

Smoke Signals Transcript

Coeur d'Alene Indian reservation – Idaho, 1976

[Randy]

Good morning. This is Randy Peone on KREZ radio, the voice of the Coeur d'Alene Indian reservation, and it's time for the morning traffic report on this rainy bicentennial fourth of July. Let's go out to Lester Fallsapart in the KREZ traffic van, broken down at the crossroads.

[Lester Fallsapart]

Big truck just went by.

Now it's gone.

[Randy]

Well, there you go, folks. Looks like another busy morning. And I just got a news bulletin that says Matty and John Builds-the-fire. are hosting a fourth of July party at their house.

And remember, it's B.Y.O.F.:" bring your own fireworks."

[Thomas narrating]

On the fourth of July, 1976, my mother and father celebrated

white people's independence...by holding the largest house party In Coeur d'Alene

tribal history. I mean, every Indian in the world was there. And then at 3:00 in the mornin', after everyone had passed out

or fallen asleep on couches, on chairs, on beds, on the floor, a fire Rose up like

general George Armstrong Custer, and swallowed up my mother and father.

I don't remember that fire. I only have the stories. And in every one of those

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stories, I could fly.

[Indian voices chanting]

I was just a baby when Arnold Joseph saved me from that fire and delivered me into the hands of my grandmother.

[Thomas' Grandmother]

Arnold ! What happened ? What happened ?

[baby crying]

[hands baby to her]

[Thomas]

And Victor Joseph was just a baby too, when his father saved me from that fire.

You know, there are some children who aren't really children at all.

They're just pillars of flame that burn everything they touch.

And there are some children who are just pillars of ash that fall apart

if you touch 'em. Me and Victor, we were children born of flame and ash.

[baby crying]

[Thomas' Grandmother]

Arlene, Your son's name is Victor, enit?–

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[Arlene]

Yes, it is.

[Thomas' Grandmother] it's a good name. It means he's gonna win, enit ?

[Arlene]

I don't know.

[Thomas' Grandmother]

You saved my grandson's life.

[Arnold]

Well, it was nothin'. I—I didn't even think about it. I just—

[Thomas' Grandmother]

You saved Thomas. You did a good thing.

[Arnold]

I didn't mean to.

[Thomas narrating]

after that fire, Arnold Joseph mourned by cuttin' his hair, and he never grew it long again. For years after that he threatened to vanish.

He practiced vanishing. Until one day, he jumped into his yellow pickup...

And did vanish.

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[Randy]

good morning. This is Randy Peone on KREZ radio. That's k-r-e-z radio, the voice of the Coeur d'Alene Indian reservation. And Coeur d'Alene people, our reservation is beautiful this morning. It's a good day to be indigenous. It's 45 degrees in the sun. It's 8:00 A.M., Indian time, in 1998, and it's time for the morning traffic report. For that let's go to Lester Fallsapart at the KREZ traffic van, broken down at the crossroads since 1972. So Lester, how's traffic out there this fine morning ?

[Lester]

A couple of cars went by earlier. You know old Mrs. Joe ? She was speeding. And, uh, Kimmy and James, uh, they went by in a yellow car and they were arguin'. Ain't no traffic really.

[Randy]

There you go, folks. Looks like nobody's getting to work on time this morning. As for you school kids, you'd better hurry up and eat those wheaties, because the first bell rang 15 minutes ago.

[Scene: basketball court]

Hey, Victor !

Man! Come on!

Come on.

You ain't got it !

Three-point range !

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Yo !

[men panting]

Game point, cuz !

Bring it on, Victor. Bring it on.

[grunting]

Foul !

I said, foul.

It's foul.

Bullshit. I was nowhere near you.

If I say it's a foul, it's a foul.

Hey, Thomas. Give us some help, huh ?

Nice suit, Thomas.

[laughs]

Man!

Sheesh.

[Scene shifts to Victor and Thomas as children]

Victor !

Hey, Victor, what do you know about fire ?

Thomas, I don't know what you're talking about.

No, really, Victor.

I mean, did you know things burn in colors ? I mean, sodium burns yellow... And carbon burns orange, just like that.

Hey, Victor, heard your dad's living in Phoenix, Arizona, now. Man, he's lived everywhere since he left you, huh ?

Is that so, Thomas ? You know, I was wondering, Thomas. What color do you think your mom and dad were when they burned up ?

You know, your dad ain't comin' back.

Yes, he is.

No. He's gone. When Indians go away, they don't come back. Last of the Mohicans, last of Winnebago, last of--

Hey, shut up, Thomas, or I'll beat you up again.

[Scene shifts back to basketball court-- ball bouncing]

[Victor]

Oh, I took the ball to the hoop and what did I see--

Oh, I took the ball to the hoop

[other men join in]

and what did I see--

General George Armstrong Custer, was a-guardin' me

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a-guardin' me--

[laughing]

Hey, Victor, who do you think is the greatest basketball player ever ?

That's easy: Geronimo.

Geronimo ? He couldn't play basketball, man.

He was Apache, man. Those suckers are about three feet tall.

It's Geronimo, man. He was lean, mean and bloody.

He would've dunked on your flat Indian ass and cut it off.

Yeah, some days it's a good day to die.

Some days, it's a good day to play basketball.

Hey, Victor.

What about your dad ?

What about him ?

[telephone rings]

Hello ?

Hello ?

My name is Suzy song.

