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The Education of Little Tree

By Richard Friedenberg

It began at the Jericho Mine,
Jericho City, Tennessee,
in the year 1935,
the day after Ma died.
She'd lasted only a year after
Pa was killed in the army.
That's how I came to live with
Granma and Granpa when I was eight.
One time, Granma told me that
when you come on something good,
first thing to do is stare it
with whosoever you can find.
That way, the good spreads out,
we're no telling how far it'll go.
Which is right.
So I'm telling the
story of them days,
how Granma and Granpa got
me away from Aunt Martha
and took me to live
in their mountains,
where they'd raised
my pa before me,
and which I know now was the
secret heart of the world.
You stop, right where you stand!
I said no!
You ain't goin' off with no backwoods
white Indian so long as I got breath.
Sally was my sister
and she gave him to us.
Put a hand to it,
Henry, for Jesus' sake.
You can't waltz in here and carry
him off to some God-forsaken...
Martha, leave him be.
It ain't right.
It ain't right, by damn!
Wales, he's wearin' out.
Yeah.
Are you OK, son?
Take the light.
You ain't wakening
him his first morning?

Just giving him the option, is all.
Little Tree, are you
awake enough to hear me?
We're heading up to the corn patch.
Figure you might like to help.
- Wales!
- It's up to you.
Come on, now!
Well, now!
Go on, get off him!
They're heartened to see someone new.
They get plenty of Granma and me.
That's Blue Boy.
They the only shoes you got?
Bet you can't feel a
thing through them soles.
We'll take care of that.
To learn, you got to feel the ground.
All right... You'll stay!
She's coming alive!
Don't feel sad, Little Tree.
It's the Way.
The falcon caught the slow bird, so
it won't have no babies that are slow.
It helps the bird out, you see?
It's a lesson. Animals
know that, just look around.
Only the white man takes
more than his share.
He'll claim whatever he can,
no matter how much it is.
He'll run his flag up, saying,
"This stands for my right to more. "
Then there'll be a war
over it and men'll die.
Like your daddy.
You're saying, "Hold on there, I
thought Granpa was a white man. "
It's the truth. I was born
white, no doubt about it.
But, when I met your granma,
how young she was and...
...how she could dance!
We married and I began to see

the world through Cherokee eyes,
till I came at last
to understand the Way.
And so will you, Little Tree.
You'll learn you can't
change the rules of the Way,
even if you are
white, and that's that.
My ma was white.
As was mine.
Fine a woman as ever lived.
- As was mine.
- She was.
She pleased your
daddy, too. He told us.
Dictionary.
As he can't get to the
settlement every day for school,
a crying shame, nothing
we can do about it,
I plan to teach him
myself. All I know, anyhow.
Look at the first word.
Can you make out what it says?
Aard... vark.
Aardvark.
Aard... what?
Large, burrowing, African mammal
that feeds on ants and termites.
That's his first word?
Tell me, when is the occasion going
to arise for him to employ this word?
- Can't never tell.
- Yeah, that's right, Little Tree.
You go to the settlement, you never
can tell what's going to come up.
You know, like,
"Little Tree's downcast.
Seems he lost his aardvark. "
"That's funny," says Mr. Jenkins.
"Miss Perkins is having
trouble with her aardvark, too.
"Had to go all the way to Knoxville,
up to hospital, have her whole

dang aardvark removed!
"She's resting comfortable
now, but... Them aardvarks!"
You can't never tell!
You'll stay!
How old are you going to
be on your next birthday?
- Nine. Come March 22.
- That's what I thought.
Then it is time you
started on a trade.
- That's her.
- What does she do?
She makes whiskey!
Ain't you ever seen a still afore?
This here's my trade.
Whiskey-making.
Been handed down on the Scots
side of my family for 200 years.
I'm going to hand it down to you.
Of course, when you get older,
you might want to switch trades.
Leastways you'll have
something to fall back on
when you're pressed
otherwise to make a living.
Times like these here, hard times.
Now, this...
...you call the beer.
What we're going to do today
is turn the beer into whiskey.
OK.
Pour away!
This here is pure corn.
Some fellows, and this is what
gives whiskey-making a bad name,
some fellows use potash or
even lye to make the mash quick.
Some put it through sheet
iron or truck radiators,
got all kind of poisons
that can kill you.
Now, these fellows ought
to be hung, in my opinion.

