

Families of the Crane

~~~~~ When the earth was new six tricksters posed as humans on a wild landscape; one revealed the power of a trickster stare, a mortal wound to humans, and then returned to the sea. The others abided on the earth as totems and endured as the crane, loon, bear, marten, and catfish clans. There are other totems in tribal narratives, but these five were the first woodland families. The crane is one of the original five totems of the Anishinaabe.

Alice Mary Beaulieu, my paternal grandmother, was born more than a century ago on the White Earth Reservation in Minnesota. She inherited the crane totem, a natural tribal pose, but we were crossbloods, loose families at the end of the depression in the cities.

Clement William Vizenor, my father, was a crane descendant. He was born on the reservation and murdered twenty-six years later on a narrow street in Minneapolis. My tribal grandmother and my father were related to the leaders of the crane; that succession, over a wild background of cedar and concrete, shamans and colonial assassins, is celebrated here in the autobiographical myths and metaphors of my imagination, my crossblood remembrance. We are cranes on the rise in new tribal narratives.

My grandmother did not hear the beat of the crane in the cities. She was concerned with other measures of survivance, those marginal revisions of personal pleasures and familial travail in a secular tenement. My father died in a place no crane would choose to dance, at a time no tribal totem would endure. One generation later the soul of the crane recurs in imagination; our reversion, our interior landscapes.

Keeshkemun, grandson of the first leader of the crane families, must have beamed when he presented his George Washington Peace Medal and told the British military officers that he was a bird; indeed, he was a man who inspired compassionate stories, a tribal man with a new avian trickster vision. Keeshkemun resisted the influence of the crown colonies. Later, when the territorial wars had ended and the woodlands had been opened to white settlement, the tribes were amended with political ironies, racial aspersions, traduccements, and held behind new colonial boundaries. The crane, bear, and other totems would prevail in narratives.

The people of the crane are "noted as possessing naturally a loud, ringing voice, and are the acknowledged orators of the tribe," wrote William Warren, the nineteenth-century mixedblood legislator and historian, in *The History of the Ojibway Nation*.

The crane totem, *ajijaak* in the oral language of the Anishinaabe, is the sandhill crane, but the modern totem seems to embrace the more common great blue heron. The nuances that separate the crane and heron as totems are considerable; our leaders and the moods of families are heard in treaties, narratives, even the worst translations. The sandhill crane is gregarious, a tribal bird that soars, walks, leaps, and dances; the crane has a distinctive wingbeat, a rolling voice, and a stretched neck in flight. The great blue heron is one more mood as a totem: a solitary figure in tribal narratives, but never lonesome in my remembrance. Sentries at the shoreline, herons move at dusk in shallow water. There, shiners rush the sunbeams, the last warm host between the reeds. We are crossbloods, or mixedbloods, now, and we are heron and crane totems in the wild cities.

The crane leaders in "former times, when different tribes met in councils, acted as interpreters of the wishes of their tribe," wrote William Warren. "They claim, with some apparent justice, the chieftainship over the other clans" of the Anishinaabe. The crane "loves to soar among the clouds, and its cry can be heard when flying above, beyond the orbit of hu-

man vision. From this 'far sounding cry' the family who claim it as their totem derive their generic name" of *passweweg*, the echo makers. The crane and the bear families were the first to remember the white strangers, the French explorers and fur traders, at Michilimackinac, the Great Turtle Island.

Englishman, said Keeshkemun, "You ask me who I am. If you wish to know, you must seek me in the clouds." Michel Cadotte, a mixedblood who was a member of the crane clan, was the interpreter at the time; he reported this encounter to William Warren.

"I am a bird who rises from the earth, and flies far up, into the skies, out of human sight; but though not visible to the eye, my voice is heard from afar, and resounds over the earth."

Englishman, said Keeshkemun, "You wish to know who I am. You have never sought me, or you should have found and known me. Others have sought and found me. The old French sought and found me. He placed his heart within my breast. He told me that every morning I should look to the east and I would behold his fire, like the sun reflecting its rays towards me, to warm me and my children. He told me that if troubles assailed me, to arise in the skies and cry to him, and he would hear my voice. He told me that his fire would last forever, to warm me and my children."

Englishman, "You have put out the fire of my French father. I became cold and needy, and you sought me not. Others have sought me. Yes, the Long Knife has found me. He has placed his heart on my breast. It has entered there, and there it will remain."

