

**`DRUNK INDUN**

**by Trygve Jorgensen**

“Heyyyy Tommmmyyyy!” That was the way my grandfather greeted me when I was a boy. His breath was always heavy with whiskey, rum, or whatever he could get his hands on. He loved white lightning, drinking it like some snake handling Baptist slugs strychnine to prove they have the faith laid out in Marks gospel. How a former Lighthorseman became the town drunk was always a curiosity to me. The Lighthorse were tribal police among the “Five Civilized Tribes.” They were proficient at rounding up bootleggers before statehood. If awards were given for intercepting hooch they would have been Congressional Medal winners long before the Untouchables. The Creeks actually called them “Este Wanayv” which means “ties men up,” to describe how they would rope drunks between two trees, arms one way and legs to the other, until they were sober. I guess maybe grandpa figured if you couldn’t beat em, join em, hung up the badge and tilted the bottle tying himself between the glass and the ground.

“Heyyyy Tommmmyyy! Heletoooo! Chiiiiimaaa Chukma! Hea hea,” he would say in Choctaw and then “Hennnnnshtay Chebonyy!” in Creek kinda mockin me for being two tribes; you know how Indians like to tease about pedigree.

“By God this here is my grandson” he would bellow. “Hey Hey this is my grandson --- and he’s gonna grow up to be governor of this stinkin town I tell you.”

I never knew who he was talking to. He was arguing with the night and ghosts who avoided him because he was drunk; I wanted to avoid him too, and yet something made me endure his odor, something made my feet stick and give him respect.

I would say timidly, this is when I was a ten year old, and did not yet possess the

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social ability to lie with my face to hide feeling ashamed, “Hi grandpa.” “What him say? What himmm say? Hea hea,” he would slobber speak. I thought he was kinda gross; I once saw him farmer John blow his nose right on a dog and laugh. I never did pet that dog. “I said hi! Grandpa.”

“Come here and hug your grandpa.” He would lean precariously, arms extended forward, every muscle fighting gravity and wood grain alcohol. I would lean nervously towards his embrace, half dropping to the ground.

“Heyyy! Heyyy! You’re alright hvlbvtv (alligator)!” He would pat my head like some pet. Why he called me gator I never knew. I guess he was trying to make me get a warrior spirit. All I thought about was that I would have been better off without a drunk Indian for a grandpa.

Eventually his attention would shift from me and then he would try to talk Muscogee (Creek) with my mom. It would have been alright if she spoke it. Anyways, she would just answer him in English. I remember she said “Kithoks” (“I don’t know”) a lot. My earliest memories of him are like that.

Grandpa was Seminole/Creek from around Wetumka. He married a Choctaw from around Honobia, a whole country away. Grandma was playing the piano at his church while accompanying her uncle who was on a mission trip to Wetumka. A ecumenical tribal exchange like a Choctaw Methodist being an ambassador among the Creek Methodist. Grandma was like a foreign exchange student.

Anyways my great uncle brought his niece with him more than once and that is how my grandma met my grandpa at Thlopthlocco Methodist. Family history doesn’t mean much when you’re a kid, and why you are the way you are doesn’t matter much. I

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didn't understand until later.

When I was a kid I used to wonder why my mother even tried to see him. I mean he was kinda neat, but he was a drunk. I was ashamed of him from birth probably. I was scared of him, like his drunk would somehow make me like him. I know I could have gotten tipsy just talking to him. Maybe a spirit of childhood discernment generated a fear of falling into his despair.

As I got older it became harder to not resent him. He was why people talked about Indians always being drunk. He was the stereotype, the butt of every joke. All you had to do is point at him and there was the story of Indians; poor and drunk.

I know people mocked him or scoffed in contempt; I felt it. I remember storing up frustration and had these day dreams about hitting some kids in the head with an ax handle as they mocked him in my mind. I never could see their faces and I wonder sometimes who those kids were. I had to pray for forgiveness all the time when I was fourteen because I learned how to mock him better than anyone and would stumble around bellowing and acting drunk which made my buddies laugh; I am ashamed of that now.

I'm telling you all this because now that I am older and can piece together all those events I can remember how my mom insisted on dragging me on these bi-annual pilgrimages up dirt roads from Talihina to Thlopthlocco. St. Paul's Choctaws enroute to Thlopthlocco Creeks. We would set out about six in the morning. Mom would make sandwiches and we would carry some water. We would climb out of Talihina towards McAlester and the roads were winding up hill and down and mom always was a slow driver. About lunch time we would arrive on the other side of McAlester. We would eat

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in the car and then we would head towards Calvin to cross the bridge. The road took us north to Wetumka. We would hit another dirt road and head north towards Okemah. There sat Thlopthlocco Methodist, Creek elders seated beneath arbors talking, laughing, gossiping, and eating. Now some of their camp houses are nicer than Choctaw ones because some of them Creeks have oil money, and they don't build just plain ol one room cabins like up here, no they go all out and even have a porch.