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Uh, I've got bad news. Arnold Joseph passed away.

Oh !

I'm his neighbor here in Phoenix.

His stuff is still in his trailer, and his pickup's here.

[sighs]

I think somebody should come get it.

I'm making arrangements for him. I'll call again.

Thank you for phoning.

What ?

[scene shifts to trading post]

Can you cash this ? It's from my mom.

Mm-hmm.

Hey, Victor !

I'm sorry about your dad.

How'd you hear about it ?

I heard it on the wind. I heard it from the birds.

I felt it in the sunlight.

And your mom was just in here cryin'.

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Listen, Thomas, I gotta go. I got things to do.

Victor !

Your mom said she only had 40 bucks.

That ain't enough money to get you to Phoenix.

I can help, you know.

Help what ?

I- I have some money.

I can help.

Listen, Thomas. I can't take your money.

So why don't you go buy a car or something ? Anything.

But just leave me alone, okay ?

Go find a woman.

I can get you to Phoenix !

Okay, so you can get me to Phoenix.

But what do you get out of the deal ?

You have to take me with you.

[chuckles] you're funny.

[scene shifts to young Victor and Thomas]

Victor, look at this ! Ain't it cool ? [holds a sparkler—suggests his role as fire builder]

Here.

Nah, you keep it.

Hey, Thomas ! [Arnold speaking]

You'd better get home.

Your grandma lookin' for you.

Check this out. [Arnold does a magic trick with a coin]

[indistinct]

But it's right there in your ear, see ?

Go ahead, take it.

Hello ? Hello ?

[Arnold and Victor in the truck]

Happy independence day, Victor.

You feelin' independent today ?

I'm feelin' independent.

I'm feelin' extra magical today, like I could make anything disappear.

Houdini with braids, you know ?

Poof. Wave my hand, and poof.

The white people are gone,

Gone back to where they belong.

Poof.

London, Paris, Moscow.

Poof ! Poof ! Poof !

[chuckles]

Wave my hand and the reservation is gone.

The trading post and the post office.

The tribal school and the pine trees.

And the drunks.

The Catholics and the drunk Catholics. Poof !

And all the little Indian boys named Victor !

I'm so good, I could make myself disappear.

Poof.

And I'm gone.

[engine revving]

[chuckles] here, give me that beer.

Look what you did ! [hits Victor, who groans]

Just quit your cryin'. I didn't hit you that hard.

[crying softly]

Go in the house. Tell your mama I'll be right in.

Did you cash the check ?

Yeah.

That's all the money I got.

I know.

Oh, this damn arthritis.

Hurtin' bad today, ain't it ?

Nah.

[Thomas' grandma]

I don't trust him, you know ?

He's mean to you.

He wasn't always mean.

[Victor to his mom]

You know, Thomas said he'll give me the money,

But he wants to go with me.

You know, people always told me I make the best fry bread in the world.

Maybe it's true.

But I don't make it by myself, you know.

I got the recipe from your grandmother,

And she got it from her grandmother.

And I listen to people when they eat my bread.

You know, they might say, uh, "Arlene,

There's too much flour."

Or, "Arlene,

You should knead your dough some more."

I listen to them.

And I watch that Julia Child all the time.

She's a good cook too, but she gets lots of help.

So, do you think I should go with Thomas ?

That's your decision.

But if you go, I want you to promise me you'll come back.

– Come on, mom.

– Promise me !

[chuckles]

Geez. Want me to sign a paper or somethin' ?

No way. You know how Indians feel about signing papers.

[scene shifts back to Thomas and his grandma. There's a knock at door]

[door opens]

[Victor]

Okay, Thomas, I need the money, and you can come with me, but I have a few rules.

First of all, you can't wear that stupid suit.

And secondly, I don't want you tellin' me a million of your damn stories.

And third, we're goin' right there and comin' right back.

Good morning. This is Randy Peone on KREZ radio, and I just got a news bulletin here that says...Frenchy Sidejohn won \$5,000 last night playing bingo. I want to congratulate Frenchy, and all those used car dealers in Spokane are eagerly awaiting your arrival.

It's 7:35 A.M., Indian time, and time for the weather report.

Lester here. One of the clouds up there looks like a horse. And the other one looks like, uh-You know that, um, tavern we used to go, the log one ? And that waitress there ? Hola. Looks like her.

[Randy]

well, there you have it... From tribal meteorologist Lester Fallsapart.

And I just received a request from Irvin in Desmet. He wants to hear a sad song.

[song plays—Velma and Lucy in the car]

we passed the stores

we passed the hotels

filled our car with gas and then

we drove that night, I saw the Moon

almost got us in an accident

[Velma]

Oh, man ! I love this song !

[Lucy]

Geez, you love every song.

No, no. I mean it.

[song continues]

I really love this song.

Geez, I'm thirsty.

Give me a beer.

Hey, girl, we don't drink no more.

Remember ?

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That's right, enit?

Well, give me a coke.

There you go, Lucy-goosey. Have a coke, eh ?

Hey, watch where you're goin' ! Geez !

I am watchin' where I'm goin'.

[song continues]

Ahh !

Hey, that's Victor and Thomas.

Hey.

Hey, Victor, sorry to hear about your dad.

You need a ride ?

Oh, yeah.

Hey, Thomas. Need a ride ?

– You bet.

– What are you gonna trade for it ? We're Indians, remember ? We barter.