Then there's the other side, them
that say whiskey ought to be aged.
I tried that once. Set back some
fresh-made for a whole god damn week.
By the bye, there's a word you won't
find in your granma's dictionary,
so you probably shouldn't
try it out on her, OK?
OK.
Now... where was I?
You set some fresh-made
back a whole goddam week.
Week, yeah...
Didn't taste a damn lick different
from all the other whiskey I ever made.
I'm gonna raise the flame
on this a little bit.
See? You want to boil it, but
you don't want to scorch it.
What I could use is just one
more armload of good dry wood.
I'll get it, Granpa!
You be Little Tree?
Well, let's see what you brung.
Little Tree, this here's Willow John.
He has the magic.
- What do you reckon?
- Ain't you gonna taste it?
Well, this is what you call
your single. Damn near 200 proof.
We only get a couple of gallons of it.
You add water, start over again,
and that's how you get
your selling whiskey, see?
Still, a man ought to know
what his single tastes like,
seeing as how it's the
backbone of the whiskey and all.
That's out of the
early corn. Got a...
Don't know what you'd call
it, exactly. A kind of a...
- Bite.
- Bite.

Yeah, that'd be it.

- Have you told him of our history?

- Not as yet.

He should know.

- It's a hard tale.

- It is that.

But if you don't know your
past, you won't have a future.

Why don't y'all leave
it up to the boy?

This here's a story about your
ancestors Little Tree,
and how they come to be here.

Do you care to know?

I do.

Well, now...

...the Cherokee have lived in these
hills since the Doda put 'em there.

They farmed in the valleys,
made the winter hunts,
and taught themselves the Way.

But then the white man come
and the Cherokee made
a paper treaty with him.

They said, "These white men ain't
so bad. We could live together. "

Then government soldiers came and said
the paper treaty had changed its words.

Now the words said the Cherokee
had to give up their homes
and move far west, where the
government had other lands for them.

Lands that the white man
didn't want, of course.

While the Cherokee were trying to
understand, the government soldiers
found this big old valley and
ringed it in with their guns,
and drove the Cherokee
in there just like cattle.

And they filled up that whole valley.
Then they brought in mules and horses
and said they could ride out west.

Now the Cherokee, they

had nothing left, did they?

They had no homes, no
farms, no land, nothin'.

- But they would not ride.

- Damn right.

So they did save something
from it, didn't they?

They couldn't see it, they couldn't
wear it, they couldn't eat it.

But they did save something.

They would not ride.

- They walked.

- Yes.

It was a long walk
and as they got farther and
farther from their mountains,
they began to die.

At first, it was just the
very young and the very old,
and the soldiers stopped to let
the Cherokee bury their dead.

But then more began to die.

They died by the
hundreds, by the thousands.

The soldiers said, "Put your dead in
the wagons and we'll carry them for you. "

- But did they?

- No, sir.

No.

The Cherokee would not put
their dead in the wagons.

They carried 'em, walking. Yes...

The man carried his dead wife,
the son carried his dead momma,
and the little boy
carried his baby sister.

The white people lined up along
the trail to watch them pass by.
Some of them people began to cry
and that's why they call
it the Trail of tears.

But the Cherokee did not cry.

They did not speak,
they did not look.

They walked on.
But by some magic that I don't know,
some managed to escape
and make their way back,
staying off the trail, until
they found their mountains again.
And they went far back
into them and time went on.
By and by, the white man
forgot about them and passed by,
and finally left them in peace.
And that's you,
Little Tree. That's us.
That's where you come from,
and that's why we're here.
Well, now!
I reckon Willow John likes you.
- He left it for me?
- Looks like it.
- But I didn't get to thank him.
- He didn't do it for thanks.
He gave it to you 'cause you deserve it.
That don't call for no show, does it?
- I suppose not. But shouldn't I...?
- Go on to bed now.
Long day tomorrow.
Take them big shoes off,
for once and for all.
They're finally ready.
They're still wet!
You put 'em on wet and walk 'em dry.
That way they fit like
they grewed on your feet.
Got rid of them clobbers,
did you? Just in time.
Got a long, heavy haul
down to the settlement.
How many jars you
reckon you can tote?
- How many in all?
- Thirteen.
Two to keep, for medicinals.
That makes... what number?
- Eleven to go.

