readings at all, nothing. They're packed in one of the boxes ready to go back East."

Dad suggests, "I can queue up the 'flying Neewa eating pumpkin pies' tape. I have to download all those files onto my PC anyway. You want to help me?"

"Sure, let's do it," I answer enthusiastically.

In short order, Dad has everything set up. The camera and hot wire are already connected to the computer.

He sits in front of the PC. “Ok, click ‘download,’ now click ‘camera,’ ‘capture,’ ‘save’, okay, now ‘publish.’”

I wait till the entire file is finished.

“We got it.” The file is saved to the desktop.

“Dad, play it back,” anxious to see the tape, “hurry up.”

“Ok Christina watch this, I have some stuff to do.”

When Neewa tripped the motion detector the camera was lying on its side. In the frame is Neewa already on the countertop with the view flipped ninety degrees.

The video of Neewa shows her eating the pies all right, but only a partial view. I can see a portion of her ivory white fur in the foreground and part of one pumpkin pie. I cannot see her eating the other two pies though, but I can hear her.

As I continue watching the tape, Neewa sniffs the camera and licks the lens. She can hear the camera running.

Now I hear her swallowing the pieces of pie, gobbling them down. It’s almost like she is consuming a whole pumpkin pie at once. Next, the pie plate in view is being licked.

Another pie plate on the counter rattles around like a thunderstorm as she cleans that one off. Then plates hit the floor and Neewa jumps down to finish up the rest. The sound of her pawing and slapping down a plate and then licking it clean is woefully clear. I listen to the next pie plate being cleaned.

The kitchen window in the background was about the only other thing I could see. All the sounds of Neewa’s feast are recorded, right up until the camera shuts itself off.

Turns out there are no pictures of Neewa levitating onto the three-foot high counter top. I'll never prove that she flew. Still, I wonder how in the world did she get up there?

Chapter 40 - Beading Juniper Nuts

The phone rings. I pick it up holding it inches from my ear, wondering who could this be? It's Diane on the other end inviting Jackie and me to come over to her house and do some beading. "Don't forget to bring Neewa," she says before hanging up.

I'm excited about beading.

I demand, "Dad, meet us at Diane's at four o'clock."

Jackie and I start walking over to Diane's.

I like Heather, but she is the Medicine Woman and sometimes she gives me the creeps. I want Dad to be with me when I'm there or I will be totally freaked out.

Remember what happened the last time we were at Heather's house? There was that fierce windstorm that scared the crap out of me. We were outside, covered in sand, and that dust devil came flying into Heather's yard, chasing us into the house.

Heather said it was an Evil Devil Spirit in the dust devil that wanted to possess me. But Heather protected us with her powders, throwing the sacred stuff all over us and into the wood stove. Oh my God, that was too creepy.

Heather said in a really weird voice, "Go devil, leave us, you demon."

I can't get those words out of my head.

Maybe it was Heather who made the dust storm with the Evil Devil Spirit. I don't know if I should even be at Heather's house?

After it was over, Heather gave us herbs to protect us from evil. I wish I had them in my pocket right now. But they are packed away with my clothes, the antlers, and our entire collection of ghost hunting equipment except for the stuff that goes back to Dad's work. He's going to return all of it at the end of the week, his last day.

Neewa is all excited as we arrive at Diane and Heather's house. I thought Neewa should wait outside with the kids in Diane's neighborhood? They love to play with her, though they make fun of her tongue hanging out the side of her mouth.

"Neewa!" Heather exclaims petting and hugging her. "You come right into my house, I want you here with me."

Diane smiles at Neewa as she holds the door open and watches her slip in. She runs in, galloping through the house, smelling every room, especially the kitchen, which she scours for scraps.

Diane motions Jackie and me to come over to the kitchen table. She has her beading stuff on the table. We brought her a couple of strands of yellow beads that Dad had given us. Diane places them with all of her beads. I see bright turquoise blue, red coral, white, and black beads. She has rolls of silky string and a pile of silver clasps in the center of the table.

We sit ourselves down and she shows us some basic beading designs. After that we each take a sewing needle, some fishing line, and begin stringing beads from our trays.

In silence, I look around her home. The house has not changed since I was last here.

Using a loom is what I want to learn. I saw some beading techniques for looms in a display at the tribal building. Loom beading creates the most intricate designs, like the ones you see in museums and galleries.

I string beads onto a necklace when I look up and see Diane run her needle through a small acorn-like bead.

“What is that?” I ask.

She answers, “It’s a juniper bead.”

I exclaim, “The ones the prairie dogs bite a hole in?”

Diane looks puzzled, “Yes, the prairie dogs do bite a hole into the nut. They put a circular tunnel almost all the way through to the end. I push a heavy sewing needle through the bottom of the nut to make it into a bead. Then I string them in patterns with other beads. Here, look at this one.”

