

PUFFIN CHAPTERS



EAGLE SONG

Joseph Bruchac

illustrated by Dan Andreasen

He lives in the city—
but that's not his home

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She':kon

“Hey, Chief, going home to your teepee?”

Danny Bigtree clenched his fists but kept walking. The November wind was cold against his face. It blew his long black hair over his eyes. He thought again of cutting it short.

If he asked his mother to cut his hair, she might look at him in that way she had. She wouldn't tell him no, though. Even though her eyes might question his decision, he knew she would cut it if he asked. But he knew, too, that even with short hair he'd still be noticed. The other boys would still say things like that. That's how it always

was here in Brooklyn. Especially if you were different.

It would do no good to say, as he had once said to them back in September, "I'm not a chief. We're Iroquois and we never lived in teepees. We lived in longhouses a long time ago, and now I live in an apartment building." They'd just laugh again. Then Tyrone and Brad would ask him where his war pony was.

None of the boys followed him. They went back to their basketball game. Danny stopped at the corner and looked back to watch them play. He wasn't really interested in basketball, but the way they played it almost looked like fun. Some of them were really good, especially Tyrone. While Danny watched, Tyrone bounced the ball, cut around two of the other boys, jumped up and threw the ball in a high long arc. It swished down through the basket.

Brad, Tyrone's best friend, came over and the two boys slapped their palms together in a high five. Danny sighed. He'd never played much basketball on the reservation. Lacrosse was his game. But nobody here played lacrosse.

Danny found himself thinking again of what it had been like up at Akwesasne. The wide St. Lawrence River.

He knew it was so polluted from the factories on the Canadian side that no one could fish in it anymore, but in his memory it was beautiful. Akwesasne. Fields and woods to play in. Lots of other Indian kids who looked and talked the way he did. Akwesasne. The name was so much better than "Brooklyn." Akwesasne meant "The Place Where the Partridge Drums." He didn't know what Brooklyn meant.

There had been plenty of reasons to leave Akwesasne, though. No jobs was one. It was because of the lack of employment that men like his dad traveled all over the country to do ironwork. When his mom had finished her social work degree and been offered the job at the American Indian Community House in Manhattan, she hadn't hesitated. It would be a better life, she'd promised. So far, for Danny, it hadn't been.

He went down into the subway entrance, and when he was on the train, he closed his eyes. That way he wouldn't know if anyone was looking at him. If he kept his eyes closed long enough, he could imagine himself riding on the back of an eagle that would take him away from Brooklyn. It would take him away from schools and tene-



He's not an "Indian Chief"— he is a Mohawk boy.

Danny Bigtree's family has moved to a new city, and no matter how hard he tries, Danny can't seem to fit in. He's homesick for the Mohawk reservation where he used to live, and the kids in his class call him "Chief" and tease him about being an Indian—the thing that makes Danny most proud. Can he find the courage to stand up for himself?

"This appealing portrayal of a strong family offers an unromanticized view of Native American culture . . . and gives a subtle lesson in the meaning of daily courage."

—*School Library Journal*



A PUFFIN BOOK

Ages 7-10

U.S.A. \$4.99

CAN. \$6.99

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Cover design by Mike Reddy

ISBN 0-14-130169-4



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0 51488 00499 8

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