"You say true," replied the British officer. "I have put out the fire of the French men; and in like manner am I now putting out the fire of the Long Knife," the Americans. "With that medal on your breast, you are my enemy. You must give it up to me, that I may throw it away, and in its stead I shall give you the heart of your great British father, and you must stand and fight by his side."

Englishman, said Keeshkemun, who wore the George Washington Peace Medal, "The heart of the Long Knife, which he placed on my breast, has entered my bosom. You cannot take it from me without taking my life."

"Tell him, sir," the British officer told the interpreter, "that he must give up his medal, or I shall detain him a prisoner within the walls of this fort." Keeshkemun heard the threat in translation and held the medal in his hand.

Englishman, said the leader of the crane, "I shall not give up this medal of my own will. If you wish to take it from me, you are stronger than I am. But I tell you, it is but a mere bauble. It is only an emblem of the heart which beats in my bosom. . . . You are stronger than I am. You can do as you say. But remember that the voice of the Crane echoes afar off, and when he summons his children together, they number like the pebbles on the Great Lake shores."

"Your words are big, but I fear them not," said the commandant of the fort. "If you refuse to give up the medal of the Long Knives, you are my enemy, and you know I do not allow my enemies to live."

Englishman, responded Keeshkemun, "You are stronger than I am. If you consider me an enemy because I cherish the heart which has been placed on my bosom, you may do so. If you wish to take my life, you can take it. I came into your strong house because you sent for me. You sent for me wishing to set me on to my father the Long Knife, as a hunter sets his dogs on a deer. I cannot do as you wish. I cannot strike my own father. He, the Long Knife, has not yet told us to fight for him. Had he done so, you Englishman would not now be in this strong house. The Long Knife counsels us to remain quiet. In this do we know that he is our own father, and that he has confidence in the strength of his single arm."

"Your English father has not sent for you to take your life. You have refused to accept the badge of his heart. You have refused to join him in putting out the fire of the Long Knife who are stealing away your country. Yet he will not detain you. He will not hurt a hair of your head. He tells you to

return to your village in peace," said the commandant. He placed tobacco and other gifts in front of the tribal leader. Your English father says remain quiet, and "remember if you join the Long Knives, we shall sweep your villages from the earth, as a fire eats up the dry grass on the prairie."

William Warren wrote, "Keeshkemun, without answering a word, accepted the presents and returned to his village. To his influence may be chiefly attributed the fact that the Ojibways of Lake Superior and Mississippi remained neutral" during the wars.

Kechenezuhyauh, the first recorded leader of the original crane clan, lived at La Pointe du Saint Esprit on Madeline Island in Lake Superior; he died in the late seventeenth century. Akeguiow, his eldest son, succeeded his father as leader of the crane families at La Pointe. Shadawish, the youngest son of Kechenezuhyauh, became a leader at the headwaters of the Wisconsin River.

Keeshkemun, son of Shadawish, continued the distinguished role as leader of the crane families; he settled at Lac du Flambeau. Warren pointed out that "Keeshkemun was not only chief by hereditary descent, but he made himself truly such, through the wisdom and firmness of his conduct, both to his people and the whites. During his lifetime, he possessed an unbounded influence over the division of his tribe with whom he resided, and generally over the Lake Superior bands and villages." Waubishgangauge succeeded his father, Keeshkemun, as leader of the inland families of the crane.

Ogemaugeezhigoqua, daughter of Waubishgangauge, married Basile Hudon dit Beaulieu, who was employed in the fur trade by the North West Company. Ogemaugeezhigoqua had been baptized Margaret Racine; she was the granddaughter of Keeshkemun and became known to the crane families as Margaret Beaulieu.

Pierre Radisson and Medart Chouart des Groseilliers were fur traders at La Pointe du Saint Esprit in the middle of the seventeenth century. In 1693 Pierre Le Sueur and his soldiers established the first white fur trade post at La Pointe on

Madeline Island. In 1763 New France was ceded to the British; a generation later they established a trading post on the island.

