

# Indian Summer: Children of the Wind

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Indian Summer

Children of the Wind Series

R J Cowley, Jr

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Hope lies in dreams, in imagination, and in the courage of those who dare to make dreams into reality.

Jonas Salk, American Medical Researcher - Developer of 1st successful polio vaccine

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### EPILOGUE

## Prologue

My name is Henry Sheridan, Henry Stonewall Sheridan III to be exact. I was driving from my home in Elmira to the north shore of Canandaigua Lake, about to compete in the Toastmasters' Annual Tall Tale Contest held at The Inn on the Lake Resort and Conference Center. My tale was so well received that the assembly honored me with the first place against a field of accomplished storytellers.

22 September 1990 was one of those gorgeous autumn days in New York's Finger Lakes Region. The high plateau and the rolling hills still wore their summer garb of lush green. The azure sky was spotless save for an occasional cotton ball cloud lingering about. The midday sun was radiant while a gentle breeze tickled leaves with a hint of autumn air. The cold, deep lakes had finally warmed. Starbursts of sunshine bounced off the rippling waves. The grapevines hung massive purple awaiting harvest.

Before I begin my tale, please allow me to tell you a bit about Henry Sheridan. I am an adjunct professor at Elmira College. My doctorate is in cultural anthropology. Ever since my beloved wife Ellen passed on unexpectedly fifteen years earlier, I have been indulging my passion for everything anthropologic at Elmira College. Upon losing Ellen, I could not continue my duties at the University of Pennsylvania in Philadelphia. I retreated to this land of lakes and wineries.

The gig at Elmira has been a blessing. My students have taken to calling me "Uncle Henry." Perhaps it is my avuncular manner. I do not object that they have taken me as their own. They are my ersatz family. My classes are full and fully attended, regardless of the schedule.

Alas, I have been remiss in committing to writing my tall tale entitled "Indian Summer." I wish to correct that oversight at this time. To all my nieces and nephews, those who already have attended my seminars and those I have yet to meet, I dedicate the story of an incredible aboriginal people.

### 1. A CALL TO SERVICE

They were the Un-da-ka-ne-wa, meaning "Family of the Great Life-Force" or "Children of the Great Life-Force." Most often when mentioning their name, they abbreviated it to "Un-da-ka" or "Family." All others who knew them or knew of them called them "The Buffalo Men."

This is their story.

The Great One tossed a pebble through the opening in the front of his tepee. Little Rabbit, the Great One's administrative assistant, turned away from tending the fire and entered the wigwam, the most substantial single home in the community.

"Yes sir, what can I do for you?"

"Send for Hungry Bear. Tell him I want to see him, pronto."

Little Rabbit was on the move and outside by the time the Great One had completed his sentence. She darted through the cluster of tepees almost as large as the Great One's that encircled the great Chief's home. She dashed through a warren of smaller homes scattered throughout Verdant Valley. She passed the Assembly Lodge, the official site of the Un-da-ka Leadership Council, and out into the surrounding area where the marginal members of the Family tended their fires and housed their children.

Hungry Bear was nowhere to be seen, nor did Little Rabbit expect to see him. He was a hunter and, as she had assumed, was out at one of the nearby hunting camps.

On her return to the Great One's tepee, she encountered Old Badger, one of the collection crew who had opted to use one of his sick days that day. With authority vested in her by her position as gatekeeper to the Great One, and over Old Badger's protestations, she commandeered his services. The mumbling Old Badger went in search of Hungry Bear.

She reported to the Great One that Hungry Bear would be at his hearth as fast as humanly possible.

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"Good of you to come." The Great One spoke as he motioned for Hungry Bear to sit across from him near the fire.

"Yes, sir." The sturdy young man of over twenty summers, five of which had been on the hunt, waited for the Great One to proceed.

"I have had my eye on you. Reports from the field are that you are one of the best hunters in all of the Family." The Great One began.

Unsure of what to say, Hungry Bear kept his own counsel and waited for the big man to continue.

"As you may know, we have a serious problem with the collection side of our Family business." He observed the young man in front of him to gauge his reaction.

"I'm afraid I am not familiar with the collection business, and I certainly am not aware of any problems. I have my hands full with hunting. I am away from Base Camp much of the time," Hungry Bear countered.

"Yes. Yes. I am aware of that. What I am offering you here is an opportunity of a lifetime to become an integral part of the Un-da-ka management team."

Hungry Bear sat in stunned silence.

"Word is that you have excellent people skills. You are highly regarded as a young man of promise among the Council. Your contemporaries hold you in high esteem for your skill as a hunter. And, not least, you come from good stock. Your parents are very near the epicenter of our world here at

Base Camp."

"I don't know. Collecting chips? Doesn't sound all that interesting." The young man replied.

