

## Real and Fake Indians

By Charleen Touchette and S. Barry Paisner

American Indian athletes Shonto Benally, Shane Yazzie, and Nadema MacCleod race against Maude Meanabee's ring of artifact marketers to retrieve inscribed stones in an adventure that brings Indian Country to Washington, D.C.

### Northern Arizona

Shonto Benally wakes. The sun is rising over the mesa at his grandmother's sheep camp at the center of Navajo Nation. He rolls his bedding, wedges it against the log wall, and emerges through the hogan door to greet the dawn.

He thanks the Holy People for his good life, the livestock, the land, and the wonders all around.

"Nizhoni Hashtli, Nizhoni Hashtli, Nizhoni Hashtli, Nizhoni Hashtli, Nizhoni Hashtli, Nizhoni Hashtli,"

"May it be beautiful before me, behind me, above me, below me...", Shonto chants. "As it was in the long ago days, May I walk in beauty."

Shima taught him the Morning Prayer the Dine chant to greet the day.

"With dark abundant rain clouds above me...",

There has been a drought for seven years in the Painted Desert. Every morning Shonto prays for a return to the old ways that he knows will bring abundant rain to Navajo Nation.

"On a trail of sacred pollen, May I walk in beauty,"

Shonto combs his long hair and pulls it up into a thick knot wrapped with a tsii'yaal, the traditional white string the elders use to bind their hair.

Each morning he rises at dawn to pray on the same spot, near where his umbilical cord is buried at his shima's sheep camp in Teec Yah To.

Three times each day, Shonto takes out his bow and quiver and shoots his arrows into the target he's set up facing Dook'o'oosliid - the San Francisco Peaks. With each arrow he gets closer to having to leave his homeland of Dinetah between the Four Sacred Mountains for the Olympics at the end of the summer.

Shonto is tall, even for a Navajo. He wears Navajo style moccasins, a faded Bob Marley t-shirt, work jeans fastened with a sand cast silver belt buckle, and a cowboy hat.

At dusk he faces west and the setting sun for his evening prayers. Morning and night, through the seasons, he follows the sheep. Everyday he watches the sun rise and set. Day after day, Shonto keeps the old ways and follows the ancestors.

“Nizhoni Hashtli, Beauty all around. It is finished in beauty,” he says to complete the chant that begins his day.

Later, Shonto drives his shima back home after they had waited all afternoon to see the doctor at the Indian Hospital in Chinle. The dirt road to Shonto's grandmother's sheep camp in Teec Yah To is damp from a rain shower. Even so, they see a cloud of brown dust rising from a vehicle in the distance approaching at breakneck speed.

“Who could that be?” Shima asks in their language, “Shonto, do you recognize the truck?”

“No, Shima. Doesn't look like anyone who should be all the way out here. It must be a government vehicle. They're the only ones who'd have a white chidi out here with all this mud.”

Shonto's heart sinks when he sees his grandmother stiffen, lean forward in her seat, and strain against the seat belt, as if by pushing forward she could mentally get the truck home faster.

“I could be wrong though. Maybe it's just some hippies who got lost looking for Relocation Resisters to 'help', or a doc from I.H.S., or that Bilagáana attorney Joe Cohen. It's awfully late for B.I.A. guys. You know they like to get back to the trailer at Second Mesa by five.”

“Hope you're right, Shonto,”

Shima slumps slightly in the seat next to him and suddenly she looks smaller. She is silent for awhile as the truck rolls through miles of sage studded Painted Desert towards their homesite. They pass a wooden sign emblazoned with the words, “YOU ARE NOW ENTERING THE SOVEREIGN DINE NATION.”

Shima perks up and reads the sign aloud, and then she says, “Roberta Blackgoat had a sign that said, ‘The Creator is the ONLY ONE who's going to Relocate me.’” She straightens her spine, plants her moccasins squarely on the

floor of the truck, smoothes the folds of her velvet skirt, and places her hands on top of her knees. Then she says, "Same for me. I'm not going anywhere. My elders told me never to leave the Four Sacred Mountains. I'm staying here where I was born, where my cord is buried. Shonto, don't forget. You bury Asdzaan Tsininijinnie right here, near the old ones."

Now they can see it is a Bureau of Indian Affairs truck approaching. The white truck with the federal B.I.A. insignia picks up speed when it passes them. Shima doesn't say anything, but her shoulders drop. Shonto knows she expects the worse.

When they come within sight of the sheep camp, Shonto shudders and slams on the brakes. Even from a mile away, he can see the yawning gap where his grandmother's hogan had stood just this morning when they left for the drive to Chinle.

He spins the chidi around and begins to chase down the B.I.A. truck, but they're already miles ahead. The dust ball the truck generates is becoming a dot on the western horizon. Shima is confused, and asks question after question in Navajo. Shonto is in a rage. He barely hears her beside him begging him to stop the truck.

"What is it, Shonto? Turn around, I want to go home. Let me see what they did," his grandmother pleads.

Turning the truck around on the narrow dirt road is tough. The mud is slick and the rear wheels start to slip into the ditch. Shonto tries to focus, but all he can see is red. He knows he has to get his grandmother back to the sheep camp. She won't leave until she's seen the damage. He turns the steering wheel hard into the skid to regain control of the truck, and then heads back to Shima's place.