William Warren wrote about a sacred copper plate with marks that represented the tribal generations on the island. "By a rude figure of a man with a hat on his head, placed opposite one of these indentations, was denoted the period when the white race first made his appearance. . . . This mark occurred in the third generation, leaving five generations which had passed away since that important era in their history." The Anishinaabe had established communities on the island more than "two hundred and forty years since they were first discovered by the white race," which would be at least the turn of the fifteenth century.

Basile Hudon dit Beaulieu was born May 18, 1785, at Rivière-Ouelle, Province of Quebec. The Treaty of Paris was signed two years earlier by Great Britain and the United States; territorial boundaries were established at the end of the Revolutionary War. Basile moved to Madeline Island in 1804 and was active in the fur trade; he died on September 9, 1838, at La Pointe. His grave is located on the island at the Baraga Catholic Church. Warren wrote that Basile Beaulieu, William Morrison, and others were mentioned with the principal traders John Baptiste and Michel Cadotte. "These early pioneer traders all intermarried in the tribe, and have left sons and daughters to perpetuate their names." Basile and Margaret raised nine mixedblood children at La Pointe.

Julia Beaulieu married Henry Oakes, who worked for the American Fur Company. Elizabeth married Charles Borup, an immigrant from Copenhagen, Denmark. Oakes and Borup became bankers in Saint Paul, Minnesota. Henry Hudon was a veteran of the Civil War. Paul Hudon married Marie-Margaret Fairbanks. Catherine married Robert Fairbanks. Sophia married a man named Henderson. Margaret married Martin Bisson. Abraham, a popular name at the time, is remembered on a monument at the Baraga Catholic Church cemetery on Madeline Island: "To the Memory of Abraham

Beaulieu, born 15 Sept 1822, accidentally shot, 4th Apr 1844, As a mark of affection from his brother."

Clement Hudon Beaulieu, the eldest son, was born at Lac du Flambeau in 1811. He attended the government school at Mackinac, where he met Elizabeth Farling, the mixedblood daughter of a missionary. Clement was twenty-seven when they married. He was an agent for the American Fur Company in Chequamegon Bay. Elizabeth established a home at old Crow Wing, Minnesota, a new trade center with a vision of the future. Beaulieu and Allan Morrison were the prominent traders in the area; they had proposed a townsite on the shores of two rivers, but the railroad line and station were built farther north. The mixedbloods lost their land and economic incentives. Colonel Clement had underestimated the power of the banks, corporations, and politicians. In 1868 the families of the crane were removed to the White Earth Reservation.

Elizabeth Ayer, the first school teacher at old Crow Wing, wrote to her son, "Crow Wing is quite dilapidated. The Beaulieu house in which so many gentlemen of rank, and ladies too, have been entertained is empty; the yard fence is much broken and hogs and other animals have destroyed what they can that is valuable on the premises."

Clement and Elizabeth raised ten children. Julia Elizabeth married a second cousin and retained her surname. Robert George married a cousin and she retained her surname. Clement Hudon, the mixedblood namesake, attended the Seabury Divinity School in Faribault and departed from the canon of his father; he was ordained a priest in the Episcopal Church. The Beaulieu families had been members of the Roman Catholic Church.

Reverend Clement Beaulieu wrote that when General Henry Hastings Sibley was elected the first governor of Minnesota, "he commissioned some of his old fur trading associates. . . . My father was made a Colonel of a Guard in the Northern Counties of the state. As the military status of the Pioneer Guards was more or less nebulous, its real function

for the greater part was social." Colonel Clement held the highest commissioned rank of any mixedblood on the reservation. He participated, with his son, Augustus Hudon, and his nephew, Theodore Hudon Beaulieu, in the publication of *The Progress*, the first newspaper on the White Earth Reservation. Theodore, editor of the newspaper, was married to his second cousin, Julia Elizabeth Beaulieu, daughter of Clement Hudon Beaulieu. Colonel Clement died on the reservation in 1892.

Theodore Hudon Beaulieu wrote an editorial salutation in the first issue of *The Progress*, dated Thursday, March 25, 1886. "With this number we make our bow to the public. The novelty of a newspaper published upon this reservation may cause many to be wary in their support, and this from a fear that it may be revolutionary in character. . . . We shall aim to advocate constantly and without reserve, what in our view, and in the view of the leading minds upon this reservation, is the best for the interests of its residents." I am related to the editor, and to the mixedblood families of the crane who published the first newspaper on the White Earth Reservation.

