

They Cried on the Trail

Chapter 1

By Carolyn Estes

John Whitefeather was proud of being a Cherokee.

The Cherokee Indians were a large tribe living in the beautiful Smoky Mountains area. They tried to live peacefully with their new white neighbors.

John, age 14, could read and write the Cherokee language. He learned about the Cherokee constitution and government in his school and about the Christian faith in his church.

He lived with his parents in a log cabin on a farm in Georgia. The Cherokee families were especially proud of their log cabin homes. Many of the white settlers copied the Cherokee way of building log cabins.

John looked forward to growing up in the Smoky Mountains and raising cattle on his own farm.

However, the Cherokee newspaper reported trouble between the Cherokees and their white neighbors. The other Georgia residents resented the Cherokees' success and wanted their land.

It had been big news when gold was discovered on Cherokee land in 1829. But it also brought big trouble.

Georgia lawmakers decided to take the land where the Cherokees lived. Soon other states adopted the same type of laws. President Andrew Jackson supported removing the Cherokees from their land.

One night John overheard his parents talking.

"I think we should leave Georgia. We could go west and find new land," said John's mother.

"I want to stay here. We have so much. We have our home, crops and cattle," his father pleaded.

"All right, I guess we will see what happens," Mother said.

John was happy they were staying. He didn't want to leave the home he had known all his life.

Their decision to stay was not such a wise one.

One beautiful May day, John headed to the stream to catch some fish for dinner. Suddenly, government troops rode into their community. John ran home. The troops came to their farm and took John and his parents.

The forcible eviction of the Cherokee Nation had begun. Within two weeks federal troops swept across North Georgia, Tennessee and Alabama. Almost every Cherokee was captured. They were moved to forts further north.

John and his parents were confined in Tennessee with hundreds of other Cherokees.

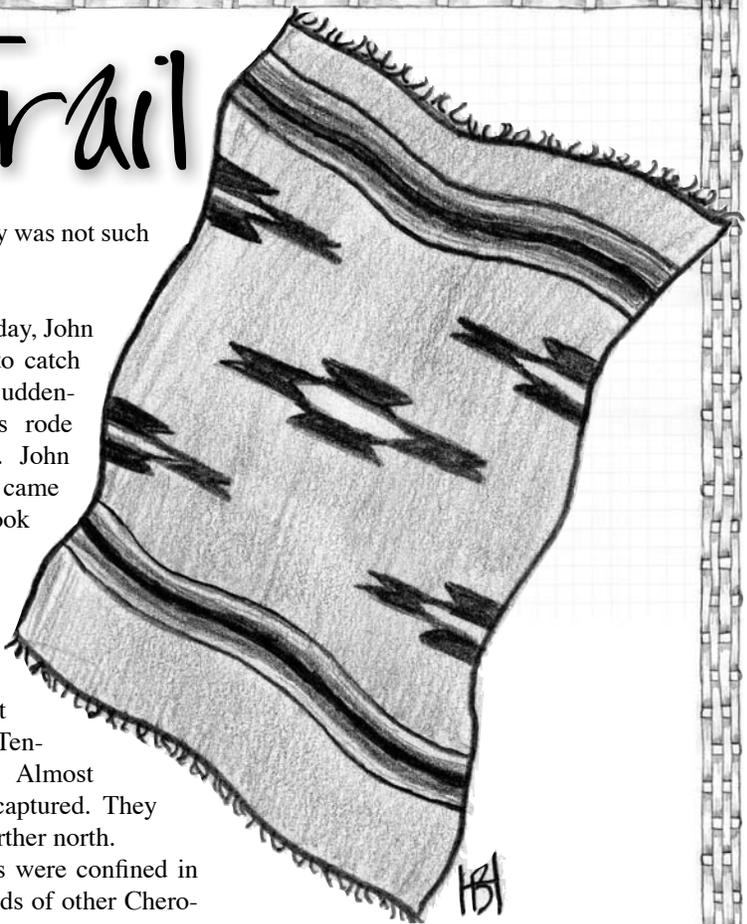
"I want to go home," John told his father.

"I'm sorry, my son, we no longer have a home," his father said. "We are going to have to do what they say until we reach our new land in the West. I'm sure we will find a new place better than the one we left. Don't say anything to make your mother cry again, she's been crying all day. Rest, my son, rest."

John threw his blanket on the floor and lay down. He closed his eyes and dreamed about his old home with the clear water stream. He could almost hear the fish jumping and smell the sweet lush green grass along the bank.

Tears escaped from his eyes.

"I will never see that stream again," he thought.



About the Trail of Tears

In 1838, President Andrew Jackson ordered the United States Army to enforce the Indian Removal Act. About 17,000 Cherokees were rounded up in Georgia, Tennessee, North and South Carolina, Kentucky and Alabama. The Cherokees were moved to Indian Territory, which would become part of the state of Oklahoma.

The Chickasaw, Choctaw, Creek and Seminole tribes were also moved.

This is a fiction story about two Indian children. It is based on the history of the Trail of Tears. The names of the children are made up. The story is not based on any real family.

This serial story has eight chapters. You may want to keep each week's chapter and make a book.

About the Author



Carolyn Estes is a journalist in Oologah, Oklahoma, a town established by the Cherokee Nation. This is her third chapter story for the

Oklahoma Newspaper Foundation.

About the Artist



Blake Hope of Oologah is a 21-year-old Visual Communications student. His heritage is Cheyenne, Arapaho and Cherokee.