

## "GOD'S TEARDROP"

On a warm winter afternoon, along a trail high in the Sierra Madre Mountain range, in the Mexican State of Oaxaca, a gift from the almighty was left for a favored soul to find.

It was on an immense defensive wall of natural cut stone, which rose quite majestically beneath the canopy of billowy white clouds hanging low against an azure December sky, which overlooked a deep green valley.

Amid this breathtakingly beautiful landscape there walked a weathered old man on that steep rampart. His common Spanish name was Pedro Chavez, but he much preferred his Myan Indian name of Ten Thunders. The Mazatecs are the direct, modern-day descendants of the ancient Aztecs.

At 91 yrs old, Ten Thunders was bent in his posture and haggard in appearance. Yet his body possessed a stamina that made him as strong, agile and chipper as any man less than half his age. His good health and long life were the result of his simple tradition-bound lifestyle, for this mountainous region of north-western Oaxaca was a land that modern civilization and technology had hardly impacted.

So, even though it was 1990, this elderly Mazatec still dressed in a style that was much like the traditional garb of his ancestors. For he had on a pancho, and wore hand-sown garments made of animal skins.

Silky, snow white hair fell past his rounded shoulders, making a striking contrast with his wrinkled and leathery brown face and skin. His coal black eyes had bags under them, and seemed to be dull and lacking in luster. But they were still very sharp sighted for a man of such advanced years, and they permitted him to see over great distances, or to keenly examine things close up, without the need for glasses.

A bright red band was wound several times around this old indian's forehead. The back of it bore several long eagle feathers, as was the custom of many Native Americans. These feathers were believed to give an Indian man courage and strength, and were thought to bring good fortune and success in hunting to all braves who adorned their heads with them.

So isolated was this region of Mexico, that Ten Thunders had spent all of his 91 yrs. up in the Sierra Madres, hunting, fishing, gathering and farming. For he had never known any other way of life than that of the Mazatec people. Now in this day and age, such extreme life-long isolation, outdoor customs and perhaps, especially.... Such primitive clothing as that had always been part of Ten Thunders day-to-day manner of living, might well seem ridiculously anachronistic.

But, in this odd corner of the world, such rustic backwardness was more than understandable because up in this craggy mountainous terrain of this region of Sierra Madres, the land was

quite inaccessible. There were no highways or even roads which anything but a horse or a cart pulled by some beast of burden could pass through great difficulty. Ten Thunders knew every trail in these mountains like the back of his hand but, sometimes, the old man still found surprises in his travels along these dusty pathways.

On this particular day, the old Indian stopped and bent to collect a large piece of black glass. Immediately, he recognized what kind it was: Obsidian! A thick silver of it. You didn't have to be a geologist to know the origin of obsidian. When the molten interior of the earth throws up fiery red-hot lava into the frigid blue sky, it cools quickly and becomes a shiny black volcanic glass stone like this one. Indians know that if the edges are finely honed, no knife is sharper than one made from this material.

Mazatec legend, which goes back to the time of the ancient Aztecs-has it that the black gleaming color of obsidian lava stone are like the sea: "Transparent, yet dark and bottomless," so their beauty cannot be rendered on paper or on canvas. For this reason, they are considered to be Holy. A symbol of the Almighty. A sign of the reality of God, and the presence of The Great Spirit among human beings.

Ten Thunders turned the spalled flake over in the palm of one hand, poking and spinning it around with the fingers of his other hand. He tested the edge with his thumb and held it up to the sun, admiring its translucent, dark loveliness.

How a stone of this sort had gotten here was a total mystery to this wise old Indian. He thought he knew these mountain passes well, but finding something like this was quite baffling. Most certainly, there had been no active volcanoes in the Sierra Madres for tens of millions of years. "Could this flake of obsidian have actually been here that long?" Ten Thunders wondered.... "No, never!" The very idea was totally absurd. But, that left unanswered the whole question of how it had gotten here

These mountain trails were many, many centuries old, and at one time nearly a hundred years ago, traders and prospectors had traversed them, carrying red coral, abalone shells, topaz and turquoise, as well as mined silver, panned gold dust and other treasures. They'd transported them on packed mules, horse-drawn carts and coaches of various sizes, up and down this range for generations.

