

# Tribal Journey

Gary Robinson



**Pathfinders**



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## Chapter 1

### Freedom Rings

I'm lucky to even be alive to tell you my story. I learned the hard way that texting and driving don't mix. And that healing can come from unexpected places. But I'm getting ahead of myself.

It was the first Friday in April. The three o'clock bell rang. Screams of joy erupted from every classroom. Spring break had arrived. Freedom at last! A week of unsupervised fun!

I escaped the West Seattle High School building like it was on fire.

"Jason! Jason!" I heard my name being called from across the school's front lawn. It was my best friend, Ron.

"Ron, what's up?"

“I’m jazzed,” he said. “My family’s spring break trip was canceled. I’ll be here all next week!”

“Awesome. Maybe we can cruise the Junction. Or hit Alki Beach every day! I’ve got to stay in shape for the swim meet next month.”

“Whoa,” he said. “I don’t have unlimited use of the family car, remember. I have to ‘earn’ it by doing chores around the house. You know, the point system.”

“Oh yeah.” I had to think for a minute. We were both sixteen, but neither of us had a car.

“I know,” I said finally. “Tomorrow’s Saturday. I can come over. We can work our way through a whole list of chores around your house. Maybe we can earn enough points to use the car all week.”

A horn honked. We both looked to see his mom’s car waiting at the curb.

“Sounds possible,” Ron said. “I’ll text you,” he shouted, as he ran toward the car.

“Later,” I shouted back.

I caught my usual bus for the ride home. Riding the bus wasn't fun, because most of the riders were younger kids. But both my parents worked, so the bus was the only way for me to get home. I usually sat in the back and looked out the window. Or just thought about stuff.

I grew up here in West Seattle. Most people don't know that this area was the original Seattle. It's where the white settlers first landed in this region to create their new home. But of course there were people already here. My mother's people—the Duwamish Indians. Her ancestors were on the shore to greet the settlers when they arrived.

Anyway, those are things I learned in the tribal culture classes my mother had me take when I was little. I'd been too busy for such things lately.

My cell phone vibrated in my pocket. I'd asked Dad for a smart phone like most of my friends had. But no luck. He said I could have one of those when I could pay for it myself.

So I flipped the lame phone open to find a text from my friend Amy Chang. “Any1 planning a get 2gether during spring break?” she asked.

I texted back, “That’s what Ron & I r trying to figure out. I’ll let u know.”

When I became a teenager, my non-Native friends complained that Indians always lived in the past. Without much thought, I decided I agreed with them.

Of course I wanted to fit in with the other kids at school I hang out with. They’re a mixture of races: whites, Asians, Latinos, blacks—you name it. Most of them had figured out how to ignore their family’s past and live in the now. Track the trends. Merge with the moment.

So I decided to do likewise and go with the flow. Nothing that my Duwamish mother, grandparents, or uncles tried to teach me from Native culture really applied to life today. They were so behind the times. It was easy to turn my back on all that and go with the flow.

Another text came in. This time it was from Ben, my Latino friend. “My spring break is messed up. Got 2 go 2 Spokane 2 visit relatives.”

“That sucks,” I texted back. “Hope u make it thru the week—see u when u get back.” I closed my phone and stuffed it back in my pocket.

What was I talking about before? Oh yeah. Going with the flow. Seattle was a great place to go with the flow. The home of Mariners baseball, Seahawks football, Starbucks coffee, and Microsoft. Sure, it was cloudy or rainy three hundred days of the year. So what. That’s one of the special things about the Northwest. The weather makes everything so green.

I’d been swimming since I was little. I loved the water. I had dreams of being like Michael Phelps and winning twenty-two Olympic medals. Making the high school swim team was a step in that direction.

My cell phone vibrated again. I dug it out of my pocket one more time and flipped it

open. Another text from Ron. “My mom sez chores 2moro will work fine.”

I texted back, “Hope my mom sez the same.”

The bus let me out at the corner of my street. I walked the short two blocks to my house. The neighborhood was made up of little two-story brick houses that had seen better days. My house really had problems—a leaky roof, rotting front steps, and cracks in the walls.

Dad never had the time or money to fix any of this stuff. His job as a maintenance worker at the Boeing jet factory must not pay very much. It did pay enough to keep him stocked in beer, however.

I was lucky to have my own room upstairs. It was small but all mine. It was the best place to be when Dad went on one of his rampages.

My younger brother Zak and his twin sister Shauna shared a room down the hall. Since birth they’ve never liked to be apart. Shauna can’t sleep if Zak isn’t nearby. So half of the room was filled with boy stuff, and the other half was all pink and girly.



As I approached the house, I was surprised to see my mom's car parked in the driveway.

“What are you doing home?” I asked Mom as I walked through the front door.

“It's Good Friday. Sunday is Easter. So they let some of us get off work early to have some quality family time.”

That was really the last thing I was interested in.

“Can I go over to Ron's tomorrow? I told him I'd help him with a few chores.”

“You? Helping with chores? Wow, that's a new one.” She was smiling when she said it, so I knew she wasn't totally serious.

“We'll see. We might do something as a family. I'll talk to your father when he gets home.”

I think I moaned out loud. I knew that “we'll see” was parent code for “probably not.”

## About the Author

Gary Robinson, a writer and filmmaker of Cherokee and Choctaw Indian descent, has spent more than twenty-five years working with American Indian communities to tell the historical and contemporary stories of Native people in all forms of media. His television work has aired on PBS, Turner Broadcasting, Ovation Network, and others. His nonfiction books, *From Warriors to Soldiers* and *The Language of Victory*, reveal little-known aspects of American Indian service in the U.S. military from the Revolutionary War to modern times. He has also written two novels, *Thunder on the Plains* and *Tribal Journey*, and two children's books that share aspects of Native American culture through popular holiday themes: *Native American Night Before Christmas* and *Native American Twelve Days of Christmas*. He lives in rural central California.