

CREEBOY



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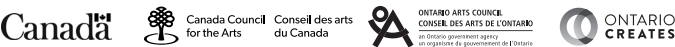
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*To Joseph (Joe) Oiumet, Bev Marshall (formally Thompson), and Dr. Leroy
Little Bear for helping me find myself.*



CHAPTER ONE

ALL MY RELATIONS

“For crap’s sake, quit yelling at me!” Why won’t Mom get off my case?

What good is all that school crap about conflict resolution if you don’t know how to fight? The times we practised it in class. All the time! Every year! PATHS (Planning Alternative Thinking Strategies), from kindergarten on up. What the hell is it good for when you got a mom and dad who don’t know any of the rules? Who don’t know how to get along? Who spend more time yelling and crapping all over each other than trying to solve things? It’s been almost a year since dad left us, and almost two weeks since he’s been in jail. Mom and Dad are still fighting. Yeah, great role models,

my mom and dad. Now it's being passed on. Another epic fight with Mom.

"Take it or leave it, Josh," Mom said.

What did she say?

"You didn't listen to a word I said, did you?" Mom said.

Here we go again!

I stood against the kitchen counter. My bowl below my chin. Shoveling in cereal as fast as I could. I wanted to throw the bowl at her and get out of there. My sister Jade glared at me from the breakfast table. A look that said, *shut the hell up!*

Jade. I could feel her glare through her purple lens glasses. Dark brown hair that flows like the mane of a wild horse. Tall. Shoulders straight. Stoic. Her walk is like a big, flashing neon sign with words shouting FOLLOW ME. Her friends do! She could be in the worse of moods and no one would even know it. But I know. Beware! She can flare up like a flash fire when stoked.

I wondered how my younger siblings took in all this. I watched them, trying to tune out Mom's nagging. Nag. Nag! NAG! The kids sat like shrunken dolls beside each other on one side of the kitchen table, each one of them with a bowl of Lucky Charms floating in chocolate milk. Lily just turned nine last June, and Amber and Adam were seven. Lily used her spoon to fish out all the marshmallow shapes, line them up in rows of matching colours and then eat them. All three

kids drooped low over their bowls, as if that saved them from hearing the argument between Mom and me. I dropped my bowl in the sink and grabbed a granola bar from the cupboard.

“Jade?” I heard Lily whisper. “I don’t want to go to school on Monday.”

“You don’t have to if you don’t want to,” Jade said.

“Great advice, Sis. Passing on the Queen of Skipping crown?”

Jade gave me that *shut up* look again. She’s cranky in the mornings.

Mom yapped on. Didn’t she notice we weren’t listening?

Lily straightened. “Can I stay home forever?”

Jade swished cereal around with her spoon and asked, “How come, baby girl?”

We all called Lily and Amber *baby girl*.

“They’re bullying me again.”

We learn about anti-bullying in every grade, but nothing ever seemed to change.

“That sucks.” I went to her and rubbed her head and said, “Stay home then.”

Meanwhile, Mom rattled on. “When your dad left us —”

“He left *you*,” I snarled at her and swept an arm to show my siblings. “He didn’t leave *us*.”

“We’re his family first.” Mom got up from sitting across from the kids, leaving her cup of coffee, and wandered into the living room like a lost fawn. “He’ll come around. He’s just got to.”

From where I stood, I could see her slumped onto the edge of the couch.

She sobbed. “Now your dad’s in jail. Our entire lives turned upside down.”

Jade jabbed her spoon into her cereal bowl. It clanked against the bottom so hard I thought the bowl cracked.

I called to Mom, “*Yours* is turned upside down. I’m standing straight up.”

Mom came back in a rush. Her hands wrung the bottom of the same baggy, grey t-shirt that she’d been wearing since we first heard what happened to Dad.

“Josh, you got to quit the gang,” she said.

Jade nodded.

I didn’t look at her as I shoved the last bite of my granola bar into my mouth. “Don’t tell me what to do.” Little bits of granola spit out. No way I’ll give her the comfort of knowing I haven’t been *jumped in* yet. It’s the only way I can hang out with Dad and my older bro. With Dad being the leader of the Warriors, I’m sure to get in.

Mom stopped, as if listening intently, as if unsure what to say. And then she said, “You got to go back to school.”

“The class of 2003 will just have to graduate without me.” I turned away from her. “Get off my case about school. I have a powwow to get ready for.”