It was entirely possible that this particular stone had dropped from some over-loaded wagon or beast of burden while rounding the corners of this treacherous trail long ago, and that only now after nearly a century or more-as if by fate-had anyone bothered to pick it up. This was a fanciful idea, but one the old Indian briefly entertained. "Who knew," Ten Thunders mused, "someone might have dropped this in the time when my grandfather was alive or in the year of my birth."





Still, this elderly Mazatec man trekked across the trails of these mountain passes on an almost daily basis, with his watchful eyes frequently combing the terrain before him. This simply didn't seem possible that he would miss such a glorious semi-precious gem in the rough as this one. Perhaps, one of the many religious pilgrims on their way to pay homage to Our Lady of Guadeloupe had dropped it here just yesterday, or possibly only hours ago.

Since he'd encountered scores of pious men and women on these trails many times in the past, he knew they often bore gifts for the Blessed Virgin, from flowers to coins, to precious jewels, and other fine gifts, which they hoped, by bestowing upon her, she would answer their prayers. Could one of these pilgrims have carelessly left this fine piece of obsidian behind? Anything was possible, but not everything was probable.

At the exquisite beauty of this shiny black flake glittered in his hand like sunshine set in midnight darkness, the elderly man pondered what his spiritual obligations to the earth-his Mother-might be regarding this stone. Was he meant to have it as a gift from God? Or, would taking it anger fate?

As winter clouds gathered and encroached on the sun, the brilliant shard of volcanic glass lost a bit of its luster. "Was this a sign?" the old man wondered. Among his people the land must always be respected. Because every stone, every blade of grass, tree and flower was a sacred trust. Ten Thunders hesitated as he stood there holding that lovely piece of obsidian flake. He was unsure of what he ought to do with it. Should he give this wonderful stone back to the trail? Or should he pocket it, and give it as a gift to his 8yr old great granddaughter who he was now traveling to see?

He knew that if he gave it to her, that the sweet, good natured little girl would cherish it forever as a gift of love from him forever. But, was that what fate had intended for a mysterious stone such as this? A stone which might well possess magical powers as yet unknown?

Were he not 91 yrs old, and never sure when he closed his eyes to sleep at night if he'd ever awake the next morning.. Were he not always worried each time he saw his children, grandchildren and great-grandchildren, that this might be his last visit to them, he would have instantly put it back where he found it....

...leaving some other fool to sin against the land by taking this treasure w/o Mother Nature's blessings. But, at this age, Ten Thunders knew he couldn't do that. This stone was obviously a gift from Heaven, meant to bless him and his posterity. The old man was certain of this as he clutched the great sliver of obsidian to his chest. Ten Thunders kept the stone and continued on his way. All the while thanking God in the silences of his soul for this truly magnificent gift..





To her utter dismay, Maria encountered a huge number of Americans who expressed nothing but hatred and contempt for illegal aliens and for Mexicans in general. Sometimes that hatred actually seemed to be directed towards her. Even though Doctor Maria Chavez was a documented immigrant who had every right to be in the U.S.A.;, white U.S. citizens with intolerant attitudes towards dark-skinned Spanish speaking people like herself, disturbed and sickened her. Their constant talk of border walls and mass deportations turned her stomach. One morning, Maria awoke in tears from a bad dream. In her nightmare, she was living in a lap of luxury and enjoying a fine gourmet dinner. Meanwhile, through a high chainlinked fence, Maria could see her family and Mazatec kin.

They were starving, hurting, and living in abject squalor; wracked with guilt for having abandoned her people...broken in heart and spirit...disgusted and repulsed by the xenophobic bigotry she heard and saw eachday...

The brilliant immigrant physician decided to give up her residency as a surgeon and general practitioner at Houston General Hospital and resolve to turn her back on the comfortable affluent lifestyle she'd come to know. This 20 something young woman, whose career future held so much promise, sadly made her way back across the Rio Grande to the land of her birth. Even in a third world country like Mexico, a doctor can make a lot of money but, feeling she had a penance to serve, Maria Chavez (aka Flying Sparrow) decided not to seek wealth. Instead, she chose to help the poor and under-privileged in one of the most poverty stricken regions of her country. The Sierra Mazateca subrange of the Sierra Madres Mountains of Oaxaca. Her one-time home.

