

# GRAY RAINBOW JOURNEY

K. B. SCHALLER

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# About *Gray Rainbow Journey*

A courageous book that breaks new ground, *Gray Rainbow Journey* dares to depart from what the public is accustomed to reading as it presents yet another facet of the Native American in his many struggles. A fascinating story by a new voice in Indian America.

PRINCIPAL CHIEF WILLIAM “RATTLESNAKE” JACKSON  
American Cherokee Confederacy

Native American Christians have long known what a struggle it is to live in two worlds, torn between traditional beliefs and the Christian faith. The characters in *Gray Rainbow Journey* speak for so many of us.

BETTY MAE JUMPER, TRIBAL ELDER  
Doctor of Humane Letters, author of *Legends of the Seminoles*  
Seminole Tribe of Florida, Inc.

An enlightening peek into contemporary Native America that portrays reservation life clearly and compellingly. It gives a window into the challenge of making spiritual choices for today’s native person.

CRAIG STEPHEN SMITH (OJIBWE)  
Native American Evangelist, author of *White Man’s Gospel*

A fascinating peek at a different facet of Native American life: that of Christian Indians, and the many challenges they face. *Gray Rainbow Journey* is a heart-thumping face-off between good and evil that will keep you in suspense until the very last page!

DANA K. CASSELL  
Writers-Editors Network

# I

## Bitterroot Angry at the Sun

*April 11, 1980*

*Cheha sat on her screen porch enjoying the sunlit morning as she worked at her bead loom. The annual Powwow and Indian Crafts Show was not very far off, and her beadwork always brought a tidy sum.*

*But suddenly the soft brightness disappeared. In its place, a gigantic shadow oozed across the small patch of ground that was her front yard. Startled, Cheha looked up.*

*The great winged creature was straight out of the nightmare world. Its menacing eyes petrified her, held her spellbound; and he was soaring straight toward her....*

**M**y hands shook as I sat there holding the journal at the small table in my mother's breakfast nook. As I strained to see in the rapidly fading daylight, I dreaded what more these pages would reveal. Yet my curiosity was overpowering.

I drew in a shuddering breath, because as I turned each page of the spiral notebook, it was like opening a door where you knew a Horror was hiding somewhere in the room—a Horror you knew that, without warning, would leap out and grab you.

My muscles ached from hours of sitting and poring over her baffling words; so I stood, stretched my back, rotated my head, and kneaded my shoulders. For all my fervent searching, I thought with dejection, so far there was little to add to the facts I already had: three months gone without a trace, without a word; journals—eight spiral notebooks—left

behind, although it was obvious that writing was a ritual for her.

I was tired. I had a mid-term nursing care exam coming up and I needed to go home. Yet I was unable to pull myself away from this new discovery, because it held the first promise of a break in the mystery of Cheha Youngblood's disappearance.

How close I had come to not discovering the journals at all! Even now, I had no idea what prompted me to look beneath her mattress. But look I did, in yet another search of this tiny house where I had spent much of my childhood. And there they were, spread out end-to-end, written in pencil in her unusual third-person way of speaking.

I breathed in deeply and mustered all my reserves of courage. I needed them in order to continue exploring the dark reaches of my mother's mind:

*Its wings spanned the width of the house! And, suddenly, the creature ripped through the side of her screen. Cheha leaped up then, screaming in Terror!! Her loom clattered to the floor. Hundreds of tiny, brightly colored seed beads scattered across the cement....*

I tore my eyes away from the text. Were they dreams—night terrors—or was it madness?

*...she stood with her back against the wall, horrified, as this—thing!—glared at her with his fiery eyes. And though it was a gigantic owl, strangely, it hopped about like a buzzard on a carcass. The stench of death clung to it and fouled the air...*

The next passage caused my heart to thunder and my mouth to go dry:

*Then the owl-creature hissed: "You will follow the way of the black hat!" And with a terrifying screech it shot upward. This time it ripped off Cheha's entire screen roof and quickly disappeared into the blinding sunlight!*

I pondered the words, and whispered them into the quiet stillness: “*The way of the black hat.*” Like the trademark black Uncle Joe that Mama’s grandmother, and my great-grandma, wore?

This nightmare was so like the stories Hannah Glory Cypress, Mama Hat to all who knew her, relayed around the evening campfires. They were told in the blackness of deep nights in the South Florida Everglades: tales that were as old as the Indian nations.

But my Christian mother had forbidden Mama Hat to pass them on to us children, so they were therefore instilled in us secretly, during casual conversations and family gatherings. Little snippets. Seeds. One here, a few there, planted, and nourished by stolen waters from hidden springs. They were seeds she hoped would germinate in us and keep the ancient ways alive, for they were tales Mama Hat feared would become like many perceived the Indian people to be: existing, yet somehow extinct.