A story.

Better be good!

Better be good.

[clears throat, sighs]

Durin' the '60s, Arnold Joseph was the perfect hippie...Because all the hippies were tryin' to be Indians anyway. But because of that, he was always wonderin' how anybody would know...When an Indian was tryin' to make a social statement. But there's proof, you know. Back durin' the Vietnam war, he was demonstratin' against it, and there was this photographer there. He took a picture of Arnold that day, and it made it onto the wire services... And was reprinted in newspapers throughout the country. It even made it to the cover of *Time Magazine*. In that photograph, Arnold is wearin' bell-bottoms and a flowered shirt, his hair in braids, with red peace symbols... Splashed across his face like war paint. He holds a rifle above his head, captured in that moment...Just before he proceeded to beat the shit out of...the national guard private liein' on the ground beneath him. Another demonstrator holds a sign, just barely visible over his left shoulder. It reads: "make love, not war."

Geez. Did your dad really do that ?

Thomas, you're so full of shit.

[Lucy]

oh, then what happened ?

Arnold got arrested, you know. But he got lucky. At first they charged him with attempted murder, but then they plea-bargained that down to assault with a deadly weapon. And then they plea-bargained that down to bein' an Indian in the twentieth century. Then he got two years in Walla Walla.

[girls sigh]

So, what do you think ?

Well, I think it's a fine example of the oral tradition.

[girls laugh]

[song continues]

but they're floating
just above the land
and we are floating
you're my road buddy
but I'm lonely all the time
I thought we'd show that friendship
could be stronger than the crossroads devil
I'll take that thing you got from praying [etc.]

[Velma]

You two guys got your passports ?

– Passports ?

Yeah. You're leavin' the res...And goin' into a whole different country, cousin.

But it's the United States.

Damn right, it is. That's as foreign as it gets. Hope you two got your vaccinations.

Bye, Victor !

[Thomas]

Hey, Victor. Remember that dog that used to live over there? That dog that fell in love with that cat? Old lady Harrison, she used to tie that dog up, but—Imagine if they had a baby. It wouldn't know whether it was a cog or a dat.

[chuckles]

Get it, Victor ?

[before they enter the bus]

Hey, are you sure about this ? It's a lot of money.

Yeah, I'm sure. Are you sure ?

Damn right, I'm sure. Ah, get on the bus.

[they sit next to a young gymnast]

I have to ask.

No, Thomas.

Hey, you're pretty flexible. Are you a gymnast or somethin' ?

I was an alternate on the 1980 Olympic team.

Geez, I wish I could do that.

Well, it's pretty easy. Try it.

[giggles]

No way !

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[laughs]

Hey, you're—you're an Indian, right ?

Yeah. I'm Thomas, and this is Victor. We're Coeur d'Alene Indians.

I'm Cathy. I'm from Mississippi. Nice suit.

Thanks.

[Cathy]

I don't mean to brag, but I was every bit as good as Mary Lou. In 1984 I tried out again...

And Mary Lou beat me that time, but I had grown, you know? Oh ! Those little people !

They get all the attention. Me ? I put my whole life into makin' the Olympics, then Jimmy Carter took it away.

Geez. You gymnasts got a lot in common with us Indians then, ain't it ?

[Victor]

Hey. Hi. You said you were an alternate for the team, right ?

Yeah.

Well, if you were an alternate, then you'd only compete...If somebody was hurt or something, right ?

– Yeah.

– Was anybody hurt ?

No.

Then you really weren't on the team, were you? I mean, it didn't really matter if there was a boycott or not. You were stayin' home anyways.

You ain't got nothin' to complain about, so why don't you just be quiet?

[upset gymnast moves to another seat]

[Thomas]

What'd you do that for? She was nice.

Nice, my ass. She was a liar.

No, she wasn't.

Yes, she was. Think about it, Thomas. What would a big shot Olympic gymnast be doing on a bus? Answer me that, Thomas.

I don't know.

You know, Thomas, you really need to grow up. Don't you know anything? People are awful. They'll rob you blind if you ain't watching. Where's your piggy bank? You still got your piggy bank?

Yeah.

Just remember, Thomas: You can't trust anybody.

[Song—scene shifts to a party—young Victor and his parents]

let's rent a car and drive it

a million Miles away

let's start a fire and survive it

a million Miles away

let's steal the sun and hide it

a million Miles away

[Arnold, drunk, speaks to a child]

Hey, get home.

Hey, Victor.

Hey, Victor ! Dance with us.

Come dance with your old man. Hey, Victor, who's your favorite Indian ? Who's your favorite ?

It's your mama, huh? Tell him it's your mama.

[Victor]

Nobody.

[Arnold]

What'd you say, Victor ? Speak up, boy. Who's your favorite Indian ?

Nobody.

Nobody ? Huh ? Nobody ? Did you say "nobody" ?

He didn't mean it. Come on, tell him, Victor. Tell your daddy you didn't mean it.

Nobody. Nobody. Nobody.

[Arlene]

You gotta love somebody, Victor.

[Arnold]

nobody !

[drunken laughter]

Nobody. Nobody !

[scene shift to a diner]

[Thomas]

You know, your dad took me to Denny's once.

Thomas, I've heard this story a thousand times, okay ?