The United States Indian Agent at White Earth saw the newspaper as a threat to his control of tribal people on the reservation. He wrote to the publisher that the newspaper was circulated "without first obtaining authority or license so to do from the honorable Secretary of the Interior, honorable Commissioner of Indian Affairs, or myself as United States Indian Agent."

In March 1886, "we began setting the type for the first number of *The Progress* and were almost ready to go to press, when our sanctum was invaded by T. J. Sheehan, the United States Indian Agent, accompanied by a posse of the Indian police," the editor wrote. "The composing stick was removed from our hands, our property seized, and ourselves forbidden to proceed with the publication of the journal. . . . We did not believe that any earthly power had the right to interfere with us as members of the Chippewa tribe, and at the White Earth Reservation, while peacefully pursuing the occu-



pation we had chosen. . . . We were restrained and a guard was set over our property. We sought the protection of the courts. . . .

“The United States district court, Judge Nelson in session, decided that we were entitled to the jurisdiction we sought. The case came before him, on jury trial. The court asserted and defended the right of any member of a tribe to print and publish a newspaper upon his reservation just as he might engage in any other lawful occupation, and without surveillance and restriction.” *The Progress*, which became *The Tomahawk* two years later, was the first tribal newspaper to be seized by federal agents. The editors published controversial stories and opposed the Dawes Severalty Act, or General Allotment Act, the federal legislation that allotted collective tribal land to individual reservation members.

Colonel Clement testified at a hearing of the Subcommittee of the Committee on Indian Affairs on March 8, 1887. The committee had resolved to examine the conditions and capricious decisions of the agent at the White Earth Reservation. Senator Morgan asked the first questions:

What is your age?

I was seventy-five years old last September.

What family have you living with you?

I have my wife living with me. . . .

Is your wife Indian or white?

She is half Chippewa and half Scotch.

Are you Chippewa? asked Senator Morgan.

Yes, sir, responded Clement Beaulieu.

Full blood?

No, sir; half French and half Chippewa.

What other members of your family have you living in the house?

My children are all grown up; there is only one living with me. My oldest son, Charles Beaulieu, has been in the Army.

Which Army?

The Union Army. In 1862 I raised up a company for him of mixedblood, Indians and French. I got him a hundred men.

And he took them into the Army?

Yes, sir, said Clement Beaulieu.

He was a captain of the company? asked Senator Morgan.

Yes, sir; he was captain of the company. . . .

Where do you reside?

I reside at the White Earth Agency.

How long have you lived there?

For fifteen years. . . .

What other sons have you?

I have another, a minister. . . .

What church is he minister of? asked Senator Morgan.

The Episcopal Church, answered Beaulieu.

How long has he been in that calling?

He was confirmed about four or five years ago.

What is your religion?

Catholic; we are all Catholics except that one. . . .

Are you a citizen of the United States?

I was born in what is now the State of Wisconsin, said Beaulieu. My mother was a member of the Chippewa tribe, and my father was a Frenchman. I was born before any treaty was made between the Chippewas and the United States. The first treaty was made in 1837. No removal of the Indians was made to any tract, but we had a right to occupy the land and to hunt as usual. . . .

When did you move to Minnesota?

I was two years in Canada and in 1838 I came to Wisconsin and have remained there just on the edge of Minnesota ever since until 1846, and then I removed as an agent for the American Fur Company to Minnesota. . . .

When did you first join the body of Indians of which you are now a member, the White Earth Indians? asked Senator Morgan.

I joined them under the treaty of 1854, when there was a separation between the Lake Superior Indians and the Missis-

sippi Chippewas. I joined that band because I could not go so far back as Lake Flambeau. Under the provisions of that treaty we were allowed to go either with the Mississippi Chippewas or with the Lake Flambeau Indians. . . .

Have you held office or paid taxes?

Yes, sir. . . .

Where was that? asked Senator Morgan.

That was in Duluth.

In what county?

We had no county. . . .

Under what law did you do all these things?

I thought I had the law of Minnesota, or Wisconsin as it was then, to go by . . . the law of the Territory. I had a few pieces of the printed laws; I do not know where I picked them up or whether they were the laws of Michigan or Wisconsin, and I used them to dictate to me what to do. But it was all a mistake, I suppose. . . .

