

SEEDS

Marisa D. Lopez

I am half Indian, three-eighths Caucasian, and one-eighth Asiatic/Austro-Hungarian and Gypsy. I educated myself about the many cultures I am descended from, and my pride comes from many places. One place I know well is my father's stories from his people. I was curious about where I came from. I guess all kids are. For me, it was important to understand how they did things back then. Daddy's stories really taught me about the similarities between people, and that, although times may have changed, people haven't.

Some stories Daddy told me were of his family when he was a kid, growing up in the Indian village of Ocoronee. I always liked hearing his stories about my grandfather, who was a wise man and healer, a warrior of his clan, the Acalua. They speak the same



language as the Yaqui, but have the same religious customs as the Chiricahua and Nednhi Apache of Sonora and Sinaloa, Mexico.

The story of the Rain Dance was a story that I always loved to hear my dad tell. When he was six years old, there was no rain for many months, so his people could not grow corn. The tribe decided to get together and have dances and prayers. Indian dancing can go on for days on end. It's always a prayer to Yusen to bless the people with rain, to grow food and become healthy and strong. Dances always got my dad and all the other little kids excited. Elders would dance in the inner circle, while the rest of the tribe danced in a larger outer circle. The circle has significance to my father's people—it symbolizes continuity. Daddy said that whenever somebody in the outer circle got tired, another would take his or her place in the circle. My father remembers that the elders sang and danced without ever leaving the inner circle. I found that amazing.

Grandfather led the prayers during the Rain Dance as the drum and shakers kept a steady rhythm. For three days, not a cloud was in the sky, and the hot sun beat down. The third day, a dark cloud appeared overhead, and the people danced, sang and prayed harder and faster than before. Daddy jumped around with the other kids, moving his legs faster and faster to the beat. Not long after, the cloud moved above the dancers. They felt a strong power around them and it began raining hard. The people thanked the creator, Yusen, and the crops grew. I love that story because of the way my dad uses his sense of humor to tell it.

00 For the most part, his life was very country-hickish, even for an Indian. He rode horses and worked on a little farm near his family's house. One evening, my dad and his brother were walking a horse with a load of corn plants, heading home for the night. My dad's brother had a hard time walking, as he was born with a limp. They walked the horse up a steep, rocky hill, and after they got to the top, they sat down to rest. My dad stupidly tied the horse's lead rope around his ankle. The two were standing around drinking some water when a herd of wild horses ran past the bottom of the hill. The herd must have had at least four females, and my dad's horse happened to be a stallion. Well, when that stallion saw those pretty, young mares, he dug his four hooves into the dirt and ran

down that hill like a rocket. My dad was dragged down the hill, his pants ripped, bleeding from his legs and bottom and yelling to his brother to help him get the rope off his ankle. His brother ran as fast as he could to catch the stallion, but Dad was already at the bottom of the hill in a bunch of mesquite bushes, screaming like a girl. My uncle had to carefully pick my dad out of the bushes. Dad ended up having my three aunts picking mesquite pricklies out of his butt. Everybody in the village laughed at him. Normally I'd laugh at a story like this, but my dad must have been really sore, so I actually felt sorry for him.

When he told me a short story of an animal following them home in the dark, it put a smile on my face. My grandfather told my dad and his brother, who were twelve and sixteen years old at the time, that they should be careful when walking in the dark. One night he told his sons that they shouldn't go out that night because it was dangerous and they might get themselves into trouble—or worse.

My dad and uncle didn't listen. It was dark before they got even halfway home, and they were beginning to understand why they shouldn't have gone out in the evening, even though the moon was very bright and they could see the path ahead. They began to feel a strange presence behind them as they were walking. Still, hearing the rustle of footsteps behind them, my dad and uncle weren't afraid. They knew who this animal was. Dad said it was their father protecting them as they were walking home.

Whatever you may believe about these stories, the message is one of togetherness of people. The seed that is watered through prayer and dedication can grow into something beautiful. Protection and guidance of young people, teaching them the old ways of doing things no matter where your family is from, are important. You will share stories with your own children. This is what I have learned.



*Eighteen-year-old **Marisa D. Lopez** is Apache, Lakota, Eastern Cherokee, and German. Her teachers Boo, Ms. Colby, and Strash have all inspired her to go to college, where she hopes to study music and fine arts. This project was a chance for her to “tell the stories of my father’s people and tell others that it’s never too late to learn about where you come from.” When she’s not writing, Marisa plays classical guitar, studies politics and social issues, and tries to learn from people of other cultures.*