

Joe the Painter knew almost everyone in town and everyone knew Joe and all of the people who knew Joe as well as I knew Joe didn't like him. Except me. I liked Joe. I was probably the only person who was willing to be seen with Joe regular like. A lot of folk would say hi to Joe if they ran into him and couldn't get across the street in time and some would even sit down to coffee with him while the sun was out. One or two of the married fellows had invited Joe to dinner at their houses but they only did it once.

Joe was friendly enough. Whenever he'd see someone he knew, he'd boom out a "Howdy."

"Howdy Ed," he shouted at Ed Petersen as Ed slipped out of the old Vance hotel at three in the afternoon. Joe was friendly like that. "What the hell you doing in the Vance at this time of the day?"

But he wasn't one to chew his words.

"Dingdang! George, don't tell me you actually paid \$5,000 for that piece of junk?"

He was polite. He just wasn't judicious.

"Howdy Mrs. Secord, how's the girls? Looks like you been living off pudding. Say, you pregnant again? Damn fine weather ain't it."

"Joe's just an honest man," Marvin Booster, the bartender at the Ritz, would tell his customers after Joe left. "Most people can't manage honesty. Honesty makes most people nervous."
"Howdy Marvin, you settle up with the tax boys yet?"

Joe just had a habit of making people uncomfortable. Most times they would try and drift away before Joe stuck them with one of his "howdies."

"Howdy Bill, did you beat the drunk driving ticket?"

"Howdy Pete, you and the Mrs. back together yet?"

"Howdy Betty, god you look like hell. You had a relapse?"
But that wasn't exactly why people avoided Joe though it was a pretty good reason all by itself. And it wasn't that he was dirty or smelled bad. He took a shower every morning and his clothes were always clean. He didn't drink. And he didn't smoke.

"Howdy Bob, you know a bullet would be a heck of a lot faster and not near the expense."

Joe didn't like smoking at all.

"Smoking just touches me wrong though I suppose I got a few bad habits, too."

Joe liked to blow his nose in the gutter. Whenever he felt a clog in his "breathing trap" as he called it, he'd step to the curb, lean over so as not to get his shoes dirty, hold one nostril shut with his thumb, snort, and blow out the other one. Then he'd change hands. Like shooting beans through a straw. He always did it first thing in the morning and then, after that, whenever the occasion demanded it.

On weekends, sometimes, a few of the kids on their way to

the docks to fish would hang around in front of the Ritz bar and wait for Joe to come down from his bachelor apartment. He'd blow a little louder for the kids.

I think that Joe's main problem was that he was loud. He wasn't boisterous, he just talked loud all the time. Maybe he was a bit deaf and didn't want to admit it or just didn't know it. Before he came out to the coast, he had worked in a foundry back east.

"It was real noisy," Joe shouted. And he liked to stand close to you when he talked. It was no good backing up because he'd just follow you around until he got you in a corner.

People who disliked Joe didn't dislike him because he was a criminal or snobbish or weird or perverted or mean, it was a whole bunch of things that altogether tended to overwhelm folk.

"You're probably the only friend, only real friend that Joe the Painter has," Howard Souto told me once and I suppose he was right.

I liked Joe. He was a friend to me and a good one.

Joe's real name was Joseph Ghoti. Everyone just called him Joe or Joe the Painter because he had painted houses for a living before he retired and moved into the small apartment above the Ritz.

The one thing that no one could fault Joe for was his civic spirit. He went to all the political rallies ... for both parties. He voted in all the elections and if he felt particularly strong about some issue, he'd paint a paper placard and hang it out of his apartment window. He bought poppies on Veterans Day, kept his old papers and pop bottles for the Boy Scouts and bought dozens of boxes of Girl Scout cookies and gave them away as presents to the kids who stopped by on their

way to the wharf. He went to the county fair every year and stood when they played the National Anthem. He'd even stand when they played it on television. I watched a baseball game with him once that was played in Montreal and he stood when they played the Canadian National Anthem.