Diane holds up a bracelet with juniper nuts placed every third bead.

“No way!” Jackie jumps up and stands behind Diane for a closer look.

“Way!” I say.

Pointing at the bracelet I say to Jackie, “They’re like the ones you found out at Ruby Lake. Diane makes them into beads and strings them.”

Jackie takes one of the juniper nuts from Diane’s beading tray and rolls it between her two fingers.

Nodding her head in agreement, “Yup it’s the same. That’s amazing. Look how cool they look in that bracelet, awesome.”

“Show me how you get the hole the rest of the way through.” Jackie leans over Diane’s tray.

Diane picks up another nut. “The prairie dog leaves some of the shell at the bottom when it bites down. I just push the needle through the bottom of the hole like this.”

Quietly we observe as she takes the nut and slides the heavy sewing needle inside. Then positioning it over some cardboard, she pushes the needle down, puncturing a small hole through the remaining portion of the nut, making a juniper nut into a beautiful juniper bead.

Jackie reaches into her pocket and pulls out a handful of juniper nuts from Ruby Lake and puts them in Diane’s tray.

“Wow, where did you get all those?” Diane turns to look at Jackie, puzzled.

Jackie smiles, “They are from Ruby Lake, the Spirit Deer gave them to me.”

Diane asks, “The Spirit Deer? When did you meet the Spirit Deer?”

Jackie says, “Well, I didn’t but Christina met him on a trail.”

We all laugh and continue beading.

Diane adds a handful of juniper beads to each of our beading trays. We string them with the other colorful beads.

I comment, “The juniper beads have the best natural color. Don’t you think?”

We all nod our heads in agreement.

Diane says, “The Spirit Deer is very important to us. If you are in his favor, he will protect you from evil. But if you are his enemy, he will pierce your heart with his antlers.”

Jackie speaks, “She is in his favor, Chester said he left the antlers for her.”

Looking at Diane to see her reaction I say, “I knew I should have left those antlers where I found them.”

Diane replies, “You were given the antlers of the Spirit Deer? That is very special.”

Chapter 41 - Diane's Secret

“I have a secret everyone in our Nation knows, but we don't tell white people.”

Diane pauses and looks at both of us for a moment.

“The Chief is my father and his wife is my mother. When I was a baby they gave me to Heather. She is my mother now. I was a gift to her, ‘Napittu—h’ is our word for present.

“My blood Mom and Dad have nine other children, my brothers and sisters. My Chief wanted Heather to have a child to help her and follow in her footsteps.

“The Chief said to Heather, ‘Teach her to be the Shaman of my people.’”

Diane is moving about the beading table helping us. She looks at us out of the corner of her eye, observing our reaction to the secret.

Diane says, “They gave one of their own children away. Heather raised me from when I was a little baby. She takes care of me and I take care of her.”

Heather is watching us with her steel gray eyes, looking into my soul. She has deep wrinkles in her forehead from her many years. Her skin looks gray, like her eyes, and hair.

Heather speaks, “No one wanted this land so they gave it to us. This land is not good for much of anything. It’s just desert and sagebrush. We are on the outskirts of town, on the edge of the desert. There is nothing but a few Indians here.”

I can hear the wind howling. Sand is being picked up by gusts of wind. It sounds like hail is hitting the windows.

Heather speaks proudly, “My son and my daughter are grown now, and they have their own lives. Chester likes to hunt and fish. But his favorite thing to do is paint. He’s such a good painter. Linda is going to be a doctor. She is always away at school. I miss her so much.”

I interrupt, “I met Linda at the basketball game, she is so cool. We went to the Pow Wow with her. She danced the Shawl Dance, it was awesome.”

Jackie adds, “I liked the bead designs on her clothes. And that deerskin dress and those moccasins she had on, can I get them in my size?”

At that moment I recall Heather dancing at the Pow Wow. I can almost hear the musicians, and see the smoke hanging in the great hall. What I remember most is the moment when she disappeared right in front of my eyes.

Looking straight at her, “How did you disappear?”

“Oh that,” she replies, “that is something one Shaman passes on to another. I can’t tell anyone for fear that an Evil Devil Spirit will learn the secret.”

Chester and Dad arrive at Heather’s house. Chester knows we will be going back East soon. He looks serious as he walks over to the beading table.

Neewa greets Chester with a wagging tail and a few nudges to his palm with her cold wet nose.

Chester reaches down and scratches Neewa behind her ears and under her chin, “Neewa, how you doing girl?” He massages her head with his two strong hands and scratches her behind the ears.

I give Dad a dirty look, letting him know I’m pissed that he’s late. He knows we don’t want to be at Heather’s all by ourselves, it’s creepy. I continue beading.

Chester looks at us and says, “How you guys doing?”

I say, “I’m fine.”