I opened the cupboard door under the sink. A stench assaulted my nose. The garbage overflowed with folded food boxes, crumpled plastic bags and clammy coffee grounds. It’s my assigned chore to take out the garbage, but I didn’t care. She could do it herself. I tossed the wrapper at its heaping top. It missed, fluttering towards the floor as I slammed the door shut.

The kids jumped at the bang. Mom and Jade looked at me. The slam did nothing to shut Mom up.

Mom’s wide-eyed stare changed; softened, like she was going to bawl. She took an unsure step, like she wanted to walk up and wrap her arms around me. Did I really want a hug from Mom? Where was she going with this?

Mom said, “You get top grades. You’re too smart to drop out. You already missed the first two weeks of school, and you’re going.”

I looked at the clock: 8:15. “And today is the last powwow of the summer. Kids, get your regalia on.”

Mom gave a sideways glance at my sibs, as if she just realized they were watching her. She pressed her lips together, and then she looked back at me. “Josh. Please. The gang life taking

over our community is bad. I don't want you to turn into your dad, or to turn into your older brother, Darion."

"Razor!" I glared at her. That's Darion's gang name. He got it because of an old-fashioned knife he found at the pawn shop down on the highway back when peach fuzz started to sprout from his chin. It had an antique folding blade for shaving. Unfolded, the blade was the length of his hand. He still carried that knife today.

"Like a cool, clean shave." Jade joked with the kids, trying to lighten the mood.

Mom's forehead wrinkled and her head tilted to one side. "Now we got to save you from this gang life you're trying to lead."

For crap's sake! I headed out of the kitchen. "I don't need no saving. And I'm not *trying* to lead a gang life. I'm a Warrior now."

Before I turned down the hall, I could see from a side glance that Mom straightened and took a deep breath before saying, "You go back to that gang and I'm calling the cops."

I stopped. I could feel my nails digging into my palms as my hands clenched into fists. I turned to face her. "Go ahead! Call the cops on me like you did Dad? How many times you do that? Huh? How many times you call the cops on Dad? For what? Cause he yelled at you? Because he's a leader of a gang? Cause he's trying to be a man and you won't let him."

“Being in a gang isn’t being a man.” Mom almost raised her voice that time.

“It’s because of you that he left for someone else,” I said.

Lily cried, “Daddy doesn’t love us?”

“Sure he does, baby girl. Just in his own way.” Jade tried to comfort her while giving me the *look what you’ve done* look.

Yeah, I know. Now I’ve opened more reasons for Mom not to shut up.

Mom recoiled like a snake jumped out at her. “You know I had to.”

“You don’t support him as a gang leader. Never. Not once. He’s doing it to protect us. To protect our community of Pâ-ko-sey-i-mo-min from other gangs. To make money on a reserve that has no real jobs. He’s got a plan. We could have all been rich by now if only you support him. But that’s all screwed up cause now he’s in jail!”

Over her shoulder, Adam reached for the chocolate milk container and I watched it spill. Jade sprang forward and put it back upright, and then she hurried to get a rag out of the sink. Adam slumped in his chair, hugging his knees under his chin and rocking back and forth with his face all screwed up, ready to cry.

“It’s alright, Adam,” Jade said as she wiped up the table. “You don’t have to cry over spilled milk.”

Mom stood with her hands up and gestured to make her point. “His plan to get rich was by stealing and selling drugs to kids.”

I wanted to throw something at her. “You don’t know nothing. You’re just a stupid woman who knows nothing.”

My chest tightened. Hola! What was I doing? I could feel my sibs unmoving, watching Mom.

Jade stood and said to the kids, “Let’s go get ready for powwow.”

Chair legs scraped on the floor as the kids hopped off and hurried to their rooms with Jade following. She glared with fire in her eyes while passing me. She brought up her hand. I flinched, thinking she was going to slap me or something. Instead, she stopped, put her hand on my shoulder, and whispered, “Go easy on her.” Then she followed the kids up the stairs to their bedrooms.

Mom’s voice filled with tension. “You want to end up like your dad? Always angry? Violent? In jail? Remember what our Elder, Clayton said, ‘To be a true warrior, you must be a role model of the seven sacred teachings: courage, honesty, humility, truth, love, wisdom, and respect. Follow your Indigenous ways, speak your Cree language. Being in a gang isn’t being a warrior.’ Clayton is the most respected Elder on our reserve. Listen to him.”

I hit my fist against my chest. “You know I do, but I am also a Warrior.”