"That's the Canadian National Anthem," shouted Joe as he jumped out of his chair. "Come on, stand up and get your hat off, those folks got feelings too you know."

It was his civic spirit that seemed to get him into most of his trouble.

About three years ago Joe caught me on the street just outside Lazio's Marine Supply store.

"Howdy Chief," shouted Joe. "You got time for coffee? Something in the paper you ought to see."

Joe was the only one in town called me Chief. My family was from Horseshoe Bar, a mountain community about seventy miles out of town. My father was Cherokee, out of Oklahoma during the dust bowl years. He had settled in at Horseshoe Bar and married a Pomo woman up from Round Valley. I wasn't a chief and Joe knew it but he didn't smile when he said it.

"Look at this ... right there ... what do you think?"

"Where?"

"There, there ... right there," Joe shouted and stabbed his finger into the paper.

"The centennial celebration?"

"That's it. How about that! The town's one hundred years old."

"That's great, Joe." I said it without much inflection.

"Great? Can't you read? Look here. There's going to be a competition for the best pageant."

"That's great, Joe."

"What's the matter? Hey, maybe you don't know what a pageant is, huh? Is that it? Maybe you can't read." And he stabbed the paper again.

"So ... there's going to be a pageant. That's great."

"Damn, I guess I'm going to have to read it to you."

There was no stopping Joe once he got started.

"The city council announced last night," Joe began loud enough to be heard down the street in the Ritz, "that the California State Endowment for the Arts has approved the city's application for \$56,000. The money will be used to stage a pageant competition. The successful pageant will be performed as part of the centennial celebration. Applications for the pageant competition should be ready at City Hall by the end of the week. Maybe now you're more excited."

"What's to get excited about. Hell, Joe, what are we going to do, enter the pageant competition?"

"Now you're talking!"

"A pageant?"

"Sure, be a great thing to do for the town. Give the town a pageant that would do it proud. And you get paid. See ... right here ... participants in the successful pageant will be paid for their performances during the month of April. You got performances four nights with two performances on Friday and Saturday ... for a whole month."

"Where are we going to get a pageant?"

"Well, you just don't go out to your local market and buy one. Damn, you don't just walk up to Howard Souto at the Green Front and say, 'Howdy, Howard, got any ripe pageants in today?'"

"Joe ..."

"You got to write one!"

"Joe ..."

"A pageant about the way this town was founded. That would win the competition. I could write it, you know. What do you think?"

My coffee was getting cold.

"Why would you want to write a pageant?"

"Why? Chief, I live here. This is a good town. Damn fine town. And it's going to have a birthday, you know. And I can write a real good pageant and do it up right. This is my town. Who else should write a pageant?"

"Well, sure as hell not me," I said, trying to get a taste of my coffee.

"Dingdang, of course not you. You can't write. You can hardly read and I suspect that you don't even know exactly what a pageant is. Besides, you're going to be one of the stars."

"One of the stars?"

"That's right ... Ah-ha, now you're interested."

"You're nuts, Joe ... I'm no pageant-er or whatever I'd be."

"An actor ... a star!"

"Forget it. You can write your pageant and I'll watch it and I'll bring my family, bring everyone up at the Bar and we'll all cheer when it's over but I won't be in it."

"Look Chief," said Joe seriously, bringing his voice down to a normal volume which meant he was going to tell me a secret. "My pageant is going to have Indians in it. You're the only Indian I know."

"I can get you lots of Indians."

"And," said Joe, reaching across and patting my hand, "you're my best friend."

Well, hell, what was I supposed to say?

I didn't see Joe after that for near a week. He caught up with me over a cup of coffee and pie at Connie's.

"Howdy Chief," Joe sang out, waving a piece of paper around in a circle.

Ed Petersen, who was sitting at the counter, slid off the stool and headed for the rest room. Bill Johnson left half a cup of good hot coffee, dropped a dollar at the register, and left before Connie could give him his change. Mrs. Bertrand, sitting at the front booth, disappeared behind a copy of the *Herald*.

