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Reconstructing Lives

A British scholar enlists college and community members to connect the strands of an Indian School student's complex past.

By Sherri Kimmel

She was a Lipan Apache, daughter of a tribal leader, living on the border of Mexico and Texas. In 1877, at age 10, her band was almost wiped out by U.S. soldiers. The uprooted girl and her younger brother, now prisoners of war, eventually were sent to the Carlisle Industrial Indian School, where more than 12,000 Indians from all over the United States would be enrolled between 1879 and 1918, for assimilation into the white world.

A few—like Montreville Yuda, father of George Yuda '47 (see Page 33)—settled in non-native

communities. But Kesetta, as the Apache girl became known, spent most of her ill-starred life in and out of the school, which trained her to be a domestic. In fact, she was the longest-enrolled student.



Susan Rose '77 (right) with Barbara Landis (left), Jackie Fear-Segal and dog Tico.

Kesetta's is one of the most "extreme and brutal Carlisle Indian School stories," according to Jacqueline Fear-Segal, author of a new, much-hailed book, *White Man's Club: Schools, Race, and the Struggle of Indian Acculturation*. Fear-Segal, an American-studies professor at the University of East Anglia, spent the 2000 academic year at Dickinson on a faculty exchange laying groundwork for her book. She was back this past academic year as a Community Studies fellow doing preliminary work for her next book, which will examine the photographic records of the Indian School and explore what those photos mean to descendants of the students.

The power and impact of photos became clear to Fear-Segal as she worked on that first book. Compelling images of Kesetta and son Richard, who was fathered but unacknowledged by a white man, add to the poignancy of *White Man's Club*.

One reviewer remarked after seeing a photo of Richard: "Standing barely visible and unnoticed on the bandstand in a photographic image of the Carlisle parade ground on page 272 is a little uniformed young man maybe four or five years of age. The author, utilizing student and family records, reveals the identity of this student, and she constructs a history of his family and their importance to the school that otherwise would have been lost in the multigenerational ruptures that were produced by attendance in off-reservation boarding schools."

Essential players in the reuniting of Kesetta's and Richard's stories were Susan Rose '77, director of the Community Studies Center and professor of sociology, and Barbara Landis, Cumberland County Historical Society's Indian School biographer. As Rose says, the three were all a part of solving "the historical detective story" of the Indian mother and the son who never knew his origins. Rose's connection, perhaps, is the most tangible of the three women's. She bought her 22-acre property from the estate of Richard, whose surname Kaseeta, was a variation of his unknown mother's first name.

When his mother died in her late 30s in Lahaska, north of Philadelphia, Kesetta left behind Richard, 3. He was moved to the Indian School, where he was dubbed "the Carlisle baby." Taken in by a wealthy local family, he lived in Carlisle until his death in 1970 and was known as one of the two "Carlisle Indians," the other being the aforementioned Montreville Yuda. Richard managed then inherited the beautiful property along the Conodoguinet Creek, which had been the thriving Bellaire pleasure park in the early 1900s.

Rose often visited with Richard's widow, Helen, before purchasing the remains of Bellaire Park, and has had many chats with Helen's niece, Tess Eichelberger, who was raised by the Kaseetas. From Tess she obtained photos of Richard as a youngster, which have proved helpful to Fear-Segal. And it was Tess, hoping to help Fear-Segal piece her uncle's story together, who drove to Lahaska to find Kesetta's

grave.

Landis, who worked with Fear-Segal during her first stint at Dickinson, helped the British scholar make some early linkages between Kesetta and Richard, particularly through Genevieve Bell's early-1990s dissertation.

"Jackie was able to dig into that research and came up with family connections to this particular Lipan Apache," Landis says. "All roads led to this story. It's really amazing. Librarians call it serendipity."

Fear-Segal's puzzling together of the pieces of Kesetta's life eventually led her to Kesetta's great-great nephew, a Lipan Apache in Texas. He was overjoyed when he and Fear-Segal connected, for the tribe had never forgotten the children who had been stolen in that 1877 attack. Every August the family has a secret ceremony to honor the memory of the lost ones.

"I was happy to be able to bring the whole story together and make connections with Kesetta's people," says Fear-Segal. She invited Kesetta's nephew and a ceremonial elder to Pennsylvania this spring "to bring resolution to the story." Apache ceremonies at the graves of Kesetta and her brother Jack, who is buried in the Indian School cemetery, were planned along with a reading of Fear-Segal's book chapters about Kesetta and her family. But the Lipan elder fell ill before making the journey. Fear-Segal still hopes to complete the circle. "I would really like the healing to occur" for the fractured family and community.

Fear-Segal, who will return to her home in Norwich, England, later this summer, is hoping to forge further connections between Dickinson/Carlisle and the descendants of Indian School students. She would like to see Dickinson students travel to Indian reservations to do work in American studies and the grandchildren of Indian School students to "come to Carlisle and work on their family histories. Carlisle was the central institution for Indian re-education. It's a very key place for Indian people from all nations."

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