

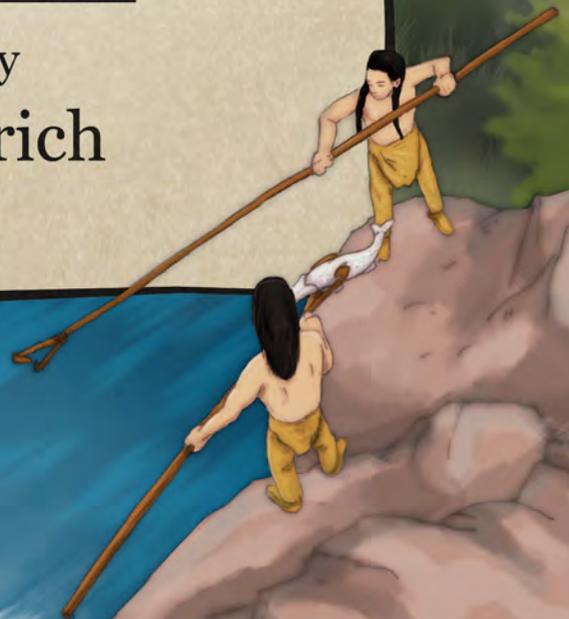


# Heart of the Palús

by  
L.E. Bragg

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illustrated by  
Patrick Marich



### **Acknowledgements**

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The Confederated Tribes of the Colville Reservation History/Archaeology Program provided the background research and expertise for the storybook narrative and illustrations. Much of the history of the Palús people comes from Colville tribal elders, Palús and Nez Perce, who over the years shared their stories with History/Archaeology Program staff for future research and education.

The History/Archaeology Program is guided by the Colville Business Council who supports cultural resource management in the traditional territories of the Confederated Tribes of the Colville Reservation.

### **Dedication**

We dedicated this book to the tribal elders who came before us, and to the future generations who will continue our traditions.

### **About the Author/Illustrator**

Author, L.E. Bragg and Artist/Designer, Patrick Marich are a mother and son team who collaborated to write and illustrate the *Heart of the Palús* book for the Colville Confederated Tribes. Both Author and Illustrator currently reside in the Greater Puget Sound Area.

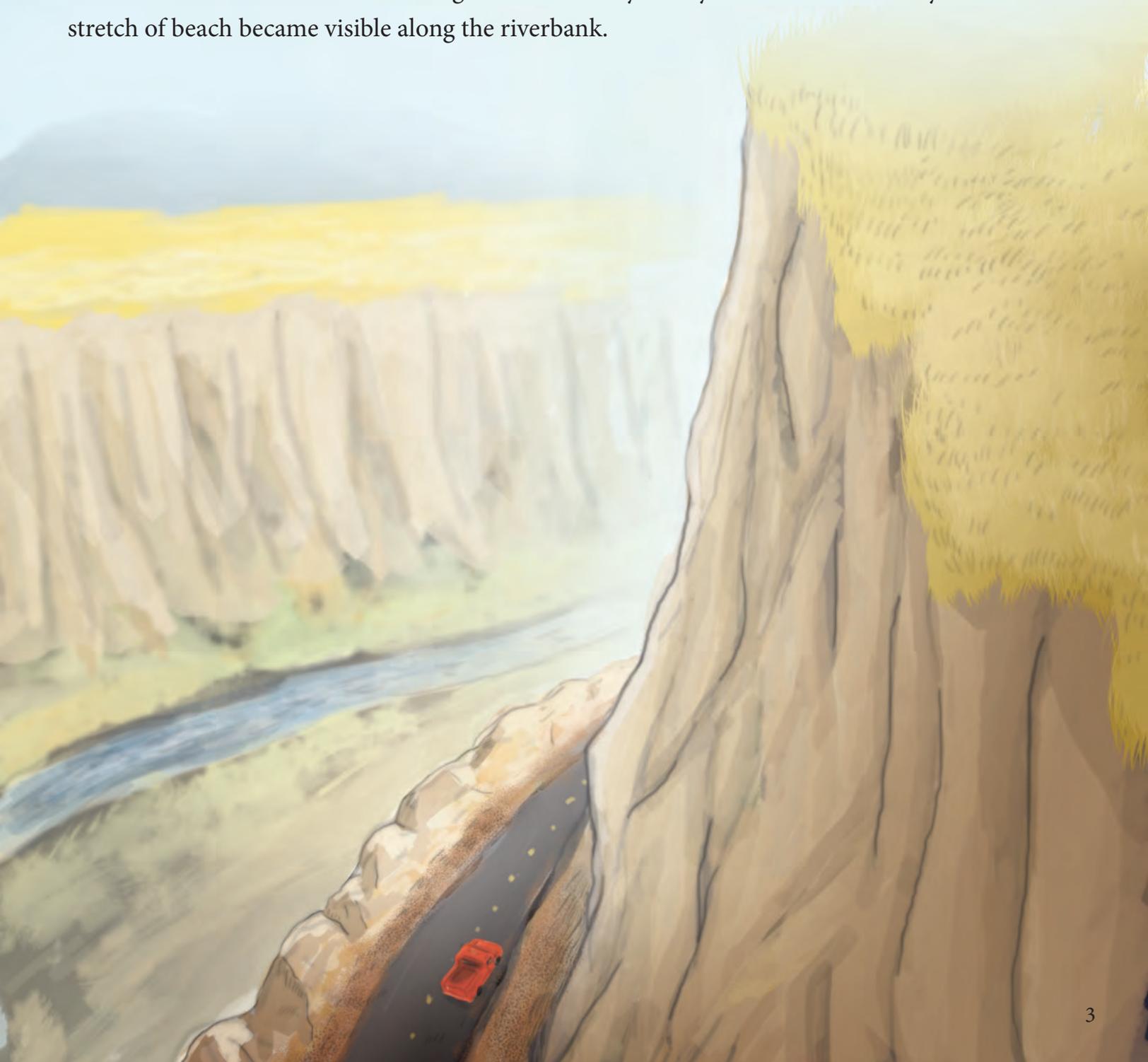
L.E. Bragg is a former resident of Inchelium, Washington, where she lived and taught elementary school. She is a graduate of the University of Washington and the author of multiple books, articles and educational stories. Ms. Bragg's books celebrate the history, scenery, and cultural diversity of the Pacific Northwest. She is the published author of two children's books and three non-fiction chapter books. *A River Lost* and *Seattle, City by the Sound* are picture books for young readers. *More Than Petticoats: Remarkable Washington Women* and *More Than Petticoats: Remarkable Idaho Women* and *Myths and Mysteries of Washington* are chapter books suitable for young adult and adult readers.

