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May 5, 2004

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Final Draft Paper #4

### My Story

*Almost 3,000 years ago, the Woodland Indians lived, cooked, and played in middle Georgia near what is now called Eatonton. They built a highly distinct Indian effigy in the shape of an eagle with large, quartz rocks. After around three hundred years of occupying the land, the Woodland Indians suddenly disappeared and left no traces behind them. This is one young girl's story...*

The sun beats on my shoulders as I walk into the woods to gather all of the berries and fruit I can find. Usually my sister, Amadahy, does this but she seems to have come down with something. She is very tired and lies down all day. She has no appetite and is in a constant sweat. I find a tree that has red berries. Red berries have been a staple for us lately since most of our people have been too tired and sick to look after the crops or to go fishing or hunting. I gather them in my basket and head back toward our longhouse. It is not very far, but I, too, am beginning to feel tired.

As I walk down the wooden path that leads to our house, I feel warm. "It is almost time to change clothes," I think to myself. Currently, I am wearing a woven shirt, fur, and leggings, but since summer is creeping upon me, I will soon change to a traditional grass dress, which most women wear during the summer.

“Angeni, your sister is sweating very badly,” my oldest sister, Galilahi, runs out to tell me. “Can you go fetch her some water?”

Galilahi is almost twenty. Her name means “attractive,” and like so, every Woodland girl envies her looks. She is married to the most handsome brave in the nation. My mother died almost a year ago, and Galilahi recently took charge to help take care of Amadahy. She lives in our house with us along with ten other Woodland families.

I reach the stream and dip my basin into the water. It is cool and feels nice in my hands. I decide to wash off my face as it has collected dust from the trip to the woods. I see my reflection in the stream. My long black hair flows slightly right below my hips, tickling my dark skin. I do not have the attractive looks of Galilahi. My body is awkward and changing. Father says that it will soon be time for me to be married, yet I cannot imagine marrying any one of the boys in my chiefdom. They are all mean and unattractive.

I pick up the basin and head back to our longhouse. I walk inside, grabbing a cloth along the way to help my sister cool off. She is growing hysterical, making no sense in what she is saying. This has happened a lot recently to many of the people. My friend, Eyota, passed on almost a month ago. I can only hope that Amadahy will get well. Father is fetching the medicine man tomorrow. Galilahi has been fasting and praying to our gods in hope that Amadahy will be healed.

I sit by her side as she falls into a slight sleep. I look around and see a shelf of pots. I spot the pot on the far left. This was the first one Amadahy made. I remember

my mother teaching her how to form the clay in her hands. My mother told her that is was special, so we would put it on the shelf. The pot still sits on the shelf, never used.

Before long, I realize it is dinner. We have fish and berries with the other families. Most of their children are sick, too. We all pray for the children and then head to sleep. It has been a long day, and I quickly fall asleep, bothered by the mysterious illness that has swept upon my people.

I wake up to the sun glaring through the sticks which form my house. I hear crying. I stand up and walk toward where Amadahy sleeps. She is surrounded by my father, Galilahi, and some more of my people.

“Angeni, your sister passed on during the night,” my father tells me. He holds me in his arms as I mourn this horrible news. He is a strong man yet I feel his shoulders shake as he tries to contain his emotions.

Thoughts run through my head: “My father should’ve called for the medicine man sooner.” “Why did she die so young?” “Who will be next?”

I silently help Galilahi clean up Amadahy’s bed. We have much to do to get ready for the ceremony. The mound is quite a ways away and with the sickness consuming my people, not many will be able to attend.

As we start the journey to the mound, two men carry Amadahy on their shoulders. She is dressed in jewelry made from porcupine bristles and clay beads. We reach the mound.

The mound is in the shape of an eagle. Our people built it long ago, before I was born, from the instruction of the gods. They first cleared the land by burning all of the

trees. The people then took dirt in their baskets and piled up the dirt to taper the land. At the highest point, they made an eagle out of special stones. It took them years to do this because the stones were very heavy and the eagle was to be very large. Eagles are important to us because they represent eternity. The body of the deceased is laid on the rock eagle and then real eagles come and take the body into the heavens and their spirit lives eternally.

It is now time for Amadahy to be taken into the heavens by the eagles to join my mother. The two men who carried Amadahy on their shoulders lay her body gently on the mound. They spread her arms and legs out in accordance with that of the eagle's. Three elders speak to the gods and play their flutes. As they play, I feel a soft breeze, and I know that Amadahy is joining my mother in the heavens. I can only help but smile even though I am supposed to be mourning.

It has been almost a month since Amadahy journeyed into the heavens. The days have grown longer and longer. Everyone is becoming sick. Many have died, and I am beginning to lose hope. Galilahi is sick, and I am caring for her along with the sick children of another family. Their mother also died a few weeks ago. Someone has passed almost everyday since Amadahy's. They are dying so fast that there are not enough men to carry the bodies the entire way to the mound, so they are beginning to lay the bodies on the sides leading up to the mound.

I, too, am beginning to come down with the same illness that has kidnapped the lives of those whom I love; however, I am trying to be strong for Galilahi. She is very weak and soon she, too, will join my mother and sister.

I walk over to grab a wet cloth to bring to Galilahi. All of a sudden, I see darkness before me. I close my eyes and feel my body collapse and fall onto the dirt floor of the longhouse. I can feel nothing. Then out of nowhere I feel myself being lifted as if on the wings of an eagle...