- All right. Try it now.
- What say I put two in the sack for you?
- Three.
You're sure, now? If I put in
three, that's how many you'll carry.
- Three.
- All yours.
Don't feel like nothin' at all.
That new knife kind of
balances things out, don't it?
- How do them moccasins feel?
- Like they grewed on my feet!
Now, that there is Jenkins' store.
You got good eyes. Tell me, is
there a pickle barrel out front?
- No, only some men sitting.
- That's the sign to come on in.
Pickle barrel means the law.
That's another thing to remember.
I guess new fortune's
on its way. Howdy, Wales!
- Who's the little fellow?
- My grandson, Little Tree.
Hey, Little Tree!
It was Wednesday... No...
It was Tuesday, for I'd been playing
at a dance on the Monday night.
I come through the settlement
and I seen Smokehouse,
Turner, you know, police.
I'm talking with Smokehouse
and this big shiny car comes
pulling into the filling station.
It hit me right off! I said to
myself, that's a big-city criminal.
Smokehouse asked him,
"Where you from?"
He says, "Chicago. "
Meantime, pulling
Smokehouse aside, I say,
"He says he's from Chicago, but
he's got an Illinois tag on his car. "
Old Smokehouse come down
on him like Judgment Day!

He was jumpin' and sayin' to him...
Let's give it the acid
hest, Wales. Here we go.
Elegant!
Hey, Little Tree, come over here.
Thank you.
Would you do an old man a favor
and go out to the woodpile and
fill the sack with woodchips?
Getting mighty low. I appreciate it.
What's them things on your feet?
Moccasins.
Can I touch 'em?
Suppose.
- They's soft.
- Yep.
- You're an Indian, then.
- I'm working at it.
You been inside that there store?
They got dolls in there?
Expect so. Almost near everything.
- Would you look and find out for me?
- S'pose.
Pa says he's gonna buy me one
as soon as we get our share...
- Share of what?
- What?
You know, the share.
The share of tobacco you pick, dummy.
I ain't never picked
no tobacco before.
That's 'cause Indians are
lazy and don't work none.
- What's this I'm doing, then?
- I ain't saying it's your fault.
You're just... different, that's all.
I mean, look at the color of you.
Come ahead, put yours up.
Come on.
- Which one do you like better?
- I don't know.
Do you like mine?
Yours is dirty.
All right, now. Me and Mr.

Jenkins is all settled up.

So I figured out your cut
of the deal here. 50 cents.

- Mine?

- We're partners, ain't we?

- But...

- You done the work, you get the pay.

That's how it is.

Let's get it over with.

Well... this morning, God is truly
shining his beatific light on us.

It is said that he also
serves who stands and waits.

Lord knows we've been
standing here a long time.

But today, our prayers are answered.

A great man is about to arrive
and bless us with his words,
all the way from Washington City.

Our own Congressman, the
poor man's best friend,

Johnny Mack Stoddard!

Above all the churches in
East Tennessee, he chose ours.

I think the Christian thing to do
is to get up and march out there
so he can see his chosen
people as he drives up.

And...

Stand up, now!

How are you, reverend?

Hey, how are you?

Thank you for coming.

Can I shake your hand?

Nice to see you. How are
you? Good to see you as well.

Hey, how are you? All
right, bye for now.

Right this way, John.

Up I go!

My friends, my fellow Tennesseans,
sons and daughters
of the great pioneers
who fought their way

through forest and mountain
to found this rich land,
that has been given with good
heart and trust to myself,
your humble servant.

I come here today to tell you of a
mighty battle I'm fighting for you...

- Like my calf, kids?

- Yes, sir.

Go on ahead! Pet him all you
want. Won't hurt him none.

- Would you like to take him home?

- Yeah.

- You got any money?

- No.

Well, now...

Ain't that a cryin' shame.

- I got some.

- How much is some?

- 50 cents.

- Where did you get 50 cents?

This calf's worth more than
a hundred times that much.

Yes, sir. I wasn't
figuring to buy him.

Well, I'm a Christian man, son.

Somehow, even costing
me all this calf's worth,

I figure you ought to have him,
the way he's taken up with you.

I wasn't gonna take him, mister.

Don't worry about me

none. It's for the best.

Thank you, sir. I didn't mean...

I said, where did you get 50 cents?

- Did I take advantage of him?

- No, that's what Christian people do.

You reckon? Well then,

I guess he's mine.

I gotta go show my granpa!

- You can come up and visit him.

- I can?

If you want.