Patrick Marich is a member of the Sin Aikst, or Arrow Lakes Band of the Confederated Tribes of the Colville Reservation. He is a University of Washington graduate and an accomplished artist, illustrator, and web designer. Pat has previously illustrated educational books for the Washington Superintendent of Indian Education. He currently works as a web designer for a Seattle-Area tech company. In his spare time he pursues his passion for art, film, literature, and sports.

As our pickup rounded the bend, the river came into sight. The summer of my tenth year had just begun; school was out, and my family had packed up our camping gear and headed out on our annual trek. It seemed as though we had been driving forever as my sister and I squirmed in excitement at the idea of seeing Grandfather and hearing his wonderful stories.

“I think we’re almost there, Tom!” exclaimed my little sister, Lucy.

The narrow road wound around sharp curves with steep, rock-walled cliffs jutting up toward the sky above us and dropping off abruptly into the river below. Looking up the canyon walls, I could picture the giants from a tale Grandfather often told us of how the Palouse River and Palouse Falls came to be. The winding road carried my family down, down the canyon until a stretch of beach became visible along the riverbank.





Grandfather's boyhood home had been at the Palús Village, on the shores of the Palouse River where it flows into the Snake River. Grandfather was a member of the Palús Tribe, a group of people who had lived along the rivers for thousands of years. He taught us to use the Indian spelling "*Palús*" for the tribe, and the non-Indian spelling "*Palouse*" for the river and prairie. Although most members of his tribe had moved away, my Grandfather said that he could never leave this place because it was too important to be left alone. So, he returned here every summer, when the salmon began their long, difficult journey up the river.

"We're here, Tom!" my little sister, Lucy, called out as Grandfather's camp came into sight. We pulled up to his canvas-covered dwelling and found him coming toward us with outstretched arms. My sister and I tumbled over each other as we raced to be the first out of the truck. With warm hugs, Grandfather welcomed us all to his humble home. "Can we go to the river?" Lucy and I asked at the same time. Father waved us away as he and mother unloaded the truck, and we eagerly ran ahead as Grandfather took us toward his fishing spot along the river.



I was proud that Grandfather was so well known throughout the Columbia Plateau for his fishing skills. He made all of his own gear, and showed us how he wove his nets from the fibers of local hemp plants, and formed his leisters. Using his handmade tools, Grandfather caught enough salmon, steelhead, and eel-like lamprey to cook, trade for supplies, and smoke so that he had fish to last all through the winter.

“My own father and Grandfather fished in this very same spot, but in my Grandfather’s day there were so many fish that you could see their skins flashing in the sunlight as they struggled to swim upriver. My Grandfather caught as many as five-hundred fish in a single season. Now, I am lucky to catch enough fish to see me through the winter,” Grandfather told us with a sad, downward glance.



Grandfather gathered his gear, and we headed to the wooden platform that he had built at the river. The planks were anchored to the shore on one end and stuck out over the water at the other. He tied a rope around his waist to keep him from being swept downstream if he fell as he thrust his leister at a fish. Fishing was dangerous work, and we held our breath as Grandfather inched his way out over the slippery planks. Suddenly, Grandfather stabbed his leister at the water and twisted the pole, imbedding the points into the fish, so it did not escape as he yanked it from the river.

“This salmon will make a fine dinner tonight,” Grandfather chuckled. “Tomorrow we can catch lamprey near the falls, and gather freshwater clams and mussels from the riverbed.” As my eyes scanned the banks of the river, I could see how the boulders along the shores had been worn smooth by the feet of tribal fisherman who had come to fish at the river for generations. This summer I finally came to understand how much this place meant to my Grandfather.



This was to be the last summer that Grandfather would be able to build his shelter, and spend his summer fishing here at this river-bend on the land of his Palús ancestors. Soon the dam built downstream would be finished, and its backwaters would drown Grandfather's summer home and fishing grounds. Grandfather was a protector of this river and plateau, and he did what he could to pass on the wealth of tradition to my sister and me before it was lost to the waters that would rise behind the coming dam.