What was your reason for wanting all this power?

To keep the peace; that was the only motive, said Clement Beaulieu.

Was there much trouble with the Indians up there?

There was a good deal of stealing. . . .

Are your children educated people? asked Senator Morgan.

My children pass to be educated. They are the best educated boys, I think, there on the reservation, my boys are.

Where did you educate them?

When I was at Brainerd. . . . I sent for a teacher and kept him there as long as I could, and then sent them down to Saint Paul, and then, after they were there, I thought they hadn't enough, hadn't but a small education, and I sent them down to New Jersey and kept them there as long as I could.

All of your children?

No, sir; four of them. The other one didn't want to be educated, he wanted to be a farmer, and I could not get him to go away from home.

Which one was that?

That is the one now living with me, Theodore B. Beaulieu. . . .

Are there many white people on the White Earth Reservation who are not connected with the Chippewa Indians by ties of kindred, and who are not connected with the offices of the Government of the United States?

No, sir; there might be a few sometimes to do some kind of work we cannot do ourselves. We just hire some man to come in on our reservation, provided he is a good man, and we generally inquire about that, and a great many are looking for work and they come in there and they get some work too, said Clement Beaulieu.

Paul Hudon, son of Basile Hudon dit Beaulieu and the younger brother of Clement Hudon, became a government interpreter. Paul, Marie-Margaret Fairbanks, his mixedblood wife, and their five children were the first settlers on the White Earth Reservation. He was allotted forty acres of land according to the treaty between the United States and the Chippewa Indians of the Mississippi, concluded March 19, 1867. John Hudon, their eldest son, was promoted to lieutenant in the Ninth Minnesota Infantry, a veteran of the Civil War. Truman, their last born, is my great-grandfather.

Major J. B. Bassett, the agent at the time of removal to the White Earth Reservation, wrote to Alvin Wilcox, author of *A Pioneer History of Becker County Minnesota*, that Paul Hudon Beaulieu was "sent by me to White Earth in the spring of 1868, before the removal to explore the county and meet me on my arrival there, which was to precede the arrival of the Indians." The removal agent concluded that the "attempt to civilize a people and at the same time prevent them from adopting any of the arts or advantages of civilization, is to my mind absolutely absurd and ridiculous. Give the benefits of law and the work is down at once. Abrogate law amongst the white people and we would soon relapse into barbarism."

Truman Beaulieu was born August 15, 1859. Minnesota was a new state, and John Brown, the radical abolitionist, was tried, convicted, and hanged for treason. Truman married

Josephine Turpin; their six children were born on the White Earth Reservation. Rose Belle married John Spratt. William Robert married Rose French. Ellen married Matthew Miller. Paul married Emma Earth. An Indian Land Certificate for forty acres was issued to Truman on August 11, 1881, and signed by Commissioner Henry Rice. Truman was a hauler of logs; his breath was hard, and he was a gentle man with common ambitions. Later, the family lived in a large house in Calloway, a small town on the reservation, and served as the first telephone exchange in the area; the switchboard was located in the house.

John Clement, the youngest son and my granduncle, was a great story teller, one of the best on the reservation; he even knew where the best stories lived and were remembered. Once we drove around the reservation to visit friends that he had not seen for more than twenty years; he looked over some of his best stories, and he even remembered some of the first telephone conversations on the reservation. We found one of his stories at a small farm on a warm afternoon. We parked near the house, shouted and honked the horn, but no one responded. The doors and windows were open; we tried again, and when we were about to leave, an old woman, a distant cousin, moved out from behind the barn. She wore rubber boots, a black apron covered with blood, and carried an ax in one hand. The wooden handle and blade were stained with blood. Her face and arms were spattered with blood. Our cousin was dazed and dragged her feet as she walked; she was not able to speak. I smiled, nodded, and moved back to the car. "Yes, yes, these were the good old days on the reservation," said John Clement. Our cousin had butchered more than two hundred chickens behind the barn that day, each head chopped by hand on a blood soaked stump. She bathed and appeared later in a print dress with bright red flowers; we ate dinner and told stories, but she never did seem to be there with us that night. "Our women never missed a chance to butcher chickens, the ax has settled the reservation and sobered some men," he said.