"Howdy, Connie, how's the boil doing?"

Joe slid in across from me and slapped the paper down on the table.

"There's this screening," he shouted. "You have to submit an idea for the pageant. Council's got this jury that is going to look at all the ideas and select the best three."

"They going to do all three pageants?"

"Chief, you're not listening again. The jury is going to choose three. Whoever gets chosen will get a small grant. You take the grant, work up the pageant, and about a month before the centennial celebration, the city council will preview each pageant and choose the best one. That pageant will be the one that is shown during the centennial."

"Oh." I could see that I was going to need more coffee.

"You awake? You got all that?"

"Sure, but what do I have to do?"

"I'll be the author ... been doing some research and I've got the idea right here," and he tapped his head to indicate the general location. "I need you to get me thirty or forty Indians. All kinds ... you know, men, women, and kids ... could use lots of kids."

"Thirty or forty?"

"How many in your family?"

"Two brothers and three sisters."

"That won't be enough. You got any friends besides me?"

"Indians?"

"Chief, you hard of hearing ... we been talking about Portuguese fishermen? Course I mean Indians. I need thirty or forty Indians."

There was my father and his two brothers and their families at the Bar and Bernie and James and their cousins over at Hupa Valley. Mom had a couple of sisters down south who might come up.

"I suppose."

"Don't be supposing, supposing killed the cat."

"What's the pageant going to be about?"

"Can't tell, it's a secret."

"Suppose you tell me."

"There you go supposing again."

"You don't know yet, huh?"

"Dingdang, course I know. Say, are you trying to wring my leg out? Dammed if I don't think sometimes you're dumber than you look."

"How about a hint? Got to tell the folks something."

"Stay right there," Joe shouted, sliding out of the booth.

Out the door he went and over to the edge of the curb, set his feet on the edge, leaned over and cleared both nostrils. Splat!

"You got to promise that you won't tell anyone. I want it to be a surprise. Hey, you listening?"

"Won't tell a soul, Joe, just the folks ... I promise."

"You guys got some sort of special sign?"

"Huh?"

"You know ... some sign that means you gave your word and that you'll die rather than talk?"

"Joe!"

"No sign, huh?"

"You got my word!"

"Okay ... you got a pen?"

Joe fumbled in his pockets and came up with a grocery receipt from the Green Front. He looked over the top of the booth and all around the coffee shop and then wrote something on the receipt. It was so small you could hardly read it.

"Math ... Mathe ... ah ... Lar ... Ler ... Lerzo ..."

"Marthew Larson," shouted Joe.

"Marthew Larson?"

Joe was nodding his head up and down and smiling like a big kid.

"Marthew Larson ... the lumber magnate? The Marthew Larson who built the mansion over on Bay Street?"

"Shssssss, damn, keep your voice down. Dingdang, you talk loud!"

"The pageant is going to be about him?"

"Founder of this town. Make a great pageant. I'm going to call it 'Marthew Larson and the Deer Island Massacre.'"

"Deer Island Massacre?"

"Never heard of it, right? Course you haven't. Can't read or write. I'll bet not many people in this town know about it. Happened in 1863. Larson and his two brothers brought a boat up from San Francisco and dropped anchor in the bay. Nothing here then but the salt flats and the bay and the trees and some Indians."

"Thirty or forty Indians?"

"Right ... and within four months Larson had brought up about fifty families. Part of them began logging the timber and setting up a mill, the others began to build the town. Some of the families including Larson and his brothers moved over to Deer Island where the marina is now. There was a band of Indians on the island and relations between Larson and the chief didn't go too well. Hey, you still awake?"

"Deer Island, huh?"

"Right. And in the middle of the night on March 31, 1863, just a bit after midnight, the massacre took place."

"Massacre?"

"Keep your voice down! Damn! Yes, a massacre. Larson's two brothers were killed but Larson survived and built the town. That's how this place was started. Make a good pageant, huh?"

"And you want me to get you Indians to play the part of the Indians on Deer Island ... the ones involved in the massacre?"