Grandfather looked out over the rapids, his eyes rising up the canyon walls. "That is Beaver's Heart," Grandfather gestured toward a large, rounded rock on the west side of the Palouse River where it met the Snake River. "They tell me it will soon be gone, no longer watching over us above the river. We must remember how the *Heart of Beaver* came to be atop the banks of the Palouse, long ago when the falls were created. Now, listen, remember, and teach this story to your children and grandchildren." We leaned forward, focusing intently on Grandfather's face as he began to tell the legend.



“In ancient days, before humans came to live on the river, the animal people lived along the shores where the still water of the Palouse ran calmly downstream until it met the Snake. At that time a family of giants, four brothers and their sister, also lived near the river. The giants were vain and took pains to keep their black hair shiny by using special oil produced by Big Beaver. When their oil ran low, the brothers set out on a hunt to locate Big Beaver and steal the oil from his tail. They found Big Beaver living beside the river above where the falls are now.

“When they saw Beaver, the first brother hurled his spear at the animal, who ran downriver as fast as he could with the giant brothers in pursuit. The brothers caught up to Beaver and the second brother speared him. Again, Beaver escaped; but, in his haste and anger, he turned sharply toward shore creating a bend in the river and causing a deep canyon to form there. The brothers speared Big Beaver a third and fourth time, yet he got away each time. As Beaver fought, he changed the course of the river creating waterfalls, bends and rapids along the way.



“Big Beaver swam south toward the Snake and at a bend in the Palouse River, he was speared for the fifth time. Angrily, he turned to fight the four giant brothers in the biggest battle of all. As he fought, Beaver left deep claw marks, and jagged rips in the steep rock walls, and gouged out an enormous canyon. The river behind the cliff broke loose with a huge gush of water and tumbled over the canyon wall creating Palouse Falls.

“Beaver then dove into the water and swam downstream until he reached the Snake River. There, he met Coyote who had watched the fight from the hills. Intent on keeping Beaver from getting away, Coyote sang his power song and forced Big Beaver to turn back up the Snake River to the mouth of the Palouse. The four giant brothers waited there, and this time Beaver could not escape their spears. Here, where the Palouse and Snake Rivers join together, Beaver’s heart became the landmark rock known as *Heart of the Beaver* by the Palús people.”



That evening when the skies had darkened, and fishing was done for the day, we took time to sit under the stars with our family. Grandfather made a fire from the sagebrush and greasewood that we had gathered from the plateau. Flames danced, and embers crackled as we sat around the campfire on the riverbank eagerly listening to Grandfather. He put his hand on my shoulder as he began, “Like *Heart of the Beaver*; this place too will soon be gone.” I closed my eyes and pictured the ancient rock he had shown us earlier in the day as Grandfather began to tell us the story of our people.

“Did you know that we are camping where our ancestors camped for thousands of years?” We nodded silently, encouraging him to continue. “This is where the Palús Village, the very heart of the Palús people, stood. It is the place that the Palús, Nez Perce, and families from tribes across the region came to each year when the salmon returned from the ocean.” Grandfather pointed to the hills, “From the banks of the river we could look to the hills and see time-worn horse trails leading down the canyons to the river for the fishing season.”



I learned many things that night as Grandfather continued his story, though I already knew that our tribe and our village were known as *Palús* a word meaning, *Big Rock in the River*. We called ourselves, *Naha' ampo*, or *The River People*, in the Sahaptin language also spoken by our neighbors and family among the Cayuse, Nez Perce, Umatilla, Wanapum, Walla Walla, and Yakama tribes with whom our ties are strong.

“During the fish harvests hundreds of mat-covered lodges lined the shores here. Families set up camp along the river, and built large drying racks nearby to cure the salmon for winter months,” Grandfather taught us. “The village was a place where families came together to trade goods, for news, to exchange gifts, sing, dance, meet with relatives, and consult with tribal leaders and healers. Our homeland provided well for the people and our horses.”



“Tell us about the horses,” Lucy, who loved horses, interrupted. “Horses may have come to the plateau with early European explorers, but the Palús and other people of the plateau quickly adopted the majestic animals as our own. We raised the horses for their strength, stamina and beauty,” Grandfather recalled. “My Uncle would mark a mare with a sacred paint mixture to ensure a strong bloodline.

“Uncle’s beautiful horses had distinct, colorful spotted hindquarters. Originally they were called *A Palouse* or *A’Palousey* for the land where they were raised and our people who raised them. Eventually, the term *A’Palousey* changed into the breed name *Appaloosa*,” noted Grandfather. “I wish I could have seen the herds of horses running across the plateau, and along the Snake River,” said Lucy with a dreamy look in her eyes.



“*Naha’ ampoo*, the *River People*, also traveled the plateau hunting and gathering seasonal plants, fish, and game. We began gathering roots in early spring when plants first sprouted and were most tender,” explained Grandfather. “When the new season brought us our first foods, we held a root feast to give thanks for the returning foods. We sang and danced to honor the Earth and thank her for providing food to our people.”

