



THOUSANDS OF NATIVE AMERICAN CHILDREN WERE TAKEN

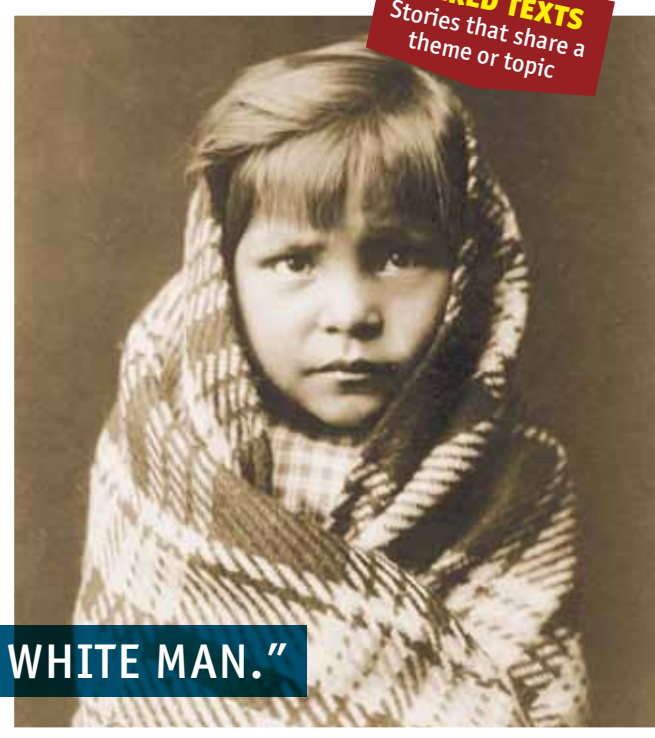
FROM THEIR FAMILIES AND SENT TO BOARDING

# WOULD WE



VINTAGE IMAGES/GETTY IMAGES (DOLL); ARCHIVE PHOTOS/GETTY IMAGES (NAVAJO BOY); CORBIS (SIOUX BOY); EDWARD S. CURTIS/CORBIS (FEAST DRESS); LIBRARY OF CONGRESS (ALL OTHER IMAGES)

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Stories that share a  
theme or topic



SCHOOLS TO "LEARN THE WAYS OF THE WHITE MAN."

# BE KILLED?

THIS IS THEIR STORY.

BY LAUREN TARSHIS





# Was 12-year-old Ota Kte going to be killed?

The year was 1879, and Ota Kte (OH-tuh koo-TAY), a member of the Lakota Sioux Indian tribe, was riding on a train with 83 other Sioux (SOO) children.

They had left their families and their **reservations** in the vast Dakota plains and were traveling east to a mysterious land called Pennsylvania. Watching over them was a white man in a U.S. Army uniform.

Ota Kte's father had told him that this white soldier was taking the children to a school in the East.

But Ota Kte was sure the white man had tricked his father. The older boys on the train said they were being taken to the place where the sun rises—and that when they arrived, the white soldier would take the Sioux children and throw them off the edge of the Earth.

Ota Kte did not totally believe the boys. He did believe one thing, though: Never trust a white man.

White people had been bringing harm to Ota Kte's people for longer than Ota Kte had been alive. First came the settlers who seized their lands.

Then came the white men's diseases—smallpox, tuberculosis, measles—which wiped out entire villages. Finally came the soldiers with their guns and cannons, and the endless wars that left both Native Americans and white men dead in the prairie grass.

Ota Kte kept a close eye on this white soldier as the train chugged east. How had he convinced Ota Kte's father and the Sioux chiefs to send their children away?

And what did he really want with Ota Kte?

## "Kill the Indian"

The soldier was U.S. Army captain Henry Pratt. And he believed he was saving Ota Kte.

America's Indian tribes were in **dire** trouble. A century earlier, an estimated 1.5 million native people had lived across the territories that would become the United States. There were hundreds of unique tribes, from the Pequot in the East, who fished and farmed in bustling seaside villages, to the Shasta of the Northwest, whose sturdy dugout canoes **plied** the



Captain Henry Pratt served in the Civil War and fought in the Indian Wars, including against the Sioux, for eight years. He was one of the few Americans who believed that Native American children were equal to white children.

rivers and streams in the dense and rainy forests of present-day Oregon. Ota Kte's Sioux ancestors had flourished across the sweeping Great Plains.