"What else would I want Indians for?"

"Joe ... I'm not sure I can do that ... I mean ... you know my folks ... they may not like ..."

"What's to like? It's all history. You can't muck around with history. It ain't always the way we'd like it to be but there it is. Can't change it."

"But Joe ..."

"Dingdang, now don't go getting huffy and sulky on me, Chief. I need thirty or forty Indians and you said you could get them. It'll make a great pageant."

"Who gets to play Matthew Larson?"

"Well, you sure as hell can't play Larson. Larson was a whiteman. You don't look like a whiteman. You look like an Indian. I'll probably play Larson."

Confidence, that's what Joe had, and civic pride. Sure enough, at the end of the month, Joe called me up and yelled over the phone that his idea was one of the three that had been chosen and that Mayor Anderson had caught Joe after the meeting and told him how much he liked Joe's idea.

"Great idea, Joe, that's what he said. Shook my hand, bought me a cup of coffee from that machine they have. Awful damn coffee. I told him, too ... awful damn coffee."

"Chief, they liked the idea so much, I didn't even have to show them my script."

"You got a script?"

"Damn if you're not blind and deaf! Course I got a script. I just don't want to show it to every nosepusher that comes heeltoeing up. I want it to be a surprise. Everyone'll see it at the competition. Say ... did you get me those Indians?"

Folks at the Bar said sure, they'd come ... be kinda fun. My aunts at Round Valley said yes, too, and Bernie and James over at Hupa promised to come and bring as many of their friends and neighbors as they could find.

"Where we going to put the folks during the rehearsals?"

"That's the best part. The mayor said that the Indians could pitch their tents on Deer Island."

"I don't know if they have tents, Joe."

"The hell you say!"

"I'll see what I can do."

"The mayor said they could use the facilities at the marina. And Chief ... you listening, Chief ... rehearsals begin on Monday."

Rehearsals began on Friday. My father couldn't make it down from the Bar right away and Aunt Amy and her girls had car trouble in Laytonville and had to wait there two days

for a part. Bernie and James and about ten of their relations came down to the island to say hi and then disappeared in town. Just as well, too. It took the mayor until Wednesday to find enough tents and butane stoves. Even Joe wasn't ready ... some last minute changes to the script. By Thursday night the camp was set up and everyone was there.

"Ho," said my father, looking around the camp and smiling, "just like the old days."

Around ten o'clock that evening Joe came bustling into camp with a cardboard box that said Seagram's on the side. I knew it wasn't liquor but Bernie and James were disappointed when Joe opened the box and took out a few scripts.

"Howdy," said Joe and he shook hands and introduced himself to everyone in the camp including the kids. "Thanks for coming. Real good of you to come. It's going to be a great pageant."

"Why's he shouting?" said Bernie.

"These are the scripts. I don't know most of you so I'm going to let the Chief here hand out the parts."

Everyone sort of looked around casual-like and skinned their necks to see who Joe was talking about.

"Hey ... is he talking about you, cousin?" And James began to laugh.

"You must have gotten a promotion that we didn't hear about over in the valley."

"Floyd, hey, Floyd ... give us an honor song for the Chief here."

Joe just grinned and dropped the box of scripts in my lap. "Tomorrow," he shouted, "we start tomorrow."

That first night on Deer Island was soft and quiet. Some of us got propped up against the tight clusters of marsh grass and

listened to my father and my uncles tell stories. All the kids were sprawled on top of one another like a litter of puppies. After the men got things going, Aunt Amy took over. She was the best storyteller. Bernie and James got out a drum and started singing a few social songs and some of the families danced for a while. Mostly we watched the fires and watched the fog slip in off the mud flats and curl around the tents. You could hear the frogs in the distance and the water pushing at the edges of the island. As I went to sleep, I imagined that in the morning, when the fog lifted, the town and the pulp factory and the marina and Larson's mansion would be gone and all you'd be able to see was the flats stretched out to the trees.

I didn't read the script until early the next morning.