“My mother and aunts used antler-handled digging sticks and hemp or cornhusk woven bags to dig roots and gather plants such as camas, bitterroot, kouse, Indian carrots, potatoes and onions from valleys throughout the plateau,” said Grandfather. “Biscuit root, or kouse, and the blue-flowered camas, cooked in underground pits, were staples of our diet.”



Grandfather turned to Lucy, “Young girls were taught by their mothers and aunts to choose plants that were safe to eat, in season, and would taste best. Our women knew which plants cured ailments, or made the strongest baskets. My own grandmother was a skilled weaver, tightly weaving cedar roots into beautifully decorated baskets and bags for gathering and storing our food.”



“We use our baskets for picking berries too!” Lucy declared, remembering how mother and the aunts had taken her up the mountainside last summer to find the best huckleberries. “Yes,” Grandfather responded. “When summer warmed the plateau, the women and children filled their baskets with wild currants and chokecherries from low lying valleys. They walked high into the hills to find all types of berries, just as you do now.”



“We *Naha’ampoo* moved between camps and villages following our food. Some villages like *We’ tswewi* and *A’pocotop* were known as centers for root digging and berry picking. Most of our largest villages were located along the rivers, near the falls and rapids where the fishing was good, and many salmon were caught. *Waw’awi*, meaning *fishing place*, and *Alamo’ tin*, *soaring flame*, were known for their abundance of fish.

“The Palús Village was one of the biggest and most important fishing camps,” I told Lucy. Grandfather nodded in agreement, “The Snake River and its branches came alive with salmon, trout, and a variety of fish and lamprey every summer. Just as I speared fish here today, the men speared and trapped the fish, while the women dried the fish and eel-like lamprey on large drying racks to cure and preserve the meat.



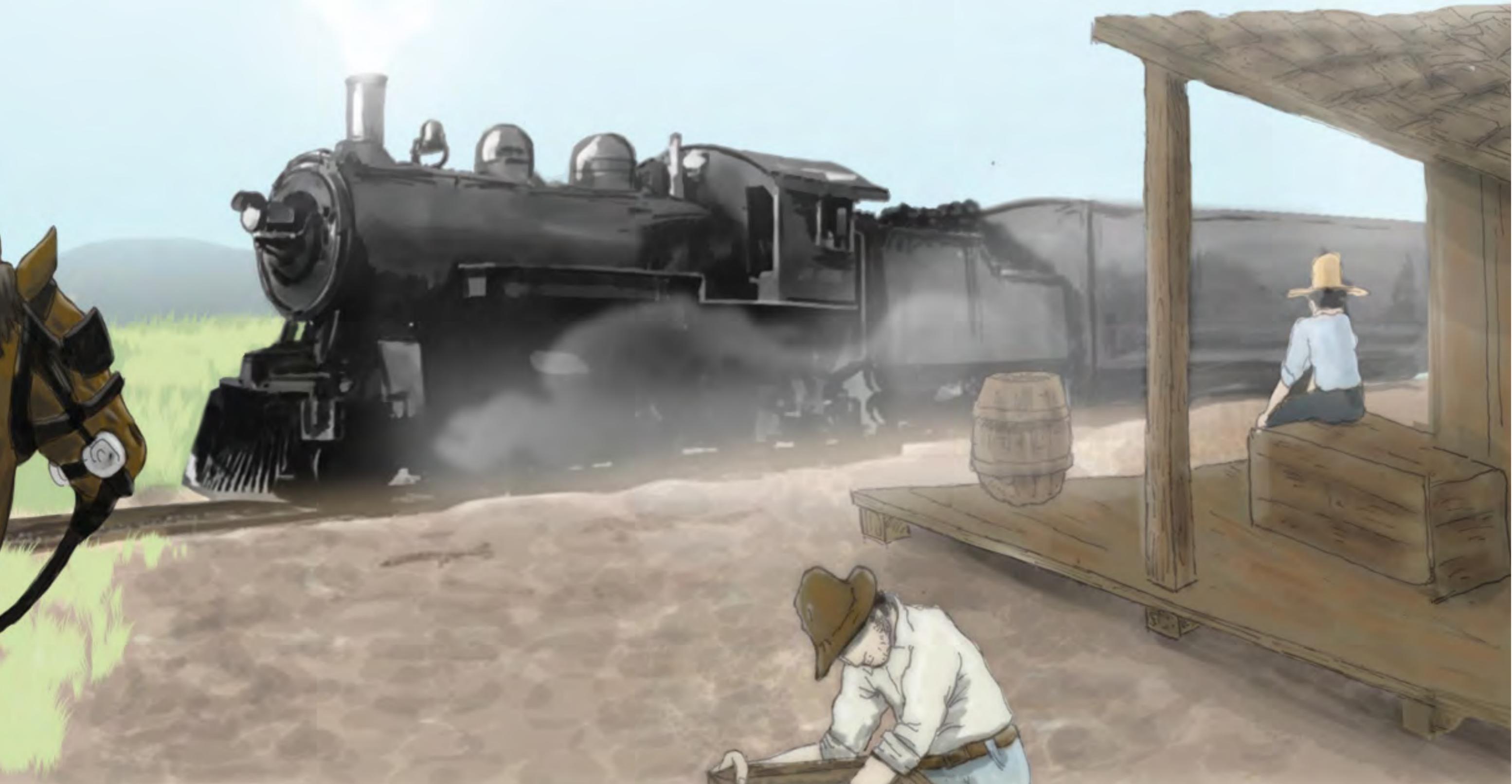
“Do you remember how your father and I hunted ducks and geese last fall when they migrated south for the winter?” Grandfather asked. “Yes,” I responded, remembering how much I had wanted to hunt with them. “Traditionally men hunted, while women harvested eggs in the river’s wetlands. We also found small game on the surrounding plateau, netting birds, and smoking groundhogs and rabbits from their dens and burrows.