Yeah, it was the Summer he left. We were 12, ain't it ? I had this dream, you know ? And this dream told me to go to Spokane to stand by the falls. You know, those ones by the Y.M.C.A. So I walked there. I mean, I didn't have no car, I didn't have no license. I was 12 years old. It took me all day, but I walked there... And I stood on that bridge over the falls, waitin' for a sign.

I must've been waitin' there for a couple hours. But I just watched the water. It was beautiful. I kept hopin' I'd see some salmon, but there ain't any salmon in that River no more. And then I heard this voice: "Hey, what the hell you doin' here ?" It was your dad, yellin' at me. And he keeps on yellin'. "I asked you what the hell you're doin' here." So I told him I was waitin' for a vision, and he just laughed. He said, "all you're gonna get around here is mugged."

[laughing]

So then he took me to Denny's. It was afternoon, you know, but I still had the grand slam breakfast. Two eggs, two sausages, two slices of bacon... And two pancakes. And some juice, and milk. You know, sometimes it's a good day to die, sometimes it's a good day to have breakfast.

[scene shifts to the nighttime, Arnold and Arlene sleeping off a drunk.
Banging sound]

Arnold.

[Arlene sees Victor in front of the house, breaking beer bottles on the rear of Arnold's truck]

[sighs]

We ain't doin' this no more ! No more !

[banging]

We're done with it.

[The next morning: man on television]

get back !

[television: Gunshots]

I told ya, all I want is the money that I got comin' to me !

It's over ! No more drinkin' ! Did you hear me ? No more !

Let go ! Let go ! [Arnold knocks Arlene to the floor]

Hit me again ! Come on !

[TV continues] [Arnold leaves the house, gets into his truck]

If you leave now, don't you ever come back ! You hear me ? Don't you ever come back !

[Victor]

Don't leave, dad !

[engine starts, revs]

Don't leave, dad !

Victor ! [Victor chases after his dad]

Oh, papa ! [Arnold quickly hugs Victor, gets back in the truck and leaves]

[switch clicking]

[Arlene]

He's gone, Victor.

Yeah, your daddy's magic, ain't it ? He sawed us into pieces, didn't he ?

[switch clicking]

Feel like my head's in the kitchen and my belly's in the bathroom... And my feet are in the bedroom.

[switch clicking]

You feel that way, too, huh ?

[switch clicking]

[Thomas]

Hey, Victor.

Victor.

[Victor comes out of the house]

Hey, Victor, heard your dad left.

What happened ? Why'd he leave ?

Does he hate you ?

[Victory attacks Thomas]

Victor ! Stop it ! Victor, don't do that to him !

[Victor runs off, leaving Thomas groaning]

Why'd Arnold leave ?

Hush now, Thomas. Just hush.

[Back on the bus-- Thomas]

Hey, Victor, what do you remember about your dad ? I remember one time we had this fry bread eatin' contest, and he ate 15 pieces of fry bread. It was cool.

You know, Thomas, I don't know what you're talkin' about half the time. Why is that ?

I don't know.

I mean, you just go on and on, talkin' about nothing. Why can't you have a normal conversation ? You're always tryin' to sound like some damn medicine man or something. I mean, how many times have you seen *Dances with Wolves* ?

A hundred, two hundred ? Aw, geez. You have seen it that many times, haven't you ?
Don't you even know how to be a real Indian ?

I guess not.

Well, shit. No wonder. Geez. I guess I'll have to teach you then, ain't it ?

First of all, quit grinnin' like an idiot. Indians ain't supposed to smile like that. Get stoic.

[Thomas tries]

No. Like this. You gotta look mean, or people won't respect you. White people will run all over you if you don't look mean. You gotta look like a warrior. You gotta look like you just came back from killing a buffalo.

But our tribe never hunted buffalo. We were fishermen.

What ? You wanna look like you just came back from catching a fish ? This ain't dances with salmon, you know. Thomas, you gotta look like a warrior.

There. That's better. And second, you gotta know how to use your hair.

My hair ?

Yeah. I mean, look at your hair. It's all braided up and stuff. You gotta free it. An Indian man ain't nothing without his hair. And last, you gotta get rid of that suit, Thomas. You just have to.

[Song plays. Thomas emerges from a store wearing a "Frybread Power" t-shirt, jeans, and his hair unbraided and free-flowing]

[Back in the bus, the boys discover 2 cowboys have taken their seats]

[Thomas]

Um, 'scuse me. Those are our seats.

[Cowboy]

You mean, these were your seats.

[Victor]

No, that's not what he means.

[Cowboy]

Now listen up. These are our seats now, and there ain't a damn thing you can do about it. So why don't you and super injun there... Find yourself someplace else to have a powwow. Okay ?

[driver]

Come on, now, boys. Just sit down.

[Thomas]

Geez, Victor, I-I guess your warrior look doesn't work every time.

Shut up, Thomas.

[Thomas]

Man, the cowboys always win.

The cowboys don't always win.

Yeah, they do. The cowboys always win. Look at Tom mix. And what about John Wayne ?
Man, he was about the toughest cowboy of them all, ain't it ?

[Victor]

You know, in all those movies...You never saw John Wayne's teeth. Not once. I think there's something wrong when you don't see a guy's teeth.

[tapping sound—Victor starts to chant]

John Wayne's teeth, hey-ya, John Wayne's teeth, hey-ya

hey-ya hey-ya-hey.

[Thomas joins in] John Wayne's teeth, hey-ya, John Wayne's teeth, hey-ya

hey-ya hey-ya-hey.