Even I had thought them long dead, those stories that Mama Hat, before she moved to the Bitterroot Confederacy, told beneath her Seminole *chickee*. But the owl-buzzard night terror had exhumed them. Now those memories were peeking through the cobwebs in the crypts of my mind, slithering through the crevices, poking out their tongues and making ghoulish faces at me—those tales of death-speaking owls and night spirits that roamed the earth. They were told when the moon, stars, and campfires were the only lights, and they still maintained their power to terrify.

My heart began to drum in my chest and my skin to prickle in the dying moments of day. But try as I might, I could not tear my eyes away from the jagged remnants of my mother’s anguished life:

*Cheha cried out then, and bolted upright in the pitch darkness. Her blood pounded in her ears. Sweat drenched her face, streamed down her neck, and soaked her nightshirt. Where did the sunlight go...?*

*She switched on the bed lamp. As the Horror skittered away with the fleeing shadows, she remembered. It was night. Morning, really—3:00 a.m. Heart hammering sickeningly, trembling, she crept over to the window and pulled open the curtain. It made*

*perfect sense that the yard that was so shockingly bright in the dream was now as black as she remembered the Everglades nights to be, so many memories ago....*

The ten-year-old girl that still cowered inside me shuddered. No doubt my mother's Terror was an extension of those long-ago tales; but even so, I realized that, during the day one could rationalize specters and shadows—things that haunt our dreams. But in the quietness of night, when the floors of our deepest fears creak beneath their unseen footsteps, they are real.

As I continued reading, I glanced about now and then with mounting uneasiness:

*The giant winged creature spoke of a black hat. It has been over a decade now, but did HE also cause Mama Hat to disappear? If so, why? Was it because my grandmother discovered the truth about US and therefore had to be silenced? Oh, the strength of HIS wickedness! And if HE sent the owl-buzzard, can HE also work evil in Cheha's children—even her Dina?*

*Cheha's life is all gone! Like water poured out on the ground that cannot be gathered up again...*

*April 13, 1980*

*Cheha feels detached—strangely empty—so empty; like when her mother passed to the other side. Empty, like when she married, and when she reared her children. Only one thing is worse than this emptiness: The terror. HIS Terror!*

Now I was really perplexed: “*even her Dina?*” Did she think that I was cursed or something? My mind was spinning; even my thoughts seemed to echo off the walls of the empty house. Did she leave us because she believed that somebody was working evil in all of us children—even me?

Other than her feud with my kid sister, Shania, what had any of the rest of us—my two brothers or I—ever done? My stomach was churning with its usual bitter heaviness that stress induced. And I could almost

hear my mother's hopeless sigh:

*April 12, 1980*

*Now Cheha must fly, and without a word, because if HE knew, HIS Evil would be there waiting for us!*

I was literally scratching my head as I pondered the words: *He—us?* The following entry in bold angry letters screamed from the page:

*April 15, 1980*

*DO NOT COME UP TOMORROW, SUN, BECAUSE CHEHA IS FURIOUS WITH YOU. YOUR RAYS DANCE ONLY ON THE OUTSIDE WORLD, WHILE INSIDE THESE WALLS, CHEHA WAITS IN THIS DARK STILLNESS. LET THE DAY THAT SHE FLIES BE AS BLACK AS THE NIGHT AIR THAT STOLE HER DREAMS!!!*

*Enough!*

I closed the journal and sat there with my face buried in my hands. "Where are you, Mama?" I whispered in the quiet emptiness. "Why didn't you tell me what was going on in your life? You are *Christian*. You went to church. Couldn't you have shared your fears with your pastor, the elders, a friend—*somebody*? You always were ashamed of the traditions of the people, rejecting them as limiting. Backward. But the truth is, you're a caricature Indian yourself—the stereotype the White man portrays—closed-mouthed and stone-faced!"

I cried then, because the cold reality was that nobody seemed too concerned about Cheha Youngblood anymore—nobody, that is, except me. Foul play was not suspected because her suitcase and personal items were also missing, so she was just another Youngblood that took off to parts unknown. In fact, one of the investigators, a big, blond-headed guy from in town, had even joked as he fingered her picture on the dresser: "You say she's your mom? She's quite a looker. You sure she didn't just run off with one of those good-looking Injun road workers in town?"

Not even her big brother, my Uncle Donnie, seemed all that concerned, I thought, as I dried my tears.

“Cheha was born and raised on the reservation,” he said. “She moved here to Bitterroot, but The Root is pretty much part of The Rez—only yelling distance away. If anybody did anything to Cheha, somebody would have seen it. She’ll come back when she wants to—if she wants to.”

His next comment even held a hint of amusement: “Besides, taking off seems to run in this family’s veins—especially the women’s!”

Well, I did have to admit that Mama Hat was included too, in this increasing clan of runaways, but that did not excuse the family’s lack of interest in my mother’s whereabouts. Didn’t they care where she was and how she was doing? Didn’t anybody ever wonder why our runners took off to parts unknown? Didn’t anybody care if Mama was still alive or not?

