

THE VOICES OF INDIAN PEAK

Amy watched McKenzie's joyful burst at blowing out the big number seven candle on her birthday cake. She prayed this symbolic event heralded the end of last year's adjustments for her child. At age six, Kenzie started first grade with enthusiasm. She eagerly participated in the annual school sponsored eye examinations without concern. A flutter of worry sparked in Amy's mind when Kenzie was assigned for a repeat exam with a regional Ophthalmologist. The school results were confirmed. Kenzie had minimal and limited vision in one eye. The second was fine but had been compensating for the problem since infancy.

The past year included X-Rays, Scans, blood work, trips to University Eye specialists and more. Amy had often wondered what these evaluations were doing to Kenzie's self- image. That worry was recently dispelled when she and Terry, her husband, were at breakfast, reading the last report from the doctor. Impish McKenzie walked into the kitchen wearing pajamas and a night-scattered hairdo.

"What's that?" Kenzie asked.

"It's the doctor's report from your last test." Terry answered with a smile.

"What does it say, Daddy?"

"It says that you don't have to have any more tests!" Amy spoke with a tone of cheer in her voice. "And it also says that you won't need glasses, either, since your eye has stopped changing and it will stay like it is forever."

"Is that OK with you?" Terry asked his youngest daughter as he lifted her into his arms for a deep hug.

"Dad!" Kenzie replied with pretended disgust. "I never knew my eyes were different before so, to me, I see the same as I always did. Don't feel bad! It's OK! I'm glad that all those tests are done. I can be myself again."

Taylor, the eldest daughter, age twelve, stepped into the kitchen holding her cell phone.

"I just talked to Jessica and aunt Jen says its fine with her if Kenzie has a pool party at her house for her Birthday."

"Yahoo!" Kenzie's shout made everyone laugh. Life was finally bringing joy to her child, Amy mused with relief.

A week later, a bright June day warmed the pool on Indian Peak Road in anticipation of a day of pleasure for the Birthday girl and her cousins. Jenny, Amy's sister, and parent to Jessica, aged eleven and Shelby, aged seven, was busy carrying punch to a picnic table decorated with hand crafted designs particular to Kenzie's favorite characters from children's stories. Jenny was a gifted Scrap-Booker as well as Origami Artist who took joy in pleasing her niece.

It was a party of cousins. Taylor, Amy's oldest daughter sat on the left side of the table. Next to her sat Jessica. On the right side sat Shelby, seven, next to Ashleigh, six. She was Uncle Carl's daughter. Brandon, seven, Uncle Joshua's son, sat at the far end of the table.

The adults at the party included Great Grandma Muriel, matriarch of the family, parent to Grandma Maureen,(parent to Amy and Jenny), and Grandma Janet,(parent to Joshua, Carl and another son, Brian). Uncle Jim, brother to Maureen and Janet was not able to share the day with the family since he was busy working as a chef at an area restaurant. A new baby, Savannah, was cradled in Janet's arms. She was the child of her son, Brian and his wife, who were also at work for the day.

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With the cake celebrated and consumed, punch finished and gifts opened, Kenzie, who was thrilled with everything, demonstrated her gratitude by embracing each gift giver with kisses and hugs.

"I'm going swimming!" She announced, at last. "Let's go!"

The children ran into the house to change. Seconds later they were all in the water, diving, splashing, tubing and playing water basketball.

A short time after three o'clock, a rare cloud covered the sun. The air cooled and the children escaped from the pool to seek the cover of towels for warmth.

"Can we get changed and go for a nature walk? I'd like to find some quartz stones," asked Brandon. At seven, he was already intrigued by the woods and crystals.

"Only if everybody goes together and the older girls are in charge of all of you."

Jenny, as hostess, felt she had to set guidelines for the venture. She knew Indian Peak Road, the traffic, its boundaries and limits. Every child before her had participated in family nature walks in the neighborhood one time or another. Minor traffic on the country road was infrequent and came from local residents, a small repair business on the street and the Bed and Breakfast Inn run by the Robinson family. The Inn sat on a high ridge that took advantage of a broad view that spanned the valley below and route 140 that led to Yosemite National Park. The scenery of rolling hills from the ridge was close to spectacular.

"You will stay together, walk on the road and will not walk into the bushes where you can't be seen. You must listen to Taylor and Jessica. Taylor will call on her cell phone if

there's a problem of any kind. Hear me? You may walk as far as Robinson's and turn back but you cannot enter their driveway or climb the ridge. Remember, I can see you from the hill behind the house. Now, everyone who is going, say, I will obey the rules!"

They shouted in unison. "I will obey the rules!"

"OK!" Jenny saluted them like the scout leader that she was. She turned to the adults and added with a laugh, "A few nasty bug bites will bring them home in a hurry!" They nodded in agreement and watched in amusement.

The children changed into their summer casual clothing, banded together, waved at the adults and left with the military air of a troupe. In the meantime, the adults smiled at their antics. The great adventure would take them a short distance, within earshot, to a visible area from the house, yet it offered the children a sense of independence and discovery that each would treasure.