"Ho," said my father, "did you read this?"

"Joe did a lot of research on it." And that was all I could think of saying.

"Son, you better talk to Joe."

"Sure, I'll talk to Joe."

Damn, if there wasn't going to be trouble.

"What'd you think of the script?" Joe shouted.

"Joe ..."

"Told you I could write."

"Joe ..."

"Typed it myself, too!"

"Joe ..."

"Had to go all the way to Sacramento for some of the old records."

"Damn it, Joe ..."

"No sense in talking about it. Got just enough time to get it together. Come on. Dingdang, time's halfway to China ... round up your Indians and let's get started."

"Did you talk to Joe?"

"Sure, dad ... I talked to Joe."

"What did he say?"

"He said we needed to get started."

"Ho."

Joe had us practice every day. We ran up and down the sand, yelling and hollering and rolling around in the marsh grass.

At the end of the first week, Joe backed me up against one of the tents and lowered his voice.

"Chief, we got a little problem."

"A problem?"

"Your Indians don't look like Indians."

"What?"

"Now, don't take offense. I know they're Indians ... you're not one to slip in a few Italians or Chinese on me but they don't look like Indians."

"Joe ..."

"Bothered you too, I know ... couldn't put my finger on it at first but now I got it. None of your folks have got long hair."

"Long hair?"

"They all got crew cuts! Hell, we can't have Indians with crew cuts. No one's going to believe that Indians in 1863 had crew cuts. They got to have long hair with braids ... everybody. We got to find them some wigs."

"Wigs?"

"No time to grow long hair. You got any ideas? You're sure easy with the questions."

"I don't know ... maybe the drama department at the high school would have some wigs."

"Now you're talking."

The drama department only had ten wigs and they didn't much look like Indian wigs but Joe said that they'd do. Lucille's dress shop loaned us another eight ... off their manikins. Bernie got twelve balls of black yarn from a yard sale. Aunt Amy and her girls and a bunch of the boys braided the yarn into braids. If you wore a hat, you could stuff the braids along the side and they looked pretty good. But we were still short about ten wigs.

"Not to worry," shouted Joe, slapping his head with inspiration. "The rest of the Indians can play the parts of Larson and his brothers and the other men."

I got to admit that putting on the pageant was fun. The kids had a great time there on the island and the evenings got better and better. Towards the end, some of the folks from the town came on over and sat around and talked. A few even got up and danced. Dad took old Mrs. Pearson and danced her around for near a half hour.

Boy, were we nervous on the day of the competition.

"You all know your parts," Joe shouted and he shouted even louder than usual.

"Damn," said James, "that man can shout."

"No point in being anxious. You'll do a great job. Just remember to yell like hell. Make it look real."

We were the last group to perform. The first pageant was pretty good. It was about Sarah Jute and the 1903 fire. Fire started in Pearson's warehouse on New Year's Eve. Most of the firemen were at a party and pretty drunk. Sarah was a prostitute in Old Town. New Year's Eve was a busy time for her, but when she saw the fire, she rounded up the rest of her friends and some of the men who were with them and they all

formed a bucket line and held the fire in check until help arrived. Sally Jamison played the lead. She was great as Sarah, running up and down the line, yelling instructions to the women ... real energetic.

"Hey," I said to Joe, "that was pretty good."

The second pageant was real dull. Paul Wolwalk had gotten some of the businessmen together to act out the founding of the first city council. We all clapped to be polite.

Then it was our turn.

"Okay, Chief, let's knock them to their legs."

"Pretty good crowd, huh, Joe?"

The city council had set up about fifty chairs along the boardwalk of the marina. The mayor and his wife were right in the middle. But there were a lot more people than there were chairs and the rest of the folk were either leaning against the railing or dug into comfortable positions in the sand.

"You nervous, Joe?"

"Dingdang!"