By 1879, settlers and the U.S. Army had forced most tribes off their lands, and "white man" diseases had devastated the native population. America's 250,000 remaining Native Americans were living on reservations, barely surviving on food and cast-off clothes provided by the U.S. government.

Pratt was deeply troubled by their **plight** and by the poor education offered at reservation schools. He believed that Native American children deserved a quality education.

So he came up with a plan. First, he convinced the U.S. government to turn an abandoned Pennsylvania army **barracks** into the Carlisle School, America's first boarding school for Native



NATIONAL ANTHROPOLOGICAL ARCHIVES/SMITHSONIAN INSTITUTION (HENRY PRATT, BEFORE CARLISLE)

ARCHIVE PHOTOS/GETTY IMAGES; (SHOEMAKING); FRANCES BENJAMIN JOHNSTON/CORBIS (HO USEKEEPING); NATIONAL ANTHROPOLOGICAL ARCHIVES/SMITHSONIAN INSTITUTION (AFTER CARLISLE)

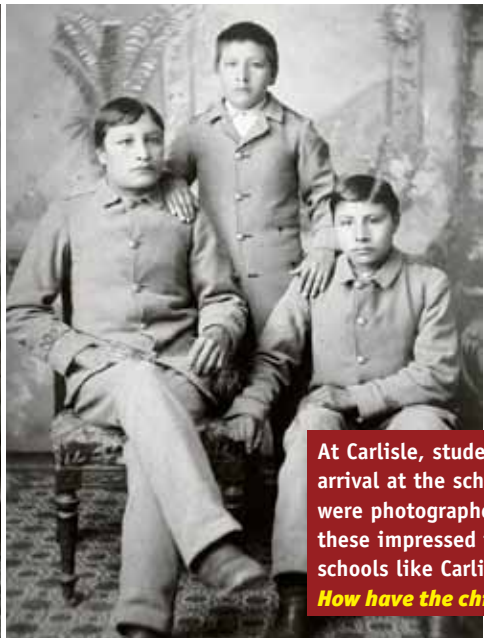
American children, and offered to run the school himself. He then traveled to the Sioux reservations to convince the chiefs to send their children. Understandably, the chiefs were suspicious of Pratt, a soldier for the very army that had driven them off their lands and broken one treaty after another.

Ultimately, though, the chiefs agreed that the best hope for their people was education. So they gathered up 84 children, including Ota Kte, and sent them east with Pratt.

But Pratt hadn't told the chiefs everything. It was not Pratt's plan to simply educate these children and teach them English. He also planned to "civilize" them—to strip them of their traditions and ways of life. Pratt believed that the children needed to completely abandon their "Indian-ness" in



At boarding schools, boys learned trades like shoemaking or gardening. Girls were taught domestic duties like housekeeping. All children were forced to speak only English. **Why did Captain Pratt insist that children not speak their native language?**



At Carlisle, students were photographed soon after their arrival at the school. Years later, before graduation, they were photographed again. "Before and after" pictures like these impressed the U.S. government, which hoped that schools like Carlisle would "civilize" the "savage" Indians. **How have the children changed in these images?**

order to succeed in America. "Kill the Indian, save the man," was Pratt's saying. Perhaps Ota Kte was right to be wary. After all, Captain Pratt did intend to "kill" part of Ota Kte—the Sioux part. In this way, Pratt thought, he would help Ota Kte survive.

### Luther Standing Bear

The changes began the moment

Ota Kte stepped through the iron gates of Carlisle. All the students were given Christian first names. Ota Kte was given the name Luther. As for a last name, school officials usually translated each child's Indian name into English. But Ota Kte's name meant "plenty kills," which was considered too "savage." So Ota Kte took his father's name, which is how Ota Kte became Luther Standing Bear.

Along with his new name came a new look. His long hair was cut short. His leggings and moccasins were taken away, replaced by an itchy wool uniform and black leather boots that squeaked with every step. He began



to learn English and to say Christian prayers. He went to classes and did his chores. At night, Luther heard children around him sobbing in their beds. He missed his family too. He thought of what his father had told him, that he was like a Sioux warrior, fighting for the future of his people.

