

EMPOWERMENT \$AGA

# THE CHOICE



VOLUME 1 ISSUE 6

The story begins with shape-shifters, four birds - Eagle, Raven, Hawk, and Owl - perched on telephone lines on the outskirts of the Native community.

They are spiritual helpers to a group of teens - Shining Star, Theresa, Ranger, and Jay. These young teens learn financial resources as they embark on many adventures, and encounter intrigue in the process!

**The Choice** shows the perils and rewards of making the right life choices, and how traditional values can help with those choices in order to thrive.



### EAGLE

Eagle is an ancient spirit: all knowing, all seeing. As a human, he transforms into a strong leader who guides others through their journeys. He wears a medicine bag.



### OWL

Owl is a wise one, and beyond. As a human, she conveys wisdom to others about their life situations. Owl always carries her fringed purse.



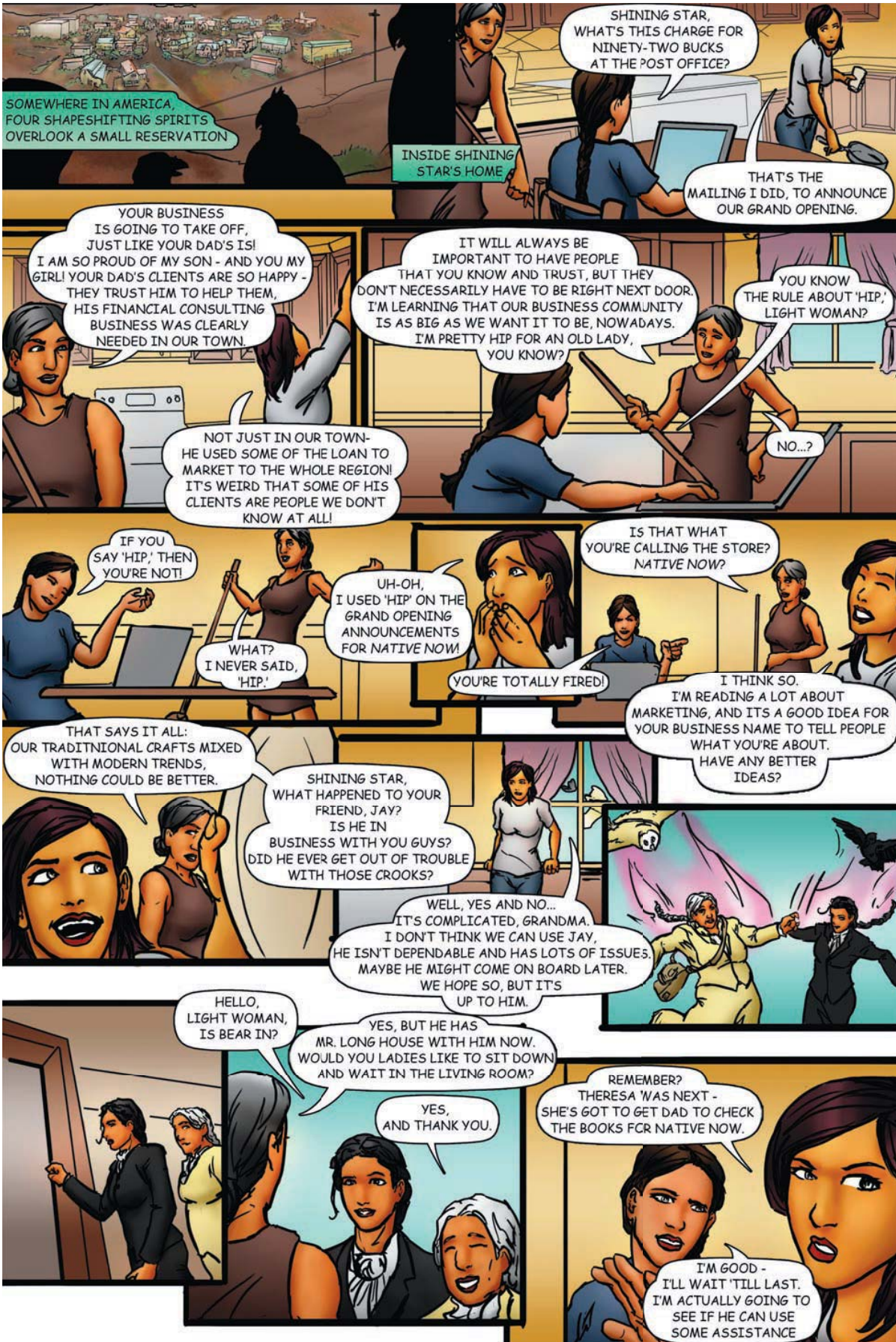
### RAVEN

Raven is the one who brings balance; all-encompassing of all the attributes of life. In human form, she evokes reasonable consideration of all facts. Raven wears a turquoise ring.