It was worse up close. The B.I.A. goons leveled everything. They pushed the hogan over with their truck. The sheep corral and shed are in shambles, even the outhouse is smashed. A foul smell floats on the wind over the heavy scent of crushed sagebrush and wet clay.

Children's shoes are strewn everywhere among the wreckage of logs, broken glass, and tarpaper. Goats, sheep, and chickens scurry around aimlessly. Three of Shima's dogs are frantic. They run around barking and trying to herd the sheep together. The body of her fiercest dog Rex lies distorted in front of the pile of debris that was once Shima's hogan.

"I knew I should not have gone to the doctor. I never should have left. Why didn't I stay home? If only I'd stayed," Shima says.

She wanders around the wreckage gathering mismatched shoes, and clutches them to her breast. "Look at all the shoes. They're everywhere. Now I'll never find them all," she says. Shonto has never seen his grandmother so sad and broken.

"I'm taking you out to Aunt Shirley's homesite," Shonto says, "Her daughter Martha stays there now. She'll take care of you until we can get your hogan rebuilt."

"Those B.I.A. men were over by Aunt Shirley's sheep camp near the Blackgoats' homesite lease last month. They destroyed her place. I think that's what killed her," Shima says, "Shirley was only seventy-four, two years younger than me. Both Aunt Shirley and my mother were born to Tódích'í'nií - Bitter Water Clan."

"Aunt Shirley stood strong and resisted, like Roberta Blackgoat," says Shonto.

"After she died, her daughter Martha got everyone to help rebuild," Shima says,

"Martha told them, 'Ama Doo Alchini Bighan' – 'Home is sacred,' and they built up the hogan again, log by log. Martha vowed to stay there to honor her mother's fight. She's taken over Shirley's work now, herds the sheep, spins, weaves, and she knows how to type. She's a good girl. Once a week, she drives into Flagstaff to type letters for the Resisters."

Shonto smiles.

"Martha is your sister. Our families' ties go way back. Shirley's great grandmother was mine's best friend, before she and most of the rest of them around Teec Yah To were forced to walk to Fort Sumner," Shonto's grandmother tells him.

Martha Teec Yah To is happy to take in Shonto's grandmother. She is Bitter Water Clan, after all. Shonto unloads the animals from the back of the pick-up. Martha has fresh water and alfalfa ready for the sheep and goats. She feeds the dogs, and pens the chickens in the coop safe from coyotes, and comforts Shonto's Shima. Then Martha fills a bowl of mutton stew and pours some Navajo tea for them both. Shima nods with approval.

Once Shima is settled, Shonto thanks Martha for her hospitality. He tells his grandmother he'll send his friend Yazzie Yazzie to get her horses and cattle with

his horse trailer and bring them over to Martha's place. Then Shonto tells her he'll be back himself in three days.

It is almost quitting time when Shonto's truck rolls into Second Mesa, slips into the dirt parking lot, and comes to a halt.

Shonto steps out of the truck, and walks up the platform stairs of the B.I.A. trailer straight into Harry Houston's office. Houston reaches for his sidearm.

In one seamless motion Shonto knocks the pistol to the ground with his left hand, then punches Houston square in the face with his right fist. He turns and is out the door by the time the B.I.A. Area Director's body hits the floor.

Houston's secretary Gloria Polestewa pokes her head in the door, sees her boss spread out on the carpet, smirks, and returns to her filing. She nods approvingly at the tall Navajo youth's backside as he strolls to his truck, backs up, and heads west on Highway Two Sixty Four.

Gloria's daydreaming is interrupted a bit later when Deputy Lomaheptesa returns from the Hopi Cultural Center.

"Hey, Gloria. What happened here?" Lomaheptesa asks.

"Some young Navajo strolled in and punched Houston in the face. He's been out cold for a few minutes. Thought I'd throw some water on him, once I'd had a minute to myself," Gloria says.

"Did'ja call the tribal police? Tell'em which way the boy went?" the deputy says.

"What for? Looked like the young man had his reasons. Didn't see which way he went anyway," Ms. Polestewa replies.

"You bet he had his reasons," Lomaheptesa says, "Houston was out of control today. He was as happy as I've ever seen him smashing this elder lady's place out on the H.P.L. I kept telling him, we were just supposed to impound their sheep and cattle. He ignored me. Kept ranting about how he was going to get these squatters off Hopi land."

"Gee, sounds bad," Gloria says. "But I'm not surprised."

"Yeah, but he outdid himself today. You should have seen him, revving the truck and ramming the hogan again and again. The lady had her family's shoes lined up to dry on the roof. Each time Houston battered the house, the shoes jumped a foot into the air," Lomaheptesa says. "Harry just laughed and kept

bashing into the house. It finally collapsed and crushed everything inside. Scattered the shoes everywhere. Then Houston got out and jumped up and down on the wreckage. He strolled all over the place like he was king of it or something. Posted the notice prohibiting repairs on the only log he left standing. It was sick.”