"Keep in mind that this is a once in a lifetime offer. There are many young men in the Family who would love to have a seat at the Leadership Council."

"Do you mind if I think it over for a day or so?"

"As you think it over, do not overlook your responsibility to be of service to your fellow man. Few are called as you have been called today. Your Family needs you." With that, the Great One waved him away.

He withdrew and walked toward his home nearby.

As Hungry Bear departed, Lobo, one of the Chiefs of the Leadership Council stuck his head under the flap of the Great One's tepee. He said, "You think he bought it, Chief?"

"I don't know."

## 2. THE SPIRITUALIST

He was the Spiritualist, advisor, and physician to the Great One; he interceded with the Great Life-Force on behalf of the Great One, assuring that the Great One avoided injury and illness during his twenty-summer tenure as Principal Chief of the Family. The Spiritualist was among the eldest of the Family. With his age came the purest knowledge of the Un-da-ka-ne-wa history and the unfortunate sobriquet, the Old Geezer or simply the Geeze.

Hungry Bear turned to the Spiritualist for advice after his session with the Great One. "Hey, Geeze. Help me out here. Will you?"

The Geeze tended to his cooking fire outside his tent. His bedraggled abode was but a mere stone's throw from the circle of lodges that belonged to the Family elite. He cast a jaundiced eye toward the interloper. "Sonny, be careful what you call me." With that, he tossed a final branch on the fire and stood as straight as his ancient bones would allow.

Hungry Bear was not put off by the old Geezer's rebuke. "You got some time for me?" He asked.

"Come inside where we can have some privacy."

The accoutrements of the Family shaman hung about, an array of plants of all kinds that created a pungent aroma and tickled Hungry Bear's nose. Once seated with a cup of the old man's herbal tea in hand, Hungry Bear broached his topic. "Have you heard what the Great One wants me to do?"

"Yes. It is all over Base Camp."

"Oh? Well, ah ... what do you think I should do?"

The Old Geezer looked hard at the young man as if sizing him up.

Hungry Bear could not read the man's motives for acting such. The Spiritualist had known Hungry Bear his entire life. He had heard stories that the Geeze, in spite of the Family taboo on such things, acted as a midwife when he had secretly assisted at Hungry Bear's delivery. He waited for the Spiritualist to speak.

"You do know," the Geez said pointedly, "that the role of the Great One goes back to the beginning of time. Leaping Elk has been the Great One for only twenty summers. There were many before him, too many to count."

Hungry Bear was tired from the day-long hunt and vexed by the issue dropped in his lap. "Leaping Elk has been the Great One my entire life. What does this have to do with supervising a bunch of buffalo chip collectors?"

The Spiritualist smiled grimly at the young man's uncaring attitude toward the history of the Family. "What your Chief has offered you is a great honor. You should not take it lightly. If you do become a part of the Family Leadership Council, who knows, you may be the Great One someday; that is if you live up to your name."

Hungry Bear was not impressed.

The Spiritualist continued. "The Family and the buffalo were created at the same time by the Great Life-Force. We were put on this earth not only to hunt the buffalo but also to nurture and protect the herds. We must do as the Great Life-Force commands if we are to provide for generations to come."

Hungry Bear grew restless; it was beginning to look like the Geeze was about to launch into an extended soliloquy.

The man continued. "We are one with the buffalo. We are the only ones who know how to hunt the great beasts and protect the herds." He continued to rhapsodize about the shared history, citing relevant and insightful information for ears that would have been well-served to listen.

The young man across the hearth from the Spiritualist was having none of it. Hungry Bear remained polite; and, he tried desperately to appear as if he was listening. Unfortunately, his physiology betrayed him. He became acutely aware that he desperately needed to get out of there.

The spiritualist ran on sharing his wisdom and extolling the virtues of a life in service to the Family. Hungry Bear thought that he was going to explode if he didn't get out of there.

Eventually, the old man realized that he had lost his audience. With a dismissive wave of the hand, he abruptly said; "Get out of here before you make a mess of my home."

Without even a feeble attempt at a graceful exit, Hungry Bear departed. Once out in the air, he walked home, deep in thought. He was a little frightened and more than a little angry.

"Omigod," he muttered. These guys want me to do this lousy job!"

### 3. A SLEEPLESS NIGHT

Sleep was not an option despite his bone-weary fatigue. Half the night passed before Hungry Bear fell into a trance-like semi-sleep. He saw his life as he knew it evaporate before his eyes. He cursed aloud drawing a stern rebuke from his startled parents. He was awash with despair.

He muttered, "What wisdom is there in taking the Family's most productive master hunter and turning him into just another Chief?" Hungry Bear gave in to the catharsis of recollecting his glorious days as a hunter.