Are they false, are they real, are they plastic, are they steel

hey-ya, hey-ya-hey.

[laughing, shouting]

[tune changes to serious—sung by Native American chanters]

John Wayne's teeth, are they plastic ,are they steel

ha-ha, hey-hey

ha-ha, hey-hey etc.

[woman on P.A.]

Now arriving in Phoenix, Arizona. Please meet your passengers at the gate. Reboarding in five minutes for Yuma, Arizona, and our final destination: Los Angeles, California.

[Thomas]

So what do we do now ?

What do you think ?

We walk.

[In desert country]

Hey, Victor, Did you know I was an alternate on the 1980 Olympic team ? [does a cartwheel]

[laughs]

[Thomas]

How long you think it'll take us to get there ?

We get there when we get there, okay ?

I mean, I just wanna know if you have any idea how long it's going to take. We've been travelin' a long time, ain't it ? I mean, Columbus shows up, and we start walkin' away from that beach, tryin' to get away. And then Custer moves into the neighborhood, drivin' down all the property values and—And we gotta keep on walkin'. Then old Harry Truman drops the bomb, and we gotta keep on walkin' somewhere. 'cept it's all bright now, and we can see exactly where we're goin'. Hey ! And then we get a beach house on the Moon. But old Neil Armstrong shows up and boots us off into space. Then your mom gets that phone call about your dad bein' dead, and geez, your dad's gotta be livin' in Mars, Arizona. And we ain't got no money, no car, no horse. We have to catch the bus all the way down here. I mean, we ain't got nobody can help us. No superman, no batman, no wonder woman. [chuckles] not even Charles Bronson, man. Hey, did you ever notice how your dad looks like Charles Bronson ?

Thomas, my dad doesn't look anything like Charles Bronson, okay ?

Yeah, your dad looks like Charles Bronson. Not the Charlie Bronson of

the first *Death Wish* movie. No, your dad's more like *Death Wish V*, the one where Charlie Bronson fights that Asian death gang.

Thomas, will you shut up !

Thirsty ?

Get that thing

away from me, okay ?

[Takes canteen and throws it away]

[Indian voices chanting]

[They reach Suzy Song's trailer. knocking]

[Suzy]

Hey.

[Thomas]

Hey !

Well, one of you must be Victor, ain't it ?

He's Victor. I-I'm Thomas.

I'm Suzy song.

Is my dad here ?

Yeah. Come in. Come on.

[Suzy returns with a can—Arnold's ashes]

That's him ?

Yeah. This is Arnold. I mean, he's not lookin' so good, huh ?

Okay, we gotta go. We got a long ride home.

Hold on. Y-you just got here. I mean, you guys want something to eat or drink or somethin' ?

[Thomas]

I'm thirsty, and I'm hungry. I'm both.

Come on.

[Later—they are watching TV and eating frybread]

[Thomas]

You know, the only thing more pathetic than Indians on TV... Is Indians watchin' Indians on TV.

[chuckles]

[Victor]

So, Suzy, what are you doin' out here ? Do you have a job, or what ?

Yeah. I work for

Indian health service, but I don't know if I have a job anymore. I haven't been back to work since...I found your dad. I haven't talked to anybody since it happened.

Are you a nurse or somethin' ?

I used to be a nurse, but now I'm a hospital administrator.

What does that mean ?

It means I travel too much.

I bet you've been everywhere then, ain't it ?

Yeah. I've been a lot of places since I left home.

So where's home then ?

New York.

[Thomas]

Hey, Suzy.

– This is pretty good bread.

– Yeah, it's okay.

Hey, Victor, you should try some. It's almost as good as your mom's.

Ain't no bread good as mom's.

This is pretty close.

[Victor tries it]

It's okay. Ain't even close to mom's, though.

Victor's mom makes the best fry bread in the whole world.

Really ?

It's so good, they use it for communion back home. Arlene Joseph makes some Jesus fry bread. Fry bread that can walk across water. Fry bread risin' from the dead.

Is that true ? Huh ? Come on, is that true ?

[Thomas]

Way back when, we were havin' a feast on our reservation. A good old feast. We didn't have a whole lot of food, Just a little bit of deer meat, a huge vat of mashed potatoes, some coke and fry bread. But the fry bread made all the difference in the world.

You see, a good piece of fry bread... turned any meal into a feast. Everybody sat at the tables, waitin' for the cooks to come with the fry bread. They waited...and waited, but you see, there was a hundred Indians at that feast... And only 50 pieces of fry bread. Arlene kept tryin' to figure out what to do. I mean, it was her magical fry bread that everybody wanted. But Arlene knew what to do. You see, Arlene's fry bread was magic. Arlene was magic. She knew how to feed a hundred Indians...with only 50 pieces of fry bread. She went out to talk to the people. "Listen !" she said. "There are one hundred Indians here... and only 50 pieces of fry bread !"

Everybody was mad. There was gonna be a fry bread riot for sure. But then Arlene said, "but I have a way to feed you all !" She took a piece of fry bread, she held it over her head...and she ripped it in half !

[Suzy laughing]

Oh, that's a good story. Is that true ? [taps Victor on the arm] Hmm ? Is that true ?

No, it's not true. Thomas, you're so full of shit.

[Thomas]

So I told you a story. Now it's your turn.

[Suzy]

What ? Do you want lies, or do you want the truth ?

