

Morning Star

A Short Story by Ellenore "Star" Attwood

I am a Native woman, born and raised on the Grand River Territory. At an early age I moved to Toronto and married and raised my family. I have a strong love for literature, art and Native music. I am presently pursuing my acting career.

I sit as an advisor on the Board of Directors for the Iroquoian Institute, "Onkwehonwe néha." We the Board are working together to preserve the Iroquoian languages, culture and traditions which are our heritage and must be kept up. Along with this effort, I have also been working hard at trying to recapture my Native tongue, Mohawk, along with mastering the English language.

I am also involved with a fine working cast of Native

people in the movie *Divided Loyalties*. This movie is about the struggle to power of the noble man, "thayendanega," also referred to as "Joseph Brant."

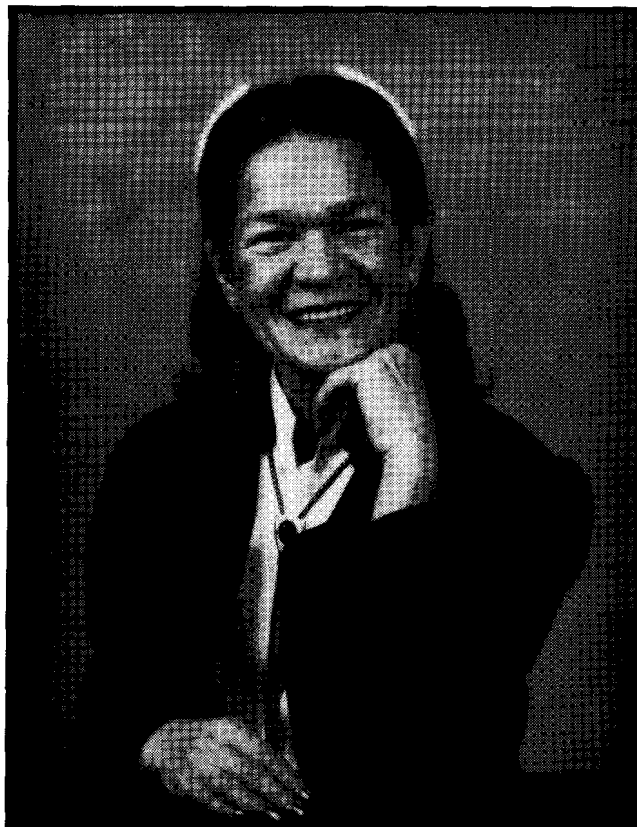
"A Native Prayer" and "A Swift Prey" are part of the art work I finished to go along with my story "Morning Star."

The story is about a Mohawk girl during the seventeenth century, with her struggles before and after becoming a woman. She eventually is captured by her heart, to a very powerful warrior. The setting is a Mohawk village on the banks of the St. Lawrence River.

To my English teacher, Miss Sandy Springall, and the people of the Mohawk Nation, I inscribe this story.

Beads of sweat broke out across Laughing Water's forehead. Another pain hit her. It was her second one this morning. She tried to rise from her squatting position on the shore of the great river. The snows had gone at last. She patted a handful of cool, clear water on her face and forehead. The pain eased itself. She must not scream out. She was a woman of the Mohawks.

Laughing Water filled her gourd, spilling none. She turned slowly and began walking back to the lodge. Soon her man would be awake. The camp began to stir. Dogs began their incessant barking. The birds were crying their mating calls. Laughing Water, always the first up in the morning, had already said her thanks to the Great Spirit and