### HAWK

Hawk is a hunter and a messenger, a patient observer with a quirky sense of humor. In human form, he is always physically fit and active. He constantly wears his bead and bone choker.



SOMEWHERE IN AMERICA, FOUR SHAPESHIFTING SPIRITS OVERLOOK A SMALL RESERVATION

INSIDE SHINING STAR'S HOME

SHINING STAR, WHAT'S THIS CHARGE FOR NINETY-TWO BUCKS AT THE POST OFFICE?

THAT'S THE MAILING I DID, TO ANNOUNCE OUR GRAND OPENING.

YOUR BUSINESS IS GOING TO TAKE OFF, JUST LIKE YOUR DAD'S IS! I AM SO PROUD OF MY SON - AND YOU MY GIRL! YOUR DAD'S CLIENTS ARE SO HAPPY - THEY TRUST HIM TO HELP THEM, HIS FINANCIAL CONSULTING BUSINESS WAS CLEARLY NEEDED IN OUR TOWN.

IT WILL ALWAYS BE IMPORTANT TO HAVE PEOPLE THAT YOU KNOW AND TRUST, BUT THEY DON'T NECESSARILY HAVE TO BE RIGHT NEXT DOOR. I'M LEARNING THAT OUR BUSINESS COMMUNITY IS AS BIG AS WE WANT IT TO BE, NOWADAYS. I'M PRETTY HIP FOR AN OLD LADY, YOU KNOW?

YOU KNOW THE RULE ABOUT 'HIP,' LIGHT WOMAN?

NOT JUST IN OUR TOWN- HE USED SOME OF THE LOAN TO MARKET TO THE WHOLE REGION! IT'S WEIRD THAT SOME OF HIS CLIENTS ARE PEOPLE WE DON'T KNOW AT ALL!

NO...?

IF YOU SAY 'HIP,' THEN YOU'RE NOT!

UH-OH, I USED 'HIP' ON THE GRAND OPENING ANNOUNCEMENTS FOR NATIVE NOW!

IS THAT WHAT YOU'RE CALLING THE STORE? NATIVE NOW?

WHAT? I NEVER SAID, 'HIP.'

YOU'RE TOTALLY FIRED!

I THINK SO. I'M READING A LOT ABOUT MARKETING, AND IT'S A GOOD IDEA FOR YOUR BUSINESS NAME TO TELL PEOPLE WHAT YOU'RE ABOUT. HAVE ANY BETTER IDEAS?

THAT SAYS IT ALL: OUR TRADITIONAL CRAFTS MIXED WITH MODERN TRENDS, NOTHING COULD BE BETTER.

SHINING STAR, WHAT HAPPENED TO YOUR FRIEND, JAY? IS HE IN BUSINESS WITH YOU GUYS? DID HE EVER GET OUT OF TROUBLE WITH THOSE CROOKS?



WELL, YES AND NO... IT'S COMPLICATED, GRANDMA. I DON'T THINK WE CAN USE JAY, HE ISN'T DEPENDABLE AND HAS LOTS OF ISSUES. MAYBE HE MIGHT COME ON BOARD LATER. WE HOPE SO, BUT IT'S UP TO HIM.