Even my brothers, when they dropped by the house, were almost casual in their concern: “Any news about Mama?” And all the time they were nonchalantly stuffing their faces with sandwiches, dragging on a cigarette, or chugging a beer.

I stacked the journals. The day was all but spent, the walls were closing in, the shadows were starting to whisper, the house to creak. Also, Uncle Donnie was no doubt beginning to worry because I hadn’t come home directly from school. I picked up the telephone—the only thing we kept working in the house—and dialed. Uncle Donnie picked up on the third ring.

“Just calling to let you know I stopped off at Mama’s to check on the house. I’m on my way,” I said.

“When am I gonna eat? I got diabetes. You know I need my meals on time. So you need to get home and cook something so I can eat!” Uncle Donnie said, sounding exasperated.

I sighed. *Learned helplessness*. There was an edge to my voice. “There’s always food in the refrigerator you can heat, Uncle Donnie. I do go to school, too, you know. I can’t always keep banker’s hours.”

“You never said anything about working in a bank!”

As usual, any figure of speech was lost on him. “Look. I’m on my way, okay?” I replied resignedly.

“You should have been home two, three hours ago. And mind how you talk to an elder, aaay!”

*When all reason fails, play the Respect Card*, I thought. “I’m on my way. Sorry I’m late.” I hung up before I really mouthed off at him.

I searched for a bag for the eight journals and entertained my favorite fantasy: that of disappearing also, like my dad, a North Carolina Cherokee-Apache did when he walked out; then my Seminole mother; and before her, Mama Hat, my great-grandma. And if an old Indian woman had the courage to flee, I wondered, why did I feel obligated to take on the problems of Bitterroot and my family of disappearing Youngbloods and vanishing elders?

It had been after a rousing revival meeting in town that Mama Hat had disappeared. It was hard for folks to accept, because my Traditional great-grandmother had been a fixture on the reservation, and later in the Native enclave of Bitterroot—The Root, as everybody called it—for generations. She was always barefoot. She wore a black hat, dozens of strands of brightly colored beads around her neck, the Seminole cape and patchwork skirt and, of course, although she was Seminole, the signature pipe in her mouth, like a female Sequoyah. A Rez grandma for as long as most folks could remember, it just did not seem possible that she had quite simply *disappeared*. The last anybody on The Rez or in The Root saw of her, Mama Hat was standing in her yard talking gently to the fireflies and the fat lizard that made its home under the loose stones that led to her doorway.

Weeks of intense searching turned up nothing. Many stories followed. Sightings were reported in places as far away as Arkansas and Oklahoma. Follow-ups ended in confusion and conflicting accounts, but no Mama Hat. Among the most bizarre of the tales was that she was out West hosting her own television talk show. Some even hinted that she shape-shifted into an eagle or something, and flew away.

Only one thing was for sure: my great-grandmother had simply vanished. Away from it all.

I wondered sometimes, even though I felt guilty doing so, what it would be like to disappear too, away from Bitterroot, from caretaking, all of it; and move into a world of my own choosing, which was to finish school. Get a good position somewhere. Buy nice clothes. Go to parties and have a good time for a change, without being spied on and gossiped about, via the Rez-Root grapevine. And more importantly, meet

somebody special.

As I headed for the door, journals wrapped securely in an old Winn Dixie grocery bag I found beneath the kitchen counter, I heard a thump from somewhere outside. I tensed—my nerves were already on edge. I listened intently.

“Who’s out there?” I called out.

My answer was the hammering of my own heart and the pounding of the blood in my ears.

I peered outside. Still nothing, but I banged on the window anyhow. “Is anybody out there?”

Still no answer.

I was feeling more and more edgy being alone in Mama’s deserted house, with Night creeping in and Fear, the cruel prankster, causing havoc in my mind...

For more of the story, read on...

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## About the Author



“*Gray Rainbow Journey* introduces America to Native Christians in their unique struggles and attempts to balance the often-opposing worlds of Christianity and the Traditions,” says debut novelist **K.B. SCHALLER** (Cherokee/Seminole).

A member of the Native Christian Church, Schaller organized and served as playwright/director of an ensemble theater for Native American Youths at the former Chickee Christian Academy on the Florida Seminole Indian Reservation.

An independent journalist, Schaller has contributed articles to *Indian Life* and the *Seminole Tribune* Native newspapers. She is also a poet whose poems appear in several anthologies.

She and her husband, Jim, a design engineer and also a lay minister, have a blended family of four children and three cats. Chief, the most recent addition, is “a rescued Rez cat who curls up at my feet during my long stints at the computer—and who is a prototype for the feline character Eddie Was,” she says.

Schaller is hard at work on the sequel to *Gray Rainbow Journey*.

For more information:

**KBSchaller.com**

**www.oaktara.com**