Brandon was overjoyed to find a glistening piece of quartz, probably left, he decided, from the Gold Rush days in the hills of Mariposa California. Ashleigh collected shiny leaves. Others were excited with the flutter of a bird, escaping the bushes as they arrived, or the rustle of a small animal in the pine forest floor at their feet. Shelby was excited when a butterfly rested on her finger for a second.

"Look!" Kenzie called out. "There's a lady over there. Do you hear her calling somebody?"

"Where?" Jessie asked. "Where are you looking?"

Kenzie pointed to an area behind a large pine log that lay on the side of the road. Wild Manzanita bushes clustered behind the log in such thickness that there was no apparent room for anyone to stand.

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"Kenzie! There's nobody there!" Taylor insisted. "Are you seeing things? I don't hear anybody calling anyone!"

" Maybe it's a ghost!" Ashleigh giggled as the idea popped out of her mouth.

Shelby put her hand over her own mouth and giggled with her, adding,

"Or maybe a witch!"

Brandon put his hands on his hips and said, " You're imagining things, Kenzie! Now get over it!"

McKenzie boldly walked to the spot she had signaled and said, " Let me stand here a minute and stop your teasing. I want to hear what she's saying to me."

Taylor became more concerned by the minute, yet, she could clearly see no one there. Kenzie was not in danger and seemed to be happy. She decided that her sister must have had too much sun. She remembered that Amy was forever telling Kenzie to wear a summer hat at the beach and by the pool. This must be an example of what happens, she considered, so she stood back and waited for it to end.

She could see Kenzie nodding her head. Her lips seemed to move silently. Kenzie turned to see their mesmerized looks at her actions and said, " Don't you hear the little girl calling her mother? They're looking for each other!" None of them responded to her question. Suddenly, McKenzie raised her arm, pointed to the Robinson's ridge and said,

"There she is!"

Seconds later, the Manzanita bushes rustled and parted. What appeared to be a female Mountain Lion leapt from the leaves and up into the hills. Taylor screamed.

"It's a mountain lion! Hurry Kenzie! Run with me! Run everybody! She moved forward with Jessica. They grabbed Kenzie by her arms and carried her away with them.

"Let me go!" Kenzie shouted as she wrestled herself from their grip. "It wasn't a Lion, it was the lady running to find her little girl that was lost."

"Home! Everybody!" Jessica demanded. "I've had enough of this. You can tell the adults about it, Kenzie. Maybe they'll believe you. I think you need some macaroni and cheese supper to clear your head!"

Kenzie ran ahead of the crowd. She wanted to be the first to tell her story to the adults. She was convinced she saw and heard the lady and her daughter. Actually she felt quite happy that she was able to help them find each other.

"Mom!" McKenzie called from the driveway entrance. "Wait till you hear what happened!"

Taylor, arriving immediately behind her, said. "She's had too much sun today!"

The rest of the children nodded and laughed in agreement.

Amy looked at the anger in her child's face and decided to appease it. "Tell me what happened?" She asked with a positive lilt in her voice.

"OK everybody!" Kenzie turned and called to the children. "Be quiet! I want to tell this to Mom myself!"

"You can tell me sweetheart." Amy's glare to her audience made it clear that Kenzie had the floor as long as she needed it.

"I heard a lady calling. Then I saw her standing at the side of the road near the bushes. I asked her who she was calling. She said she was looking for her little girl who was lost, moons ago, she

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said. I asked her how come she lost her. She said that they were on the peak collecting acorns and pine nuts when some soldiers came. She hid the little girl behind a big stone and covered her with leaves. Then the soldiers came and did bad things to the lady. She said it was time for her to go to the spirits but she could not go until she found her little girl. I told her that the little girl was calling her too and that she was standing up on the ridge searching for her.

She told me that I was the first traveler who could see and hear her child. She said that was because I had a bright light in my head that helped me to see many things. When I was near your heart, the spirits had to close some of the light from the outside so that it would always shine brighter inside. One day, she said, I will be able to see and hear what others can't inside people's hearts and help them to find their way home. Isn't that nice?"

"Did the lady say her name?" Amy had to know the identity of the messenger to her child. She believed every word of Kenzie's experience.

"She said her name was She who heals the sick. Her little girl was called She who loves berries. Isn't that a fun name? She said they were from the Awhanachee people. We learned about them in school."

"Did you see them when they found each other?"

"No, but I saw two big birds in the sky when the sun came out. Do you think that the birds were their spirits?"

"Could be!" Amy agreed. "How wonderful it is to learn what a special girl you are!"

Amy planted a fat kiss on her child's cheek.

Minutes later, the children were, again, enjoying the pool while macaroni and cheese simmered in the oven. The adults were overwhelmed with Kenzie's story. Maureen asked Jenny for a pad of paper so the story could be journaled for the Family History book.

Amy looked at her mother, Maureen, and said, "I think my husband's Native American spirits spoke to my child today and through her, they told us not to be concerned. Kenzie has a destiny that will surprise us all."

"I totally agree!" Maureen replied."

Great Grandma Muriel added, "Who would believe that Kenzie's greatest birthday gift would come from spirit voices on Indian Peak Road?"

"It's a gift of wisdom to all of us." Janet offered.

"Sure is!" Jenny confirmed.