Visitors from the U.S. government were impressed by Carlisle. They marveled at the girls in long woolen dresses and pulled-back hair working at their sewing machines, at the boys with their military haircuts and neatly pressed trousers sitting obediently in their classes.

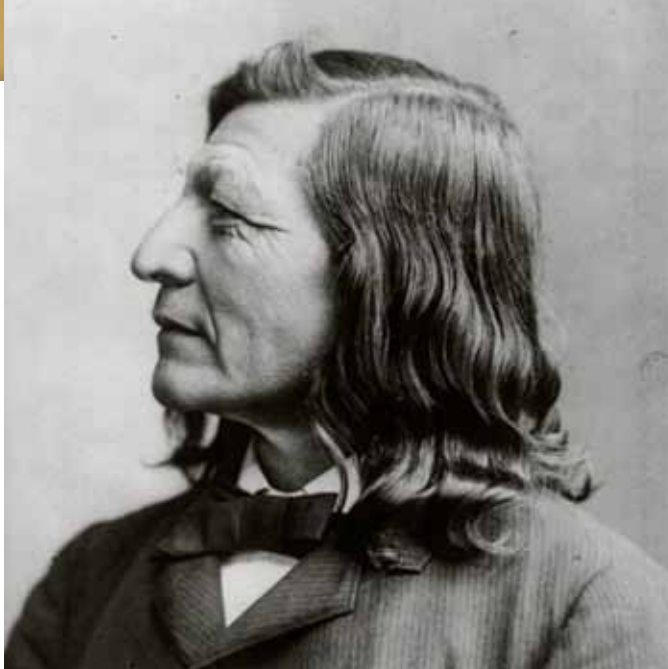
“We have solved the Indian problem!” wrote one government agent after visiting Carlisle. “These children are thriving.”

But were they?

What was it really like for these children—some only 4 or 5 years old—to be sent so far away from their families and their ways of life?

In fact, many children became **profoundly** homesick or rebelled against the strict discipline. Two girls tried to set their dormitory on fire. Others tried to run away.

In the summer of 1880, a group of Sioux chiefs made the four-day train journey to Carlisle. The sight of their boys dressed like American soldiers infuriated some



Luther Standing Bear became an important voice for Native American people. He wrote histories of his people in English that captivated the American public. His work helped change the way the U.S. government treated Native Americans. **How might his experience at Carlisle have prepared him?**

of the chiefs. Pratt managed to calm them, but one, Chief Spotted Tail, decided to take his children with him back to the reservation.

Still, the United States government continued to open other boarding schools. Soon, parents were no longer asked to send their children—they were forced. Those who refused were threatened with arrest. And by the early 1900s, tens of thousands of Native American children were enrolled in these boarding schools.

Carlisle was one of the better ones, with rigorous classes and well-trained teachers. All of the schools enforced rules through harsh disciplinary measures; children were strapped—that is, struck—for not speaking English or for being tardy. Outbreaks of tuberculosis and influenza spread easily in crowded dormitories.

Hundreds died.

## Between Worlds

Over the decades, Native Americans began to demand more rights. They wanted their children closer to home and attending schools that taught them to **cherish** their heritage, not to abandon it. One by one, the boarding schools were shut down. Carlisle closed in 1918.

As for Luther Standing Bear, Carlisle altered his life forever. Like the majority of graduates, he returned

to his reservation, where he no longer felt at home. “I was caught between two worlds,” he wrote.

After working in his father’s business for a time, Luther Standing Bear left to star in a “Wild West” show, performing in front of white audiences as a “savage” Sioux Indian.

Over the years, he would put his Carlisle education to good use, returning to run a school at Pine Ridge Reservation, near where he grew up. He became a well-known writer and a **prominent** voice for the rights of his people.