Joe put on his hat and walked out through the sand. He had on a black frock coat that the high school had loaned us and a broad brimmed black hat. He looked impressive in the coat and the vest with the gold watch chain strung from pocket to pocket. He didn't have a watch though. The chain was hooked around a couple of flat washers so it wouldn't fall out. Marthew Larson couldn't have looked grander.

"The pageant that the Native Sons Players are about to present," Joe began in a thunderous voice, "is about the founding of our town. It is about our founder, Marthew Larson, and how he came to Sequoia County in 1863 and sculptured a town out of a barren wilderness. I hope you all enjoy the weather and our presentation."

Native Sons Players! Damn, that Joe was creative. Sounded professional.

The pageant was in three parts. The first part dramatized Marthew Larson landing near Rocky Point and coming ashore. He was greeted by an Indian named Redbird who lived with his tribe on Deer Island.

I got to play Redbird.

Larson and Redbird greeted one another and Redbird invited Larson back to his camp. Redbird gave Larson some otter skins and Larson gave Redbird a couple of iron kettles and a Bible. The two men parted friends and Larson returned to San Francisco to get the rest of his family and friends.

I didn't forget any of my lines. No one had any trouble hearing Joe. At the end of the first act, everyone clapped. Mayor Anderson clapped really hard and smiled at everyone around him.

The second act started with the arrival of Larson and the other people. My two uncles from the Bar and their families and three or four of the folks from Hupa played the parts of the settlers. Everyone ran around pretending like they were building a town. Halfway through the act, I came out to complain that Larson and his people were encroaching on my people's land. I thought it sounded strange for an Indian in 1863 to complain about Whites "encroaching" on their land but Joe swore that it was a direct quote from the historical record. Redbird had a better vocabulary than I did.

"God gave this land for all to use, Red and White," shouted Joe.

"We will share it with you, whiteman," I said with my arms folded across my chest like Joe showed me, "but you must not build your houses on our island. My people live there and we are happy."

You could see the tension building.

The second act ended with Matthew Larson and his two brothers coming ashore at Deer Island and claiming that it belonged to them. I had a nice monologue at the end of the second act.

"The whiteman takes more than he needs. He is greedy like a bear in the spring. We will share the forest and the rivers and the great lake but we will not share this island. It is our home. We will fight to keep it. Beware, whiteman, the wrath of the Indian is swift and terrible."

There was a short break between the second and third act so that the people in the audience could stretch and so that us actors could get ready for the last act.

"The year is 1863," Joe shouted. "Matthew Larson has defied Redbird and ignored his warning. Larson and his brothers have landed on Deer Island and have begun to build homes for themselves and their families. Redbird and his people are camped nearby."

That was our cue. Everybody came trooping out to the center of the island right in front of where the mayor and the council were sitting. Aunt Amy and the girls built a fire and we all got into our positions.

"It is evening," Joe continued, "and the Indians are singing and dancing around the fire."

"Hey, ah, ah, ah, ah ... ahaha," Bernie began the song: nice and loud so everyone could hear and then the rest of us joined in. It sounded pretty fierce but it was just one of the 49ers that Bernie and the rest of us knew. Some of the kids were singing along and dancing and trying to keep those yarn braids under their hats.

"The Indians were dancing and singing and you could hear

the drum and the bloodcurdling shouts all the way up the island where Matthew Larson and his family huddled in their houses."

And that was our cue to sing real loud and whoop and jump around on the sand. James and his cousins were really getting into it.

"Damn," said James as he fancy-danced past me, "this is fun."

"But the night grew late," Joe bellowed above the drum and the singing, "and the Indians grew tired. Soon they were all asleep, tired out from all the dancing and singing."

We all began to yawn and stretch and say things like, "Boy, I'm tired," but we said them in Cherokee or Hupa so that the crowd didn't know. One of my uncles told a pretty bad joke and some of the kids began to laugh. We stretched out on the sand and pretended to be asleep.

"It is now about midnight," Joe shouted at the crowd, "and the pale moon is hidden by the fog that has stolen out of the bay. And in the distance, if you listen very carefully, you can hear the muffled sound of oars."

