

fictional murder investigation during formation of Indian reservation gambling casinos

DREAM SPIRIT

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### **Kennebunkport, Maine**

It was Friday, August 10, 1983 at 6:30 p.m. when the shots rang out and the late afternoon commuter traffic on Route 1-A came to an abrupt halt. Angry people were yelling and honking their horns in a desperate attempt to clear the clogged highway. Amid the confusion a blue Camaro silently exited onto the bypass leading to the turnpike and headed south.

Twenty minutes passed before the local police arrived with an ambulance close behind. After a quick inspection, it was obvious the passenger in the limousine was dead. A second police unit showed up and started unsnarling traffic, now backed up for two miles. Inside the Exxon station the driver was being questioned. He appeared quite shaken and told the police he had just stopped for a pack of cigarettes.

The victim was identified as 57-year-old John Silver Cloud. The identification inside his wallet also revealed he was from the Bureau of Indian Affairs in Washington, D.C. The limousine was checked out from a car pool in Washington. It wasn't unusual to have these big cars in the area, especially when the Vice President vacationed there.

The locals didn't seem too interested in the comings and goings of the Washington crowd, but tourists always gathered trying to get a glimpse of the celebrities. With recent memories of President Reagan being shot, rumors spread quickly that an attempted assassination had taken place just outside the Vice President's summer home. It didn't take long for the Secret Service to go into action. The FBI was called in and before long Kennebunkport, Maine was put on the map, again.

John Silver Cloud's body was taken to Portland and the limousine impounded. The only next of kin notified was his grandfather, Chief Smiling Bear, a shaman who lived on an Indian reservation in Arizona, one of the last of the real medicine men and spoke no English. John grew up on the reservation, raised by

his grandfather. His father had succumbed to alcoholism and burned their home killing himself and his wife. John was with his grandfather when it happened.

Maxine Epstein was also listed in case of any emergency. Maxine lived in Portland. John and she were old friends and dated occasionally since graduating together from Bowdoin College in 1948. She was waiting for John to marry her; neither had married. Maxine, or Max, as John called her, took the news very hard.

In his younger days, John was the typical teenage rebel. His grandfather realized the teaching of the “old ways” was doing no good to John, and when John entered high school on the reservation, he had already earned a reputation with his drinking and cavorting. Fearing John would become a victim like most of the young men there, Smiling Bear arranged to have him go east to college and experience what he was rebelling about, the “white man”. There, he would live among the “white men” and see first hand what opportunities would be available to him, if he asserted himself. And learn the “white man” wasn’t out to get the Indians, just out to get what they wanted. John had lived too long with handouts and needed to know what responsibility meant. Lessons from his boyhood were simple. His grandfather had taught him: “If the ‘white man’ feeds us for a day, we wake each morning anticipating his arrival to help us and become dependent and lazy. But if we learn to feed ourselves, we will no longer need the ‘white man’ and we will regain our self-esteem and independence.” John didn’t realize what this message meant until years later when the opportunity for American Indian independence might come in the form of casino gambling.

It started when an American Indian lawyer realized the Indian reservations were not entirely governed by the Constitution of the United States. A Supreme Court decision recognizing the Indian reservations as sovereign states allowed gambling on those reservations making it possible for them to evolve from Bingo parlors to casino gambling. This was a big step toward

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independence for the American Indian, but the politicians in Washington were very uncomfortable.

John Silver Cloud was on top of the movement from the beginning. He was the tribal representative for the Association of American Indians and director of the Bureau of Indian Affairs in Washington, D.C. He fought many battles in court and his name became very familiar in Washington circles. He spent two years as intern at the Bureau. And after gaining support from the Association of American Indians in 1955, he headed the Bureau for thirty-one years. Those years were not easy. Being the only American Indian in office, he was always “left off” certain invitations and last in line for many perks.

His trip to Maine was a culmination of many months of preparation in establishing casino gambling on the reservations. He needed support from Vice President Bush. He knew the conservatives would back him if he laid the groundwork well and saw to it the principals were directed toward the betterment of his people. He finally got his invitation to Bush’s summer home at Walker Point in Kennebunkport. There, in a relaxed atmosphere at the ocean side retreat, he would make his case. He shared company with the U.S. Attorney General and the Director of the FBI. They spent the day sporting about on the yacht and ate boiled lobsters and steamed clams on the sprawling porch of the estate. He declined an invitation to spend the whole weekend, anxious to get back and report the good news to his people.

While in Kennebunkport, he called Max and told her the news. They planned to spend the rest of the weekend together in Washington at his apartment. Early that evening, Max had just hung up the phone from making her reservations when it rang to tell her the tragic news. She made a quick call to John’s office to confirm what had happened and learned they were taking his body to Portland for an autopsy. She went to the hospital the following morning and was intercepted by the FBI. She made arrangements for John’s body to be taken to the reservation in Arizona after a

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funeral service in Washington. While at the hospital, she made a quick phone call to an old friend in New Hampshire.

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