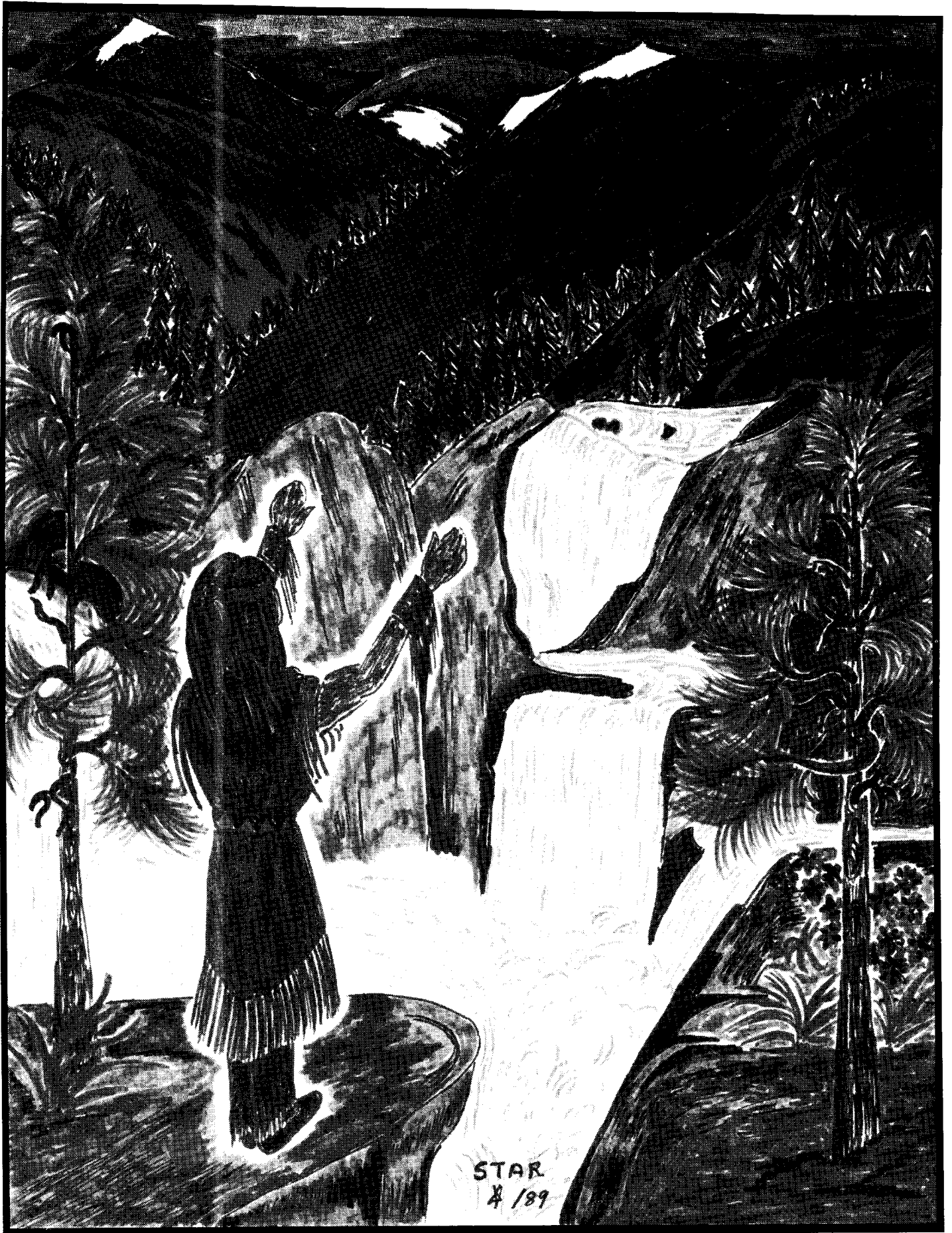


seen the morning star. As she entered the lodge another pain hit her.

Shining Moon knew it was time, and gently led her daughter to her sleeping robes and shooed everyone out of the lodge. The morning meal would wait.

White Eagle, wrapping his blanket of soft mink, as befitting a chief and warrior of his great nation around himself, slunk out. To make such a fine blanket, Laughing Water had tanned many hides and sewn them together with the sinew of a bull moose.

He strode toward the Great Water, his heart beating wildly. He remembered four times ago, during the season of the falling leaves, the birth of Running Bear his only son. Laughing Water had lain there for three setting suns before



he heard the wailing cry. It was only now that she could bear another child. He feared for the life of his loved one.

On the river bank under a stately elm, he left his blanket and breech-cloth; stepping out of his moccasins he slipped into the powerful current. He swam out till the undertow began pulling at his legs, then turned to shore.

After scrubbing his body with soft, powdery sand, White Eagle again put on his breech-clout, the fringes hanging well below his knees. The beading on it was in dyed porcupine quills and glittering glass beads that were traded from the French trapper for two beaver pelts. The work on it was of an eagle, intricately done by Laughing Water. Another pain shot through his heart. He has to be near her.

White Eagle raised his arms to the dawn and sang his morning song to the Great Spirit. As he picked up his robe he heard a faint cry which grew louder and louder, blotting out all other sounds of the camp. He began to walk faster. In his lodge he knelt at Laughing Water's side. Her face wreathed in a smile. He took the small bundle, wrapped in soft, white rabbit fur and gazed in wonder.

White Eagle gently laid the wailing bundle in Laughing Water's arms. "Her name is Morning Star, daughter of the Mohawks," she said before succumbing to exhaustion.

Running Bear was now old enough to play war games with the older boys. He snuck off into the woods. The first flowers of Mother Earth's awakening from her long sleep were beginning to bloom. The soft, velvety, green mosses he lifted lovingly from the earth and then stole back to camp. These things grew near his hide-away in an old oak tree. He was careful not to let the other boys see him because he didn't want to be teased like a girl.