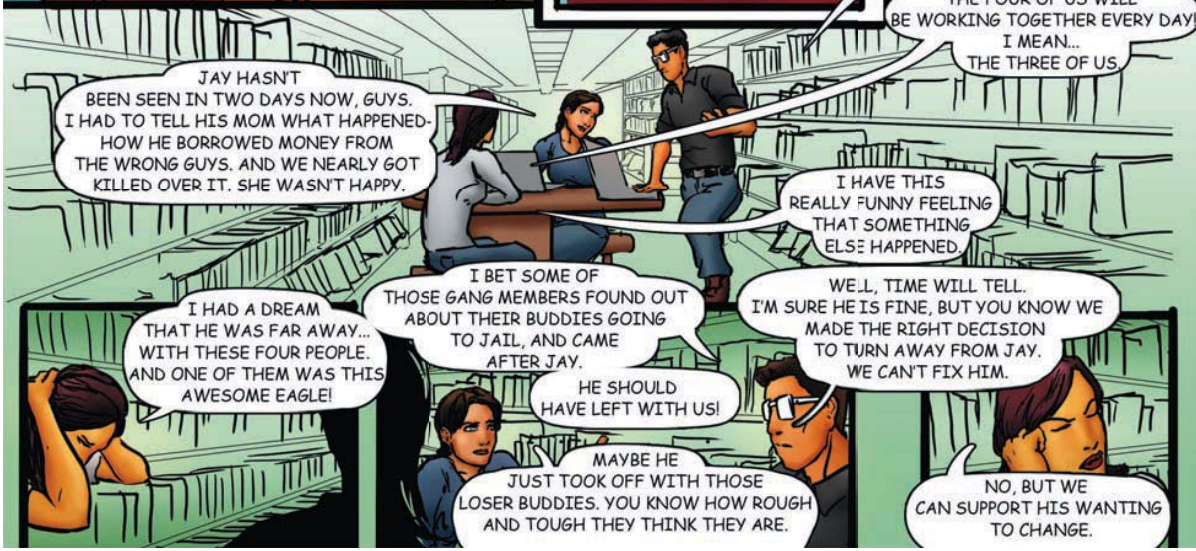
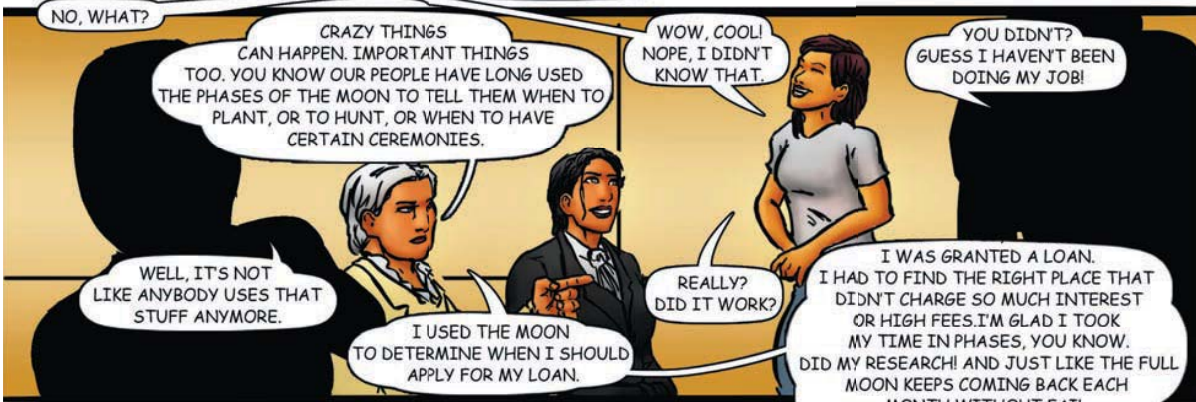
HELLO, LIGHT WOMAN, IS BEAR IN?

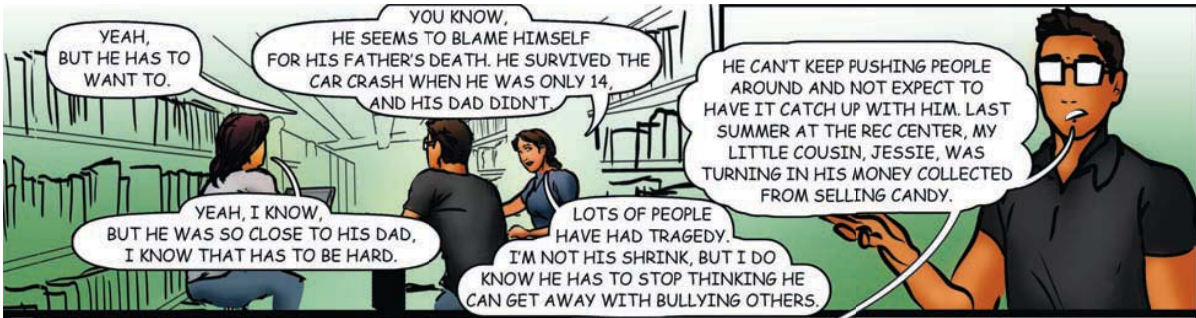
YES, BUT HE HAS MR. LONG HOUSE WITH HIM NOW. WOULD YOU LADIES LIKE TO SIT DOWN AND WAIT IN THE LIVING ROOM?

YES, AND THANK YOU.