I can fight for you against

this army of Jews and Catholics
who's bent on picking
everything from your pockets.

Thank you!

Thank you, thank you.

God bless.

Granpa, look!

A fellow sold him to me, for 50
cents, but he was a Christian man,
and that's what them
fellows do, so it's OK.

I didn't take advantage
of him or nothin'.

- Take care. Bye-bye.

- See you later!

Granpa!

Do you know any Jews or Catholics?

I'll tell you what, Little Tree.

If you were to take a knife and
cut into that politician's heart,
you'd have a hard time
finding a kernel of truth.

The son of a bitch didn't say nothin'
about getting the whiskey tax taken off,
the price of corn, nor
nothin' else of value.

I stand against politicians
and all such sons of bitches.

Listen here. That's a new cuss word with
a whole lot of starch attached to it.

You don't want to use that
no way at all around your...

- I believe your calf's died.

- No, he ain't neither.

Come on, get up. Get up!

He's dead, Little Tree.

If something's dead, it's dead.

There's disease on the liver.

Can't eat it.

We'll send the dogs back.

It'll make a meal for them, anyhow.

For the calf's hide.

Ain't no way of learning

you, except letting you do.

If I'd stopped you buying the calf, you'd always want it.

If I told you to buy it, you'd blame me for its dying.

- You just gotta learn as you go.

- Yes, sir.

Well then, tell us what you learnt out of this.

Well, I sure as hell...

I reckon I learnt not to trade with no Christian.

Tell me something. Did you find your secret place yet?

Secret place?

- I don't know.

- Well, you'd know.

- What's it look like?

- It's a place only for you.

Sometimes you feel you gotta go there.

All Cherokee got a secret place.

Is that so?

I tell you what. Instead of working the still this morning, you'd be better off searching out your own place, before the snow comes.

- You think?

- I do that.

Come on, Blue Boy!

Gotcha!

This is it. This is my place.

- Revenuers!

- Damn!

- How far back?

- Some.

All right.

Take this. I'll clean up and meet you at the cabin.

- Can you manage it?

- Yes, sir.

Come on, Blue Boy!

- Indian!

- Just a kid.

- Yeah, Indian kid.

- Wait a goddam minute.
Ain't you Sally's kid?
Sally, who married the Indian.
- Could it be?
- Ain't you?
- What you got in your sack?
- What's in the sack, boy?
- Can I take a look?
- Terrible thing...
...teach kids to be whiskey-runners.
Give it over.
You ain't going no place.
- Watch her.
- Hand the sack out.
Easy as one...
...two...
Get off!
Help me!
He's gettin' away!
Hey, Blue Boy!
Little Tree?
I'm here, Granma. Over here!
Are you all right? Are you OK?
You can let go of the
sack now. Let go, let go.
- Didn't break one!
- Couldn't have done better myself.
You're coming to be one of the best
whiskey-makers in these mountains.
Come on!
Maybe they thought it
was somebody else's kid.
How'd they know he's yours? There's
plenty young 'uns in these parts.
- Sure!
- They recognized him.
Called his ma by name.
One of 'em said, how could we...
...put him in the whiskey trade
at his age? Don't look good.
Bound to get back to
somebody. And then what?
- Is this yours?
- Nah!

Look here what I got.

It's a present.

I owe it to Willow John.

He gave me this.

- It ain't as good, is it?

- Well, I like it.

- You do?

- Did you show him the calf?

The calf?

You name him yet? I've come up with the perfect name.

- Wanna hear it?

- Sure.

OK. Brown Eyes. 'Cause he's got them pretty brown eyes.

How is Brown Eyes?

Can I still come up and see him?

He's...

He's dead.

- Say, what?

- He just...

He just... keeled over and died, just like that.

I couldn't do nothin' about it.

The fellow cheated me.

- I didn't know. He said he was...

- Little Tree, come on to church now.

I'm sorry.

Ain't nobody in the world oughta cheat you.

All right!

What makes this day different than all others?

Tell me! Tell me! Speak it!

Testifying day.

Today you will stand before the Lord and confess your sins.

- Amen.

- Yes, sir.

Stand up and make yourselves clean.

Praise Jesus.

- Praise God.

- I'm a sinner.

- I'm a sinner in the face of the Lord.