“Larger game was abundant in the early days too, with deer, antelope, elk, and bear wandering the plains and hills. My family left the river in the fall to travel into Chief Joseph’s Nez Perce Country, and hunt deer and elk in the Wallowa and Blue Mountains. We camped together, as the men set out in hunting parties and the women worked to dry meat, tan hides, and prepared for winter,” Grandfather paused as he recalled his childhood.



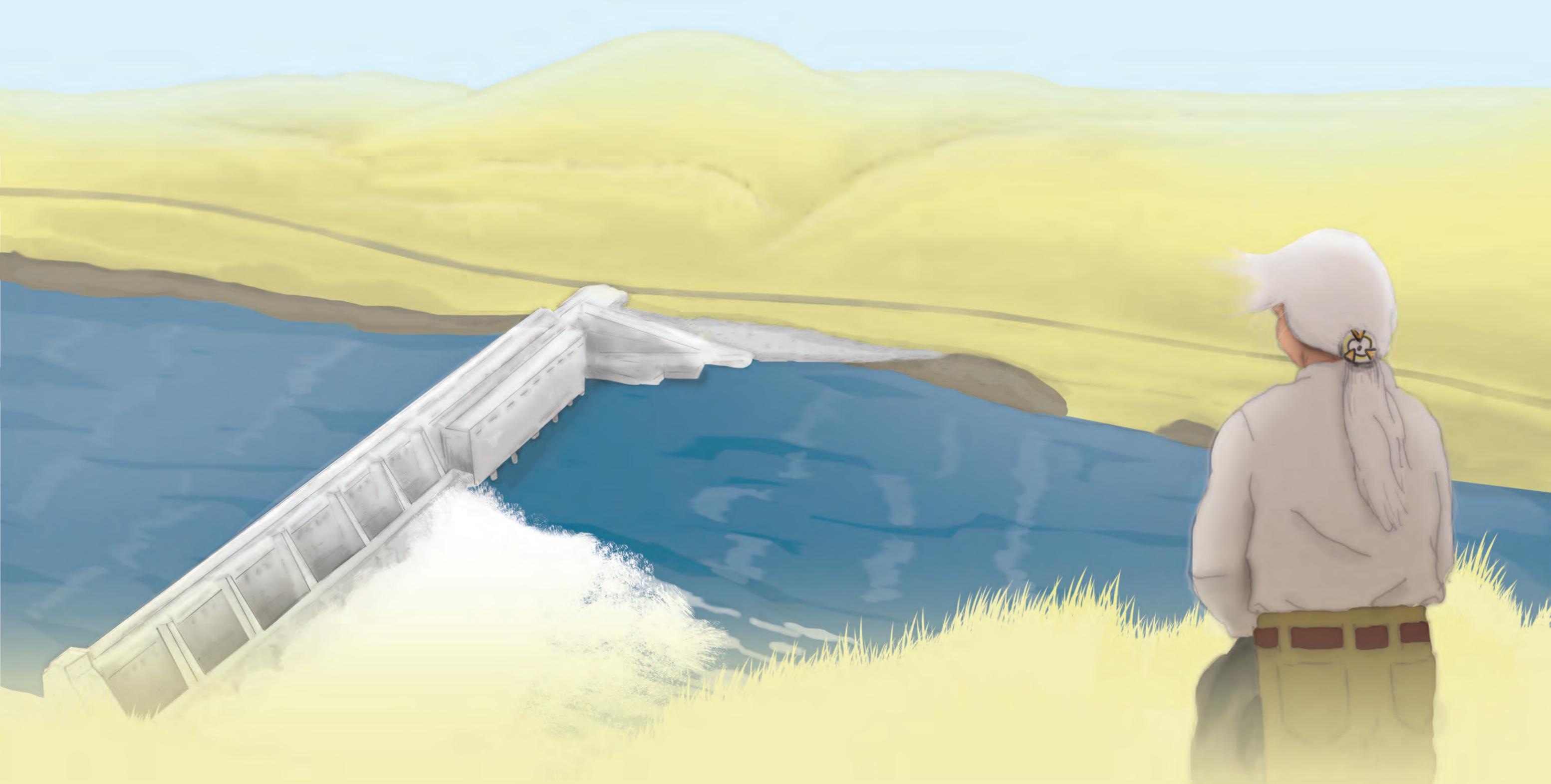
“The *Naha’ ampoo* moved to sheltered villages with grass for their horses and wood for fires during winter. We built winter villages in river canyons and valleys safe from strong winds and extreme snowfall. This was a time of community, weaving, mending tools, curing the sick, and caring for livestock. We shared gifts with one another, and listened to our elders tell stories, much like you listen to me today.