“Houston is warped,” Gloria says, “Wonder what he'd do if someone did that to his grandmother up at Polacca and crushed all her pots and grandkids' Kachina dolls?”

“He doesn't think like that,” the deputy explains, “To Houston these people aren't even human. I was glad to get out of there before I had to see that old lady's face when she saw her place flattened.”

Gloria notices Harry Houston is beginning to move. He shakes his head, blinks, and rolls his eyes as he comes to.

“Look, Houston is waking up now. No harm done,” she says loud enough for him to hear.

“What happened to me? How'd I get on the floor?” Harry Houston asks blinking his eyes, and rubbing his jaw.

“Don't know Boss. I was in the back filing,” Gloria shuffles the files she holds against her chest, and then returns to her alcove and file cabinets.

Duane Lomaheptesa passes close to her and mumbles under his breath, “That man makes me sick.” Then he crosses the trailer's width, reaches down, and helps the Director back up into his chair.

“Last thing I remember, some Navajo kid walks into my office, next minute I'm waking up on the floor, not knowing how I got there,” Harry Houston says sounding groggy.

He reaches up to rub his jaw, and asks,

“How long have I been out? Who was it that hit me?”

“Just a little while. Don't know. Maybe it was a relative of that grandmother whose hogan you demolished this afternoon?” Duane says.

“Just doing my job, Deputy Lomaheptesa,” Houston responds with a phony salute.

“We were only supposed to impound some livestock,” Lomaheptesa challenges him. “You didn’t have to destroy the whole place. No reason to do that to anybody. That was their home. Don’t you have any respect?”

Houston shrugs his shoulders and begins shuffling papers.

“The Elders don’t approve of what you’re doing to the Navajos out there,” Lomaheptesa mumbles.

“I’ve got plenty of supporters,” Harry Houston says and laughs.

“It was true,” the Deputy thought, “Lots of Hopis wanted the Navajo off Hopi land.”

“Just following the law,” Houston says.

“We’re only charged to impound livestock and convince them to move to prefabs in Flag. But that isn’t cruel enough for you. You love knocking over their hogans.”

“Nothing wrong with enjoying your work,” Houston says.

“Why can’t we just do our jobs, and leave their homes standing?”

“That’s our land. It’s Hopi land. They have got to go,” Harry Houston shouts and throws a dart directly at Big Mountain on the map covering the opposite wall.

Shonto sits on a hillside watching Shima’s flock. He can see her bent form sifting through the shambles of the camp in the distance. She insisted he drive her back here from Martha’s place for the day. If there’s anything not totally shattered, Shima will find, and retrieve it.

Shonto has been out herding since dawn contemplating the B.I.A.’s destruction of his family’s camp.

“How can we allow this to happen to the Dine?” he says aloud. He remembers what his grandmother told them the night before as they sat near the pot bellied stove in Martha’s hogan.

“In 1863, your great-grandmothers were girlfriends of twelve years old, and were Kinaaldas. The coals were ready, and they were mashing cornmeal and spreading it in the pit oven when word came that the soldiers had been sighted. Our shima tried to talk Martha’s shima into staying and hiding with her, but she

had to go with her own family. On the way to Fort Sumner, the girl's younger brother died in her mother's arms."

"When they arrived at Bosque Redondo on the Pecos River, the Indian agent at the fort separated the families, and gave them Anglo names. They were gone for four years. Your great grandmother always told us how changed the people were when they returned after their long exile."

Shonto stands and surveys the lands around him, and then he says aloud,

"The Dine need to return to traditional ways."

He pulls an arrow from the quiver strapped to his back, sets it in his bow, and begins sending arrows into a straw target set up regulation distance away. Shonto empties the quiver, retrieves the arrows, and empties it again, extracting and shooting one arrow after another into the center of the target.

The sun crosses the sky as Shonto thinks about what he could do to wake up his people. He remembers Navajo warriors astride painted horses, bows taut, arrows set, riding full bolt, they let their arrows fly to rip into the chests of Kit Carson's men, and Nana, the eighty-year-old Apache chief who killed the Indian Agent and his family as they slept because he broke the treaty, and Haashkeneinii who took his group from Monument Valley to Navajo Mountain and never surrendered, and Manuelito who hid his band from Kit Carson's campaign and was never captured, and Ba'ililii who fought the soldiers that stole away Navajo children to boarding schools, and now, Kathryn Smith who met Relocation officials on her porch with a shotgun.

"How can our values be protected when our 'leader' at the B.I.A. grew up as a white man and only claimed his Indian card when the President gave him the nod to head the B.I.A.? Stranton is an insult."

Shonto walks to the target and pulls the arrows out of its now pulverized center for the seventh time. When he turns to walk back and begins shooting, he knows he must act. He empties his quiver again, and as he shoots each arrow, Shonto sees the face of B.I.A. Director Fred Stranton in the center of the target.

As the sun disappears over the western horizon, Shonto knows what to do.

"The Dine must be free from the Bilagáana. Death to the B.I.A.," he says aloud.

Shonto decides he'll fly to the Olympics and take the gold for the Dine. Then he'll go to Washington and kill B.I.A. Director Stranton.