- Tell it, sister!
- I committed...
- Tell it!
- ... fornication!
- Amen!
- Beelzebub!
- With...
...Junior Logan.
- And with...
- More!
- Tell it, sister.
- And with...
- Tell it.
- And with...
- Got it?
- Yeah.

You want to be shortening
up on that handle some.
Just kind of let her fall.
See now...

That maul's got enough weight
to split that pine just like a...
Hang on, there...

Son of a gun. It just hit
me like a bolt of lightning.
I'm teaching you everything,
the land, the business,
and I forget the most important one.
What's that?

Half of dinner. You get the other
half, we'll have the whole shebang.
If you come across a frog or two, I
don't believe we need any more gifts.
Don't move, Little Tree.
Don't turn your head
or even blink your eye.
Thank you, Granpa.

Hell, we showed that son
of a bitch, didn't we?
Yes, we did.

He'll sheer clear of us from now on, and
tell his relations to sheer clear of us.
Hotter than hell, ain't it?
For this time of year...

- What happened?
- Granpa... rattlesnake...
- Where?
- I led him as far as the shelter.
But he...
Build up the fire, Little Tree.
Make it hot as you can.
Damnation!
That's good.
You keep the fire hot.
We can't move Granpa so we've got to
keep him warm all through the night.
Thank you, Little Tree,
but that won't be necessary.
What'll help is the
heat off our bodies.
He ain't gonna die no more, is he?
After all you've done?
Well, now...
There's all kinds of
dyin', Little Tree.
I've seen people at the settlement
walking around like you or me,
but they're as good as dead,
'cause they spent their
lives in meanness and greed.
The spirit inside of them shrunk down
to no more than the size of a pea.
'Cause the only way to make
your spirit big is to work on it.
You got to use it to understand.
The more you try to
understand, the bigger it gets,
till it gets so big and powerful...
...you come to understand everything,
you remember all your past body lives.
I believe Granpa is gettin'
near such understanding,
though he don't know it.
But...
...if his body dies,
he'll remember us.
That's what I want you to know.
We'll all of us be

together in spirit always.
That's the important thing.
That's the important thing.
My God! A fellow can't
lay his body down nowheres
without you stripping buck
naked and hunchin' at him!
Oh, my God!
Mr. Wales...?
I'm Elizabeth Dubois.
This is Mr. Lane.
We're from the State...
- Politicians.
- Pardon?
Oh, no. We're from the
State Department of Welfare.
Politicians.
Sir, we'd very much like to talk
to you. It's really quite important.
It... has to do with...
I think the boy, Little Tree, is it?
I think he should...
He sits in on everything
there is to sit in on.
A complaint has been filed
by a Mrs. Martha McCullers.
- Damn!
- Aunt Martha?
She alleges that you're not
sending your grandson to school,
in violation of state and
federal codes, and that...
...you have involved him
in illegal activities.
In short, it states that...
Are you sure...?
...that you are unfit guardians
and he should be removed
to a suitable place for his
moral and educational upbringing.
- He's going to her, then?
- Who?
No.
He's on the Cherokee rolls and

therefore is officially an Indian.

I am?

As such, he will be sent
to Notched Gap Indian School
to board there until the age of 18.

You have 30 days to appeal
the decision in court.

Otherwise...

We have to go.

Elizabeth?

All you have to do is come
here the next circuit I make,
I'll have the cease and desist lawyered
out, and you put your mark to it.

You follow me, Bobby?

All right, then.

- Wales.

- Mr. Taylor.

You been in jail, I recall.

Whiskey-making.

Once.

I could take this to court, sure.

But it wouldn't do no good.

The bureaucrats that
run these things
don't understand mountain
people, nor Indians neither.

I don't think them sons of
bitches understand anything at all.

We'd lose. They'll take the boy.

I'll not be coming.

You heard of the Dog

Star, Little Tree?

It's the brightest star you
can see in the dusk of evening.

Understand?

Good. Well, then...

Wherever you may be
in the dusk of evening,
you look up at the Dog Star.

Me and Granpa, we'll be looking, too.

Willow John as well.

Whatever you have to tell us,
we'll hear you then. All right?

- You're this close to learnin' the Way.

- I am?

- Don't you let go of it.

- No, sir. I won't.

You been good.

- I'm going away.

- Me too.

- Where?

- Depends on the turtle dove.

- We ain't heard him yet.

- What's he going to say?

He don't say nothin', silly.

He's a bird!

It depends on the direction he calls from. That's where we move.