I opened one eye so I could see what was going on. Joe bowed to the crowd and trudged off across the sand. He waved to the mayor as he disappeared under the boardwalk and the mayor waved back. In a minute, Joe reappeared with Uncle Ben and some of the men from the Bar and a few of the older kids. They were dressed in jeans and jackets 'cause we couldn't find any good costumes for all of them. But they all had rifles and knives and Uncle Ben had an old sword that he had borrowed from Captain Oleg, who ran a salmon charter for the tourists during the summer.

They all came creeping across the sand real quiet. When

they were about thirty feet away, Joe stood up and said in a loud voice that we weren't supposed to hear:

"There's their camp, men. Spread out and let none escape. It's God's work ... there'll be no peace with Redbird and his people for there can be no peace between Christians and heathens. Steel your hearts to the cries of the Indians. Who goes with me to make our families safe? Who goes with me to bring the light of civilization to this dark land?"

And Uncle Ben and the rest of the men shook their rifles and waved their knives and shouted, "We're with you, Marthew!"

"Then do your duty," yells Joe and all the men came charging into our camp.

"Whites!" yells one of the kids.

"We're being attacked," yells another.

"Grab your arms, men," I yell, leaping out of the sand. "Protect the women and children."

Jimmy Pete comes at me with a knife and I whack him with my tomahawk. Aunt Amy pushes Uncle Ben over a log and is then shot by Jesse Long from Hupa who is playing the part of Marthew's brother William. James shoots Jesse and Joe kills both Bernie and James.

We couldn't find any blanks for the guns so we just shout out, "Bang! Bang! Bang!" real loud.

It looks real good, too. Some of the kids got a bunch of little plastic bags of ketchup from Connie's restaurant. Blood. They hadn't worked very well at first 'cause they wouldn't break easily when you smashed them against your chest. But if you tore them open a bit, they worked fine. We taped one to each hand so that when we were shot, we could slap a hand over the wound and it looked like we had really been shot or stabbed.

"Death to the heathens," shouts Joe and he shoots me dead.

"I'm killed," I moan and slap a ketchup pack against my stomach. I have to do it twice. Those packets are tough.

"I'm dead," I say again. "Marthew Larson has killed me and all my people."

In a minute, all of us are lying in the sand trying to look dead. The flies start to buzz around the ketchup.

Everything was quiet. The mayor and the council just sat there. Joe took off his hat.

"I abhor the taking of a human life but civilization needs a strong arm to open the frontier. Farewell, Redman. Know that from your bones will spring a new and stronger community forever."

When the clapping started, we were all supposed to get up and take a bow.

But it didn't start. Everyone just sat there. The mayor was looking red and snapped around to whisper something to his wife.

Joe was kneeling next to me with his rifle.

"Just stay there," he said, "I'll take 'em a minute to warm to it. It was more powerful than I thought."

Then someone began to clap and everyone joined in. We got up and took our bows.

We stayed on Deer Island that night. The next morning James and Bernie and I packed up the tent and the wigs and the stoves and returned them. I didn't see Joe for three or four days. Word was that the mayor was upset and that he and Joe had had words and that Joe had taken the lion's share.

"Howdy Chief, you want some coffee?"

"Sure Joe, hell, where you been? My father said he really enjoyed that pagant. All the folks said to tell you if you need Indians again to just give them a call."

"That was a good pageant, wasn't it?"

"The best, Joe."

"The mayor didn't like it."

"What does he know."

"He said it wasn't apppproopriate!"

"What does he know."

"The committee chose Wolwik's pageant."

"What? What about Sally's pageant? That was better than Wolwik's."

And Joe began to laugh. God, that man could laugh louder than he could talk.

"The mayor said that Sally's pageant wasn't apppproopriate, either."

"Damn."

"Come on, I'll buy. I still got some of that pageant money left. We can get some pie, too ... à la mode."

Everyone in town knew Joe. And all the people who knew Joe as well as I knew Joe didn't like him. Except me.

I like Joe.

A Coyote Columbus Story