Upon returning to her native Mazatec village as an adult, Maria served her people any way and every way she could, with her heart, head, hands, and medical skills.

An ancient medicine man (who had known Ten Thunders) said of this often white-coated woman, that she possessed great magical powers, thanks to her charm known as "God's Teardrop," which her great-grandfather had bestowed upon her as a child. On some level that appeared to be true. For Maria could summon gigantic loud singing birds (helicopters) which brought food, clean water and supplies. She also had the power to whisk the sick and the injured away in these "mighty birds" and then bring them back when they are well.

Now, of course, modern day Mazatecs know that helicopters are not really mystical birds from some far off heavenly realm, but, for many native Americans, the technology wonders of aerodynamics (like helicopters) tend to merge and meld with mythological legends (like: The Thunderbird) into one great seamless worldview

If truth be told, the help that "Flying Sparrow" (as the Mazatecs preferred to call her) was providing to her tribe, really did seem to be miraculous.

For the first time ever, it seemed the people (especially the politicians and government officials) in Mexico City, just below the Sierra Madres, were finally doing things for the Mazatec Tribal Nation instead of rejecting their pleas for aid-as they'd done in the past and dismissing them out of hand, as a bunch of ignorant savages who refused to modernize their community. This changed in attitude by the Mexican authorities, both state and federal, was largely due to the constant agitation and willful insistence on being heard wielded by Flying Sparrow.

For this determined young woman would often leave her village high in the mountains and fly down to her nation's capitol. There, she would march and protest and demonstrate for the equal rights and fair treatment of her people. In time, Flying Sparrow learned how to acquire influence in Mexico City, as well as in Oaxaca.

Ultimately, she gained access to the halls of government, where many politicians agreed to support her in her efforts to bring the benefits of the 21st century to the Mazatecs, while still preserving their culture and traditional way of life.

Most importantly of all, Flying Sparrow made it clear that modernizing the Sierra Madres most definitely did not mean the rape and pillaging of the Indians' tribal lands with bulldozers, mining, logging and highways. What's more, it most certainly didn't mean the hideous over-development of shopping malls and fast food restaurants.

When the Mazatec people began to see how dramatically their lives had begun to change for the better, without the destruction of the lands and social structure they so loved, there was a tremendous out-pouring of gratitude to Flying Sparrow, for the political activism and advocacy she so tirelessly engaged in for them. More than anything else, the Indians were grateful for the free medical care that Flying Sparrow provided to all in need. No longer did children die needlessly of curable diseases.

The sick and the injured were seen and treated in a timely fashion by the scores of doctors and nurses she had flown in to volunteer their time and skills. Everyone from over burdened mothers who needed abortions or contraceptives, to the handicapped, autistic and mentally ill who'd never received proper care before she came, swore by Flying Sparrow's ability to find appropriate treatment for them. Soon, the story began to spread far and wide in the Mazatec villages that she was a great, powerful medicine woman who, in her signature white coat, could perform healing wonders.

Although Flying Sparrow was a highly educated doctor of the 20th century, who was thoroughly modern and rational in her outlook, and dedicated to the scientific method, she knew she had to play this role of a shaman to the hilt. Otherwise, people would be too afraid to allow her to help. Flying Sparrow found herself working in a land that time had seemingly forgotten.



Thus, despite everything she'd done to bring the civilization of the modern world to the isolated villages of her mountainous homeland, and, despite all her efforts to enlighten them with rational, objective thinking, the Sierra Madres remained a place where primitive spirituality ran deep, and where the line between magic and reality was thin. Even though she was an agnostic who eschewed superstition, Flying Sparrow often had to show her extended family, and all the men and women of her tribe, that she was still one of them.

At times, this caring woman, who had sacrificed everything for her people—prayed quite frequently, and fervently with her patients while clutching a large obsidian flake of shiny black glass to her breast in divine supplication to whatever higher power might exist. When asked about this magical charm that she always kept close at hand, Doctor Maria Chavez told the story you just read in part one of this account.

It came to be known as : "The Tale of God's Teardrop"