Now if I was lucky grandpa would not be there; I think I was mortified by him showing up near God's house drunk. At any rate I would have to do the usual family greetings, shaking hands with all of the men and nodding, listening to them chatter in Creek and then wonder why they were laughing. The old women would always tease me about being "Choctulgee," as if I were a member of a Choctaw creek town.

I would have to sit in church until my mother would nod her head, then I would bolt outside. Once outside I would avoid some of the bigger kids who liked to scare outsiders; I remember thinking most Creek boys were mean back then. There were a few kids, like Chebon Fish, who were really friendly and even took up for me; of course he was younger. We would run through the pasture playing dirt clod wars for hours, hiding like spies with cow crap grenades. Wherever there were girls there was a clear and present target; hostile aliens requiring a sorte' of poop missiles. The trick was to try to hit the hair that is easily washable rather than clothing which could be proffered as evidence in a trial whose sentence meant a peach limb switch. Now that I think about it I did the Peach switch dance so much I could have become a fancy dancer in Anadarko.

This one time I was there hiding when I saw his face in the light of the coal oil lamp outside the McKinney camp house. Grandpa was grinning like a fool; obviously lit

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enough to burn a wick of his own. Under the lean too of the camp house sat ol' Aunt Betty and Hepsy. They were singing old hymns and there was grandpa bobbing his head to the tune.

“Hey there’s your grandpa,” Chebon jabbed me.

“Yeah,” I looked away.

“Lets go see if he’s got any change.”

In protest I replied, “Noo!”

“Why not, he’s always got some money?”

“I don’t want to. He always smells bad.”

“Yeah one time he smelled like pee really bad.”

“Shut up, I don’t want to talk about it.”

“Suit yourself, I’m going to get some money.” With that Chebon began moving that direction like an opportunistic fox. Soon he was there, and wouldn’t you know it, he pointed towards my direction in the grass.

“Heyyy Tommmyyy! Come herrre! Come (belch) herrrre!” He shouted so long I knew everyone in the church and buried heard him. I sat for a long second trying to figure out an escape route but elder respect is like gravity that you can’t escape. I stood reluctantly and started the shame trudge dragging my toes which I am sure was plowing grass seed with each swish. He brusky grabbed his hand out and shook my shoulder with laughter when I arrived.

“Tommy, your’e gettin big. Your momma feeding you sour mash? Hea hea.”

Aunt Betty chimed in; “He look like she feeding him the hog and mash, look how long that boy is,” she grins. “I’m not fed anything special,” I was defensive. I then pushed his

hand off my shoulder. He could tell I was embarrassed and didn't say anything.

“Hey Tommy, here,” he looked at me with his face while he stuck out a pack of gum. I wanted to run ashamed, instead I stood there shaking my head no. “Here!” he said more insistently and I finally took one while he smiled half toothless. “Hey Tommy you been fishin?” he inquired and all I could do was shrug.

He must have sensed that I was not happy and he started talking in Creek to Betty. Conversation made it possible for me to escape, and I did, trying to reconnect to earlier pranks and fun, finding the moment passed.

It was long into the night that the church sat and sang. After I heard them sing the Creek national anthem, Halleluyah (Halleluia), I knew that mom would be calling for me. She stepped out of the church door behind ol' miss McKinney and called me over. She then did the standard introduction which took what seemed like an eternity, every single detail of my life resuscitated for spiritual and psychological evaluation by the old woman. Child rearing requires consent of the elders in our world.

“Tommy. Get your sack and mine out of the trunk and take them over to Aunt Betty's.”

“Do we have to stay tonight?”

“I'm not going to drive all the way back home at this hour, now hurry up and bite your lip.”

She always hacked me off; first the trek across the country, the length of church services that went on forever, good looking girls that your related too, and then the hard floor. I know she had sympathy for me because she always managed to not tell me we were staying until after it was too late to get my full complaint. One time I found out

about the Wetumka trip and managed to stay hidden in the mountains there in Honobia, just me and the skunks skulking and stinking.

That night at Thlopthlocco I was laying on the mat and it must have been about three a.m. and man did I have to pee. Something about laying on the hard ground makes your bladder feel like it is outside of your body pinned between you and the ground primed with explosive fluid. But then I heard the chatter...

“So dad rode up and hid?” I heard my mom’s question.

“No,” Betty cleared her throat, “he said he had already dismounted in the woods there outside of Maud goin towards Wewoka this side of the oil derricks. Anyways, he musta saw the crowd of all those white people and decided not to move in, bein safe sorta. He was trying to find out what was goin on because he heard them screamin.”

“He must have been scared.”

“Heck girl I woulda wet my pants. But he was that a way, always more curious than smart. I figger he was all impressed with his new shiny badge and bein an Este Wanayv.”

“What was he doin out there anyway.”

“Well to hear the way Ijo (deer) said it, they was out lookin for those boys, I guess tryin to find em before any of those whites did. Anyways it got around that some white lady, what’s her name? Well shoot I dun forgot, getting old and my brain don’t work so good after all that whiskey, ha!”

“If you have any whiskey you better hide it from dad” my mom said humorously.