Inside the lodge he went and sat by his mother, looking at her sleeping face and the new baby in her arms. Laughing Water, sensing her son's presence, opened her eyes. She smiled at her son and in a voice like the rippling waters said, "Running Bear, this is your sister, Morning Star, daughter of the Mohawks. You must always guard your sister's life."

Running Bear reached into his quiver and gently withdrew the flowers and mosses, passing them to his mother. Pride bursting from him, he ran to join his father. The strong smell of deer cooking

drove away the still lingering forest scent. He was starving.

The next morning Laughing Water took her daughter to the river to bathe. Taking off her doeskin dress, Laughing Water walked into the cold water. Shivering, she scooped up handfuls of soft sand and scrubbed her body till it tingled. After rinsing her beautiful, long hair she waded out of the river and unwrapped the tiny bundle.

Cuddling Morning Star to her breast, she walked back into the river. When the water was up to her waist, she stooped and gently began patting cool water on the baby's face and body.

Morning Star, shocked, began screaming. No longer did the infant feel the warm oil cleansing of her coming into the world. Her mother immersed her little body into the cold water. With soft, gentle hands she bathed her baby.

After leaving the river Laughing Water pulled her soft, warm doeskin on and lifted the baby high in her arms. The soft rays of the early morning sun warmed the baby's body. Her crying ceased. Laughing Water's dark, brown eyes were shining as she gazed into the dawn. "Great Spirit, let my child grow strong. Protect her from the evil spirits." Her voice sang like the melody of many waters.

White Eagle sat studying his wife and daughter over the early morning fire. It was burning outside the lodge, now that the snows were gone. The smoke from the fires during the long, cold months had harmed Shining Moon's eyes. It was now hard for her to see. The old grandmother carefully combed out Laughing Water's long, black hair. It had the colour and shine of a raven's wing. White Eagle knew his wife was exceedingly beautiful. He loved her deeply. Morning Star, his daughter, was fair and without blemish. His son grew tall and strong. He felt great joy in himself.

Today he would take out a hunting party. The time when all the earth sleeps had been hard and long. Their provisions were low. He now had a new mouth to feed, and needed fresh broth to give his woman strength.

After the morning meal White Eagle called together the warriors, designated who would stay in camp, and went to see Rain Maker the Shaman.

Rain Maker prayed to the Great Spirit for a bountiful hunt. The young men who

had been hunting since childhood were anxious for the hunt. This was one way to show off their skills. They went on foot through the forest, since their moccasins were almost soundless. No game would be frightened away today.

While the hunting party was away Laughing Water gently blew cool water from her mouth into the baby's nostrils. Then pinching them together. This was repeated every time the baby started to cry. One crying baby could cause the death of a whole village. Thus the child ceased to cry.

The shifting wind caused the big stag to raise his head cautiously. As he reared on his hind legs, lifting his majestic head high, Black Thunder's arrow pierced his neck. The deer turned to run, terrified. Three arrows found their mark. There would be feasting in the camp tonight.

The next few years were well in the land of the Mohawks. Their crops of corn, potatoes, squashes, beans of all sorts and tobacco flourished. There were small raids on the Hurons. The Hurons were bitter enemies and hated by the Mohawks.

One day there was a great commotion in camp. All the boys were running to the river. Comes So Far had returned. He had been gone many moons. With him he had a wife of the Cree nation. She was very beautiful with long, velvety hair and dark, liquid eyes. Although she couldn't speak in the Mohawk tongue, her smile melted the hearts of all who met her.

Comes So Far had many tales to tell of his travels. White Eagle, eager to hear all, made a feast. There was dancing and singing far into the night.

Comes So Far told of his fight with the great white bear in the land where the snows are forever. He brought forth a bear claw necklace, made from the bear's paw and tied it around Running Bear's neck. This would give Running Bear powerful medicine. He would never in his lifetime take it off. He sat in the place of honour beside his father.

Next Comes So Far brought forth a great, white bear skin, with fur soft and white as the snow. This he gave to White Eagle, his blood brother. They had hunted and fought many wars together.

To Laughing Water he gave an awl, made of a new kind of sharp steel, to scrape her hides. This he said came from a white man, with eyes the colour of the sky, that was living in the land of the Cree.



To Rain Maker he presented the greatest gift of all, a hunting knife, like no one had ever seen before. Its handle was intricately designed in silver and inlaid with the turquoise stones that only a great man or a chief was allowed to have. Its steel blade was sharper than any of the knives the warriors carried.