John Clement was born May 12, 1893, on the White Earth Reservation. He married Elsie Rabbit from Two Points on the Leech Lake Reservation, and together they lived in various reservation communities. When his wife died he moved to Bena; he lived there in several small houses that he repaired, and then gave away to tribal families. Bernadine Kirt and her daughters lived in a nice red house in Bena; their good humor was honored in that wild reservation town. Bernadine worked with John Clement on the histories of the Beaulieu families.

Alice Mary Beaulieu, my grandmother, was born January 3, 1886, in the same year that the Statue of Liberty was dedicated in New York, and the same year that Geronimo, the spiritual leader of the Chiricahua Apache, was deported as a war prisoner to Florida. Alice, daughter of Truman Beaulieu, married Henry Vizenor on the White Earth Reservation. Three years later she was issued a land allotment, signed by President Theodore Roosevelt on May 21, 1908.

“Whereas, There has been deposited in the General Land Office of the United States an Order of the Secretary of the Interior that a fee simple patent issue to ALICE BEAULIEU, a White Earth Mississippi Chippewa Indian, for the east half of the southeast quarter of Section twenty-four in Township one hundred forty-two north of Range thirty-seven west of the Fifth Principal Meridian, Minnesota, containing eighty acres:

“NOW KNOW YE, that the UNITED STATES OF AMERICA, in consideration of the premises, HAS GIVEN AND GRANTED, and by these presents DOES GIVE AND GRANT, unto the said Alice Beaulieu, and to her heirs, the lands above described; TO HAVE AND TO HOLD the same, together with all the rights, privileges, immunities, and appurtenances, of whatsoever nature thereunto belonging, unto the said Alice Beaulieu, and to her heirs and assigns forever.”

The “fee simple patent” was printed on bond paper, ten by sixteen inches, with the watermark of the Crane Paper Company of Dalton, Massachusetts. The handsome document bore the red embossed seal of the United States General

Land Office. Alice tried to understand the description but she never located the land on the reservation. President William Taft signed a second land document on September 18, 1910, for eighty more acres to my grandmother.

Peter Vezina, my second tribal great-grandfather, was a mixedblood born in Canada. Peter was métis and not embraced by treaties because his tribal mother had married a white man. In Canada, land rights were based on race and gender. He, and hundreds of other métis, moved to reservations in the United States. The Indian Agent recorded his surname as Vizenor, a despotic transcription, when he moved, before the turn of the last century, to the White Earth Reservation. The Vezinas were related to the Vezinat families in the Province of Quebec. Peter married Sophia Trotterchaud, the mixedblood daughter of Peter Trotterchaud and Angeline, a tribal woman.

Henry Vizenor, my grandfather, was born June 20, 1883, one of fourteen children, on the White Earth Reservation. He married Alice Mary in November 1905. Sixteen years later he abandoned his wife, seven children, and the families of the crane on the reservation. He married Margaret Porter and moved to Chicago, where he died in 1942. Small, round Vizenor Lake, located on the county maps in the western part of the reservation, was named for a family allotment that touched the shoreline.

Alice Beaulieu Vizenor sold her government land allotments and moved with her eight children to Detroit Lakes, Minnesota, and later to Minneapolis. She held this new world on a sideboard, but the tribal beams were checked and the wind was cold. Two sons were convicted of felonies in the same year. Our families of the crane were down, marooned in a winter depression, mixedbloods nicked with racial abasement. Joseph, the eldest son, whose nickname was Jeek, and Truman, whose nickname was Bunny, were sentenced to one year in the Minnesota State Reformatory at Saint Cloud.

The Detroit Lakes District Court records indicated that Joseph Henry Vizenor, born July 24, 1906, "then and there

being at said time and place, did willfully, wrongfully, unlawfully, and feloniously carnally know and abuse one Ona Peck." The Honorable Carroll Nye sentenced Joseph to "hard labor" for one year on a plea of guilty. Jeek and Ona were in love. She was white and seventeen years old; he was a mixed-blood who ended his public school education in the sixth grade and wanted to be a baker. A few years later he was married and a house painter with his brothers in Minneapolis. Joseph died on October 18, 1982. He was survived by his second wife, Ethel Love; his daughter, Mary Oehler; and his son, Robert Peck.