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Three autumns ago he emerged as the Family's preeminent buffalo hunter. During his first two years as an apprentice, Hungry Bear had watched the senior hunters and learned. Their mistakes were his best instructor. More than a few had paid a heavy price hunting the dangerous bison. Some had paid the ultimate price. He could see that there was something special, something different about the most successful hunters. While all the hunters strove to abide by the mandate set forth by the eternal Great Life-Force, what was it that made the few so much more productive than all the others?

One day, without a shred of conscious thought, a fully formed idea came to him out of the blue. He had become one with the buffalo. He was able to be among the buffalo in relative safety despite their enormous size, and the presence of ornery and dangerous males, who were jealously protective of the cows and their calves.

He called upon his friend, Running Deer, one evening. As they wandered through Verdant Valley outside of Base Camp, he ventured to share his most personal thoughts with him. Running Deer was an attentive listener.

Hungry Bear told his friend that the secret to being one with the buffalo was to be still in his head

and in his heart. When he was able to attain such a state of serene awareness, he could walk among the herd in relative safety. The beasts did not run from him. They did not attack him. He was always vigilant for the obstreperous bull just looking for a fight, always choosing to err on the side of caution. He spoke to the beasts he encountered without words; his mind and that of the herd were in telepathic accord.

Hungry Bear, the hunter, sought only those unfortunate young ones that he knew and the calves' mothers knew were not likely to survive into adulthood. The young beast could be suffering from a twisted or broken limb or perhaps was possessed of a weak constitution. When he came upon such a weakened calf, he was careful to take both the mother and calf into account. He assured the troubled Mama that he had both hers and the vulnerable calf's best interest at heart. Hungry Bear assured the calf that the journey to be with the eternal Great Life-Force would be painless and lead to a time of everlasting bliss.

Hunting was tedious and time-consuming work. Some days it took the entire day to select suitable prey and to carefully orchestrate the deed properly. Once he had secured tacit approval from the cow, he gently led the young beast away from the herd and to a place remote and hidden from view. There he administered the death blow; rarely did it take a second strike. Death was indeed quick. Forthwith he offered a prayer to the Great Life-Force for the repose of his young brethren's soul. He prayed that his act of violence was well chosen. Hungry Bear knew that one of his buffalo brethren had to forfeit its life so that the Family of the Great Life-Force could live. The most egregious sin a hunter, or any member of the Family, could commit was to wantonly destroy their brethren the buffalo.

In his pursuit of hunting excellence, Hungry Bear had learned one of life's great secrets, a secret in plain view, yet one few ever see. Running Deer listened attentively. He admired his friend's passion and commitment. Hungry Bear knew, however, that Running Deer, despite his prowess as a hunter, didn't get it; nor did most of the people resident at Base Camp in Verdant Valley.

Hungry Bear's life at Base Camp had improved immensely upon his becoming a fully invested buffalo hunter. The available young women, including Smiling Brook, found him more attractive than before. On occasion, even some of the more mature women already committed to another man, cast an interested eye at him. Damn! Perhaps it was selfish, but he did not want to give up that which had been bestowed upon him by his lofty status.

In the morning, he would again be asked to forego a life he had come to love and a mission at which he excelled for the betterment of the Family! The very thought of it made him sick to his stomach.

#### 4. A DAY LIKE NO OTHER

The early morning sun shone brightly on Verdant Valley in direct contrast to Hungry Bear's mood. He trudged his way to the Great One's lodgings at sunup, as instructed. There he met with the Great One and another man named Stonewall, of whom he knew very little, except by reputation.

The man had deep-set, amber eyes that stared out from chiseled, angular features. The wolf eyes stared at Hungry Bear as he approached the campfire where the Great One and Stonewall sat in conference. Upon seeing Hungry Bear, the Great One rose to greet him; Stonewall did not.

"Hungry Bear, so glad to have you on board." Turning to Stonewall, the Great One said, "Hungry Bear is our new Chief of Field Operations here at Base Camp. You two probably know each other."

From his seated position, Stonewall nodded to the new Chief. "I know him," he said.

"Well, let's get started. I am a busy man. I can't sit around here all day," declared the Great One. "As you know, Stonewall; Hungry Bear will be in charge of all operations in the field. As such, you will report to him. He is my eyes and ears for everything that goes on out there."

Stonewall grunted his acknowledgment.

"And..." turning to Hungry Bear, "you can learn a lot from this guy."

Hungry Bear offered a barely perceptible nod in the Great One's direction and turned his gaze to the fire before him. He said, "I'm afraid I am at a bit of a loss. What exactly are Field Operations?"

"It's not as easy as you might think," said the exulted Chief of the Family. "There's is quite a bit to it. And, there is an organization."

"Organization!?" Hungry Bear spat spontaneously. "I thought all these guys do is run around and pick up shit."