- Don't you know that?

- Wasn't no turtle dove that called me.

Where are you goin'?

Here.

- For me?

- You can put 'em on.

Granma made 'em from the calf's hide.

They didn't cost nothin'.

They's a perfect fit.

They's soft.

My daddy.

Thank you.

Daddy!

Look what Little Tree gave me.

- You stand there.

- Daddy, no!

- Please!

- Turn around.

Gimme those moccasins.

We don't take no charity from nobody, 'specially from no Indians.

Come on, now. We're goin', here.

Come on!

He'll be along any time now.

Did she get the shoes OK?

She said they's the best present anybody ever thought to give.

Granma'll be glad to hear it.

Hi. How nice you look.

Here, I want you to wear this.

So there'll be no confusion.

All right?

He'll be along any time.

I'll be back... directly.

We have to go.

Do you speak English?

- Yes, ma'am.

- Good.

- Do you see that gate?

- Yes, ma'am.

When you step through that gate,
you shall not speak Indian again.

Is that clear?

- Yes, ma'am.

- Follow me.

Actually, I can't speak
no Indian hardly at all.

Except Granma did tell me
the names of her medicinals.

Some in Indian, but I can only
recollect one or two at best.

The one that's kind of green, and
you scrape it off the sourwood tree.

Now that one's called... nvoki.

I think it could be a mushroom.

I ain't totally sure...

All right.

Come with me.

You are going to see the headmaster.

Be quiet, don't cry,
and be respectful.

I ain't never been...

And do not speak unless he
asks you a direct question.

Do you understand?

- Yes, ma'am.

- Good.

Come.

Stop swinging your legs.

You speak English, I'm told.

- Was that a direct question?

- What?

'Cause if it was, I could

tell you, "Yes, sir. I do. "

Yes, well...

They call you Little Tree.

Have you had an intelligence test?

- No, sir.

- No.

Anyhow, Little Tree

is an Indian name.

Americans don't name

children after...

...objects.

This is an American school.

Therefore, you will be

given an American name.

And that will be...

...Joshua.

Do you understand, Joshua?

- No, sir.

- You will.

Quiet! Quiet down and go to bed.

Put it on and get into bed. You'll

be up bright and early in the morning.

Prayers.

- Goodnight, boys.

- Goodnight, Mrs. Higgenbotham.

Not another peep.

Granma and Granpa...

I'm OK.

They've taken my clothes

and cut most of my hair off,

and given me an American name,

but I'm still Little Tree.

I ain't never gonna let that go.

Up! Everybody up!

I know you're awake, Wilburn.

Get up or I'll get the strap.

Wilburn!

Say what? Somebody talking to me?

Begin!

They don't give you none for dinner.

- Hey, kid.

- Come on!

- Your name ain't Joshua.

- Fat man gave me it.

Fat man! What's it really?

- Little Tree.

- Little Tree?

No kiddin'? That's what

I'm gonna call you, then.

Give Mrs. Big Bottom conniptions.

Ball! Come on kid, throw the ball!

Throw the ball!

Wanna play?

Come on, come and play!

- You can go play.

- Nah.

Suit yourself. I don't give a damn.

Two times eight is...

Two times nine is...

Two times hen is...

Time.

All right? Time, Wilburn.

Little Tree. What's two times hen?

Wilburn! Stop, or you get a zero.

Now, who can tell me what

animals are in the first picture?

- Rabbits!

- Very good.

- And what are they doing?

- Laying down...

Blah, blah, blah, blah!

And what are the next animals?

- Deer!

- Very good.

- And what are they doing?

- They're running...

Blah, blah, blah!

They're matin'.

You can see right off they're matin'.

The buck deer is jumpin' the does.

You can tell by the trees

it's the time of year...

Joshua,

do you know what you have done?

No, sir.

Then you'll have time to

think about it, won't you?