“Winter dances were held to give thanks, empower us with skills, and prepare our spirits and bodies for the coming seasons. If hunting and harvests had been poor over the earlier seasons, winter could be a time of great hunger. As time went by, we had less and less to see us through the winters.” Grandfather’s voice trailed off as he remembered the hardships his tribe had faced.



I knew it made Grandfather sad to think about the resources of the Palouse becoming strained as more and more people moved west. Railroads, gold rushes, wars, and settlement brought great change to the plateau. Over fishing and over grazing reduced the salmon in the rivers and game on the plains. When it became difficult for people to make a living from the land as their families had for generations, many of our tribe left the river.

“While some families had moved away, others stayed taking allotment land and homesteads near their homes on the river.” Grandfather finished his story as the last embers of our fire burned out. Though his story had ended, Grandfather’s words stayed with me all of my life, and I understood why we must protect this place.



Grandfather lived on the river throughout the summer, but with the changing of the seasons came the backwaters of the dam which covered his summer encampment. As one of the last Palús to reside at the village site on the banks of the river, Grandfather worked to save the wealth of tradition and culture that would soon be under water.

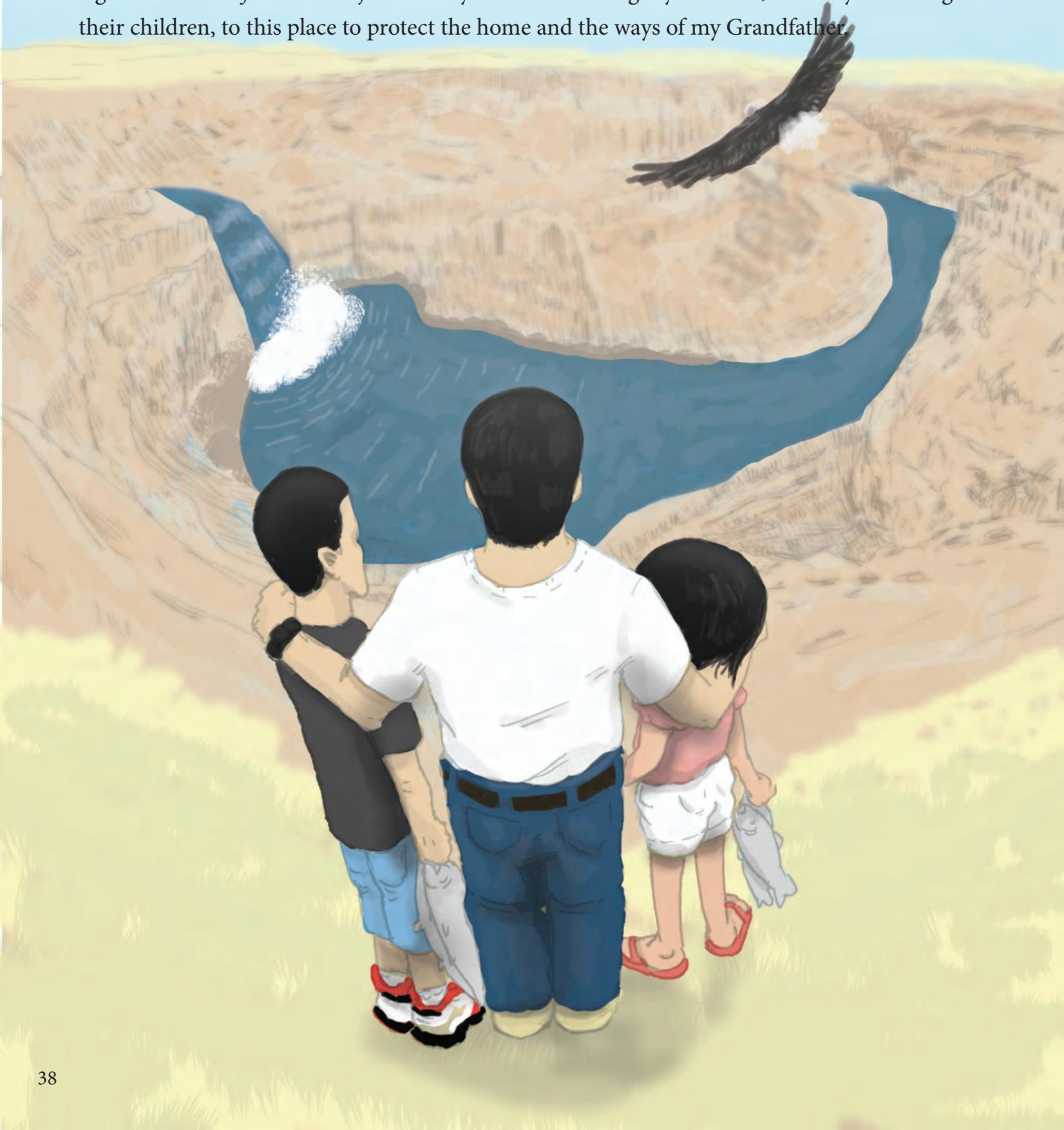
In the end, Grandfather knew that he had no choice but to leave his ancestral lands. The last keeper of the Palús Village site spent his final years going from one reservation to another, staying with family and friends, yet never really finding a home like he had on the river. Though Grandfather has gone, we still see the presence of our ancestors in the rock carvings, campsites and trails found in the river canyons.