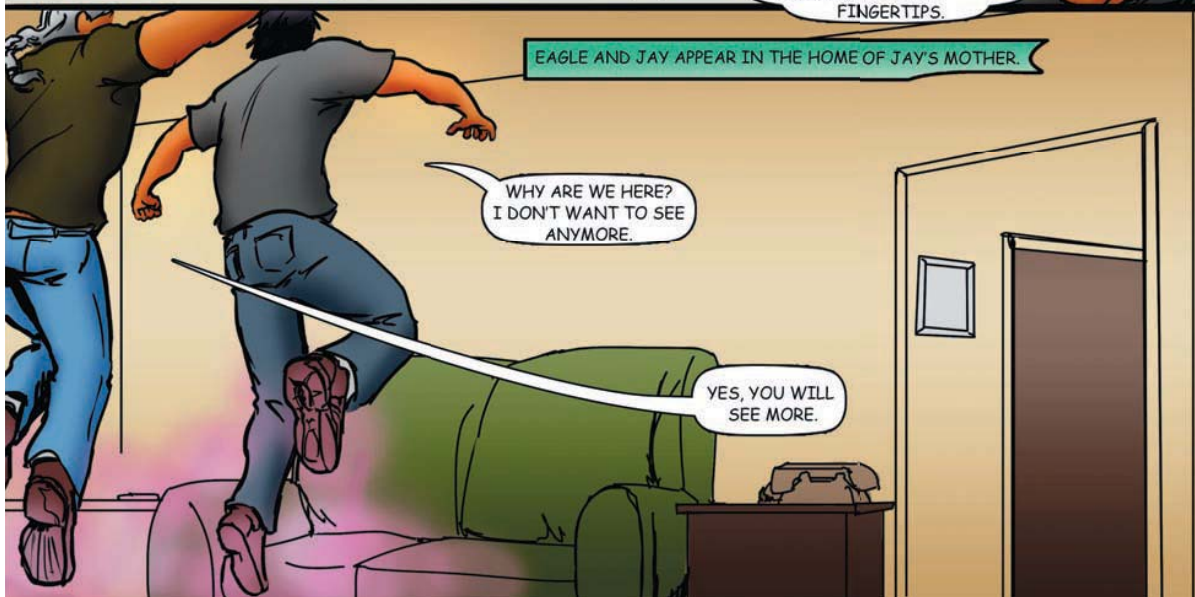
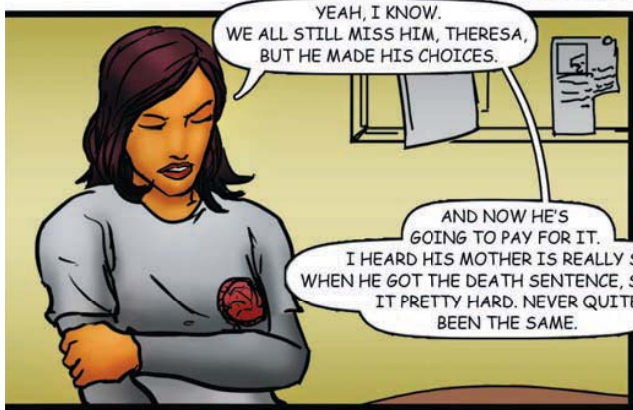
REMEMBER? THERESA WAS NEXT - SHE'S GOT TO GET DAD TO CHECK THE BOOKS FOR NATIVE NOW.

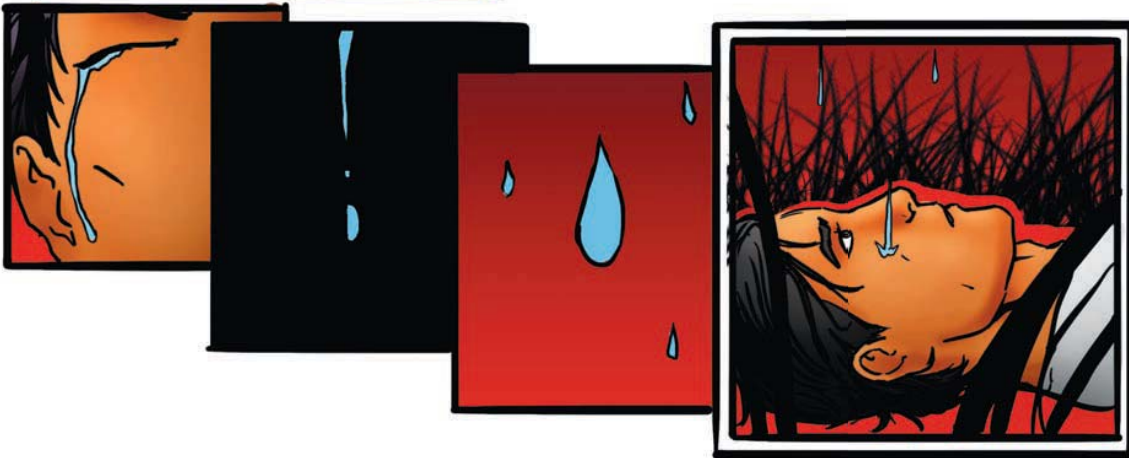
I'M GOOD - I'LL WAIT 'TILL LAST. I'M ACTUALLY GOING TO SEE IF HE CAN USE SOME ASSISTANCE





