

THE SNAKE RIVER AND THE STORYTELLER

By John F. Hall

I like to write stories, but only nonfiction stories. Morgan Harper Nichols wrote the song “Storyteller.” It is a lovely acoustic song that speaks of God's faithfulness throughout our lives and how we are living testimonies to His power and His grace. As for me, it is Christ's grace, upon grace, upon grace and His inspiration that keeps me writing. These



are some of Morgan Nichols' lyrics: “On a Sunday evening I'm looking back over the years, and where I've been looking at old photographs. I'm remembering You were right there, and You have been ever since. I see your faithfulness... You brought the pieces together, made me this storyteller. Now I know it is well, it is well, that's the story that I will tell. There were some nights that I felt like they would last forever. But You kept me breathing, You were with me right then... Oh the mountain where I climbed, the valley where I

fell. You were there all along, that's the story I will tell... You hold the broken. You hear my every cry, my cry. My eyes are open. I know that it is well, it is well. That's the story I'll tell. For years and years, and years I'll tell. That's the story I'll tell...”

As a historian, I report and write about things that I have experienced or observed. My wife, Paula has traces of Indian blood in her veins. Her great, great grandmother, Nancy Bass is a full blooded Cherokee Indian, or to be correct, a Native American. History books in American schools do not teach about the enslavement of American Indians from the time of Christopher Columbus in 1492, and until 1900. According to historian, Andres Resendez, somewhere between 2.5 and 5 million Indians were enslaved. Native tribes were not simply wiped out by disease, war, and brutal segregation. They were also worked, against their will, without pay, in mass numbers, to death. The American legal system was complicit in the enslavement. The nonfiction book by Andres Resendez is called “The Other Slavery, The Uncovered Story of Indian Enslavement in America.”

I wish I knew the story about Paula's great, great, grandmother. Was she involved in the “Trail of Tears?” Did she escape from General Winfield Scott's soldiers during that 1,200-mile journey? Historians estimate that 5,000 Cherokee Indians died from whooping cough, typhus, dysentery, cholera, and starvation during that forced march. The first time that I came in contact with American Indians was in 1976. I was trout fishing in Idaho with my young son, John and my wife, Paula. I was about to cast a line when a Shoshone Indian girl walked behind me. I was not aware of her presence. I whipped the line and the lore hook caught her ear. She screamed! Her dad ran over with two other Indians. I was thinking how Colonel George Armstrong Custer must have felt when his battalion of 200 soldiers was surrounded by 3,000 Indians. The battle lasted less than an hour.

The Indian girl's dad had metal cutters and he cut the hook in half and pushed it out of her ear. I offered to pay to have her treated at the emergency room. I told the Indian girl that I was sorry that I caused her pain. Her dad told me that she should not have been walking behind me and that he would treat her. The three Indians and the Indian girl walked away. I wondered if the Indian girl wanted to meet my son. He was a very cute kid. When we

stayed in KOA campgrounds, I would untie his bike that I had mounted on the back of the camper. It was a different world back in 1976. My son would tell us that he was going to find a friend and bring him back to our camper. Sure enough, in about ten minutes, he would find a friend and they rode back to our camper. The trout were spawning and I noticed a large trout seem to get stuck in an opening in the rocks. I reached down with both hands and grabbed the fish. I threw him behind me. I had a one-day fishing license. I cooked the fish that night for our supper. (Pictured: John A. Hall & his mother Paula Hall).



I like the song that John D. Loudermouth wrote called "Indian Reservation." These are some of his lyrics: "They took the whole Cherokee nation, put us on this reservation. Took away our ways of life, the tomahawk and the bow and knife. Took away our native tongue, and taught their English to our young. And all the beads we made by hand are nowadays made in Japan. Cherokee people, Cherokee pride, so proud to live, so proud to die... Though I wear a shirt and tie, I'm still redman deep inside... But maybe someday when they learn, Cherokee nation will return, will return, will return..."

The Anthem of the American Indian contains some of these lyrics: "Oh great eagle king of the sky, lift our spirit up and carry us high. Wings of strength that float along, take away the weak and make us strong. Oh great eagle king of the sky, through the air upon wings we fly. Soaring beauty true native sons, for we are now the chosen ones... I am who I am, and who I said I was. I am an image of myself. I am Indian..."

Years ago, I wrote a story called "Long Creek." During a cleaning of the Long Creek cemetery, which is located in the Land Between The Lakes, about two miles east of the former town of Golden Pond, I asked my oldest granddaughter, Andrea to read the inscription on Nancy Bass Oakley's tombstone. I wanted her and her sister, Heather to remember that day and their connection to that Cherokee Indian. I make the assumption that since Nancy was buried in the Long Creek Church Cemetery, that she became a Christian. Andrea and Heather can join the Daughters of the American Revolution because of their ancestry with George Oakley. He was a soldier in the American Revolution. More Oakley's are buried on that tall hill than any other place in Trigg County, Kentucky.

Although the Cherokee Indians of the past were not Christians, as a culture, they are a very spiritual people that View death as a transition rather than an end. Services are conducted by a Cherokee shaman the day after death.' The bodies are traditionally buried in the ground and covered with rocks, in the belief that they will provide nourishment to the earth. In the past, a Cherokee Spirit House was built over the grave. It had to be built within four days after the Indian died. An eagle feather is placed on the body. Cherokees, and most other Native American tribes, venerate the eagle as a sacred bird.

The Snake River might have caused the end of me, my wife, Paula, and my son, John. We had stayed an extra day at Paula's friend's house and it delayed our plans to camp at a

campsite on the banks of the Snake River in Idaho. I was pulling a pop-up Starcraft camper with my Ford pick-up truck. Had we arrived on time, it might have been the end of us. On June 5, 1976, the Teton Dam in southeastern Idaho catastrophically failed and released more than one million cubic feet per second. Eleven people were killed in the area where we had planned to camp. The one-day delay saved us. It is true that Christ moves in mysterious ways. His ways are not our ways and our plans may not be His plans. By my stories, I tell of Christ's love for us. I tell of Christ's faithfulness and give testimony to his power and grace. The failure of the Teton Dam might have caused me, Paula, and our son, John to perish. But that was not part of Christ's plans for us.

John F. Hall

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