I want both. Tell us how you met Victor's dad, anyway.

[chuckles nervously]

Well, You know, I just moved here a couple years back... And I saw him puttering around a lot. He was always workin' on that truck, you know ? I didn't have a car back then, so sometimes he'd give me a ride.

[Arnold tries to start the truck]

Geez. This hardly ever happens. It starts almost every time.

[engine cranking]

Come on.

[cranking stops]

Well, may as well walk home. You sure you don't want me to grab those ? [refers to Suzy's package]

Oh, no, no. I-I think I can make it.

It's a long walk.

[giggling]

Hey, where are you from, man ?

Plummer, Idaho. You know, I got me a ex-wife and a son up there.

What are you doin' down here then ?

I don't know. Guess I'm still tryin' to figure that out. Suzy, what's the worst thing you ever did ?

[chuckles]

What do you mean ?

I mean, what's the—the most evil thing you ever done to another person ?

Oh, I don't know if I wanna answer that.

Come on, tell me.

[chuckles]

Uh, let's see. This one time at a powwow, I stole this old Indian woman's purse. There—there was like a couple of hundred bucks in there, and I spent it all. And that was probably all of her powwow money too. I bet she just cried.

Yeah, that's bad. There's gotta be somethin' worse than that, ain't it ?

Aw, come on. What about you ? It's your turn. What's the worst thing you ever done ?

No way. It's still your turn. I mean, you gotta have done somethin' worse than steal money.

Okay, okay. How about this ? Back in college, I slept with my best friend's boyfriend.

[sniffs]

Oh, now that's bad. You must've broke some hearts that day, ain't it ?

At least three.

Yeah, just like me. I broke three hearts too.

[back to Victor and Suzy talking]

Your dad was a good-looking guy, you know ? He was givin' me the eye. Just a little bit, you know ?

My dad, did he ever talk about me ?

He was always talking about... You two playin' basketball.

[chuckles]

[Arnold]

I remember this time, me and my boy Victor, we were playin' two-on-two basketball against these Jesuits.

[chuckles]

These Jesuits had on their white collars and their black robes, and they were pretty damn good. By the way they were playing, I could've swore they had seven out of twelve apostles on their side. Because every time I tried to shoot the ball, there was a storm of locusts come flyin' in and blind me. Now, I was shootin' in the dark. In the dark, I tell ya.

But my boy Victor—He was magic. He couldn't miss. Those Jesuits didn't have a prayer of stoppin' him fair and square. Victor was only 12 years old and kind of small, so those Jesuits were beatin' up on him real good. They were beatin' up on him and chantin' at him...like he was possessed or somethin'. Maybe Victor was possessed by the spirit of Jim Thorpe, because he had this look in his eye, and he was mean. "Come on, Victor !" I shouted. "Come on, Victor ! We're up against the son and the father here ! And these two are gonna need the holy ghost to beat us !" I mean, the score was all tied up. Next basket wins, you know ?

So the Jesuits had the ball. And this great, big redhead Jesuit... come drivin' in, and knocked my boy over. My boy, he was tough. You gotta have Faith, son. Faith. Next basket wins. And he took it to the hoop, and he flew, man ! He flew, right over that

Jesuit ! Twelve years old, and he was like some kind of indigenous Angel or somethin'.
'cept maybe his wings were made out of TV dinner trays !

[chuckles]

My boy Victor ! He was the man that day. He took that shot, and he won that game. It
was the Indians versus the Christians that day, and for at least one day, the Indians won!

Whee ! [throws ball in the air]

[ball bounces]

So he told you I made the shot, huh ?

Yeah.

Yeah, well, I missed the shot. I lost the game.

You mean, your dad lied to me ?

Yeah, in a lie that made me look good.

[laughs]

He was a magician, you know.

I know.

Did you love him ?

What ?

Did you love him ?

Yes. He was like—Like a father, I guess.

A father. He had you fooled too, then, ain't it ?

He quit drinkin', you know.

Yeah. He was pretty tricky, wasn't he ?

Hey, Victor, you ever hear of... The gathering of nations powwow in new Mexico ? No ? Well, your dad and I, we went to check it out last year. All sorts of Indians there, thousands of 'em, more Indians than I've ever seen in one place. I kept thinkin', "I wish we'd been this organized when Columbus landed." Your dad and I were sittin' way up high in the stands. He never liked to get too close to anything, you know ? And then, the powwow emcee, he called for a ladies' choice dance. I got to pick my partner, and I picked your dad. There were mothers and fathers dancing, and brothers and sisters, There were some sweethearts, then there was your dad and me.

And what were you two ?

We kept each other's secrets.

[dog barking]

Kafka.

What?

It's Kafka, Arnold's dog. He's been—well, he's been gone since I found your dad.

[barking continues—scene shifts to Suzy discovering Arnold's body]

Kafka ! Where's your master, huh ?

[Back to Victor and Suzy]

You wouldn't believe the smell. You know, Victor, his stuff's still in there. Might be something you wanna keep.

There's nothing in there for me.

Victor, please ?

No way.

Hey. How about this? If I make a shot, then you have to go inside. Deal ?

And if you miss ?

Then I'll leave you alone.

Fine. It's a deal.

[Suzy shoots, makes the basket]

Nice shot. But I still ain't goin' in.

Look, Victor, I'm not playin' some kind of game here. I'm tryin' to help.