The Great One gave an unintentional start at the young Chief's comment. He looked at Stonewall, who betrayed no reaction. He said, "Tell him, Stonewall."

"Buffalo chip collection is broken down into three jobs, chippers, trailers, and carters. The chippers are responsible for identifying and selecting the chips suitable for use. The chippers are the most senior of the three-person crew. The chipper usually has his pick of who he wants to be his trailer. The trailer's job is to transport the selected chips to a predetermined collection location. Throughout the day the carter conveys the chips to Base Camp, where the chips are sorted and stored by day."

"That's it?" Hungry Bear observed.

"It's not that simple," the Great One said. "There are a lot of people involved in the process. And, collecting the chips is every bit as important as hunting the buffalo. Those chips are what keep our campfires burning throughout the winter."

"OK." Hungry Bear was noncommittal.

"Look, we have a lot of guys out in the field every day. It's a tough job. It involves a lot of walking, stooping, and hauling, day in and day out. Senior Chippers like Stonewall, here, are worth their weight in buffalo skins!"

Stonewall rose to leave.

The Great One said, "Go on out with Stonewall. He'll get you started."

Hungry Bear rose; he and Stonewall departed, as instructed.

He thought about the man walking beside him. He was about Hungry Bear's height, but thicker through the shoulders. Stonewall had a way of intimidating just by his look. The way he moved his powerful body accented his potential menace; he strode with the grace of a mountain lion.

"So, where do we begin?" Hungry Bear asked.

"I'm heading out to Peddlers' Gulch to check for chips up there."

"Ah, well, what should I do?"

"You're the boss. You figure it out."

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By midday every one of the Family, whether at Base Camp, one of the hunting camps, or out in the field, knew that Hungry Bear had accepted the position as Chief of Field Operations.

Old Badger, a man nearly twenty summers older than Hungry Bear approached the new Chief.  
"You're the new boss. Right?"

"Something like that."

"Maybe you can help me."

"I will if I can," replied Hungry Bear.

Old Badger started. "I have been a trailer for many a summer, probably more summers than you've been alive."

"So, what's the problem?"

"I have a right to be a chipper after all this time. I've talked to all the Chiefs of the Leadership Council, but haven't gotten anywhere with them. Most of them won't give me the time of day."

"So, you want me to make you a chipper?"

"Right."

"Look, I'm new to this job, but it seems to me that the chipper's job is far more physically demanding than that of the trailer, or carter, for that matter. The chippers are out there all over, bending and stooping, and sniffing."

Old Badger took exception. He said, derisively, "I know all that."

"Seems to me, it's a job better suited for a younger man." Hungry Bear offered.

"Don't you worry about that. I'm fit as anyone; all I need is a chance." Old Badger huffed.

"Let me give it some thought. I'll get back to you."

Before he departed, Old Badger said, "Did you hear about the problems at the Wooded Draw?"

"No. Can't say as I have. What happened?"

"Oh, well...Maybe I'm telling tales I shouldn't."

The new Chief of Field Operations did not bite. "OK."

"Anyhow," Old Badger charged ahead. "The trailers refused to follow the chippers into the Draw. Some of the trailers are upset about the number of green chips the chippers are collecting and asking the trailers to handle. The trailers are sick and tired of the chippers doing a lousy job and getting all the glory."

Hungry Bear raised an eyebrow, "Glory?"

"That's right. Glory." Old Badger insisted.

"Well, what does the problem have to do with you?"

"Ah, nothing, really. It's just that if I was a chipper, I wouldn't treat the trailers like that.

"I see." Hungry Bear said dubiously.

"Besides, even Stonewall says that we are being used."

"Stonewall? What does he have to do with this?"

Old Badger continued. "We were talking the other day, and he agrees that we are getting the worst of it. I'm sick and tired of having to take up for the others. I do my job. I'm the best trailer you have. But, does that mean anything? No. The damn chippers get all the glory. I don't know how you can let this kind of thing continue..."

Hungry Bear raised his hand, signaling the Old Badger to stop. "I said, I'll think about it. Now, go on and get back to work."

Over his shoulder, Old Badger offered, "You'd better get down there and see for yourself. People are bitching and complaining."

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Walk back in time. Escape reality and meet the fictional Family. Cultural anthropologist, Dr. Henry Stonewall Sheridan III, recounts the fantastic tale of the Un-da-ka, a society on the cusp of a crisis. Hungry Bear, a young man of status, takes on the responsibility for a mundane, but essential Family operation. By taking on a leadership role, Hungry Bear finds that he must confront with The Great One in a classic struggle between innovation and tradition. Smiling Brook, Hungry Bear's love interest, the impetuous young Brazen Bull, and the enigmatic Wolfman round out the cast of characters, as the story winds down to a surprising conclusion.

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