

INTERVIEW WITH AN APACHE PRIEST

ANSELMO, NEBRASKA

(prelude)

Jim was feeling rather frustrated. He had waited all day for his phone to ring, hoping that Lila would call him back, feeling quite foolish because he knew he had made a fool of himself at their date last night and all signs pointed to telling him that he blew it but he had been in prayer all night begging God for her to truly be the one that He would bring into his life to be his wife.

Jim was certain that he had sensed God answering his prayer, telling him that he would someday marry again and would not die alone. Now Jim finds himself trying to hold back a curse because he had finally given up on the phone ringing and was now in the shower, he had just soaped his hair up into a good lather and that took a lot more shampoo now than it did forty some years ago when he stopped cutting the back of his hair and now it was so long that he would set on it quite easily if he was not careful.

Yet he was still determined not to cut the back of his hair until God lead him to find the right woman to cut it for him, she would have to be willing to marry him. This time Jim wanted to find a woman that would stick with him to the end of life on this earth. Jim hoped that Lila would be that woman but now the phone was ringing and he had soap in his hair and in his hast to rinse it out now it was in his eyes and still he restrained himself from cursing.

A very stupid thought crossed though his mind, “Jimmy, you old fool, you are not going to stop showering until you find a wife, you would not find one for sure if you start to stink as badly as you hair is starting to look, you old fool stop talking to yourself and answer the phone!”

Jim flung upon the shower curtain and grabbed a towel but he was in such a hurry to get to the phone that he stepped right over the shower mat. His feet were wet and soapy and being aged to over ninety years did not help the matter but even if he was in better shape now than when he was fifty, yet he found himself off balance when his feet hit the wet floor he started to slide and all he could do was say a quick prayer as he saw the floor quickly coming up to meet him and he still had his mind on grabbing the phone before it stopped ringing, praying as much that it would be Lila as he was praying that he would survive this fall.

As he was falling and sliding on one foot Jim reached out and grabbed the door knob as he went sliding by and the momentum and the soapy wet floor caused him to spin around as he fell and he found himself softly landed on the seat of the toilet. He landed there so softly that Jim was absolutely certain that he had been placed there by an angel.

Lately Jim's life had been filled with many miracles but this was just the first of many miracles of this day. Jim reached out and grabbed the phone and quickly answered it saying, "hello, Lila, is that you Lila, oh I really do hope so, hello, hello, Lila!" only to find that when he picked up he could hear someone saying something that he could not make out and the phone went dead.

Jim, was upset that he had gone through all of that just to miss the call but was rather grateful also because he had made a fool of himself again so he was glad that Lila had not heard how he had answered the phone because he had made even more of a fool of himself at their date last night. To Jim's credit it had been many decades since he had been out on a date and being with such a very nice lady made Jim quite nervous and so he was even more talkative and silly than usual. The harder he tried to impress Lila the more foolish he appeared but unknown to Jim the more stupid he felt like he was acting the more cute Lila thought that he was being, that in itself was another miracle.

Jim sat there on the toilet, sort of stunned for a very long time, before he let himself think what to do next. He looked at the phone in his hand and saw that the number that had just tried to call him was displayed on the screen. Jim found that comforting in a way because he did not have to think that Lila had hung up on him when she heard how he answered the phone because when Lila called him she always blocked her number, thus it could not have been displayed or so Jim thought.

Even though Lila claimed to be almost sixty years old she still remembered and obeyed some of the suggestions that her Daddy had told her when she was young. He had told her to never give her number out to a man until she had decided to marry him because he did not want every guy that was chasing her to be calling her all hours of the day and night and he did not want to have to talk to those boys until she was willing to introduce him to one of them and in all her years she had never brought a boy or man home to meet Daddy and now the man she wanted to bring home to meet him was only a few years younger than her elderly father.

Lila really was drawn to Jimmy and wanted him to know but was not sure yet that he was her answer to prayer, after all Jimmy was a divorced man, he had been divorced twice and her Daddy would not approve. She knew that he had Biblical reasons for both of his divorces but still she was not sure how to tell her Daddy that this man that she cared so much about had been divorced, twice. She had only been out with Jimmy one time but yet she had very strong feelings for him but was afraid to let him know. She had to let him know and started to dial his number without blocking it but changed her mind and quickly hung up the phone.

The person that had just tried to call Jim had not been Lila but yet the call rang at the same time that she had been about to dial his number. Life can be so strange, it would drive us crazy if we knew all the times that such things happen in our lives.

The person that had tried to call Jim was a man that had known him over fifty years earlier. The two of them had been friends of a sort but yet not close and at some times they had seemed more like enemies than friends. He picked up his phone and dialed the number again

wondering if the number he had been given by Jim's pastor was really the correct number. This time it did not ring over and over as it did before but now the line was busy so he hung up but as soon as he did his phone rang.

Jim was still sitting there where he had landed and decided to call the number back that had tried to call him a few moments ago and a voice that he had not heard in many years was still as unmistakable as it was over fifty years ago, in a squeaky high pitch that crackled every few seconds the old man on the other end of the phone spoke, "hey, is this Jimmy, Jim Thompson, I hope so, I have been trying to get a hold of you!" With great surprise in his voice Jim said, "Carl is that you, I thought you said you were never going to speak to me again!"

There was a long pause between the two. Jim finally spoke, "Sorry, that was rude of me." Carl spoke then, "Yea, this is Carl, I am surprised that you remember me. I was wondering if you ever wrote that book that you were working on that caused us to argue so horribly the last time we talked?" Jim cuts him off, "Well Carl, I hope you have not called to start making demands again.

I have been writing that book my whole life and I will probably never stop but it has never been published, I know it is a good book and it would likely do well but I have just not been able to ever convince myself that it is finished, something is missing and I just can not get to the point that I can call it done so that I can publish it."

Now Carl interrupts, "well Jimmy, Jim, what is it you want to be called, Jim, okay, you say it does not matter if I remember right. I am sorry the way we left things years ago. I wanted to be a writer and so did you but neither of us ever got published, sounds like, I know I never did but I did go to college to learn to write and got really upset when the only job I could get was writing for a small town newspaper and that did not even last long"

Jim says, "yes that is why I wanted you to interview that old Apache Priest that I met so long ago, the old Indian would not even talk to me because he claimed that I was not able to understand his culture since I was not even a part Indian, I did not agree with him and still don't but I could not even convince the old Indian to tell me his name so since I knew that you were at least half of Native Indian blood I wanted you to meet this old Apache Priest and see if he would talk to you."

Carl interrupts again, "yes, Jim, that is why we argued so terribly, you wanted to use my story in your book and I wanted to write your book with you and you did not want to have a co-author. You wanted your book to be a Christian ministry and you did not think that I had the heart of a missionary. You wanted me to allow you to put the story that the old Apache Priest told me in your book even though I had written the story and you and I just could never come to an agreement and we got quite angry with each other about it.

I am sorry Jim, I wish I had not told you that I would never speak to you again, I think we could have come to an agreement if I had not been so stubborn. But now, I am in the hospital and the doctors do not have much hope. I want you to have that story as that old Apache Priest told it to me back then. I have emailed that story to myself to my many email

accounts over the years so many times that I have no idea how many copies of it are out there on various email servers that I have used over the years but I have never let anyone read it in all these years but I think it is such a cool story that I did not want to loose it so I kept many copies of it for myself so I would know that I always would have the story. Now I want to give it to you and you can use it in your book if you like it as much as I do. I no longer want to be paid for it but if I do survive this surgery and you do publish your book with my story included in it all I ask is that you give me credit for the story and that you tell my children about it so that they can read your book and see the part that I had in it.”

Jim is sobbing now and interrupts Carl, “Yes, Carl I can do that, I am so sorry I did not make amends with you years ago, I really do hope that you survive the surgery to live an even longer long life. How old are you now Carl, ninety anyways, right!”

Carl being age phobic, yells at Jim, “No you old fart, I am a lot younger than you, I am only 89 years old!” Jim laughs and says, “yea I know, and I am a young man of only 93, wonder if I will make it to be a hundred, my friend Tommy thinks that I have a good chance now, he is 97 and thinks I have a very good chance since I lost so much weight a few decades ago and now I am almost as strong as Tommy. He drags me along to work out with him three times a week and I should be more grateful but I get so sore every time but it is a lot of fun to work out with Tommy so I will keep going along but I do not want to make it to easy on him.

Tommy has been my friend since we were kids back in 1972 when we first met and then we were separated for over sixty years while he was in prison. He's a good Indian, my best friend, my TWO!” Carl asks, “what do you mean, your TWO?” Jim explains, “well if you were in Tommy's tribe then you would have a special person in your life, hopefully a good friend but it may even be a good enemy just so you keep your vow to one another, your TWO is a person that some Indian tribes believe that you must have in your life that will always be willing to help you any time you need their help even if you have grown to hate each other. If they are still your TWO you have to be willing to immediately come to the aid of the other.

If you want to know more you will have to survive your surgery and live to read about it in my book. So, Carl, how am I supposed to get this story, I really am excited about the chance that I finally get to read about this old Apache Priest so what must I do to get a copy so I can read your great story!”

Carl responds, “so you can not wait to see if I survive my surgery to get a copy, okay, I will email it to you right now. What is your email address?” Jim blurts out, “jimmyslinsshot@gmail.com and thank you so much Carl, this gives me new inspiration to start working on my book again. I will read it today and get right back to you but I am really quite certain that it will be great and I will want to use it in my book!”

Jim went to his computer and found the email that Carl had just sent to him. The rest of this chapter is mostly written by my friend Carl. I add a little to the end but 99% of the remainder of this chapter is credited to my friend Carl and the story is dedicated to his children.

INTERVIEW WITH AN APACHE PRIEST

ANSELMO, NEBRASKA

(July, 1982)

Carl had finally convinced the old priest to meet with him but getting him to talk was still another challenge, Carl pleaded with the old Indian, "I wish that you would tell me what your name is, it is strange to just keep referring to you as Apache Priest. Are you sure I can not have your name, sir.", Carl continued to plead with the old Indian, "Would you please tell me about that decorative bag and strange pointing thing attached to it that you wear around your neck on that colorful necklace?"

The old man then spoke saying, "Well I am not sure I can do that but, if I do tell you about it I sure do not want to tell you my name, and you could not pronounce it anyway, but please do not call me sir, if I tell you my secret I do not deserve the respect of being called sir and first off it is not a necklace and it is not a medicine bag as so many of the white men have come to call every bag that they see worn on a Indian's person. I do not feel right in telling anyone about my 'life bag' because it is to me a sacred item that is very important to me. I can not remember who I swore the oath to and I am not really even sure what I swore the oath concerning. I have told no one about what you ask for the past more than 50 years since it was given to me when I was 14 years old. I have wanted to keep the oath and I have now told you more than I feel that I should have already and now am not sure what is right to do. I want to tell you every thing I know because you have as they say, 'opened the can of worms' but if I tell you the little bit that I know about it you are just going to have more questions than I even know the answers to and now I think I have already said to much so that I have already broken my oath just by speaking to you about it at all. I know that the oath that I took to whoever it was that I swore to it was that I would never tell anyone anything about my 'life bag' and that I would keep it always because it contains the key to my return to my youth but in all these years I have not been able to find a key to that way back to my youth. Just telling you what I have has broken that oath and I know now that I am required to find another Apache Priest that is more wise that I am and confess my crime to him and beg him to restore my honor. I fear now that I have started to tell you that I should tell you all that I know because the honor has already been broken so my secret that I have kept all these years is no longer secret so I may as well tell you all that I know but I do fear that someone you tell will consider me to be crazy and lock me away but yet I do not expect you to keep my secret since I am breaking my own honor, how could I expect you to keep the secret and hold it in your honor, so you have all my permission to tell anyone you will about what I am to reveal to you and perhaps in the course of telling you what I know it will lead me to the solution that I seek. Firstly as I already spoke of I do not know why I took an oath to never talk about this bag of mine."

As this old Apache Priest spoke he took the braided cord off from around his neck, somehow he did this without pulling it over the top of his head because he was wearing an old

cowboy hat with many beautiful feathers adorning it and he did not remove his hat to pull off the necklace, as I call it but he told me earlier it was not a necklace but he did not say what to call it. But I mention the hat here because when I later examine the cord I found that it was made of many strands of colorful braided leather but without any tie or clasp but just one long endless loop so the wonder is in how did he remove it from around his neck without having pulled it over his head. Seems rather impossible but it was not broken and he never removed his hat to pull it over his head so it does not seem possible, he could not have just pulled it through his neck. Right? Or could he, very strange.

When he removed it he handed it to me in a very quick gesture, almost as if he was tossing it to me but with more emotion than just a toss, it was as though he had yanked it out of his body with great pain as though it was attached to his soul somehow. The old priest then said something to me with such great emotion that I thought he was about to cry, “Until this very moment in time, in my whole life no other person has ever touched this 'life bag' and it would not surprise me now if I would drop dead on this very spot but as I took this off my body I prayed to my Lord to forgive me, to please forgive me for breaking my oath that I truly can not remember even taking the oath but I know that I did swear an oath but I do not know when it was even made. I beg forgiveness because even though I do not know why or to whom that oath was given I fear that someone may be hurt seriously because of the information that will be found out from the revealing of my 'life bag' to you but still I wonder if my secret is hiding an even more important truth that needs to be revealed to the world that could if revealed restore and save many that are lost in this world. I do not know but I want to do the good that I know I should be doing and I feel that it is trapped inside of this 'life bag' and perhaps if I reveal the secret to you then it will do some good in this world, that is my prayer.”

As he said this I reached up above me head where the bag had gone and surprised myself that my reflexes were quick enough that I caught the bag and the colorful leather cord snapped into my hand as if it was attached to a strong rubber band or with some sort of loaded spring. It all popped into my hand in a single ball, the cord wrapped all around the bag in a strange unnatural way and it made a sort of sizzling snap sound as I caught it in the air above my head.

If I had not caught it I think it would have gone over my head and hit the wall behind me. It was a very strange moment and it surprised the priest and me both greatly. The old Apache Priest still refused to tell me his name but I still do respect him greatly so I still call him sir anyway but I am beginning to feel like he is more of a friend.

I looked at my fisted hand that was balled up around the bag and the cord and it was so completely wrapped that not a strand nor bit of color showed around about my balled up fist but yet I knew that the “life bag” was in my fist because it contained a bulge within and it felt hot in some odd way that is hard to explain. As I started to release the tight grip that I had on it I suddenly felt very strange inside and my hand no longer felt warm almost hot but it changed as I loosened my grip, the item in my hand cooled down suddenly and felt strangely cold.

I was not able to explain it to the priest but somehow he knew that something very strange was happening and for a moment I thought that he was not breathing and his eyes

bugged out starring at me in a fearful way that I hope to never see on anyone's face again! I really thought for a moment that he was going to die.

Thankfully he finally spoke saying, “that looked like it hurt. I am glad you caught it. I think if it had hit that wall behind you and broke upon on the floor, I truly think I would not have gotten my breath back. But I am doing better now so I may as well get on with it and tell you what I know, which is not much, but as you have seen there is something very spiritual about my 'life bag' now.

I think we are messing around where we should not go but it could also be that we are going to a place that I should never have feared going to before and it could be that I took an oath that I never should have taken. I do not know but I do know that now that I have started to tell you about this I do not want to stop now because I am not sure I will live long enough now to ever talk about it again.”

The old priest took in a deep breath and continued saying, “So, let us clean up this table here and open up my bag and I will show you what is inside of it. Well, I think I will tell you a bit more first. Every year on Good Friday I open this bag and take everything out of it and place the items out on a clean table, I clean the table first so I am sure that no other items are put back into the bag when I have finished. So once a year I also pick an item that I add to the bag, these items are always small because I plan to live a long life and want them all to fit into the bag when I my life is done so many of the items that you will see just look the size of the end of my finger and you will not be sure what they are but I assure you that I know what each item is and I will not try to tell you what they all are or this talk would take a week but I do want you to do something before I open the bag. I want you to go outside and walk around for a few minutes and examine the trails and the buildings and the garden and the trees around us and I want you to pick an item and return with it but please be sure it is no bigger than what can fit on the end on your finger and be sure that it has something about it that makes it recognizable. I plan to add it to my 'life bag' so that I can remember this day if the good Lord chooses to allow me to live after today. I really wish that today was Good Friday because I will be opening it again in a few weeks when that day comes and surely hope that I will live to see that day. Please young man, leave me now for no more than ten minutes and find an item that we can add to my 'life bag' today and I will be hear waiting for your return.”

I then got up and walked away feeling rather worried that when I return the old priest would be either gone or dead. I went outside as requested. As I was looking around the grounds I found many interesting things that I had not seen when I parked my car and walked over to the building where we have been talking.

I was strangely drawn to a grove of trees that were starting to leaf out because it was early spring time. One of the trees had more blossoms on it than it did leaves so I walked up to it and planed to pick one of the pretty pink flowers to bring back as the item I had been asked to pick. As I reached up to pluck the blossom I startled a bird that was setting on it's nest that I had not noticed on the branch above the one I was reaching for.

When the robin bolted out of the nest one of the eggs in the nest was tossed out with

such force that it hit me in the face and broke open. Part of the content sprayed into my mouth and I started to cough. The fragments of the broken egg fell to the ground and I was quite startled.

The robin flew back and landed on the branch next to me and scolded me viciously. I felt bad about what had happened but did not really feel that it was my fault. Being scolded like that reminded me of my mother chastising me for breaking a bird's egg when I was young.

I reached up to my face and found that part of the egg yolk and a piece of broken blue egg shell was stuck to my lip. When I wiped it away it stuck to my finger tip and I shook my hand but it would not fall off as if it was glued to the tip of my finger. Then my mind went where God was leading it and I got the idea to use that blue egg shell fragment for my item to bring the priest to use for his "life bag" but as I was returning to the building to tell the priest what had happened and what I had found the robin flew over me several times scolding me for breaking her egg.

When I got back to the building I sat down where I had been before and found the old Apache Priest still sitting there patiently waiting for me to return but when he saw the robin darting around and flying past the open door way he looked very startled as if the egg had hit him in the face and he asked me to shut the door. I got up and did as he had requested and the robin flew quickly past and scolded me again.

When I turned back to the old priest he looked very strange. He looked even more strange than when he had stopped breathing earlier. I sat down and asked him if he was all right and he smiled and said that he was fine but I could tell something was bothering him. I told him that he looked upset and he told me that he had been but he was fine now and that he would explain it to me in a little while. He asked me if I found an item for his bag. I showed him the blue egg shell and the color went out of his face.

He groaned and said, "So that is why Mamma Robin is so mad at you. Did you violate nature and break an egg to get that. I can not use it." I told him what had happened and that I had not broken the egg on purpose and that getting it on my finger tip was so strange that it had to mean something special. He agreed that it was strange and special but then told me an even stranger story.

He decided that he would use my blue shell because it was so much a part of his own story now that it would be wrong not to use it. It turns out that he already had an egg shell in his bag but it was a yellow one from a crow and he also showed me a part of a crow's beak that he had taken off the crow that violently attacked him a few years back when he picked up a broken egg from the ground under the apple tree a few years back. He showed me a scar on his nose where the crow had pecked him several times and in trying to beat the crow off his face as it pecked at him violently he accidentally killed the bird so he had taken part of its beak for his "life bag" to serve as a reminder to be more careful with God's creatures.

He said it was the only time that he had ever put more than one item in his bag in a single year, the part of the crow's egg shell and the part of the crow's beak. The old man

explained, “Now you know why I was so startled about the robin chasing you and asked you to shut the door. Birds sort of frighten me a bit since seeing that stupid movie and having that crow put these three holes in my nose, I am now a bit leery of attacking birds.”

The Apache Priest continued with his story and when he opened his “life bag” he said, “I want to first tell you about the long finger nail that you see coming out of the bottom of this bag and you need to know that this is the biggest part of my secret and even though I can not remember her I know that this finger nail was given to me by the old woman that raised me when I was a child and when I was 14 years old I was found wandering around in town and no body knew me and I did not know any body either. I knew my name and I knew an old woman had raised me but I did not know her name but yet I was sure that she was not my mother or grandmother or any other blood relationship to me but I knew that I loved her and wanted to find my way back to her but in all these years I have not been able to remember anything about her except that she was not really my grandmother but yet we all called her Grandmother something. I can not remember what we called her for sure.”

A distant look came over his face as if he was trying hard to recall more about her but gave up and continued, saying, “I do not even remember what she looked like or where we lived except that it was not in any town and it was very cold in the winter and very hot in the summer and very sandy but not really the dessert. She was very intelligent and knew a great deal about everything, he knew all about History and she could quote the Bible easily but she never asked any of us children to believe her Christian faith. For some odd reason she was not allowed to teach us about her God. She did expect us to all live together according to her rules but did not ask us to have faith in her God. She was afraid that the chiefs would find out and come take all of us away from her. If we asked her questions she was very happy to explain the Bible to us and I soon learned to quote the Bible even better than her and I did soon have faith in the Lord Jesus of her Bible but she never demanded such belief from any of us and very few asked her about Jesus but I was always asking about Him. She told me to promise not to tell anyone that she had told me about Jesus, I know she wanted everyone to know but she was afraid for some odd reason. Part of her faith was weak but most of her faith was very strong. I wish I could remember more about her. Our Bible studies were always held in secret away from the other children. I do not understand why I can remember somethings but yet so very little. I wish I could recall her name what she looked like. I do recall her voice, she had an amazing voice, you knew just listening to her that she loved you and wanted the very best for you. I know that she was very old but it is as if my most of my memory of her has been wiped away and I do not know why. It does seem like I remember there being a lot of other children living with us but I can not recall their names but I do recall that we were all happy and well without ever visiting a doctor, Grandmother was everything to us.”

The old man stopped talking for a moment, thinking silently to himself, then continued on, saying, “When I was found wandering around town I was first taken by the sheriff to a church where I met a man that seemed kind at first that was all dressed in black with a white belt across his throat. He got angry with me when I knew more about Jesus than he did. He tried to tell me that I should say prayers to Mary the mother of Jesus. I told him that Mary was the mother of Jesus and that praying to her would be an insult. I told him that

Mary had four sons besides Jesus and their names were James, Joseph, Simon and Judas. That made him very angry and he took me to talk to a bunch of woman in a home near his church. He called these woman nuns and it was not long before I had made all of them angry at me too. I would not except what they was telling me about praying to Mary and then they wanted me to confess my sins to the man that wore the white belt on his throat. The more they talked to me the more upset everyone got because I knew more about what the Bible taught than they did. What they were telling me to do felt like it was insulting my Lord and Savior and I could not agree with them. They all had books of prayers but they said that there Bible was at the church and they only used it when they had church or mass as they called it but I was not very happy talking to them because the more we talked the more they said things that did not sound like what the Bible taught. I had more of the true Bible in my memory than they did in their books. Then they tried to get me to believe something about me going to a devilish place called purgatory to suffer for my own sins but I told them that Jesus washed away all of my sins when he died on the cross. Two of those nuns fainted when I said that and two more of them grabbed me and the man with the white belt on his throat picked up a long rod that was thin and flat at the end and said that he was going to beat on my back side until I admitted that I was full of sin and that I would confess all those sins to him before he stopped hitting me with that rod of discipline. Those two nuns were very strong and they bent me over a bench and held me tight. They called that man their father, I knew that he was to young to be their father, one of them was a lot older than he was, but that man that they said was my priest only got to hit me once and I mule kicked him in in the neck. He started to chock and he reached for his throat and when he grabbed at his thought his white belt came off in his hand and he instantly started to breath properly again even though I was sure I had heard his adam's apple pop. I had heard an adam's apple pop before and never since then have I ever heard such a sound has anybody been able to continue to breath again after such a kick to the throat. That priest or father or what ever he should be called tried to tell the nuns to bring me outside but he was having a hard time talking. As soon as we got outside he was able to speak again. It was so strange and somehow it really got to him because he turned to walk back into the church and when he stepped into the door and turned back toward the two nuns that were now outside with me and he tried to speak to them his voice was gone again, he had just stepped back into the church when this happened and he could not speak but when he stepped back out of the church his voice was back and he could speak easily again. He got very confused and stepped back into the church and immediately he again lost his voice and started to choke so he stepped back out and was again able to speak easily. He had been trying to tell the nuns to get the car because he wanted to take me to some head priest at another church to discipline me with another rod of discipline with a few more priests to get involved in the process but when he saw how strange the effect of walking back into his church had on his breathing he instead told me to follow him quickly, he told the nuns to just never mind that he would get the car himself and as he went he stripped off and wadded up his white belt that had been around his throat and tossed it onto the ground and stomped on it. He quickly walked down the side walk and got into a black car and told me to hurry.”

The old Apache priest paused to catch his breath for a moment and then continued, saying, “My fear of him had somehow disappeared and I was now willing to do as he asked obeying his leadership and I hopped into the front seat next to him not knowing what to expect.

He tried to pray a prayer of habit that had been his prayer for so many years and it came out addressed to Mary and then his voice stopped working again. I saw the fear come back into his face and so I started to pray to Jesus as I had been taught by the old woman that raised me and told me all about the Bible and this is why I knew how to pray to Jesus. Then I remembered that a little more about Grandmother telling me more about Jesus and for some reason she did not want me to tell anyone where I had learned about the Bible. She feared that the chiefs would find out and take her children away and she knew that caring for the children was why she was alive. I did not understand why my memory of Grandmother kept fading away and then coming back to me like that. When I prayed to Jesus the man's voice came back and he told me that he was going to take me to an Indian reservation because he thought that I looked like a Native American boy to him. I told him that I am Apache but I do not know anyone here and I do not know anyone at the reservation. He thought maybe someone there would know me so we drove about 100 miles to the nearest Indian Reservation to see if anyone would recognize me or maybe there would be someone there that could help me. We got there very late at night and people there were very helpful but that is a story for another time.”

The Apache Priest stopped talking suddenly and then continued saying, “Enough about all that. Now I want to show you what is in my 'life bag' now that I have explained that the fingernail that pokes out of the bottom of the bag was given to me by the old woman that raised me I now want to give you a bit of a test. Hand me that little piece of blue egg shell that you found.” I handed it to him and just as he took it there was a loud bang on the window and a shadowy figure fell to the ground outside just under the window. I got up and looked out the window just in time to see that robin hop up off the ground and fly away again. I went back to my seat to find that the Apache Priest's color had gone out of his face again and for a moment I was not sure if he would be able to speak again. Finally he continued saying, “That was very strange, yes, very strange. Well, I now want you to look closely at the color and shape of this egg shell fragment because as you recall I have one in here already. I am going to place your blue piece into my 'life bag' with the other items and then I will take all of the items out one by one and place them on this piece of cloth that I have laid out on the table. I will not speak about any of the items until after I have them all laid out so now watch this, here goes.”

One at a time the old priest pulled the items out of the bag and placed them carefully on a separate place on the table all in a different spot on the cloth as if he putting them in the order that they would be when finished in the order that he had collected them when he had put them into the bag many times in the past more than 50 years now since he started collecting items to put into this bag. When he got to a blue egg shell fragment he placed it in front of me but on the cloth a few inches away from me and he continued to pull out the other items from his bag and place them on the cloth in front of him. When he came to a yellow egg shell fragment he also placed that shell on the cloth in front of me. He left an empty space and continued to pull items out of the bag and place them on the cloth. When he was finished or rather almost finished he looked curiously at the cloth on the table and got a concerned look on his face. He said, “my gold nugget is missing. This is not good.” He reached into his bag and felt around inside the bag as if in a panic and then he turned the bag inside out and shook it and still he could not find it. Then he noticed in the fold of the bag caught between the stitching a little tiny piece of gold and he grabbed it between his finger tips and looked closely at it and a

look of sudden remembrance appeared on his face. He smiled big and said, "I had forgotten that it is much smaller now, I knew I would be sorry that I let that dentist replace my tooth" and he smiled even bigger revealing a very nice gold tooth at the top edge of his mouth. He continued saying, "This little spec is all that is left of my nice big nugget because last year my wife convinced me to have my missing tooth replaced with my gold nugget and the dentist was able to do it for me and it seemed like a cool idea at the time but now I am not so sure because my nice big nugget was nearly lost and I did lose it from my memory for a little while. So, now that I have that out of the way it is time for your test. Are you ready for your test."

I had no idea what he meant but I said for him to go ahead and tell me what I have to do. He said, "Young man, can you tell me which of those egg shells belongs in this spot on the table that is the spot from 15 years ago and which one goes at the end in the spot that is for today, in the spot for the blue shell fragment that you found today." I said, "I think this one is from 15 years ago and I picked it up and handed it to him." He said, "thank you, I was not sure because if you was color blind also then we were going to have a problem." He reached out and took the yellow egg shell from me and placed it in the spot from 15 years ago when the crow pecked holes into his nose.

Then he asked me to hand him the blue egg shell and just as his finger touched it to take it from me there was another loud bang on the window and this time the robin flattened violently and fell down hard to the ground. The Apache Priest took the blue egg shell from me and placed it on the table in the spot for today and I walked across to the window to look outside.

The poor mother robin lay on the ground below the window apparently dead. I said I think she knocked her self out or maybe dead this time and he asked me to go check. Just as I opened the door two birds came flying quickly into the room, a large black crow and a large red male daddy robin and they both started pecking at both me and my Apache Priest friend.

These two birds were pecking at us with a vengeance and it was all we could do to keep our eyes in our heads. I picked up a broom from the corner of the room and started swatting at them with it but once I accidentally hit the priest in the side of the head. The items on the table were all up in the air and being scattered every where and the poor old man was so upset that he just set down on the floor and started to chant a slow prayer in his Native tongue that I had no way to understand.

I finally was able to strike a blow on the robin that knocked it to the floor dead and the crow at that very moment pecked one more time into the eye of my old friend and then flew straight out the door. I ran over and slammed the door shut and glanced out the window to notice that the Momma Robin was still lying out there below the window, dead. I asked the priest if he was okay but he did not answer me but continued to chant as if he was praying but I could not understand what he was saying.

I went over and picked up the dead daddy robin and to my surprise it pecked me on the hand to which I instinctively without hesitation grabbed it around the neck and squeezed, I heard the bone snap like the sound of a fire cracker which seems rather exaggerated but it was

so loud that it got the attention of the old Apache Priest and he stopped chanting and said, “oh no not again!”

He took out his knife and then took the dead bird from me and cut off part of its beak and placed it on the table next to where my blue egg shell fragment was there on the table cloth. The table cloth, the tiny gold piece that had once been a part of the larger gold nugget that was now a tooth in my old friend's mouth, the yellow egg fragment, the beak from the crow that had pecked holes in his nose 15 years earlier and my blue shell fragment and now the bloody beak of that poor daddy robin were the only items left from all the items that had been there just moments before the uproar had begun that was caused by the strange attack that those two odd birds had just done to us.

More than just the other items and now we notice that the “life bag” itself with the long sharp fingernail were no longer on the table. They were scattered all around the room. The poor old priest started to wail in sorrow and I felt so sorry for him. I thought that I had caused the death of my new friend for sure. Suddenly the old man started crawling around on the floor desperately looking for something on the floor.

He jumped to his feet and with a great new energy within him he said in English this time, “Lord please, with you nothing is impossible, please help us to find all the items that I had in my 'life bag' for so many year and if it be as you wish when I have all the items found safely back in the bag I will burn them all and come home to be with you in heaven my Lord but please Lord show me one last favor to see the miracle of all these items together again, thank you Lord, in Jesus name I pray, AMEN.” I also said in a voice far louder than I intended, “AMEN!” I silently added to the prayer, “please Lord do not let my interest in this old man's secret be the reason that he should die today, Lord please let us find all the items for his 'life bag' but please Lord do not let this old Apache Priest die today because of my wish for him to reveal his secret to me. In Jesus name I pray, Amen.”

We both started looking for the items and the first thing he found was the “life bag” itself but it was missing the fingernail that had been attached so securely to the bottom from the inside. It was very strange that the bottom of the bag looked as if it had been completely torn away so he was not able to replace anything into the bag so he placed it on the table in the center of the table cloth and we continued to look for all the other items. Each of us found item after items and each time I found an item I would hand it to him and he would place it on the table in order in a circle growing outward with the bag lying in the the center and to his amazement each time we found an item it was found in the order that he had found them in from his youth each year on Good Friday as the years of his life unfolded. How could it has been possible, the items that he found were placed on the table each as he found them and he placed the items that I found on the table as I found them and handed them to him and each time it was placed in the correct order as they had been before but in a circular shape growing from the center outward this time. Even the items that were already laying on the table seemingly in a random spot when they landed in that position soon was found in the correct position in the circle without being moved, the yellow egg shell, the crow beak and at the end appeared already in place was the blue egg fragment and the bloody daddy robin's beak that

had been in the same spot that they had landed after they were tossed about by the birds commotion and yet when all of the items were found and placed in order in this circular pattern around the “life bag” they all were found to be in the correct location and the Apache Priest and I both finally sat down and just starred in amazement at the beautiful sight that lay before us on the table there.

But when I looked at the old man he had tears in his eyes and when I asked him what was wrong, he was so very sad because the item that he valued most, even more valuable to him than the gold tooth in his mouth was still missing. He said, “it is gone, I could not find it anywhere and you did not find it either, my most prized possession is gone.” As he sat down on the floor and started to wail and as he sobbed I was so confused because in my mind we had found everything and I could not understand what it was that was missing that he would consider to be his most prized possession.

Do any of you know? If I asked 100 people could any of you tell me what is it that he is missing. Every item from inside that bag had been found, he placed them all in order of each year of his life and all the items were there but yet his most prized possession was missing. Anyone know, it may be obvious to many people reading this but I could not figure out what my new friend was so upset about.

Okay, let us all pause now at this point in the reading of my book and I want to ask you all a question. Yes Sis, it seems my youngest sister is never stumped by any such puzzles. Yes, sis, I am sure you know, I can never fool you but anyone else? Please, everyone that is reading this, please do me a favor, pause here, before you go on to the next page where I reveal to you what was missing please pause here and see if you can figure out what is it that is missing that has my friend so upset. Either post it to facebook in a private message so you do not give it away, on facebook I am Jimmy Thompson from Broken Bow, Nebraska or send me an email to jimmyslingshot @ gmail.com and tell me what you think is missing. Please be honest everyone, no cheating! I would really like to know if this is as much a mystery as it seems even to me if I had not written it myself. Okay, back to the story again...

I was so happy and amazed by the order that the items where found and placed on the table in such a way that seemed to me to be such a beautiful miracle that I could not understand what could be sad at such a joyful time. As he sat there on the dirty floor all scattered with feathers and blood that we had sorted though looking for those items he was wailing so sadly and he started to rock back and forth and he was getting so emotional that I thought he would hurt himself if he continued.

I stood up and walked over to him and put my hand on his shoulder to try to comfort him. When my hand touched his shoulder he tossed his head back as if startled and his head stopped there tossed back in a awkward position and I thought that I had killed him by simply putting my hand on his shoulder. His eyes rolled up into the top of his head and he froze there for a moment and then finally breath came back to him and he said, “thank you” but he continued to look up.

Okay, does anyone know what was missing because I still did not understand and now I was even more confused because now he started to laugh and then he started to sing praises to the

Lord Jesus, the God of all and I could not figure out what it was because he was still looking up with his head tossed back in an awkward way looking upward. Then he reached out and grabbed my hand and pointed both our hands upward and to my amazement when I looked up at where he was pointing you will never ever believe what I saw above us, unless you are one of those really smart people that figured it out.

Up about ten feet above us in the rafters of the building I saw a bunch of spider webs combined together but that was not the thing that had our attention. Caught in the spider webs were two feathers, a black crow's feather and a gray and white robin's feather were stuck in the web but there stuck together each to the other at the quills and as if it were a ring with the quills straight through it caught between the two feathers hung the very long pointed fingernail of the dear old Grandmother that had raised him and had given this gift to this old man when he was only 14 years old so many many years ago.

Jimmy's back now, Carl is gone, maybe I will bring him back later. I read this years later and even before I could finish reading it I knew that this Apache Priest's Grandmother was the same old woman that had taken such good care of me in the summer of 1972 when I first met my best friend in this world, Tommy Wild Dog, Loco Coyote, my TWO!

Written by:

Jimmy Thompson
James R Thompson
Jim Thompson
Jimmy Slingshot
Jimmy T

All of these are me...

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You can find me on face book as Jimmy Thompson in Broken Bow, NE or email me at jimmyslingshot@gmail.com and you can find my short stories on www.jimmyslingshot.com