

For we are the children of darkness...
Richard and Mimi Fariña

I shot out from the darkness into blinding light and the smell of stale cigars on the doctor's breath. Before I could focus, someone smeared stinging drops into my eyes, blurring my vision. It has never cleared, keeping life always a little out of convergence and causing me to rely on other awarenesses to the point that I have to practice using my eyes to see.

I arrived with a full head of black hair, not thick like a horse's mane or tail but baby fine and thin from my Celtic ancestors via Viking invasions. Once in the Americas, they quickly married local daughters, often working their way into power within various indigenous nations but just as often not. Mine come from the later, poor folk, hard-working folk for generations back, on my mother's side Cherokee and Celtic and on my father's liberated Choctaw and Pennsylvania Dutch. I say liberated because my grandmother was descended from a Choctaw previously held in slavery.

For awhile, I drifted safely in either my mother's or my father's arms after he returned from the war. They sustained my security without imprisoning me. Schools, adhering to their primary purpose of kneading children to fit the current social and economic needs of the county, soon shut me down. Teachers attacked me for communicating and sometimes knowing more than they did. Additionally, by age seven I realized that the old days were gone forever, and I could never have what I wanted.

My mother reinforced this realization by cutting off my braids, my link to my ancestors, and perming my hair. For her, the old ways were part of a quaint past—Indians had no place in a modern world. Only my father secretly yearned for what we had lost. He voiced it quietly when we were alone as we traveled rural southeastern Oklahoma and north Texas looking for someone who remembered his Choctaw mother. Unpredictable genetics also conspired against me. I looked in the mirror at my green eyes, freckles, and unimpressive brown hair. In my father's youth, he had thick black hair, brown skin, and hazel eyes. When I knew him, both his hair and skin had grayed, the result of long-term, undetected illness, the result of long-term, unrequited sadness. My mother had and still has dark brown, baby fine hair with translucent blue eyes. Mimicking history, the European genes dominated.

By age eight, I essentially had nothing to live for. My dreams of growing up to be a warrior, to play the games of old, had been dashed by too much reality. I shut myself down and grew increasingly more wooden and ill, my liver damaged from the combination of aspirin and chicken pox, as I moved through the required twelve years, graduating as a member of the National Honor Society. I was good at school. It was a no-brainer. By graduation, I had grown into an awkward and homely teen. I had the figure of a child with breasts. My hair

hung limp in the humidity. My long pointed nose protruded between high cheek bones, separating my angular face. My almond-shaped, green eyes were asymmetrical as was everything else on my body. If my eyes had been crossed, however, I would have borne a remarkable resemblance to Mushulutubbe, one of the three elected chiefs during the time of Removal.

I graduated in 1963. It was the beginning of my awakening but not without groping through increasing darkness and numbness for a many years. These are the stories from those years.

They are not your usual Indian stories. I did not grow up on a reservation with elders who remembered the old ways. I was born into a post-industrial, post-WW II, expansionist, imperialist America. My ancestors never lived on reservations. My roots are older than that. My people learned to survive among an ever-growing immigrant population, marrying into and out of a widening eddy of mixed-bloods with a mixed culture that resembled yet differed from their European-only-descent neighbors.

I was part of the generation who received the experimental educational approach of taking those who were the brightest and teaching them to think, question, analyze, compare, and contrast. The experiment has not been repeated since. More importantly, my parents insured that I could read, and I was given free reign to read whatever I wanted, which I did uncensored.

This was the time before psychology and psychiatry had initiated their education machine, carefully brainwashing wannabe teachers to indoctrinate children into their predetermined economic roles. It was also the time of legislated segregation in the South and segregation by practice in the rest of the country. Just as we as a generation began to awaken, we descended into a disseminated darkness that many and this country have never recovered from.

What I recall from these years were the people. They shaped me. I hope these portraits do them justice.