



Video Story Transcript

SPARTA, GA

By: Storyteller Gene Tagaban

Link to YouTube Video:

<https://youtu.be/ZUS9P6cjW9A>

Note : The following is a transcription of a spoken story performance and may not reflect textbook perfect English. It will guide you as you listen (or read) along.

Gunalchéesh! My name is Gene Tagaban.

My name is Guy Yaaw. I'm of the Takdeintaan clan, the Raven, Freshwater Salmon clan from Hoonah, Alaska. I'm the child of a Wooshketann, Eagle, Shark clan Káawu huna in Juneau, Alaska.

I am Cherokee, Tlingit and Filipino. I'm a Cherotlingipino. I'd like to tell the story about an adventure of mine when I was a young man. I bought a van and I was going to drive across the country. And see what that land where I came from, my Indian people, was like.

Many people were exploring Europe and going over there but there's so much richness here just in our backyard. So I was driving through Louisiana, me and my girlfriend. And so we stopped one night on a side road, dirt road and it was dark out. We were gonna camp there for the night. As we are just gettin' ready to camp, a truck pulls up. Pulls in front of us. Turned around. And the headlights are shining right into our van. I'm thinking to myself, "Oh! What the heck's going on here?"

And the only thing that could run through my mind was just these things I hear that's going on in the south in the back country in Deliverance. We were kind of freaked out and they pulled up right next to us. I rolled down my window. And they said, "How y'all doin'?"

"Oh, we're doin' good."

"Now where are y'all from?"

I told 'em, "I'm originally from Alaska."

"Who are you people?"

And I said," Guy Yaaw (then speaks about his people in his native language).

And they looked at me and said, "Now what kind of foreign language is that?"

"Oh, that's my Tlingit language. I'm a Native American from this country. That language I just spoke to you was from Alaska.

"Alaska! You guys from Alaska?"

I said, "Yes, I am!"

"Now what y'all doin' way down here. Did you guys get lost?"

I said, "No, we're just driving around seeing this country." And we started to strike up a conversation.

And he asked me, "How do y'all say... fire?"

"Fire."

He said, "Now did you hear that... fire. Now right here you say... fire to say... fire. You know, you're some interesting folks! Now we don't get many people like you around here much often. You know what? We're having a... a gathering here that's coming up here in a couple of days. You sure are welcome to come if you'd like to come. You can meet my kin, my folks that's back there in the swamps a little bit. You'll be more than welcome!"

I said, "Ah, thank you for the invitation but I think we're gonna move on and keep traveling. I think we're gonna make our way up... around Georgia. See, I'm part Cherokee and my people come from that area."

"Well, all I want to tell you is that stay away from Sparta, Georgia there. I've been to Sparta. A lot of black folk there, you know. You good people. I don't want you to get in trouble now. Ah, it's good to meet you."

"It sounds good to me too. I'll tell you what! A couple of days later, we are in Sparta, Georgia and we were hungry. So we went to go get a couple of sandwiches and across the street was a basketball court and playin' basketball there – a bunch of youngsters playing ball and they're all black. And we sat there to go watch them play basketball. So we're sitting there eatin' our sandwiches and they're arguing back and forth because they need an extra player.

And so they looked at me. They came up to me and said, "Heh! You right there! You play ball?"

I go, "Who? Me?"

"Yeah, we're talking to you. You play ball?"

I said, "Do I play ball?" Now, I tell you what! Indians love basketball! So I said, "Yeah, I play ball!"

And so we went out there. They brought me out there. We started playing hoops back and forth. And we were playing basketball all afternoon and then they asked me, "Excuse me. Where are you from?"

I said, "From Alaska."

And they asked me, "Are you an Indian?"

I said, "Yeah, I am!"

"Can we touch you?"

"You want to touch me?" I said, "Sure."

So they felt my skin and they felt my hair and they told me... they said, "Hey, wait here, wait here!" And so they ran off but they brought back all their family, their relatives – aunties, uncles, cousins. They wanted to meet us Native American people because they've only heard about us in movies, books, magazines, museums. They never met a real live native person before. They said, "We gotta take you...we got Uncle Leroy who'd love to meet you."

And so we went to Uncle's Leroy's house and Uncle Leroy, when we walked in, he was like this skinny black man. I mean he was so black, he was like purple. Long white hair, long white beard and he had square glasses tinted blue. Yes, and he was skinny, about as skinny as a broom pole when he came shuffling up to us, looked at me, "My Indian brothers!" You see, Uncle Leroy was in the Korean War and in the Korean War, Uncle Leroy was this young black man and he was scared and there were bombs and guns goin' off. And so he was runnin' around. But at the same time he was runnin' around, there are a couple of Indians in a foxhole and they're smokin' their tobacco, saying their prayer. "Oh, Creator, take care of us. I swear here on this here foreign land, watch over us and we promise we'll live a good life. Send us a sign that you hear what we're talkin' about. You hear our prayers!" And they're smoking their tobacco! And just as they're praying, suddenly Uncle Leroy jumps into their foxhole and those two Indians look at this black man and they go, "Ah, the creator! Thank you for sending us this good luck charm of a black man. We promise we'll take care of this young man here in a good way." And so they did.

They kept that promise and they took care of Uncle Leroy. And they taught Uncle Leroy about spirit, honor, culture, tradition, prayer, brotherhood. And they took care of Uncle Leroy and Uncle Leroy felt that. He owed those Indian brothers of his. So I went to his house. He told us the stories of brotherhood, took care of us while we were in his home. So the next morning we jumped in the van and we headed off. And as we were driving off, I heard Uncle Leroy, "My Indian brothers!"