Truman Paul Vizenor was convicted of grand larceny. He had stolen candy and cigarettes worth about sixty dollars from a store near Detroit Lakes. Alice wrote to the warden of the reformatory, "Please do something to get Truman out for he knows his mistake and I know he has learned a good lesson and will be not so full of mischief as before." Bunny was twenty years old, three years younger than his brother Jeek. "Some boyfriend would happen along to coax him to go with him and he'd come back not the same Bunny at all and my heart would just sink," my grandmother wrote to the warden. "So it's the use of intoxicants that turns the mind into false doings like one in a dream. Just like an insane man does things which lands him in the insane asylum. Their body follows their crazy mind what another crazy mind suggests." Truman died on June 1, 1936. He had fallen from a railroad bridge, struck his head, and was found in the Mississippi River.

Alice lived in Detroit Lakes, about a hundred and thirty miles northwest of Saint Cloud. She made frequent trips to visit her boys at the reformatory; the records indicate that my father and other relatives visited several times that year. Jeek and Bunny were trustees assigned to work at the institution farm. My grandmother brought Timmy, the family mongrel, along on one visit. Naturally, Timmy was left behind with the boys on the farm; he was hidden in the barn that first night.



“Dear Madam,” the warden wrote, “our day turnkey informs me that upon your recent visit to this institution that you lost a dog belonging to your son. The dog has been found and is here. . . . You may have him by calling here.”

Alice responded that her boys loved their dog and that she would soon return to the reformatory. Timmy, meanwhile, became the mascot at the farm. When the boys were released at the end of the year the dog stayed, the first canine lifer and trustee at the reformatory. Several years later the warden wrote to my grandmother that Timmy had died and had been buried at the institution.

Thirty years later I was behind those same bars at the Minnesota State Reformatory in Saint Cloud. In 1961, a few months after my graduation from the University of Minnesota, I became a social worker and corrections agent at the institution. The reformatory was not my first choice, but there were only two positions open in social services at the time. The preference accorded military veterans and a high score on the state examination had placed my name at the top of the civil service list. I was determined to be a social worker at the Cass County Welfare Department in Walker, Minnesota. The welfare director at Cass County discovered several relations with my surname on their case load and refused to hire me. He asserted that there would be a conflict of interest. Moreover, he said that my religious tastes, Unitarian at the time, were uncommon, and that my personal aversion to game hunting would cause some problems in a reservation area. “We’re hunters, that’s what we do together here, you’d be out of place.” Roman Catholics ruled the reformatory, but no one asked me about my religion there.

Naturally, in the first week of my profession, a college educated social worker, I checked the cumulative record of prisoners at the reformatory. There, much to my surprise, were the names of my two uncles. No one ever mentioned that they had been convicted and sentenced as felons. I studied their records, read letters from my grandmother, copies of letters from the warden about the family mongrel, and notes

from my father to his brothers. Jeek and Bunny were photographed in striped prison uniforms.

That moment was concealed, a chance encounter in a secret mood with my relatives, the unusual manners of the crane families on the hard road to the new urban world. I was touched by the humor of my grandmother and uncles, and mettlesome when the warden observed my responses. Peculiar, he said, and then he ordered an instant hearing on the matter of my felonious relations. We were tribal, and that would represent a racial weakness to the warden; more than that, we were mixedbloods, a double weakness, he would consider. Convicted criminals were one generation removed from me; we were together then, behind the bars when the warden pressed me to be a racial felon with my uncles. No consideration or humor would unburden the warden of his bent and bias; he turned a rubber band on his stout hand and invited my resignation to avoid a certain investigation, an institutional embarrassment.

The warden snapped the rubber band and withdrew his invitation when I promised a lawsuit, at least one civil rights complaint, and a mordant news release on the matter. My mixedblood career had begun, but a college education, the first baccalaureate in our families of the crane, would not secure tolerance, mitigate malevolence or institutional racialism. At those wicked intersections there were courageous and compassionate women and men who would overturn the harsh realities of the moment. This was true even at the reformatory. The associate warden who was responsible for custody in the institution supported me in an unusual manner; he did so with several stories. "I remember your uncles," he said. "They worked at the farm, good boys, hard workers, they always had a laugh on being here." He had been hired as a guard in the same year that my uncles were convicted and sentenced. He remembered the mascot, Timmy. "That dog's buried here, outside the wall," he said. "The name's gone, but the wooden marker's still there."