Tryin' to help what ? I mean, who the hell are you anyways ? You're tellin' me all these stories about my father, and I don't even know if they're true. Hey, maybe you don't even know him.

I know more about him than you do.

You don't know anything !

I know about the fourth of July party. The one where the house burned down.

What about it ?

I know how it started.

Nobody knows how it started.

[scene shifts to the 4th of July party. Arnold laughing, holding a Roman candle in his hand]

Yee-hee ! Whoo-hoo ! Come on ! Get up, you guys. Whoo-hoo-hoo.

[falls down drunk, Roman candle shoots into the house]

[laughing]

Come on, you guys ! You gonna get up or what ? Come on ! Wally, come on !

[scene shifts back to Victor and Suzy]

My dad started that fire ?

It was an accident.

He killed Thomas's mom and dad ?

But he saved Thomas.

He almost killed all of us?

He saved you.

No, my mom saved me.

Listen to me, Victor. Your dad talked about that fire every day. He cried about it. He wished he could've changed it. He wished he hadn't run away. But you have to remember one thing, Victor. He ran back into that burning house looking for you. He went back for you. He didn't mean to die here, Victor. He wanted to go home. He always wanted to go home.

He's waiting for you, Victor. He's waiting for you.

[Victor enters the trailer and finds Arnold's wallet. Inside is a picture of the family. The word "Home" is written on the back of the picture. In a show of mourning, Victor cuts his hair]

[Thomas narrating]

After Victor butchered his hair, he thought the ceremony was over, so he tore me from sleep at sunrise, and we left Phoenix without tellin' Suzy good-bye. I thought we were leavin' in a bad way, but Victor didn't seem to care a bit. He just drove all day and didn't say a word to me, even though I told him a thousand stories... about Suzy and drought, about his mother and hunger, about his father and magic. And then I told Victor, I thought we were all travelin' heavy with illusions.

[Thomas]

I remember so much about your dad. I remember when he took me for breakfast at Denny's. Your dad was goin' on and on about you. He said you were so good at basketball. But he also said basketball was the only thing you were ever gonna be good at.

You know, Thomas, I'm really sick and tired of you tellin' me... all these stories about my dad like you knew him.

But I did know him.

What do you know about him, Thomas ? Did you know he's a drunk ? Did you know that he left my family ? Did you know he beat up my mom ? Did you know he beat me up? Just let it go, Thomas ! He was nothing but a liar.

No, your dad was more than that.

What was he then, Thomas ? You tell me. You're the expert. What do you think he was ?

You know, you got it all wrong, Victor. Maybe you don't know who you are !

I don't know what the hell you're talkin' about.

I think you do. You've been mopin' around the reservation for ten years. Ten years, Victor ! Doin' what ? You ain't got no job ! You ain't got no money ! You ain't got nothin'!

Yeah, and what do you got, huh, Thomas ? What do you do all day long ?

I look after my grandma.

Yeah, and I look after my mom.

You make your mom cry.

Shut up, Thomas !

You make your mom cry her eyes out ! I mean, your dad left her, sure, but you left her too. And you're worse 'cause you still live in the same house with her !

Shut up, Thomas ! Just shut up ! He saved your dumb ass in that fire ! He didn't save me! He never saved me !

Quit feelin' sorry for yourself.

I wish he would have let you burn in that fire, you know ? Then he wouldn't have left me.

He was always leavin', Victor !

Everything burned up, Thomas, everything ! Everything burned up !

Everything ! Everything !

[suddenly they come to a wrecked car in the middle of the road]

Shit !

[crashing noises as Victor swerves to avoid hitting the other car]

[woman crying]

What have you done ? What have you done ? What did you do ? Burt !

[man]

get in the car, Penny !

[Thomas and Victor come to help]

I'm so– I'm so sorry. He was drunk, and he was driving so fast. I told him to slow down.
I'm so sorry.

All right, get back in the car. Get in the car ! Stay in the car !

Hey, take it easy !

Get your hands off me !

I didn't do anything.

It's your fault, man. You hit my car, man.

You're drunk ! Take it easy !

Get out of my face !

– Step away !

It's your fault !

[Woman crying]

Help me ! Hurry ! Somebody help !

It's your fault. You hit me !

I didn't do anything.

Oh, no, help me !

Don't let her up !

You're drunk !

Get out of my face !

Get your hands off me !

Look at what you did to your wife ! Look what you did !

[Thomas]

What's your name?

Holly.

[Burt]

This is your fault. This is your fault.

[Victor]

I'll go for help.

What, are you crazy ? The nearest town is 20 Miles away. You'll never make it.

I'm goin' for help. Thomas !

[Burt]

And she ain't gonna make it either !

I'm goin' for help !

That's a dead girl you're talkin' to. It's a dead girl !

[Victor runs—as he travels he has visions of the house fire, his dad, and Suzy]

[Suzy]

Your dad talked about that fire every day. He cried about it. He wished he could've changed it. He wished he hadn't run away. But you have to remember one thing, Victor. He ran back into that burning house looking for you ! He did one good thing. He went back for you.

[Arnold]

Everything in the world can fit inside this ball. It's not about magic, man. It's about Faith.

[Victor collapses. He has a vision of his father bending down to help him up. A county road worker has found Victor and sent for help]

[in the hospital, Thomas wheeling Victor in a wheelchair]

Geez, Thomas, can't you drive this thing ?

Geez, who are you to talk ? You're the one who got us in a wreck.