Jackie says, “Good, Chester, how are you?”

Chester says, “Oh, I’m fine.”

Chapter 42 - The Medicine Woman's Mystery is Revealed

Chester speaks, "You guys need to be told something very important before you go back East. Let's all sit down and talk about what you must know."

This sounds serious. "I knew I shouldn't have taken those antlers."

Chester speaks softly, "It's okay Christina, the antlers are a gift from the Spirit Deer. He is grateful for the good deeds you have done. The Spirit Deer will shield you from evil, and in return you must keep his protection of you a secret."

I reply anxiously, "What deeds? I didn't do any deeds?"

"Oh yes you did, but you did not know it," he is quick to add. "The first good deed was adopting Neewa at the pound and saving her Spirit. If Neewa had stayed at the pound much longer, she would have been euthanized, and her Spirit lost."

"What Spirit?" I shudder.

"Heebe-tee-tse's Spirit, an Indian warrior who died in the late 1800's. His body was never found and his Spirit has been wandering the desert ever since. He has been unable to return home to be at rest in our sacred burial ground. But he kept searching for a way home to us. When Neewa was born in the desert, the Spirit Being of Heebe-tee-tse entered her body and he is still there."

"Oh brother," I gasp.

Chester smiles, "Your second deed was saving Neewa from dying of distemper. By bringing her to Doctor Cuthberson you saved her and Heebe-tee-tse's Spirit in Neewa from certain death. If Neewa had died, Heebe-tee-tse's Spirit Being could have been lost, forever."

“Doctor Cuthbertson, a trusted Shaman, learned of Heebe-tee-tse’s Spirit when Neewa stayed overnight at his animal hospital. He spoke to Heebe-tee-tse and made preparations for him to enter our sacred burial ground.”

Chester continues, “Do you remember the tribal building and the Tribal Historian Members Project? All the members that have ever lived are listed on that wall. We are always looking for lost ancestors like Heebe-tee-tse, trying to return to us to be At Rest.

“Remember the little girl at the Tribal History meeting? She said, ‘Did you know Neewa has a Spirit?’

“Everyone knew about Heebe-tee-tse coming home. We have all been waiting to welcome him.”

Jackie interrupts, “So let me get this right, Neewa is a Spirit Being of this warrior Heebe-tee-tse?”

Chester sighs, “Well not exactly, you see it is not Neewa who is a Spirit Being, but the Spirit Being is in Neewa’s body.”

“Oh I get it now, Neewa’s possessed,” Jackie clarifies.

Chester persists, “When Neewa was born near Heebe-tee-tse’s grave he took refuge in Neewa’s body, he possessed her, but not in a bad way. He will not harm her.”

I break in, “Dad, what about my dream, the one where I was looking for Neewa’s family in the desert. Remember I read the newspaper about the hiker who saw the white German Shepherd family digging up the bones of the gambler.... And right next to the gambler was the Native American grave that was over a hundred years old.”

Heather adds, “We have been protecting Neewa and all of you since we have known about Heebe-tee-tse. Do you recall when Chester put the charm on Neewa’s collar

after you came back from the ghost town? The charm is a Katsina, a sacred symbol that protects the wearer from evil trespassers. This Katsina is called 'Wuyak-Kuita' and affords its wearer safety from these trespassers. Chester got it from Doctor Cuthbertson who also placed a potion in the Wuyak-Kuita charm. The potion guarded Neewa against the evil devil spirits who want to take Heebe-tee-tse's Spirit for themselves and evil purposes. And the 'jingle ding' sound coming from the charm, the incantation. It's a magical spell to shelter you and your family from evil."

Heather continues telling about events in my life and she was not even there. "All of you had encounters with evil. Remember you met George Spahn at the general store near Manny's house? You did not like the way he looked at you. He is a dead man. It was his ghost that invited all of you to his ranch. He would've killed Heebe-tee-tse and substituted an Evil Devil Spirit in Neewa. The Evil Devil Spirits at his ranch take the bodies and the souls of those who fall into their traps. They want to be At Rest with our people, but they are evil and we do not want them."

Heather smiles, "What's more, have you forgotten what happened on the fishing trip? The gunshot that hit the ground near your van saved you from an Evil Devil Spirit stalking Neewa and Heebe-tee-tse. A Chosen One, who sees, fired that shot. He was not shooting at you or your family. His bullet was meant to defeat the evil stalker.

Furthermore, remember my house? I used yellow and blue powders to vanquish the evil spirit in the dust devil? So you see, we have all been protecting you."

Chester speaks, adding still more archival proof to my already overflowing to capacity encounters with demons and evil spirits, "At the Pow Wow when the Deer Dance was performed and that Chief transformed himself into the Spirit Deer, that Spirit

Deer has been following you and Neewa ever since the Pow Wow. At Ruby Lake the ghost of the mule deer was the Spirit Deer that left his antlers as a gift for you and Neewa for helping Heebe-tee-tse.

“And you heard the howling coyotes at Ruby Lake? They too were evil and wanted the power of Heebe-tee-tse’s Spirit for themselves, but Spirit Deer and the herbs Heather gave you warded off their attack.”

Chester adds, “Heather is certain you are safe now. You must always keep the antlers and charm you have been given. Never give them away or lose them, as they will keep you safe from the evil ones.”

Heather talks to Dad, Jackie, and me, “I have another secret. No one will put a new house here in place of this old one. Under my house is our sacred burial ground where all our Indian Spirit Beings are resting. We cannot disturb them, the Spirit Beings must stay here forever.”

Chester interrupts, “Now I have to tell you quickly because they will be here soon.”

I ask, “Who will be here soon?”

Jackie looks up as she is finishing her necklace, “Who else is coming to the beading party?”

Heather and Chester smile and say in unison, “The Spirit Beings!”

Jackie puts her face down on the table and covers her head with her arms. Dad comes to the table and sits between us, putting his arms around us both.

Heather speaks, “Chanting will be starting in Linda’s room. The Spirit Beings are creating the sounds of the wind and the smells of fire and earth. The ceremony has begun.

“First, the exorcism of Heebe-tee-tse from Neewa’s body, then the Spirit Beings will assist Heebe-tee-tse in entering the Spirit World through our sacred ground. Neewa will be the same coy dog you know and love after it is over.”

I can smell burning roots, herbs, and sweet flowers. The smoke is swirling by the candlelight as Neewa walks behind the curtain. Flickering light is coming from behind the woven divide separating us from the Spirits. Mystical yellow and blue smoke churn overhead.

Heather exclaims, “We are close, the Spirit Beings are thanking you and Neewa.”

Dad squeezes Jackie and me tighter. Seconds pass like minutes.

Chanting and drumming radiate from behind the curtain. “Hey Hey Hey Hey Ya Ya Ya... Ya Ya Ya....”

The high-pitched screeches echo in my ears and through my head. Soft then loud rhythms repeat.

The chants of the Spirits send chills down my spine, “Hey Hey Hey Hey Ya Ya, Ya Ya, Ya Ya.”

Visible through an open crack, shadows of awkward human shapes move about on Linda’s wall. Above the woven blankets on a visible slice of ceiling strange forms move in circles.

Frightened by the appearance of Heather leaving the back room, I’m startled and almost fall backwards off my seat.

Heather nods and smiles a great big smile, “The Spirit Beings are thankful, Heebe-tee-tse is home, At Rest. No longer wandering the desert, he has left Neewa’s body and is where he belongs. All the Spirit Beings are celebrating with him.”

Jackie speaks softly, “The ghost hunting equipment is at home, but all the ghosts are here.”

I whisper to Dad, “Okay, so we don’t have scientific proof that there are ghosts, but there is no doubt about it in my mind. There are ghosts here.”

Just at that moment Neewa runs out from behind the curtain and jumps onto my lap. I hold her close to me as she thumps her tail against my legs, wagging it vigorously. The charm around her neck is jingling as she licks my face.

“Yuck, stop it Neewa.”

Chapter 43 - The End

I wake up in my bed with Neewa standing over me licking my face. As I push her away, she sits down at the foot of the bed staring at me with her tongue hanging out of the side of her mouth.

I laugh, “Neewa, you are too cute, I love you.”

Just then Dad yells from the kitchen, “Christina get up, you’ve been asleep for the entire morning. We are all packed and leaving for California tomorrow. You have time to visit your friends to say good-bye. Don’t forget Diane, Heather, Chester, and Marvin. I’ll call the Burns’s, Manny and Margaret, Doctor Cuthberson, and Linda. You and your sister have to stay together until we leave.”

THE END

Chapter books to come

Watch for volumes II and III of “Neewa The Wonder Dog and the Ghost Hunters.”

Join Neewa, Jackie and Christina in additional scary, death defying, yet joyous adventures. Meet the Water Babies, Death Demon, wild animals, revolutionary specters and Lily of the Mohawks among many.

Neewa and the sisters experience exciting adventures catching shad in the Choptank River, oysters in the Chesapeake Bay, and dig for treasure hidden by the pirates of the Chesapeake Bay.

While exploring on the East Coast they search for James A. Michener in St. Michaels, but discover a ghost, a French soldier from the War of 1812, left behind long after the war ended.

The sisters team up with Pickles the cat, Sheba the German shepherd and Neewa in another exciting journey. Sheba and Neewa body surf in the Pacific Ocean. Pickles and Neewa travel to the Rocky Mountains, Pueblo ruins and are besieged by evil at the Phantom Ranch at the bottom of the Grand Canyon.