Captain Pratt never did manage to kill the Indian within Luther Standing Bear. In some ways, you could say, he made that Indian stronger. ●

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# Life on “the Rez”

It's Not What You Think

By Shanice Britton, as told to Jane Bianchi  
Photography by Ramin Rahimian

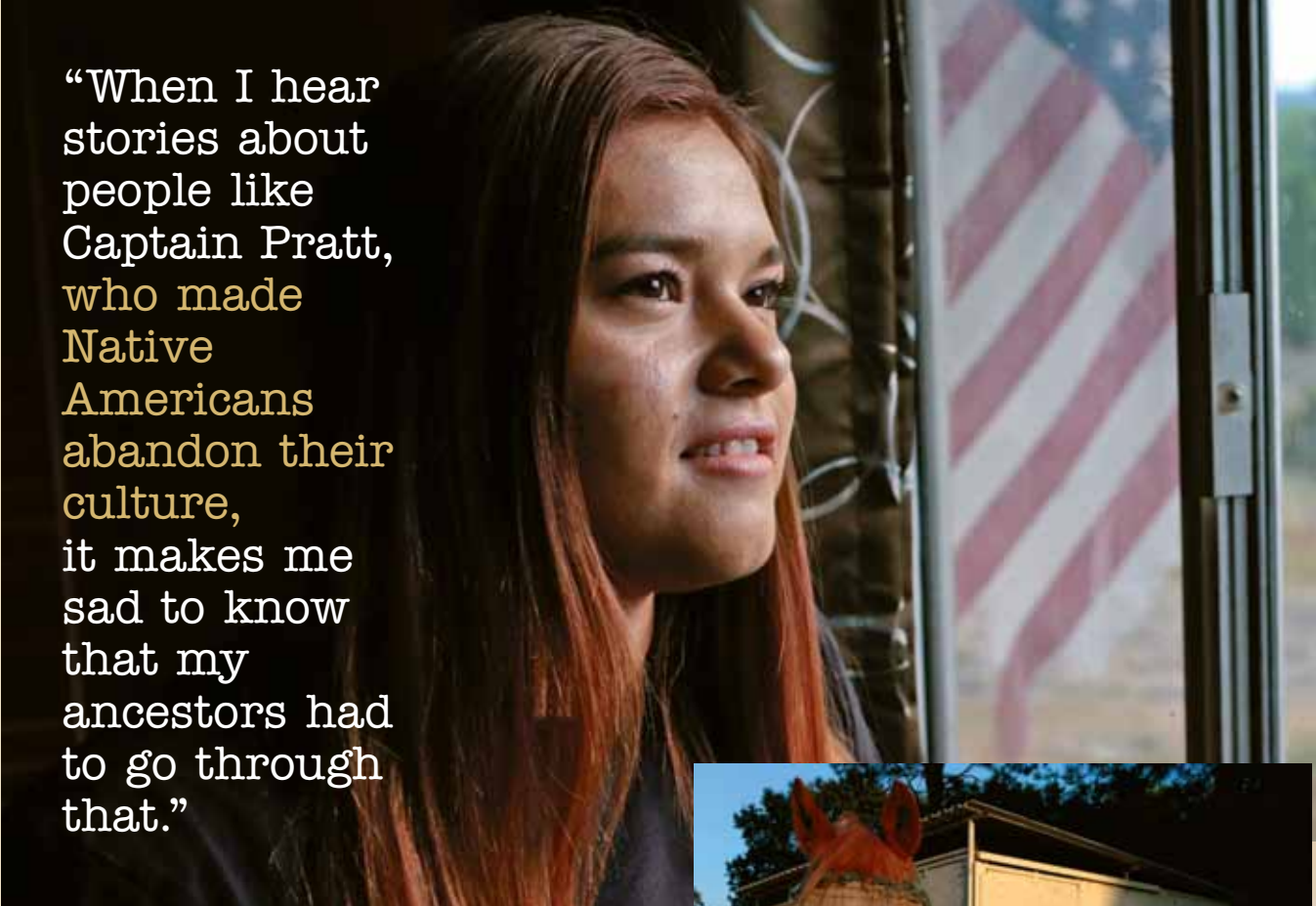
Shanice at home on  
the Round Valley  
Indian Reservation  
in California

Today, 566 Native American tribes and about 5.2 million Native Americans live in the United States. Roughly 30 percent of Native Americans live on reservations—land given to them and protected by the U.S. government. So what's it like to be a kid living on a reservation? Here is one 17-year-old's experience.

**W**hen people find out I am Native American, they have all these ideas about what that means—that I live in a teepee and wear moccasins and a headdress. But those are **misconceptions**.