Hey, a wreck's a wreck. I got cousins who've been in a dozen car wrecks. Old Lester Fallsapart has been in a car wreck every year of his life. You and me, we just had one car wreck.

Victor, I think we were in two wrecks last night.

[Holly]

Well, if it isn't our marathon runner. How ya doin' ?

Oh, my feet hurt. How's she ?

Julie's gonna be okay. You guys are heroes, you know ? It's like you're the Lone Ranger and Tonto.

No, it's more like we're Tonto and Tonto.

I mean, the police were just here. That Burt Guy said the wreck was your fault.

– No way.

– He said you were tryin' to kill him.

He's a goddamn liar.

I know. That's what I told the police. I don't think they believed me.

Well, geez, we probably should get out of town then, ain't it, Victor ?

– Yeah.

– Yeah.

[As they turn the corner into another hall, they run into the police]

Uh-oh.

[In the sheriff's office]

Well, it looks like you boys got yourself into some serious trouble here. You've been accused of assault with a deadly weapon.

That's bullshit.

It's Victor, is it ?

Yes. Victor Joseph.

Well, that kind of language isn't necessary, Victor.

We didn't do anything wrong.

You didn't do anything wrong. Well, I have this complaint... Signed by a Mr. Burt Cicero. And Mr. Cicero alleges...That Mr. Joseph assaulted him soon after the accident... And that you were drunk. Is that true ?

I don't drink. I never had a drop of alcohol in my life, officer. Not one drop.

Well, just what kind of injun are you, exactly ?

I'm Coeur d'Alene, and Thomas here is Coeur d'Alene too.

Y-yeah, exactly.

Well, Mr. Builds-the-fire, what do you think about all these charges ?

We was framed.

Framed ? Well- Hmm. We do have another statement here by a Mrs. Penny Cicero. It says here that her husband is- And I quote- "a complete asshole." I'd say Mr. Cicero doesn't have much of a case here against you. However, I do have one problem here. Uh- Now, I know that this...Is a basketball. But I am very, very curious about this.

That's my father.

Your father ?

Yes. That's my father.

[Victor and Thomas have been dropped off to retrieve the truck]

[Victor]

I can't believe we got out of that guy's office alive.

Yeah, I guess your warrior look does work sometimes.

[Victor kicks the basketball away]

Ahh !

[Victor takes the ashes]

Let me hold on to that.

Thomas, I'm sorry I got us into that wreck. I mean, I'm sorry about every wreck. Let's go.

[engine choking]

[song]

Sometimes, father you and I are like a three-legged horse who can't get across
the finish line no matter how hard he tries and tries and tries.

And sometimes, father you and I are like a warrior who can only paint
half of his face while the other half cries and cries and cries and cries.

[engine finally starts]

yeah !

Whoo !

Whoo, baby !

Now can I ask you, father, if you know how much farther we need to go.

Now can I ask you, father if you know how much farther we have to go.

Father and farther father and farther till we know.

Sometimes, father, you and I are like two old drunks who spend their whole lives
in the bars, swallowing down all those lies and lies and lies.

And sometimes, father you and I are like dirty ghosts who wear the same sheets
every day as one more piece of us just dies and dies and dies.

[Velma and Lucy laughing]

Sometimes, father you and I are like a three-legged horse who can't get across
the finish line no matter how hard he tries and tries and tries.

[Victor and Thomas finally arrive home]

I bet your grandma really missed you, huh ?

Yeah, we've been gone six days, 12 hours and 32 minutes.

You know, Thomas, I, uh—I wanna thank you for everything. For the money and stuff.

I-it's nothin', really.

I mean, I just wanted to—

I-it's nothin'. I mean, who needs money on the rez anyways ?

Yeah, you're probably right.

[Victor takes the money jar and pours half of Arnold's ashes to give to Thomas]

Are you sure ?

Yeah, I'm sure.

Victor, I'm gonna travel to Spokane for one last time... And toss these ashes into the River, and your father will rise like a salmon. He'll rise. What ? What ?

Well, I was thinkin' about doin' the same thing myself, but I never thought of my father as a salmon. I mean, I thought it would be just like cleaning out the attic, you know ? Like throwin' things away when they have no more use. Thanks, eh ?

[engine starting—Victor starts to leave. Thomas calls him back]

Hey, Victor !

What is it, Thomas ?

Hey, Victor. Do you know why your dad really left ?

Yeah. He didn't mean to, Thomas.

[Victor reaches his house, gives his mother Arnold's ashes. She lifts them in a benediction]

[Thomas enters his house and is greeted by his grandmother]

Tell me what happened, Thomas. Tell me what's going to happen.

[Thomas narrating]

**How Do We Forgive Our Fathers?
Dick Lourie**

How do we forgive our Fathers?
Maybe in a dream
Do we forgive our Fathers for leaving us too often or forever
when we were little?

Maybe for scaring us with unexpected rage
or making us nervous
because there never seemed to be any rage there at all.

Do we forgive our Fathers for marrying or not marrying our Mothers?
For Divorcing or not divorcing our Mothers?

And shall we forgive them for their excesses of warmth or coldness?
Shall we forgive them for pushing or leaning
for shutting doors
for speaking through walls
or never speaking
or never being silent?

Do we forgive our Fathers in our age or in theirs
or their deaths
saying it to them or not saying it?

If we forgive our Fathers what is left?