“Look where it got your dad. And Darion. I don’t —” Mom sobbed into her hands for a second then looked back at me with wet eyes. “Please. Please Josh.”

I stood as straight as I could. “My name’s Creeboy.” Everyone called me Creeboy because I like practising my Indigenous traditions so much.

Mom took a step towards me. She pleaded, “My boy. My son. Please stop hanging out with those criminals. Stick with your family.”

I moved towards Mom so fast that she shuffled backwards in fear of getting run over. “My homies are more my family than you’ll ever be.”

“Enough!” Jade yelled at me. She stood over me on the stairs.

I yanked open the basement door.

I heard Jade saying, “Leave him alone, Mom.”

Like she didn’t even hear her, Mom hurried after me as I stomped down the steps to the basement. She stood at the door and said, “Getting beat up? Coming home covered in blood? Always fighting? That’s not what good families do.”

She was talking about my fading black eye and cuts that I came home with after a brawl with the Rebels gang.

I jumped off the last two steps and turned to look up at her. “Are you sure?” I said. “Just like you and Dad? Just like this good family?”

Mom slammed the door. I called Razor.

“Come on. Pick up,” I said as I paced the grey, concrete floor. I could feel its coolness wrapping around me. I punched the blue plastic tarps hanging from cords where my bed hid behind it. The rest of the basement was the washer and dryer, furnace and a bunch of stacked old boxes that hadn’t been opened in years.

While the phone rang, I grabbed the suit bag that lay across my unmade bed.

“What?” Razor’s voice came over the phone all groggy like I woke him up.

Hugging the bulging suit bag to my chest, yet careful not to crush my Fancy Dance regalia inside, I climbed the stairs while talking to him. “Mom’s in one of her friggin’ moods. We’re going to be late for Grand Entry. Can you pick me up?”

“Yeah,” Razor mumbled.

“I’m gonna start walking. Meet you on the road.” I opened the basement door, expecting to see Mom waiting on the other side. She wasn’t.

Going down the hall, I found Mom pacing the living room. Last January, she painted it a greyish blue. A long sagging

couch took up most of a wall. A TV stood in front of the boarded-up window. Dad nailed it there to keep drive-by shooters from breaking it. The room stayed dark like night, even with a light on. Yep. That's what our Indigenous community of Pâ-ko-sey-i-mo-min has become. A haven for gangs. Being on a main highway between Edmonton and Calgary made it a hub for trafficking. Dad had joined the gang four years ago and got Darion and me into it because there's hardly any jobs on our reserve. Dad says we'll make more money trafficking guns and drugs than any stupid job.

As soon as Mom saw me, she came at me while wagging her finger as if scolding a little kid. "Your dad's a self-absorbed jackass."

I didn't look at her. I couldn't get out of there fast enough! "Don't put him down. He's a leader."

"I don't want you ending up like him. Do you understand?"

"For crap's sake! All this friggin' drama! I don't need it today!"

Jade yelled from upstairs, "Hola, this is going to go on forever! We need to stop this."

"Where you going?" Mom demanded to know.

The bright morning sun made me squint as I pulled open the front door. "Powwow!"

She followed me. "I want to save you from a life of crime. From going to jail like your dad."

“Like you’re trying to save Dad? I don’t need your saving.”
I walked to the road.

Square houses with no fences lined up on each side of it. Sheets of plywood boarded up the windows to keep trigger-happy drive-by shooters from shooting them out. Just like our house.

I heard Jade call from behind Mom. “Way to go, Mom. All your arguing’s got Adam crying.”

Mom went back inside. I didn’t look back.

Jade repeated herself, “Mom. We got to get to the powwow. Remember?”

Mom called after me, “I am your mom. I am responsible for you.”

I spoke louder, “I’m sixteen. I can take care of myself.”

Her voice rose with each step I took to get away from her. “People just can’t go around doing whatever they want. Being in a gang? That’s not what I want our family to be about.”

I turned and walked backwards. “Well, when you know what being a family is really about, give me a call.” Still hugging the bag, I turned and rushed down the road.

Jade said, “Mom! Powwow!”

I heard the booming bass of gangster rap from way down the road. A black ’84 Ford Zephyr appeared at the corner. The rez rocket, Razor’s car that he inherited from Dad, screeched

to a halt in front of me. Razor smiled at me from behind black sunglasses. Black braids hung from each side of his face.

I hurried in and slammed the door. "Go. Go!"

Razor waved to Jade and pushed on the gas. The car sounding like a rocket taking off.