Did they say how long

till I can come out?
I know what I done was
bad, I come to realize it.
You can tell the headmaster
and the lady teacher, too.
Tell them that Little
Tree, I mean Joshua...
tell them Joshua stands ready
to make amends, all right?
And tell them that
I stand ready to...
...make it right.
Granpa and Granma, and Willow John,
some time ago now,
I ain't sure how long,
the headmaster locked
me in this little room.
He says I've got to stay in here
until I know what I done wrong.
I have no way in the
world of figurin' that out.
I didn't mean to worry you none,
as I should be old enough
to get by without your help.
I found a piece of glass in
here, all round and clear.
Turns the Dog Star blue
when you look through it.
Granpa,
I don't think I can handle
this situation no way at all.
I want to come home.
Joshua? You can come out now.
Today is Thanksgiving.
Nice people from the town have
come to put on a play for us.
Joshua?
What?
No provisions in the larder, and
the cold days drawing ever closer.
I am sorely afeared
that we shall starve ere the
spring breezes stir the land again.
No!

white man show way of God to us,
and in thanks we give to him
much food and warm clothes...
I've been saving it for you.
Did they give you
bread and water?
I heard that's all they give
you up there is bread and water.
Little Tree?
I found this.
If you look through it,
it turns everything blue.
...in peace and harmony,
beneath the vast American sky,
under God, with liberty
and justice for all.
Wave goodbye to the nice
ladies and gentlemen!
- Bye!
- Thank you!
They come here so they can feel good
when they get drunk at the country club.
All right, inside!
- Thanksgiving dinner!
- Whoopee.
Would you like this?
- I don't mind.
- It's yours.
You can see...
Come on!
Granpa!
It was Willow John that
heard you. So I came.
Tell me true, you want to come home?
- Yes, sir. I do.
You're shut in here
like goddam livestock.
Think they'll come and take me back?
Let 'em come on.
Them woods want to
make sure it's you.
They're happy to know
you're back is all.
- Something's wrong.

- What's that?

I couldn't feel the trail, Granpa.

And you can have them clobbers!

And you can have them clobbers, too!

Now, you'll stay.

Granma!

Blue Boy, come on!

Thank you, Willow John!

I remember that moment. The four
of us standing there together again.

It was then I knew I was tome.

I also knew it couldn't last.

Maybe we all felt

the time getting close,

but we didn't speak of it.

Granpa's step got slower, so I
carried more of the whiskey jars.

We didn't speak of that, either.

"Tom appeared on the sidewalk
with a bucket of whitewash... "

Granma pushed me on learning.

I read to them at night,
with Granma helping some.

- "... Mel... "

- Melancholy.

"... melancholy settled
down upon his spirit.

"30 yards of board fence,
9 feet high.

"Life to him seemed hollow. "

The politicians came to
take me back to Notched Gap.

Each time, Granpa led us up the high
trail where nobody could find us.

She's coming alive.

It was on the high trail
that Granpa slipped and fell.

He kept telling us,

"I'll be all right directly. "

But something horrible
tad happened in that fall,
and he wasn't going to be.

Give me my hat, would
you, Little Tree?

It's been good.
Next time, it'll be better.
Be seein' you.
Damn... stupid...!
I knew where Granma
was taking Granpa.
It was to his secret place,
at the top of the high trail,
where he'd watched the day
birth and never got tired of it,
and never quit saying,
"She's coming alive",
like each time was the
first time he'd ever seen it.
Maybe it was.
Maybe every birthing is different
and only Granpa could see it.
Not long after that day, Granma
took me aside and told me again
about how her and Granpa were
moving closer to the understanding,
so that I shouldn't be sad
because when their bodies died,
they'd still be together,
always, their spirits knowing.
And that was the last thing
Granma ever said to me.
she died in the night.
I found a note which read,
"Little Tree, it's been good.
"Next time it will be better.
"Remember
if you need us, any time,
"just look to the Dog Star,
and we'll be there. "
I went up the high trail that same
night and I asked Granma and Granpa,
reckon I could get closer
to the understanding as well,
so I could catch up to you?
It was lonesome, I told them,
always being left behind.
I didn't know that Willow John
was looking to the Dog Star, too,

and talking with Granma and Granpa.
He told me they were sorry they had
to go before my education was done,
but if I went off with Willow John,
he could teach me
all there was to know...
about being an Indian.
Y'all come!
I have not made it back to
the cabin since, but I will.
I've been ranging across
this country, me and Blue Boy,
digging oil with the Cherokee,
riding fence with the Navajo,
gettin' caught up
in white man's wars.
But no matter where I am,
in the dusk of evening,
I look to the Dog Star.
And I say to
Granma and Granpa,
and to Willow John,
"Wait for me.
I'm still learning the Way.
"But someday I will catch up to you.
"And we'll all of us be
together again...
"Always.
"Our spirits knowing. "
/Subtitle/

sync, fix: