

## ***Riders on the Rez***

Smashwords Edition

by Jan Lofton

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by

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## On the Bus

We left the base at Oceanside, California way before daylight. We were out past the shopping malls at sunup, out to where oranges lit up hillsides, hanging round and orange orange on dark green trees like Halloween-colored Christmas ornaments.

At first it was cool to be riding up so high above every-body else on the road. Little kids looked at me from the back seats of cars when we passed and I made faces at them. They fell over laughing every time.

Then we got to the desert and that was like boring, just brown over and over again. There weren't many cars on the road anymore, either and it seemed like we were on the bus forever.

I played my video game until I got sick of it. I thought I'd go to the bathroom one more time. The one in the back of the bus had running water and everything.

"Billy, sit still! We are almost there!" Mom gets like that when she is trying to study.

I was just going to take another peek at the mom and two kids sitting behind us. They got on the bus at a place called Kingman, Arizona. The boy was a little bigger than me. A fifth-grader, maybe, with dark skin and cold black hair like mine, only his was down past his shoulders. His sister looked like she was about six.

I tried to whisper. "Are they real Indians?" They were dressed pretty normal in jeans and tee-shirts.

"Yes, they are. If they are from around here, they might be Mojave but they looked Navajo to me."

I'd never seen any Indians before except for my Mom and my Dad. People always asked if we were Mexicans or Chinese or Indians from India. Once in a while someone guessed Native American.

Some kids used to call me names like Geronimo and Big Chief Sitting Bull. I beat them up, and nobody called me anything but Billy after that.

My whole name is Billy Tsosie. My Dad grew up in a white foster home. My Mom was raised by a sister who died.

I had always thought there were only three of us in my whole family, but I was wrong. Mom told me that after she got the phone call. Now, I was on my way to ‘the rez’ to meet the rest of them for the first time and I hoped they’d wear their war bonnets to the bus station.

## 2

### Showing Off

We got off the bus at Flagstaff. So did that other family. No one was waiting for us or for them either. I rolled our big suitcase into the waiting room.

Mom sat down on a plastic chair and opened her book again. The other boy and his family took seats on the other side of the room. I looked at pictures of the Grand Canyon on a rack of postcards. I would have bought one for Dad if I had any money.

The parking lot outside had bright lights overhead. It was empty, too, and all the stores were closed.

“Look at it, Mom! It’s perfect! Let me go skate, O.K.?” I said. “Puh-lee-eeze?” She hadn’t wanted me to bring my board, but I knew I’d find some place to use it. It was bungeed it to the side of our suitcase.

She thought about it for a minute. “OK, but remember, I’ll be watching. You don’t do jump tricks in parking lots! And you don’t go near the street.”

I tick-tacked across to the dry cleaner’s and nose-ollied back. The two kids watched me through the station window

This would be a perfect place to practice my ollies over the yellow berms between parking places. They are easy, once you know how. So are pop-shove-its, if you jump high enough. Mom would have a fit if she saw me doing one of those without any pads on, but her head was down.

I was about to try a quick one when the boy said something to his mother. He got up and headed for the door. When he came outside, I coasted over to him.

“Yaah-te,” he said.

That means hello. “Yaah-te,” I said. “Mom said you must be a Navajo. That’s what we are! My name’s Billy. What’s yours?”

“Danny,” he said. “I’m Navajo- Mojave.”

“I live in Oceanside. Where do you live?” I asked. “What grade are you in?”

He wrinkled his face. “What’s with you? You talk like a bilagaana, but you look Dine.”

“Dine” is what Navajos call themselves. It means “The People.” Danny had said I sound white, but look Navajo. I started taking my jacket off, just in case I was gonna have to fight him, too.

### 3:

## Meeting Family

A dusty red pickup truck wheeled into the parking lot and a tall man in a straw cowboy hat got out. Mom came running out of the bus station before he got halfway across the lot. She grabbed him and squeezed him hard. He had to be my Uncle Atsiti.

“Look at how big you are!” she told him.

Mom hadn’t seen any of her family since she was seventeen. She had run away from home when she was still a teenager and gotten a job in a burger joint near Camp Pendleton Marine Base. That’s where she met my Dad.

“Margaret, don’t you know your own cousin?” Uncle Atsiti asked. He nodded toward the pregnant lady from the bus. She and the girl stood behind Danny now. “Mona got married a couple of years after you left the rez. These here are her kids, Danny and Shawna.”

Mom squealed, almost girly-like, threw Uncle Atsiti away, and grabbed up Mona. Me and Shawna smiled at each other, but Danny turned away and walked back into the station. He didn’t seem too happy to be my cousin.

Uncle Atsiti faced me. “And this has to be Billy!” He stuck out his hand. “Welcome home, stranger.” His palm was wide and callused.

Danny struggled through the station door, pulling our bag behind him. He was carrying another suitcase in his hand and had one slung over his shoulder. Uncle Atsiti threw them in the back of the truck, along with my board.

“Saddle up!” he said.

Seemed like we were all going to the same funeral. Mom and I got into the front seat. The others squeezed onto a little seat behind us.

I didn't see any houses or stores, or lights from anywhere after we left the city. There were about a bazillion stars out, though. The last time I had seen the Milky Way was when Dad and I went camping before he left.

The adults blah-blahed on about people I didn't know. Danny whispered to Shawna. The truck rocked back and forth. I wanted to stay awake and listen but the last thing I heard was Shawna's giggle.

## 4

### In the Hogan

The room was dark as a cave. This was my great-grandmother's hogan. I remembered that she had nearly squeezed the life out of me last night before she let me stumble off to a pallet on the floor.

A bed and chair stood in one curve of the round cabin. A old-fashion stove took up another wall and a lantern, the kind that worked on fire, hung from the ceiling.

I heard the women talking outside the open door. Mom laughed at something someone said.

I was about to get up when my great-grandmother came through the door. Her white hair was in a knot and she was wearing a long skirt.

I pretended like I was still asleep and peeked to see what she was going to do. She picked up some plastic jugs and went to leave.

“Ah-choo!” I faked a sneeze.

She stopped and turned. “Well, look who’s awake! Good morning, Sleeping Bear!”

She smiled at me like I was someone really special. “Get up and let your Shi-ima see you before the sun goes down again!”

I crawled out from under the blanket and she wrapped her arms around me and said something in Navajo, some words I didn’t understand. She smelled like wood fires, wool sweaters and the sheepskin I had slept on. When she let go, she handed me the two jugs. “Here, boy, go on up to the house and get us some water.”

## 5

### Spinning Yarn

A little shade house with no sides to it stood a ways off from the hogan. Mom and Mona were there, sitting on a blanket with Shawna. Miles of open desert stretched down and out behind them toward a far-off snow-topped mountain. I wasn’t sure where I was supposed to go. There wasn’t another house anywhere in sight.

Mom was rolling up a kite string out of a basket of fluffy stuff. “What are you doing?” I asked.

“Spinning yarn from sheep wool” she said. “I learned how to do this when I was about your age. Your great-grandmother takes the yarn and dyes it different colors with bark and roots and flowers. Then she uses it for her weaving”

Mom waved the roll over her shoulder toward a tall wood frame, laced with strings. “That’s her rug loom, there. The small one inside the hogan is the one I used when I was little.”

“We Navajo girls know we are old enough to learn to weave when we can touch the palm of our hand to a spiderweb without breaking it,” Mona said. “Margaret did it a long time before I did.”

I looked around for a spider web. I wanted to try it, too.

Mom saw the jugs I was carrying. “The water barrel is around the back,” she said. “Atsiti or one of the boys will show you.”

## 6

### Ro, Mo, Joe, and Jelly-Belly

A house trailer sat up hill behind the hogan, and a group of men stood by an empty corral at the side of it.

“Billy, come meet some more of your rellies,” Uncle Atsiti called

The men all had flat butts, just like Dad’s. Uncle Atsiti still wore his cowboy hat, but he and three of the others had their hair in long pony tails. One had his hair tied up in red string. He was rounder than the rest of them.

“These three are your cousins. “Ro, Mo, and Joe...,” Uncle Atsiti waved around the circle.

“Yo! ’S’up, Billy?” They held their hands out on the down low for me to slap.

“And this is your other uncle. Just call him Jelly-Belly.”

Everybody laughed at that, even Jelly-Belly.

“Billy’s dad is a warrior, you know,” Jelly-Belly said to the others. “How is he doing in Afghanistan?” he asked me.

Before I could answer him, I heard a galloping horse coming up fast behind me. I felt a hot wind as a gray one with two riders pounded by.

Danny and an older boy were riding bareback, sitting straight and tall. The big kid held the reins. Danny had his arms folded across his chest.

“Whoa!” The kid slid off the horse and came over to us.

“I know who YOU are,” the kid said to me. “You’re Billy!” He fake-punched my shoulder. “I can always use another little cousin to beat on!”

“Yo, Champ!” Atsiti said.

Joe, Moe, and Ro said, “How’s it going, Hands?”

“How many baskets did you score in that last game?” asked Jelly-Belly.

“Enough to win,” the kid said, “but I couldn’t have done it if my team hadn’t gotten me the ball.”

He turned to me. “Come on, Billy. Let’s go see your mother! Margaret used to be my favorite baby sitter.” He took my empty bottles, filled them with a hose from one of the green plastic barrels by the horse corral, and handed one to me.

Danny kept busy taking care of the horse. He checked its hooves and he fed it some hay, but he never looked our way.

## 7

### Funeral Plans

Mom made on a lot over the big kid. Turned out ‘most everybody called him T.C. “Do you have a girlfriend, yet?” she asked.

“Oh, Several,” he said. He grinned and pretended to shoot a basketball. “Can I help it if champions are irresistible?”

“T.C, take some of this fry bread to Danny,” Mona said, handing him a puffy piece of bread in a handkerchief. “He hasn’t had any breakfast.”

“Wanna come with, Billy?” he asked.

I didn’t think Danny liked me too much. He wasn’t very friendly. “Nah, I’ll stay here.” T.C. left and I ate some fry bread with syrup and listened to the women talk.

“So it’s not going to be a traditional funeral, then?” Mom asked.

“Pfttt!” Great-Grandmother made a noise and went into the hogan.

“No, it’s a church one,” said Mona. “But I still think the kids should stay outside or with friends.”

“What’s the difference ?” I asked. I needed to know just in case they were going some place where I *wanted* to go



“Traditional Navajos are always buried on the land,” Mom said. “Your grandmother became a member of the Full Bible Church before she died. Her service will be there and she’ll be buried in their cemetery.”

I was about to ask why kids couldn’t go when Jelly-Belly came around the hogan. “Come on, Billy. Let’s go watch ‘em shoot some baskets.”

## 8

### Basketball

Danny was dribbling and pointing to one of the other cousins. T.C. swooped in, took the ball away from him and sank it through a hoop on a pole made from a tree trunk.

“Is T.C. really good?” I asked Jelly-Belly.

“Oh, yeah! He’s the best center on the Eagles and they were division champs this year. Ro, Mo, and Joe played real good, too, when they were in school. Ro was even All-State.”

“What about you?” I asked.

“I’m the drummer in the family.” He pointed at his chest. His tee-shirt had a picture of a drum kit on it.

“Don’t you play Indian drums?” I asked.

“Oh, sure. I do, that, too.” He laughed. “But whachoo think, we’re not modern here on the rez?”

I didn’t know what to say. My Shi-ma’s hogan didn’t look very modern to me.

One of the Os left the game and trotted over to us. “Billy, you look like a b-ball player,” he said. “Wanna shoot a few?” He shot the ball to me, fast. It bounced off my stomach before I could catch it and. I hoped Danny hadn’t seen my bobble.

I didn’t want to shoot baskets, but I didn’t want to be a wuss and wimp out either.

“Never mind, guys,” Jelly-Belly said. “Here comes Mona. It must be time to get ready.”

## On the Road to Kayenta

Mom and I rode in the first truck with Uncle Atsiti, T.C., and Jelly-Belly. Everyone else except Great-Grandmother was in the other one.

We passed an old man wearing a hat like Atsiti's. He was following a flock of sheep and goats down the middle of the rocky road. Uncle Atsiti slowed down and swung off the road into the desert.

He rolled down his window as we passed, and lifted two fingers off the steering wheel.. "Yaah-te," he hollered. "Wave to your Great-Uncle, Billy,"

"Great-uncle?" It took me a minute to work that out? "Does that make him my dead grandmother's uncle, too?" I turned around to look at him.

"Yes, he was your grandmother's uncle, too" Mom said. "Don't ask any more questions about your grandmother. We don't like to talk about those whose spirit has left their bodies."

This was news to me. Where we lived, lots of people talked about dead soldiers, mostly about how full of life and how brave they had been.

"Margaret, you haven't done right by this boy if you are just now telling him that," said Jelly-Belly. "Billy, what do you know about being a Navajo?"

"Well, I learned some words on the bus; but mostly Dad and I only know what Mom tells us. That hasn't been much."

Jelly-Belly poked Mom. "Get over it, Margaret. Those were hard times for all of us, but we survived, didn't we?"

Now I had about eleven more questions, but before I could ask any of them he said, "Did she even tell you that the Navajo Nation is bigger than many states?"

Mom made her lemon-sucking face. "And poorer than most of them, too,".

“Not anymore. Not for long, anyway. We do more than just herd sheep now, Sis” he said. “You’d be surprised at how many Navajo writers, teachers, business people and doctors we have these days.”

“And Navajo warriors,” I reminded them. I thought Dad should be counted too, even if he grew up in Albuquerque, instead of on the Rez.

“Yeah. And we’re gonna have a Navajo player in the NBA one of these days soon!” T.C. added. “What’s your favorite sport, Billy?”

We were just coming into a small town. “I like skateboarding best,” I said as we passed the sign that said *Kayenta pop. 4922*.

Uncle Atsisti stepped on the brakes. “That’s it!” He took a sharp left turn. “We’ll leave you guys at the skate park while we go to the funeral.”

## 10

### At the Skate Park

From the size of the town, I didn't expect much of a park, but it was a great one! It had everything, including grind boxes, ramps, pipes, and even a partial bowl! Some of the big kids were playing S.K.A.T.E. One of them did a perfect Kasper Flip.

T.C. headed for a group of girls leaning against a metal building. Danny followed him, but Shawna took my hand. “Teach me to ride a skateboard, Billy.”

A kid about my age in a black *GrimReaper* shirt with a skateboarding space alien on the front, was doing some pop-shove-its. He wasn't wearing a helmet or pads.

I knew Mom wouldn't let Atsiti leave until she saw me put mine on. That was alright. I didn't want to skate right away, anyway.

“O.K., but you have to wear pads.” After I got Shawna outfitted, I made her turn around; and then I shoved her, just little bit, between her shoulder blades.

“HEY! Watch it!” She put her right foot out to stop her fall.

“You’ll be a goofy-foot rider,” I told her. “That’s what we call someone who rides with their right foot on the front of the board. Try it and see how it feels.”

She wobbled a bit when she first started out. But by the time she turned around and came flying back, she looked like a cool little kid. Her arms were casual-like by her side. She even leaned into a curve like she had been doing it all her life.

“That’s fun!” she said. “Now teach me a trick!”

“First, you need to learn how to duck walk,” I put a foot on each end of the board and walked it forward and backward so she could see what I meant.

“Switch your weight from side to side, and swing your shoulders in the same direction. You should practice on the dirt first, though. Let’s go over here.” I led her to one side.

Danny had his back turned to the big kids. He was watching me show Shanna where to put her feet.

She rocked back and forth, but the board didn’t move. “I can’t do it HERE!”

“My board is probably too long for you,” I said.

“No, it’s NOT! I know I can do it on the cement.” She took the board to a corner of the court where no one else was skating. She was determined to duckwalk. She frowned down at her feet, and flung her skinny body back and forth. I thought she would give up soon, but she refused to quit.

She had managed to take a couple of steps at last, but she was concentrating so hard that she never even saw the *GrimReaper* kid come sailing off a box. He KAWUMPed into her and they both went sprawling.

Shawna rolled over, holding a hand to her bloody mouth. The other kid jumped up right away and I figured he was gonna ask her if she was OK.

Instead, he kicked her leg and stomped around her to get his board. I couldn't believe it! I took off running. I jumped over Shanna and grabbed him by the shoulder.

"Pick on someone your own size!"

"Get away from me! She deserved it!"

He tried to kick me, too, but I jumped to the side, wrapped an arm around him and landed a hard right to his gut.

He made an oof! sound and took a step backward. I held on as tight as I could, but he got one arm free and whacked the side of my head with his board.

What they say about seeing stars is true! A big one exploded in front of my eyes! My knees went weak but I didn't let go of him. Mostly because I would have fallen down if I had.

He was about to hit me again when someone grabbed his wrist from behind. Whoever-it-was yanked the kid out of my arms. I heard a THWACK and he went down, but on top of me!

Everybody at the park must have gathered around to watch us fight. I could see a herd of duct-taped sneakers, but not much else. Someone finally pulled the kid off me and held out a skint-knuckled hand.

It was Danny. "We showed him, didn't we, Cuz?" He was almost smiling.

## 12

### Buddies

Danny turned and helped Shawna up next. "Are you okay?" He wiped her face with his shirt.

"Yep. Somehow. Look!" She held out a blood-smeared tooth.

I said, "I'm sorry about your tooth, Shawna,"

"Oh, that's okay, Billy. It was loose, anyway. "I'm gonna go show T.C.!" She stuck the tooth in her pocket and ran off.

"Hey, man, do you think I could try your board?" Danny asked.

“Sure.” I skidded it over to him. “You know how to skate?”

“Nope. Not yet,” he said, hopping onto it and duckwalking backward. “So, how do you make this thing jump up in the air?”

I showed him once and he ollied in no time at all.

“Balance,” he said, “It’s just like riding a horse.”

“No way!” I said. “They aren’t anything alike”

“Oh, yeah? Come riding with me tonight and I’ll show you.”

Shawna came back with T. C. and the big girls in tow. Everybody wanted to know what happened. After they heard the story, Danny and I got high fives all around.

## 13

### Clans and Names

Before long our two trucks pulled into the parking lot. Mom and the rest of the rellies got out with a bucket of fried chicken and some colas. They put one of the tailgates down for a picnic table and we stood around it and ate. Shawna told the fight story all over again.

“You did good, Billy,” Atsiti said.

“Real good,” agreed the Os.

“The Navajo way is to take care of family above everything else,” said Jelly-Belly. He poked Mom again. “Billy, what’s your lineage?” he asked.

“Huh?” I looked at Mom for some help.

She sighed. “Billy, you are born TO the Red Towering Rocks clan. That’s my side. On your Dad’s side, we would say you were born FOR the Bitterwater clan.”

“That sounds cool,” I said. “What’s it mean?”

“Think of your Mother’s clan as your closest family.” Jelly-Belly said. “That makes me and Atsiti like fathers to you, and your cousins here are your brothers and sister.”

I figured, if we were all so tight, I could ask the Os a question. It had been bugging me all day. “Are you triplets?”

They laughed and one of them said, “Why, do we look alike to you?”

“Sort of, not too much; but your names....”

Everybody laughed at that. One of the Os put his hand on his chest.

“I’m Robert,” he said. He nodded at the others. “He’s Joseph. That’s Moses....”

Moses nudged T.C. and said, “And this is Floyd.”

T.C. pointed his lips at Jelly-Belly and said, “Jelly’s name is Mike.”

Jelly turned to Mom and said, “And this here’s Pie Face.”

Everybody cracked up laughing at that. I must have looked totally confused.

Atsiti said, “It’s a Dine thing. Everybody gets a nickname. Margaret’s came from the day she was chasing Jelly and tripped. She went splat into a cow pie.”

“Billy has a nickname, too!” Shawna announced. “Danny called him “Wheelie-feet” back at the bus station.”

“Wheels could be cool!” T.C. said.

“How about Fighting Wheels?” asked Danny.

Mom pulled her eyebrows pulled down into a sharp point above her nose. “Don’t encourage him. He gets in enough trouble as it is. A little hozho wouldn’t hurt him at all.”

I didn’t know what she meant, but I didn’t want to ask and look even more ignorant.

She opened the truck door. “We have to leave now if we want to be home before dark.”

“We have to go, too,” Robert said. “T.C. needs to get back to the prep school in Crown Point tonight.”

Danny and Shawna and me rode home together in the back of Atsiti's truck. The wind beat our hair against our faces and peeled our eyelids back when we looked directly into it. When we turned off the pavement onto a rutted road, the three of us bounced around like sacks of potatoes. It was *way* more fun than the bus ride had been!

"Billy, how come you never came to see us before?" Shawna yelled.

"I don't know, I said. "I was gonna ask you if you knew why not."

Danny looked around like he thought maybe the folks in the cab could hear him. He leaned his mouth to my ear.

"Your grandmother used to drink a lot. Sometimes she left Margaret, Jelly and Atsiti alone for a long time. Your mom's sister, who was T.C.'s and our mom's mother, took them in for a while, but then she got real sick. Some people tried to take Margaret back to your grandmother's house and she ran away as soon as they left."

Now I understood why Mom had never told me any of this. It was a sad story.

## 15

### Riding

Danny showed me how to slip Thunder's bridle on over his head and then let me do it myself. Except for a few bristly whiskers, the horse's nose felt like pure velvet. Then Danny caught hold of the silver mane and jumped up on his back. I climbed on from the fence.

"This isn't like riding a board at all!" I said. Thunder's back was very wide.

"You'll see," Danny said. We headed up and over the rise. Danny showed me the trails up into the hills where sheep were taken to graze in the summer. We rode down into a sandy wash that he said filled up with running water after a big rain.

Suddenly, he goosed the horse's sides with a kick and Thunder took off running. It was like going from rocking chair to rocket ship in a split second! I grabbed onto Danny and his hair flicked around my head like black lightning.



But when Thunder galloped up the side of the gully, I let go of Danny's waist and leaned forward over his back. I clinched the horse's sides with my knees, as much as I could.

Danny slowed Thunder to a trot and said, "See, what I mean about balance?"

I did. Somehow, I had just seemed to know how to use my knees and body to move with the horse.

Danny pulled up on the reins and nodded toward a clump of bushes. It took a minute, before I saw the deer stripping leaves off the limbs of a bush. We watched until she moved on out of sight.

## 16

### Hozho

The sun was almost down and the cliffs nearby glowed with a pinky light. I thought maybe Danny would answer some more questions for me, if I could only figure out where to start.

Finally, I just said, "What's hozho mean?"

"Walking in beauty," he said. "That comes from the Beauty Way Sing."

He stared up at the red and purple sky. I knew he would say more if I didn't ask. "That's like...when someone needs healing, the whole family gets together and has a ceremony for them. We call it a sing, because there are different songs for different cures. Uncle is a singer."

He went on. "Some people would call him a medicine man, but he is a hataale to us. He uses the Beauty Way sing to bring sick people back into harmony. It's like...another kind of balance thing."

I didn't really understand what he meant, but a bird called in the low brush nearby and a dozen others hurried across our path, some with little feathers bobbing over their heads.

None of my questions seemed important just then.

## Around the Fire

Uncle and Jelly closed the sheep up in the pen and went into the trailer.

“Who lives there?” I asked.

“Uncle and Jelly,” Danny said. “Jelly’s studying to be a hataale, too.”

Down at the hogan, Mom and Mona had Navajo tacos ready for everyone. We ate and then Jelly built a fire in rock pit in the center of the room. There were some chairs but everybody sat on the floor on rugs and sheepskins, including my Shi-ma and Uncle, who sat across from the door. He didn’t talk much. When he did, it was in Navajo.

Jelly told them about the fight at the skate park.

Uncle looked at me said some long something to Jelly, who turned to me and said, “Billy, Uncle wants me to tell you that fighting when you have to is good. Knowing when you don’t have to fight is even better.”

“You never have to fight someone who calls you names because you are different from them,” he went on. “Be proud to be Dine.”

I thought about that. I wished I could spend more time with my rellies. Maybe I could learn how to be real Dine like them.

I wanted to tell Uncle that, but Mom gave me The Look. I was supposed to be quiet and listen, not talk.

Uncle said something else to Jelly who said, “Uncle says not to worry, you are plenty Dine. He also says you will be back here, soon.”

Mom looked at Uncle funny. Maybe she didn’t want to hear that, but I hoped he was right.

Great-Grandmother just nodded over her small loom. The way she moved as she wove the paddle through the strings made me think of ocean waves. She saw me watching, and said, “I learned how to weave from Spider Woman.”

Huh? Spider Woman? I looked around, but I didn’t see any comic books anywhere.

## Spider Woman

Grandmother explained. “We live in the Fourth World, now,” she said. “It’s also called the Glittering World and here's how it come to be:

The spirit holy ones and the holy people were created in the First World. In the Second World, the holy ones gave life to Spider Woman and Spider Man.

“In the Third World, the holy ones gave Spider Woman the gift of weaving and told her to weave a map of the universe. But she didn’t know what they meant.

“And then, one day when she was out gathering food, she came upon a small young tree that was just beginning to grow leaf buds

"She touched her right hand to one of them. When she took her hand away, a string stretched from it to the branch. She shook her hand to release the string but it stayed attached. She moved her hand to another branch, and then another and the string followed. She saw it glitter in the sunlight and saw how she could make shining patterns by moving her hand from place to place.

“She asked Spider Man to build her a loom, with the earth for its base and the sky for its top. And once he did, she wove the world we know today into being: mountains and deserts and rivers and washes and everything in between.

“When Spiderwoman finished she left behind a glittering web that stretched from peak to peak of the four sacred mountains."

I shut my eyes, to try and imagine how tall Spiderwoman’s giant loom must have been.

Grandmother said, “When the Dine came to live here between the Four Corners of this world it was Spider Man who showed us how to build the first loom and Spider Woman who taught us how to weave our first blankets and rugs....”

A beautiful woman wearing silver jewelry floated in the smoke from the fire. She drifted over to me and touched me with a fingertip, and then went around the room, touching each of us gently. When she finished, I could see a faint silver thread connecting everyone of us to the others.

She turned to me again and held out her hand. I took it and we rose up and out through the smoke hole above the now-dying fire.

Woah! A glowing web covered everything in sight. It reflected the starlight in a million twinkly places!

We floated higher into the sky. From there, I could see that the web stretched far beyond the four sacred peaks. It wrapped around the whole world!

One strand of it seemed to twinkle more than the others. I followed it with my eyes. At the other end I saw my Dad sitting on his bunk, cleaning his gear!

“Dad! Dad!” I called, waving and jumping up and down.

“He can’t hear you, Billy,” the woman said. “But he can feel you. Gather up all the love for him that you have in your heart.”

I did, as much as I could, and then sucked in some more with a great big breath and nodded my head to tell her I was ready.

“Now send it out to him.”

I felt my heart jump toward him. The web vibrated a bit and Dad stopped his polishing. He looked at over at the picture of me on his footlocker and smiled. His lips moved. He may have said “I love you, son.”

“The woman turned and looked down at me. “Now you know, she said. “Hozho comes from the heart, not the head.”

“Wake up, Billy.” Someone was shaking my shoulder and jingling something over my head. I opened my eyes to see Danny, dangling Thunder’s halter and bridle above me.

He was going to teach me how to ride. I’d get to do it by myself, today!

I scrambled into my jeans and followed him outside. Grandmother, Uncle, Mom, and Jelly walked toward us, linked shadows with the sun rising behind them. Its rays lit up the thin

shimmer that I could still see, stretching between me and them and from all of us out to the edges of the world.

I recognized Jelly's round shape before I heard his voice.

"Ya-ah-te, Sleeping Bear. And who are you today?"

"Yaah-te. Jelly," I called. Then in a louder voice than I knew I had: "I am Billie Tsosie. I am born to the Bitterwater Clan and born for the Towering Red Rocks Clan. "I am Dine and proud to be it!"

The web disappeared with a PING and my heart soared out like an eagle.

####

### Skateboarding Terms in the order used

**Tic-tac** The rider pushes down on the back of the board to raise the front wheels. She brings the front wheels down to the left or right, and then repeats the movement to the other side.

**Ollie** The rider pops the board into the air. It appears to be stuck to his feet.. This impressive trick forms the basis for more complicated ones.

**Nose-ollie.** . Also called a Nollie. The rider slaps the nose of his board against the ground and pops his board into the air.

**Pop Shove-it** The rider pops the board up into the air and spends it 180 degrees underneath his feet. (Billy was still having trouble with this trick when he was showing off in Flagstaff.)

**Grind box** A solid cement cube e for riders to practice riding a box edge on the trucks of the board as opposed to the wheels.

**Ramps** Just what they sound like. Lots of kids start skateboarding on homemade ramps in somebody's yard.

**Pipes** are used for practicing ramp tricks.

**S.K.A.T.E.** A follow the leader game. Each person takes turns doing a trick. Others have to repeat the trick or earn a letter. The last one to spell SKATE wins.

Kasper Flip The rider has the board upside down in the air and reaches a toe under it to bring it right side up before landing.

Goofy foot You are a 'regular foot' rider if you keep your left foot forward, and push with your right. You are goofy foot if you ride with your right foot forward and push with your left.

Duckwalk Place the board crossways in front of you, and hop onto it, placing a foot on each end. Begin with your knees bent and relaxed. and your shoulders level. As you shift your weight from one foot to the other, raise the other end of the board and swing it forward (or backward) . When it is easy for you to "waddle" forward and backwards you will be ready to learn some basic tricks.

#### From the Author

A story teller could have no better role model than Spider Woman, who keeps us all entranced with the very never-endingness of her creations. When I began to think about a modern retelling of this story, I thought it would be told from a young girl's point of view, but Billy Tsosie stepped in took charge of the narrative right away.

Billie has grown up and is in pre-med at the University of Arizona. Danny is now a Marine himself, and a talented artist, and Shawna has become a skateboard champion who is about to earn a sponsorship for a national tour.

Someday I hope to tell you just how all of that came about.

If you enjoyed this e-book, please consider purchasing the print edition, soon to be available from Amazon.