I grew up on the Round Valley Indian Reservation in Covelo, California, where seven Native American tribes live—including the five that I am part of, Wailaki, Yuki, Pomo, Concow, and Nomalaki. We live in houses with electricity and running water. I take showers, watch *Finding Carter* on MTV, and wear jeans, just like any other teen. There are paved roads and a grocery store, a gas station, and restaurants. It is a small





“When I hear stories about people like Captain Pratt, who made Native Americans abandon their culture, it makes me sad to know that my ancestors had to go through that.”

place that is an hour from the nearest town, so there is a community feel. Everyone knows everyone, and that has always made me feel comfortable. It’s like we are one big family, and we support each other, which is awesome. If there is a basketball game at our high school, everyone comes to watch. If there aren’t enough seats, people stand.

What is special is that my reservation is surrounded by mountains and a river. I live on 5 acres and my family owns 23 animals: 10 chickens, 4 goats, 4 dogs, 3 cats, a guinea pig, and a horse. We eat eggs from the chickens and use manure from the animals to fertilize the soil. We have a vegetable and fruit garden. Living on the reservation has **instilled** in me a love for nature.

I also hunt and fish. It’s a tradition that’s been passed down from generation to generation. When I fish, I “gig” in a dam by standing on a riverbank and poking fish with metal prongs as they swim by. When hunting for deer, my tribes encourage us to keep



two things in mind: Never shoot a doe, because she might be pregnant, and if you hunt a deer, use *all* of the deer. In other words, we’re not wasteful: We eat anything that we kill. In fact, my family loves to make deer-meat stew and deer jerky (which is delicious!).

Another thing that elders in my tribes taught me is how to weave and do beadwork. I make earrings and barrettes that I’ll give to female family members on their birthdays. I even made my brother’s first rattle.

Passing down traditions is important, because if we don’t, those parts of our culture may disappear. For instance, there’s a tribal language that we sometimes use. My aunt spoke it really well, and I wanted her to



teach me, but, sadly, she passed away. So I try to pick up as much as I can when I hear it used during tribal ceremonies.

When I hear stories about people like Captain Pratt, who made Native Americans abandon their culture, it makes me sad to know that my ancestors had to go through that. It must have been so hard. Knowing that scary history makes me feel even more responsibility to preserve the traditions of my tribes.

My tribes have two big ceremonies each year. One is in the spring, Big Time, and another is in the fall, Indian Days. During these events, we invite members of our tribes to sing, dance, and beat drums around a bonfire. Many of the performers wear **regalia**: Women wear long skirts with printed designs and sleeveless tops; men wear white tights, no shirts, and headbands, and put feathers down their backs.

Now that I'm in college at the University of California, Davis, life feels so different. On my reservation, I was surrounded mostly by Natives, and

at college, the Native population is only .07 percent. So a lot of students here don't understand my culture. Some people think that all Native Americans have the same culture, but I explain that each tribe has its own traditions. For instance, dances can be different, ceremonial outfits vary, and certain tribes learn how to hunt particular types of animals (like buffalo or deer) depending on where they live. But teaching my classmates about that stuff doesn't bother me—I'm happy to answer their questions. And it's interesting to learn about their cultures too.

I'm trying new types of food here. I recently had sushi for the first time. I like the kind with rice and cooked salmon. (I did bring some deer jerky to my dorm room, because it's familiar and reminds me of home.) Sometimes my classmates will tell me that I talk differently, because I'll say something in slang "from the rez." But that's OK—it's part of who I am. I'm not trying to hide that. In fact, I often wear my beadwork jewelry proudly around campus.

The biggest thing for me to get used to about college is that it's huge! There were only 25 people in my high school's graduating class; there are thousands in my freshman class at college. It's scary, but it's also exciting to be around people who value education.

I am determined to become a veterinarian, because there is no vet on my reservation. If an animal gets sick, you have to drive an hour to get to a vet. Someday I will open a veterinary clinic on my reservation that will help my reservation prosper. I want to prove to my peers and my three younger siblings (Shayleena, 15; Bodie, 6; and Baine, 8 months) that you can go to college and be successful. ●



From left: Shanice with her horse (the horse's headgear keeps off the flies); with her little brother Baine; and with the tool she uses to "gig."

## WRITING CONTEST

Both Shanice Britton and Luther Standing Bear live in two worlds—the world of their tribe and the world of mainstream America. Write an essay that compares their experiences. Send it to **LUTHER STANDING BEAR CONTEST**. Five winners will get *My Name Is Not Easy* by Debby Dahl Edwardson. See page 2 for details.

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