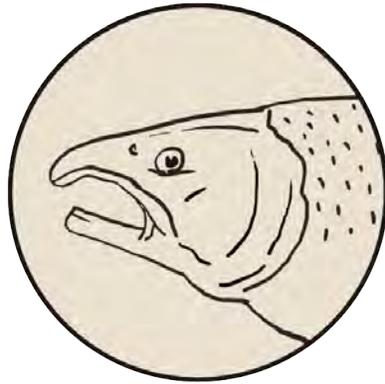


Even after the dam flooded Grandfather's camp, mother and father brought Lucy and me back to the river every year when the salmon returned. Father took us to paddle our canoe on the lake created by the new dam. Year after year, my family came to the river, and to the falls near the site of our ancient village to honor our culture, traditions and ancestors.

Now that I am grown, my family and I still return to camp below the falls each summer. I teach my son and grandson to fish on the river as my grandfather taught me. We gather shellfish, hunt small game on the plains, and deer and elk in the hills. The women dig roots from the valleys, pick berries in the mountains, and we carry on our traditions as those before have taught us.

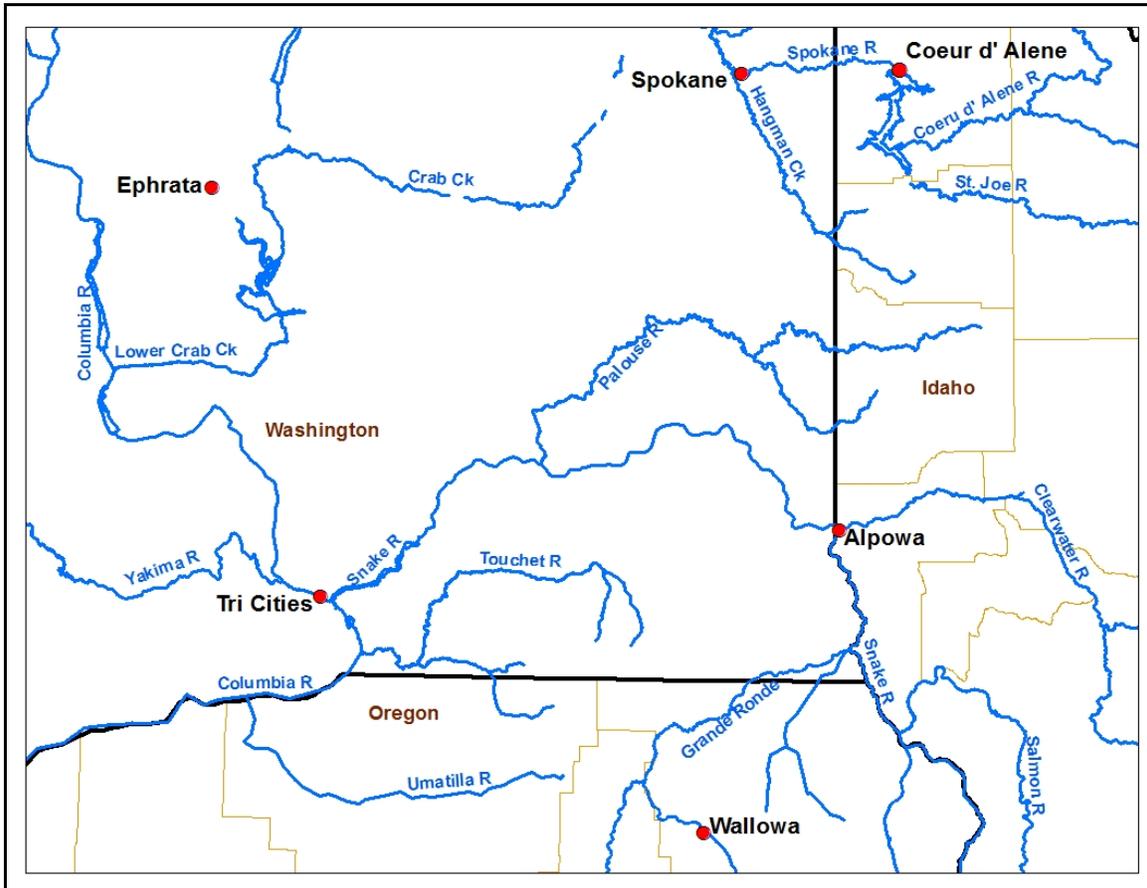
*Heart of the Beaver* rock is now gone, no longer standing guard above the Palouse and Snake Rivers. Beaver's Heart has been destroyed by a man-made lake, but Palouse Falls still roars over a rock canyon wall into the river below where it ends at Palouse Falls State Park. Beaver's claw marks still etch the canyon walls, and my own children love to see the marks and hear the legend of *Heart of the Beaver* just as Lucy and I did. I bring my children, and they will bring their children, to this place to protect the home and the ways of my Grandfather.





## The Palús

Prior to inundation by the dams along the Snake River, the Palús People had several camps and villages along the Snake River and its tributaries, within their traditional territory. The Nez Perce traditional territory overlaps along the Snake River with the Palús territory (see map), and both tribes are closely related through marriage, language and culture. The Nez Perce spent time with the Palús at fishing camps on the Snake River, and the Palús traveled to the Wallowa Valley in the south where they spent time with the Chief Joseph Band of Nez Perce.