Rain Maker lit his beautiful, carved, soapstone pipe and after raising his arms to the four winds and praying to the Great Spirit, they smoked in peace. Happiness was upon the village.

Before the brave could call out his warning, his blood spilled on the river bank. The Hurons, silent, powerful swimmers that they are surrounded the Mohawk camp. A small war party crept in from the forest and untethered the horses. A bloodthirsty war cry echoed through the camp. The Mohawks, just before dawn, were caught unaware. Laughing Water grabbed the cradle board, a gourd of water and a bag of corn and thrust it in Running Bear's hands. Pressing her fingers to his lips she motioned for him to follow her.

Running Bear, already with his quiver full of arrows and his bow across his shoulder, grabbed Morning Star and they silently followed their mother. The baby, in fear of all the noise, began to wail. Running Bear pressed the baby's nose together and silenced it.

His father and Comes So Far were fighting side by side. As a ferocious Huron grabbed his mother, Running Bear saw her raise a tomahawk and bring it down across his shoulder. Screams of terror filled the grey skies. The corn field was suddenly ablaze. Fire seemed to be all around. Running Bear pulled Morning Star into a bush near the lodge. He knew he had to get them to safety. Praying to the Great Spirit and running with all his might,

Running Bear brought his sisters to safety.

He pulled the shrub aside, and into the old oak tree took his charges. Not a ray of light filtered in. It was cool and dry. The cries of the dead and dying filled them with pain.

Morning Star, silent tears streaming down her face cuddled the new, small baby in her arms. She would not cry out. She was a daughter of the Mohawks.

When the sounds of battle had died away, Running Bear carefully parted the bushes. Instructing Morning Star not to leave the hide-a-way till he returned for her, he crept out, moving slowly and silently back toward the camp. Never had such carnage assailed his eyes. He knew his boyhood had gone. Pain and frustration cut through him like a knife.

Many brave warriors had died defending their village. The death song was being sung all through the camp. Come So Far was gone to the Great Spirit, his wife captured by the Hurons. Black Thunder was singing his death song. Half of his scalp had been hacked away. He had many wounds. Rain Maker went through the camp, shaking his rattles and calling on the Great Spirit, driving the evil spirits from the village of the Mohawks. Their corn fields were just smoldering ashes. Running Bear and Many Horses locked arms and looked deep into each other's eyes. They would begin again, Warriors of the Mighty Mohawk nation.

White Eagle held Laughing Water in his arms. She was badly wounded. Running Bear brought the healing herbs to his father. White Eagle kept vigil for many moons over his woman. Slowly Laughing Water regained her strength. Her body healed, but her eyes never laughed again.

Morning Star grew in strength and beauty. The horror of the Huron raid never

left her. Her baby sister, too frail and weak, died that winter. Her name was Little Bird, never to be spoken of again. Her grandmother Shining Moon, had died in the raid. Much sadness was in the hearts of this mighty nation.

Many Horses and Running Bear grew strong and tall and became great warriors. In their stories of battle they had counted coup many times. They took out many war parties. They avenged the Mohawks many times over for the deed done to them, by the hands of the bloodthirsty Hurons. Their great dugout canoes silently moved through the river many times during the next few years.

Many Horses became big in brave deeds, among his nation. He had a large herd of horses. When he came to ask White Eagle for Morning Star, he brought with him seven horses. These horses he had captured and broke. One was a black and white pinto, a war pony. Many gifts were sent to the lodge of White Eagle and Laughing Water.

Morning Star stepped out of the lodge into the bright morning sun. Holding the most beautiful stallion Morning Star had ever seen, was Many Horses.

Many Horses, looking deep into her eyes said, "this appaloosa is my gift to you, Daughter of the Mohawks."

Many Horses lifted his bride onto the stallion. Morning Star sat proud. She knew the whole village was watching. The blue and red beads on her white doeskin dress glittered. Her moccasins, made from the same white doeskin, had small fringes around them. The beading of a beautiful star was intricately done on the top. Many Horse's heart beat loud and strong in his chest. Never had he seen anything so beautiful as his wife, woman of the Mohawks, Morning Star.

A Seneca Indian Praise by Twylah Nitsch (Yeh-Wen-Node)

Oh Great Spirit, We Awake
To another sun
Grateful for the gifts bestowed
Granted one by one —
Grateful for the greatest gift
The precious breath of life;
Grateful for abilities
That guide us day and night.

As we walk our chosen paths
Of lessons we must learn —
Spiritual peace and happiness
Rewards of life we earn.
Thank you for your Spiritual Strength
And for our thoughts to praise;
Thank you for your infinite Love
That guides us through these days.