“Ain’t that the truth. Anyways where was I? Oh yes, Ijo sent your daddy over across the way with ol Jimsey. Ijo said he was goin north of Maud and since they were

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comin from the east they figgered they could meet up on the other side, kinda sweep around the town. So they sent your daddy to follow behind ol' Jimpsey, you member him? No?" I then heard Betty mumble and she spit her wad of tobacco out. "Hand me that snuff by you."

"Do you need a spoon?"

"No I need a man, Hayla (I jokes), I can't even lift my legs anymore, ha ha ha!"

"Uh huh. Now where was I?"

"Ol Jimpsey," mom redirects chuckling and handing her a spoon.

"Yeah, well ol' Jimpsey was Este Wanayv from way back in the shoot em up days. So they sent your daddy out with him to kinda learn the ropes. Well Ijo said that ol Jimpsey was gettin up there in age and could hardly hear, his ears were ringin from shooting guns too much, who knows, anyhow he couldn't hear worth a plugged nickel and your daddy kinda steered his horse away from Jimpsey, like he was gonna sneak off, I guess, and that is when he heard all the voices."

"What were they saying?"

"They were beatin those boys don't you know it. Your daddy could just barely make em out through the bushes he was hidin behind. Anyways they grabbed those boys and tied them to a tree. Then a bunch of those boys grabbed some wood. Your daddy told Ijo that he could hear one of those boys screaming 'Hezagadamazi, Pothkey Hulway Legetscott (God who sits in Heaven)' 'Hezagadamazi, Pothkey Hulway Legetscott' they kept yelling, and then your daddy heard them start screamin like some scared animals and he saw the smoke. You know they was burnin those poor boys. Um mm. Some folks get hard cause of that."



“Oh God, you mean daddy saw it?”

“That’s not the worse,” Betty paused. “After a while he sat there in the bushes cryin his eyes out.” I could hear mom lightly sobbing. “Anyways Ijo and some Seminole Lighthorse got permission to get those poor boys. Your daddy said he vomited upon smelling them there smoldering and black. Anyhow he had to help steady one of them while they were proceeding to cut that burnt rope wrapped around them that didn’t burn up all the way. Ijo said one looked like his face was nearly all cooked off and his death smile would make any man have nightmares. Ijo said that for days he would see your daddy cryin and talking about the smell, how he couldn’t get rid of the smell of those boys poor burned bodies, meat smelling of smoke. I think that is when he started drinkin.”

“Did momma know about this story?” my mom spoke lightly holding back pain.

“Well your daddy was tryin to dry out at that time. He had asked the Lord into his heart and was tryin to stay away from whiskey, but he got the shakes and was horrible to watch at night. Your momma was like an angel, she would sit and wipe his head with a rag and sing, oh your momma could sing and make heaven cry. Your daddy wasn’t an ugly man, far from it, but his two years of bingin was makin it hard for him to break away. Anyways your momma helped nurse him. Well the next thing you know they was getting married. I think your momma was tryin to help save him from that bottle. Well it worked for a while. Then your daddy started drinkin again. I think he started getting mean with her when she would steal and hide his money and whiskey. That is when I told her she should quit him; he was too hurt to save. Your momma tried, dear God she tried. But you know even God’s love can’t heal who won’t come to him.”

”So thats why momma went home.”

“Uh huh. Then when she died I saw your daddy cry like I haven’t seen; its like his heart died too. I guess he kinda hoped he could someday get right and make her a good man.”

I couldn’t hold myself any longer. I could feel drops of pee already making my shorts moist. I sat up and asked if I could go the outhouse. “Shore baby,” Aunt Betty said. “Go shake that bush and poor water on it.”

The next morning I sat in church barely conscious. The preacher began talking about Abraham building an altar and preparing to offer a burnt offering to God and how God sent the angel to stop him from sacrificing his son. I often wondered why God didn’t send an angel to stop those folks from burning those boys; maybe he could have stopped those boys from suffering and my grandfather would not have tried to extinguish the pain with whiskey, a fuel that only feeds the flame of heartache.

I found out from Aunt Betty that the boy’s names were Palmer Sampson and Lincoln McGeisey. I bet you will never see their names in the Mirror of Martyrs. One of them had been at church during a brush arbor revival when that poor white woman was raped and killed. The other one supposedly wasn’t anywhere when she was attacked. There was no ram in thicket that day; only a scared deputy Lighthorseman who became a drunk Indun.

“When I was a child I spoke like a child and thought like a child and now that I am a man I must act so. Brothers and sisters now is the time of decision. You must let God take all of your secret pain and heal you. As we stand lets sing 21 or 42 and prepare our hearts to live as God wills.”

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With that invitation the pastor moves from the back of the plywood podium seated behind the plywood altar darkened and hardened by heat from a wood stove. This is the small twenty by twenty sanctuary of Big Lick Church on a fifth Sunday. As he moves forward the members raise from 2 x4 pews and begin “Uba Pin Chitokakayut..” At the camp houses Banaha cooks and life grows on the scorched vine within the Oklahoma Indian Missionary Conference.