In the spring, the Palús traveled great distances along trails and canoe routes to hunt animals, fish, and gather plants as they became seasonally available in a pattern known as a “seasonal round”. The Palús shared territory with other tribes when they traveled to the Spokane Valley in the north, to Ephrata in the west, and to Alpowa and Coeur d’Alene in the east. In November, the Palús returned to the river villages to store gathered supplies and to spend the winter months. The river valleys provided protection from the deep snow and cold winds of winter.

Indian people used the landscape such as distinct boulders, mountains, cliffs, rivers, and lakes as “road signs” to find their way throughout the land. River crossings, river confluences (where two rivers meet) or places where several trails meet became places for different traveling tribes to gather and trade goods and news.

All of these places are still important to Indian people and are called Traditional Cultural Properties. Today the Palús people continue to return their traditional lands, bringing their children and teaching the next generation the traditional ways.

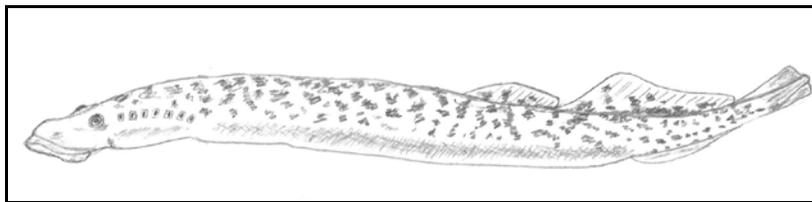
### Glossary

**Allotments:** are tracts of land provided to individual Indians on and off the reservations created by the General Allotment Act of 1887. Many Indians claimed lands they were already living on and where their ancestors lived for thousands of years, such as the Palús Village talked about in this book.

**Colville Reservation:** the reservation was established in 1872 to remove twelve tribes from their ancestral territories to the Colville reservation. The twelve tribes that make up the Confederated Tribes of the Colville Reservation include; the Sanpoil, Nespelem, Moses-Columbia, Methow, Wenatchee, Entiat, Chelan, Okanogan, Lakes, Colville, Palús, and the Chief Joseph Band of the Nez Perce.

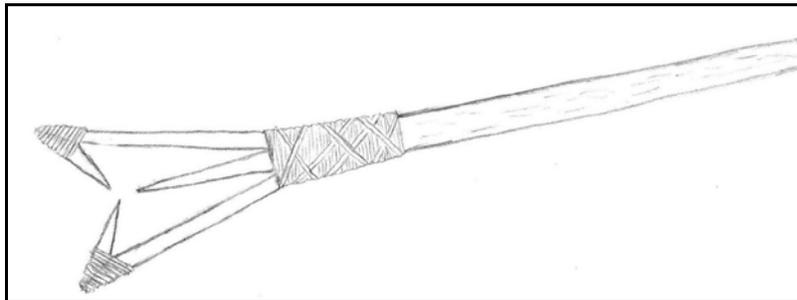
**Inundation:** means to cover with water. When the Lower Monumental Dam was constructed in 1969, to create hydroelectric power (the water flowing through turbines located in the dam creates electricity), the dam caused the Snake River to back up, forming a reservoir (water storage), called Lake Herbert G. West. The reservoir inundated the Snake River, making it wider and deeper. The result was that many of the Palús fishing camps and villages along the Snake River were inundated, including the one talked about in this book.

**Lamprey:** are fish that look like snakes. They have two back fins, large eyes, and one nostril on the top of their head, and can grow up to 30 inches long. People often refer to lamprey as eels.



Lamprey

**Leister:** is a spear with two to three barbs (bone points) to help impale and grab fish.



Leister

**Palouse:** refers to the Palouse River, a tributary of the Snake River that flows through the Palús territory (*see map*). The Palouse also refers to the prairie, (sometimes called the Palouse Prairie), the surrounding grasslands of the gently rolling basalt plateaus and adjacent mountain foothills of eastern Washington and Idaho.

**Palús:** is how the Palús people on the Colville Reservation spell their name, but there are other spellings used by the Palús people on other reservations.

**Plateau:** also called the Columbia Plateau, generally refers to the lands of the Columbia River and its' tributaries (rivers that flow into the Columbia River) that cover parts of Washington, Oregon, and Idaho.

**Reservations:** are sections of land reserved for Indian people. After moving from their homelands, many of the Palús people moved to the Colville, Nez Perce, Umatilla, and Yakama Reservations. In 1885 many members of the Chief Joseph Band of Nez Perce joined the Palús on the Colville Reservation.

### Further Information

Visit our website at [www.colvilletribes.com](http://www.colvilletribes.com)

Visit our Colville Tribal Museum at 512 Mead Way, Coulee Dam, Washington. For current hours please call (509) 633-0751 or (509) 634-2693.

Also visit the Fort Okanogan Interpretive Center, located north of Bridgeport Washington, near the confluence of the Okanogan and Columbia Rivers. The center is opened from May-September, for hours and information please call (509) 689-6665.

### FCRPS

The Federal Columbia River Power System (FCRPS) Cultural Resource Program works cooperatively with federal and tribal agencies to protect and preserve our heritage for future generations.

