

Notes of a Mad Girl #10 - Teepee Creeping

Martha and those men listened to my phone conversation with mom. The police chief's only words were "call your mother". Weirdly, I wasn't really surprised that my mom found me. It's always been a comfort to me to know that if I were ever kidnapped in a foreign country mom would find me and my captives would be soon apologizing for their sorry deed against my family.

Short story was that Mom called Congressman John Dent in Washington, D.C. Congressman Dent said he'd check it out. His office contacted the police department.

So mom asked me over the phone what was going on. A.I.M. agreed that my mom could transcribe their demands over the telephone. She spent one full hour writing in shorthand the seventeen points of request from the Indians to our government. She then went on the radio and wrote to the local papers where she requested every person within earshot to please send in a telegram to our government in favor of listening to these Native American requests.

The other story: I spent my seven days and nights cooking three meals a day for my new building mates in the Bureau of Indian Affairs kitchen. I was close to being "outed" as a non-Indian when someone said "only a white person would cut sandwiches into fours and stick olives and pickles on top". Everyone laughed and I busied myself making more coffee.

I saw some very famous feet come through "my" kitchen. Ralph Abernathy, Stokely Carmichael, Dr. Benjamin Spock were regular visitors that entered and exited through our small kitchen window. I was too shy to say anything other than hello but I was quick to realize that some interesting history was in the making.

When our government realized we Indians weren't leaving the building the heat and hot water were turned off. In between my soup and sandwich duties I wandered the halls of the Bureau building cleaning

with the rest of the women. Here was a government building literally falling apart in disrepair. But this was a building the Indians were proud of and by god they were going to sweep the corridors and empty the trash on a daily basis.

It was obvious after the first few nights us girls needed to stick together. I'm not talking about unwanted sexual advances or acts but without being too descriptive it was pretty hard to defy temptation in the face of a final battle. Those Indian guys, on the whole, were striking and it was fairly common to see people walking together late at night to more quiet locations in the building. My small tribe of three decided to make a huge mound of paper to nest in and we spent considerable time piling up a bonanza find of shredded paper. We made holes into the paper and just plain crawled in. I had my sleeping bag inserted into my space and I slept warmer than most.

My favorite memory is of all the B.I.A. Indians sitting in a large round circle passing a peace pipe from one to another. You were to smoke, inhale, and repeat again before you passed it to your neighbor on the left. The key was to not let the pipe die out before everyone had a smoke. Could we have any worse luck than being boarded up in a cold ugly building? I was fearful that I would break this smoke link and that my identity would be out of the bag. I succeeded in smoking and passing this pipe and thought about my earlier condemnation of drugs. The sensation of smoking that pipe was what I can only define as an "experience". It was like my entire body was empty and the smoke filled every shape and crevice in my body space. It didn't alter my mind, make me giddy or bring on any wild hallucinations. It did, however, fill my soul with peace.

Every day Mr. Abernathy, Mr. Carmichael and Dr. Spock entered and exited the kitchen and every day our menu got a bit more meager. One day, though, in the middle of our stay a Canadian tribe sent one of the largest fish I've ever seen. I am guessing as to the size but I'd say it was at least three feet long. Some northern tribe members cooked it and everyone was able to have a small taste. It was a celebration in a building losing hope.

Martha and some other tribal leaders again wanted to speak with me. They asked me if I'd help them in another way, a more dangerous way. Would I be willing to be driven to various gas stations in D.C. and purchase gasoline for them? They needed a white person to buy gas since there was a new directive to all the stations in D.C. to deny gasoline to any Indian in the city. I was driven close to three different stations and walked with a large empty gas can to each station. I said my car ran out of gas. When I returned through the back hedges and entered the building I had a small group of guys whose job was to escort me through the building and whose job it was to make sure there were no smokers near me. I reeked of gasoline and I had little doubt that I could burst into a flame ball any second.

The seventh day was very different. We were told to exit the building and find a weapon. I never once saw anyone with a gun and was completely confused as to what an adequate weapon was. I had picked up a five-foot thin pole and lots of folks got some hearty laughs out of the thought of me rolling this pole in the path of well-armed police. So Carter Camp instructed a gorgeous Iroquois Indian from Canada to make me a real weapon. This was the same guy who shot the rat with an arrow and I would have easily "teepee-creeped" around with him. This marksman found a pair of scissors, broke the two pieces apart and cut slots in a chair leg for the scissor parts. He taped them tightly and I had a pointed end for piercing and a handle for my hand. He made me practice on some paper and he lost interest in me when he saw that I lacked sufficient warrior enthusiasm.

The Bureau was surrounded with yellow buses filled with D.C. police and the mounted police were trotting back and forth. With everyone now standing or sitting on the front steps the tension was growing and pretty much everyone was quietly crying. Even my handsome Iroquois Indian had tears streaming down his face. We sat outside and patiently waited for uniformed men to annihilate us on the steps of the B.I.A. building in the Twentieth Century.

We were told that the Black Panthers wanted to fight with us. The Indians refused. They wisely knew that there would be a complete massacre of everyone if African Americans joined this cause. The

Indians felt that their only hope was to stand in solidarity as true Native Americans.

We saw from our front perch Abernathy, Carmichael and Dr. Spock walk personally to every bus surrounding us. We saw hundreds of African Americans officers just walk away from this fight. If they couldn't stand and fight with us, they would not participate in what looked like a possible slaughter. They just left the scene of the crime. These very same three civil rights activists quickly secured amnesty for us and we were told that we could pack up and now go home.

The kids and older tribes people that were graciously housed at the Red Cross had a grand time visiting tourist sites and the kids couldn't get enough of riding up and down in their elevators.

I walked back into the building to collect my backpack and boarded our bus for the long ride back to Oklahoma.

I loved Martha and her family. Every Indian I ever met would have died to protect the United States and our government. They were proud to become members of the armed services fighting to protect everyone's freedom. Yet it was the saddest irony of my entire Indian experience that our government never believed, understood or trusted that truth.

I returned to Pennsylvania a few months later and left my friends. I was not Indian. Without even a drop of Indian blood I could not effectively help their world. I saw the lives of my own family take so much for granted and I saw their richness through the eyes of someone who had lived on a daily basis with poverty. I also, though, was now able to see my mother through brighter eyes and I will never forget her tenacity or her generosity of spirit. She never once complained about an hour phone bill that she had to pay with her minimum wage while writing shorthand as fast as she could. She saved every letter I ever wrote from Oklahoma and I knew unequivocally that she was indeed proud of me.

My brother, Jim, often joked about how the Navy asked about his sister's life in Houston and about what I was up to every time he needed security clearance. I always hoped he was just kidding with me but I have a gut feeling that he wasn't. If they made him feel

uncomfortable I'm sorry for that but they certainly wouldn't have broken my mother.