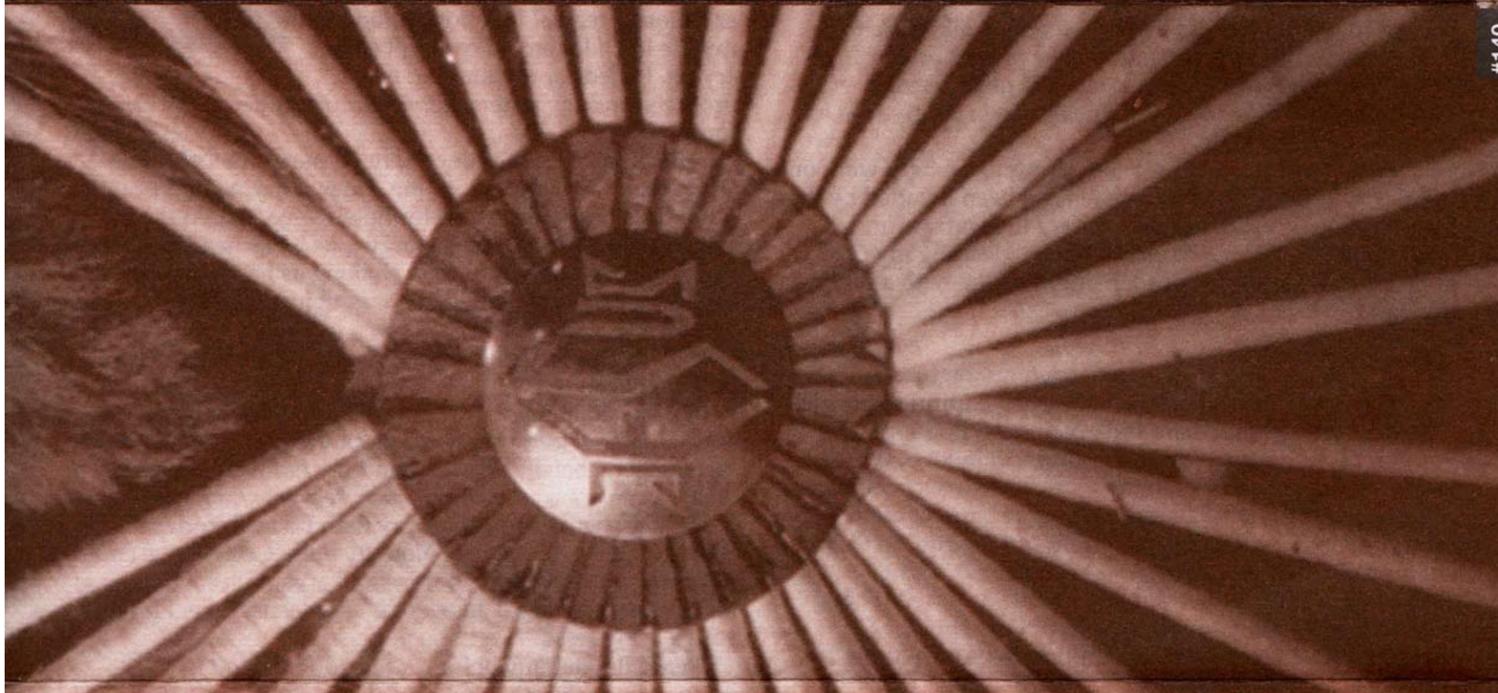


TRAIL to PEACE

A Native American's Story

By
Spencer
Cody



This question was answered when I learned that Jesus, even though He was the only innocent man to ever live, was betrayed and executed by His own people. Yet, He didn't hate them for their evil. Instead, He forgave their every action.

As an Indian, I know that my own race is far from perfect. That is why I was so changed by this revelation of Jesus, our perfect King, who could walk this hardened earth in unblemished love and forgiveness.

America's battle for internal peace is not over. Even today there are certain businesses where I live that will not serve me because I'm an Indian. But my hope is in Jesus, who alone can bring unity and love to the hearts of men. My own heart is grateful for God's faithfulness, for during times of discouragement or despair He has given me mighty words to stand on, "The Lord is my strength and my shield; my heart trusts in Him, and I am helped. My heart leaps for joy and I will give thanks to Him in song" (Psalm 28:7). I cling to these words, not just for myself, but for my people.

For further information, please contact:

"Trail to Peace" was reprinted from an article in **The Last Days Magazine**, a colorfully illustrated publication filled with challenging articles, ministry opportunities, and more!

For additional copies of this article, please order Ref. #140. For more information about Last Days Ministries, our missions training schools, or our free Ministry Materials Catalogue, send your requests to: Last Days Ministries, Box 40, Lindale, TX 75771-0040 USA.

WISE TRACKS

Another WiseTrack from Last Days Ministries
Pretty Good Printing ©1994
All Rights Reserved

5/94

I sat in stone silence looking at the white man sitting a few feet away from me. My heart was cold toward him, and I assumed he felt the same about me.

"This is the way it has always been and the way it will always be," I thought to myself, "the Indian and the white man as enemies, eying each other with anger and suspicion."

This man called Sonny Jaynes had taken me into his home to help me overcome my alcohol addiction – the relentless killer of Native Americans. He and his wife Margie were Christians who opened their home to all kinds of men who needed help; they called this ministry "Gates of Life." I now found myself surrounded by the very thing I had come to hate – white men. I could have left, but I was a desperate man.

Three weeks following my arrival, things seemed to be okay. But I was wary of these people and kept my distance from them. I had come to believe that the white man was not to be trusted, ever.

Then one day, while building fences, one of the men openly revealed his contempt toward me with racial remarks. Cold fury welled up within my heart, and before I knew it, I was beating him mercilessly with my fists. He fell to the ground dazed by the vicious beating, but his moans of pain only served to enrage me even more, and I began to methodically kick him in the head. His face was covered with blood that was pouring from his mouth and nose. I knew the seething hatred now burning in my heart was beyond my control, and I intended to beat this white man to death, until I was stopped by an overwhelming presence – an unexplainable interference – that completely paralyzed me for a moment.

Stunned, I decided to let him go. But as he ran, he turned and yelled yet another insult, so I ran after him.

Before I could catch him he reached our foreman and locked himself in the truck. The foreman was a white man whom I respected; he grabbed me, and with wise words calmed me enough to also get into the truck.

The foreman drove and I sat at the opposite window with my arm resting on the ledge – this *whiteman* sat between us. No one said a word as we returned to Sonny and Margie's.

As we drove, I began thinking about what was ahead. Memories rose in my mind of my last construction boss who called me every name but my own. Never was I honored for the work of my hands... just judged and belittled because of the color of my skin. Yet I was forced to stay in a job where I was mistreated and underpaid in order to feed my family because no one else in that town would hire Indians. I knew I had been pushed beyond my endurance by these stuck-up, arrogant people.

Once at "Gates," we got out of the truck and started toward the house. To my surprise, this *whiteman* ran ahead to Sonny and began accusing me of attacking him without cause. Sonny took him aside for a moment – then, in surprised disbelief, asked me to go with him into his office. I didn't know why; all I knew was that this was an Indian's word against a white man's. In my heart I was sure he had already come to his conclusion, and intended to put me away for a long time. I just remember thinking, "If he provokes me, I'm going to hurt him too."

Sonny didn't say anything at first. He just sat there looking amazed at the amount of anger that had poured out of me. He kept shaking his head, repeating over and over, "I just can't understand why you reacted that way!" Then he suddenly paused for a moment, and a look of revelation slowly spread across his face.

Almost impulsively, he said, "Spencer, you have hatred and bitterness in your heart toward white people – all white people!"

I looked at him and said coldly, "Yeah, you're right. And I don't think I like you that much either."

I wanted him to react to my words, but he didn't. I had expected Sonny to try to intimidate me as other white men had always done. Instead, he confronted me with the bitterness of my own heart. "Why?" he pleaded. "Why are you so angry?" I felt strangely uneasy and bowed my head as I tried to find the words that could explain what was locked inside.

My mind drifted back to my childhood days in Oklahoma...

My father and mother went to church at the Indian mission down the street. Most of the time only a handful of people attended.

Missionaries would come to our church, always very energetic and excited at first. But soon they would become frustrated and leave.

Our culture is not like the white culture. Indians are very slow paced and relaxed. We're never in a hurry to get things accomplished. But the missionaries couldn't deal with our way of doing things. They'd become disillusioned because people wouldn't show up for Sunday services at the scheduled time. Indians believe church should start

when all the people come together with one heart – and that isn't usually at ten in the morning.

We had seventeen different missionaries in the time I was there, and some of them left in the middle of the night! When a new missionary moved in, the neighbors would ask, "How long are you going to stay?" – knowing they probably wouldn't last for long.

They would come and preach for a while about sin and judgment, but I can't remember hearing one sermon about the love of Jesus. I saw nothing in their Christianity, but fortunately I saw Christ in my father and mother. My dad had an old Gibson guitar and would sit on the front porch and sing, "I am weak, but Thou art strong... Jesus keep me from all

wrong. I'll be satisfied as long as I walk... close to Thee."

I'd sit down just to be close to him. I was afraid to say a word when he sang because the presence of God was all around him. Yet I would occasionally see this humble man looked down upon because of the color of his skin.

One particular incident tore at my heart when I was twelve years old. My father and I had been standing in a hardware store for what seemed like an eternity. We had been waiting alone at the counter, but the clerk just continued to ignore us. We waited and waited, but when the door swung open and a few white men came in, the clerk came alive. He greeted them with a warm smile and within a few minutes had taken care of their every need. When the store was once again empty, he turned to my father and his smile disappeared.

"Well, what do you want?" he demanded impatiently.

I'll never forget how it felt as a twelve-year-old boy to see my father humiliated before me. But the painful memories didn't stop there.

My thoughts wandered back to a scene that took place when I was five years old. My two sisters, baby brother, and I convinced our parents to let us go with them into town one day. Our family lived out in the country, so it was a big deal for us to be able to play in the park while they went grocery shopping. But when they dropped us off at the park and drove away, we were suddenly surrounded by a group of older white children who began to insult us, calling us "dirty Indians."

I watched an older boy jerk my sister Tommie, who was eight, around by her braids. I screamed in frustration, and felt powerless to help her. I watched my three-year-old brother Michael get pushed to the ground while my nine-year-old sister Pearl kept pleading with them to stop – but instead, they slapped her in the face. They forced us to leave the park, and we had to wander through town to find our parents. As we walked among so many unfriendly strangers, I cried softly to myself and wondered why being an Indian made us so different. Once safely home, we went to our father for an explanation. But when he tried to explain the differences in our cultures, I saw that even he didn't fully understand the need for such behavior among people.

As I grew older, I became embittered at the mistreatment of my family and began feeling hatred toward white men. I started getting into fights and drinking.

By the age of seventeen, I was drinking heavily. There seemed to be no end to the anger inside me. I came home late one night after a brawl with some cowboys that put my life in serious danger. As I entered the house, I heard the sound of weeping coming from my father's room. I walked to his door and looked in. He was sitting on the edge of his bed, his hands around his knees and his head down. He was weeping and praying.

I could tell this was a man accustomed to speaking intimately with God. He was saying, "Father – Lord – would you bring my son home safely to me tonight?" And then he would continue to weep.

I walked over to him and quietly said, "Dad?"

My father looked up, and when he saw it was me, quickly stood to his feet. He hugged me like a desperate man; his face was buried in my chest, his great arms around me, and his shoulders shook as he sobbed. He kept saying, "My son! My son!" Then he raised his eyes to heaven and cried, "Thank You. Thank You, Father. You have brought my son home safely." He looked at me, kissed me on the cheek, wiped his tear-stained face, and

said, "Son, now go to bed."

All of a sudden I wanted to know this Jesus that could fill a man with such deep love for his family even in the midst of humiliation and hardship. I'd seen a lot of Christian tracts and heard a lot of angry sermons, but it was the living example of Christ I saw in my father that touched my heart, and I wanted to be like him... I so longed for the peace that seemed to clothe him.

Still, I couldn't seem to stop fighting. A short time later, I got into a fight which led to a warrant for my arrest, so I ran and hid on Indian land. After a few days I became very lonely. I had a transistor radio with me, and one afternoon I found comfort listening to Casey Kasem's Top 40. All of a sudden the station went off the air, and I started twisting the knob to find music again. I finally tuned in to some guy saying, "Now here's one of my favorite songs." Then I heard the familiar words, "I am weak, but Thou art strong... Jesus keep me from all wrong. I'll be satisfied as long as I walk... let me walk, close to Thee." It was the song my father always sang on our front porch. Heartbroken, I began to cry and quietly asked, "God, I have to know if you are real. Speak to me. Forgive me for my wretched life. Help me."

I put my head down, and something like a light went on in my spirit. I knew at that moment I'd been invaded by the Spirit of God. I returned home to face the warrant and found that my father had already been pleading my case. Soon I was back in high school, but this time with a Bible in my hand.

When I was eighteen I married my high-school sweetheart, Becky. She was a beautiful white girl with blonde hair and green eyes. Both our families objected, but we were young and in love. We weren't too concerned about the problems we'd have to face.

Becky and I started attending a white church. I felt pressured to change things about myself in order to fit in. I cut my hair short and started wearing all the "right" clothes. I enrolled in their Bible school and started talking the language young preachers talk. But my soul was in deep conflict. I knew I was attempting to be something I wasn't.

When I was nineteen and about to be ordained as a minister, my church went through a major split. It was devastating to me. Right then the confusion in my young soul reached a breaking point. I laid down my Bible and said to my wife, "I'm not going back. These white folks don't have any more truth than I have."

For the next two years, I walked in total rebellion. I began drinking heavily again and brought reproach upon my family. At the age of 21, I ended up in a Native American detoxification center, but I could only stay there a few months.

When my time at the center was up, I began looking for a rehabilitation program to help me further. I searched all over the United States for a program that would take me, and finally received a response from Gates of Life in East Texas, run by an ex-longshoreman named Sonny Jaynes. I moved Becky and our two children from Oklahoma to a house near the ministry. I deeply desired to overcome this uncontrollable side of me, and now I was faced with beating up a fellow worker.

My mind focused on Sonny's office again, and I looked to his eyes. Those few moments of reflection seemed like an eternity. Sonny was waiting quietly for me to speak, his eyes still filled with the question, "Why? Why are you so angry?"

Waves of pain washed over me as I began to pour out the cascade of memories from my past. Through an eruption of tears, I told Sonny about my life in Oklahoma. I couldn't stop crying. I cried for my mother, my brothers, and my sisters. I cried for my father, and I cried for myself.

Then I heard something I'd never heard before – this white man was crying with me. He was crying and praying out loud, "Lord, forgive us for how we've treated the Indian people. Lord, please forgive us." His head was down and his shoulders were shaking as he wept. My heart began to break as I realized he wasn't just weeping for me – he was weeping for my people.

"Lord, oh Lord, please forgive us," he repeated with a broken voice.

He looked at me with tears streaming down his face and said, "Spencer, I can't speak for every white man but I can speak on behalf of myself and my family. I am sorry for what's been done to the Indian people. Will you forgive me?"

I knew then, in a deeper way than I'd ever known before, that Jesus was real. Nobody but a God of love could fill a man with that kind of love and acceptance. Looking at his tear-stained face, I answered, "For Jesus' sake, I forgive you."

Peace flooded my being and I suddenly had a new sense of hope. For the first time, I knew without a doubt I'd spend the rest of my life pursuing Jesus.

As my relationship with Jesus grew, I began to develop a deep love for my fellow man and I, too, have become deeply loved and accepted by those I'd once hated.

For many years I believed that few could understand the great pain our people live with. Once free and strong, we'd become a conquered nation of people oppressed and hated in our own land. Mocked and despised, the injustice would even steal our hope and dignity. Who could possibly comprehend our grief?



As my relationship with Jesus grew, I began to develop a deep love for my fellow man...