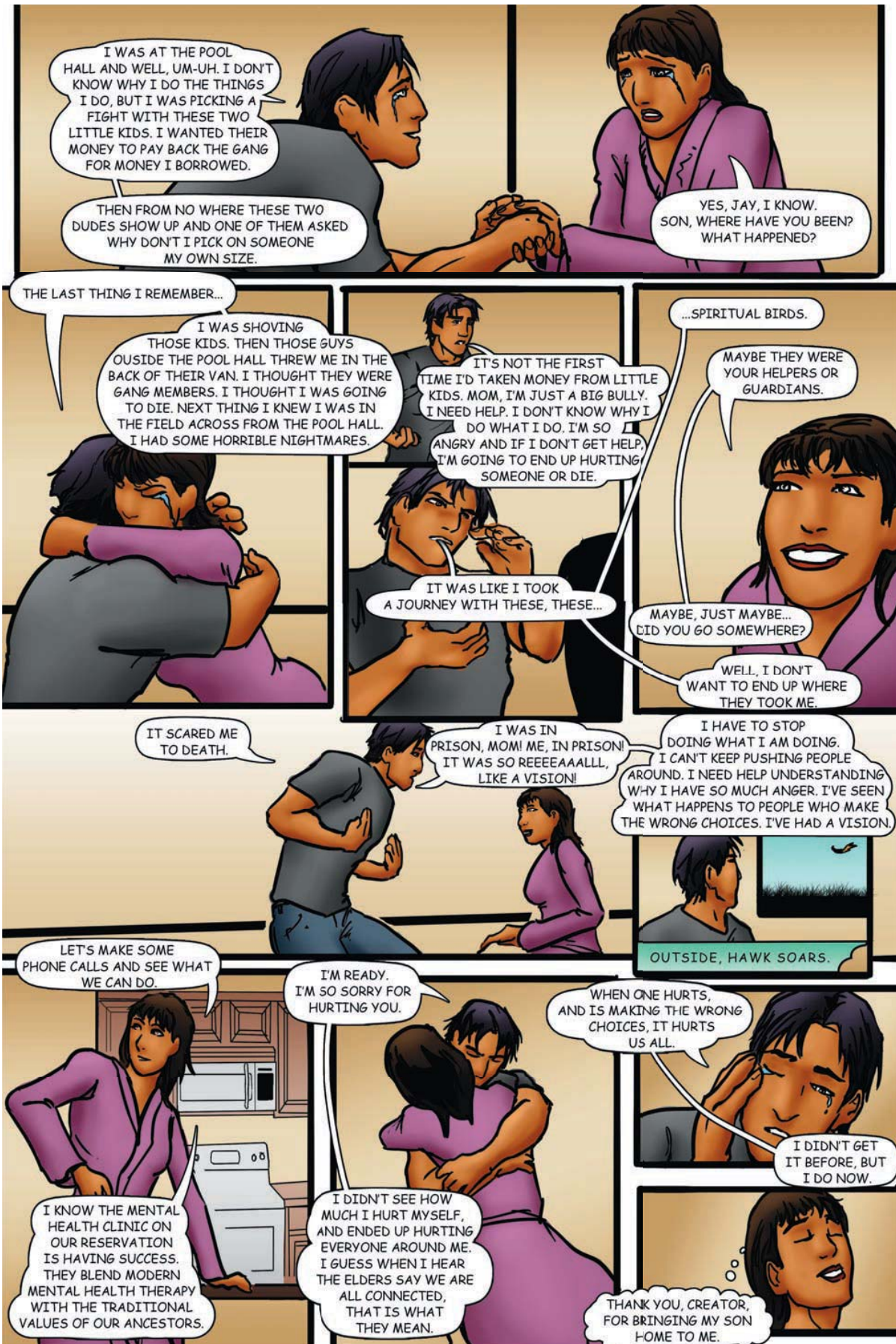


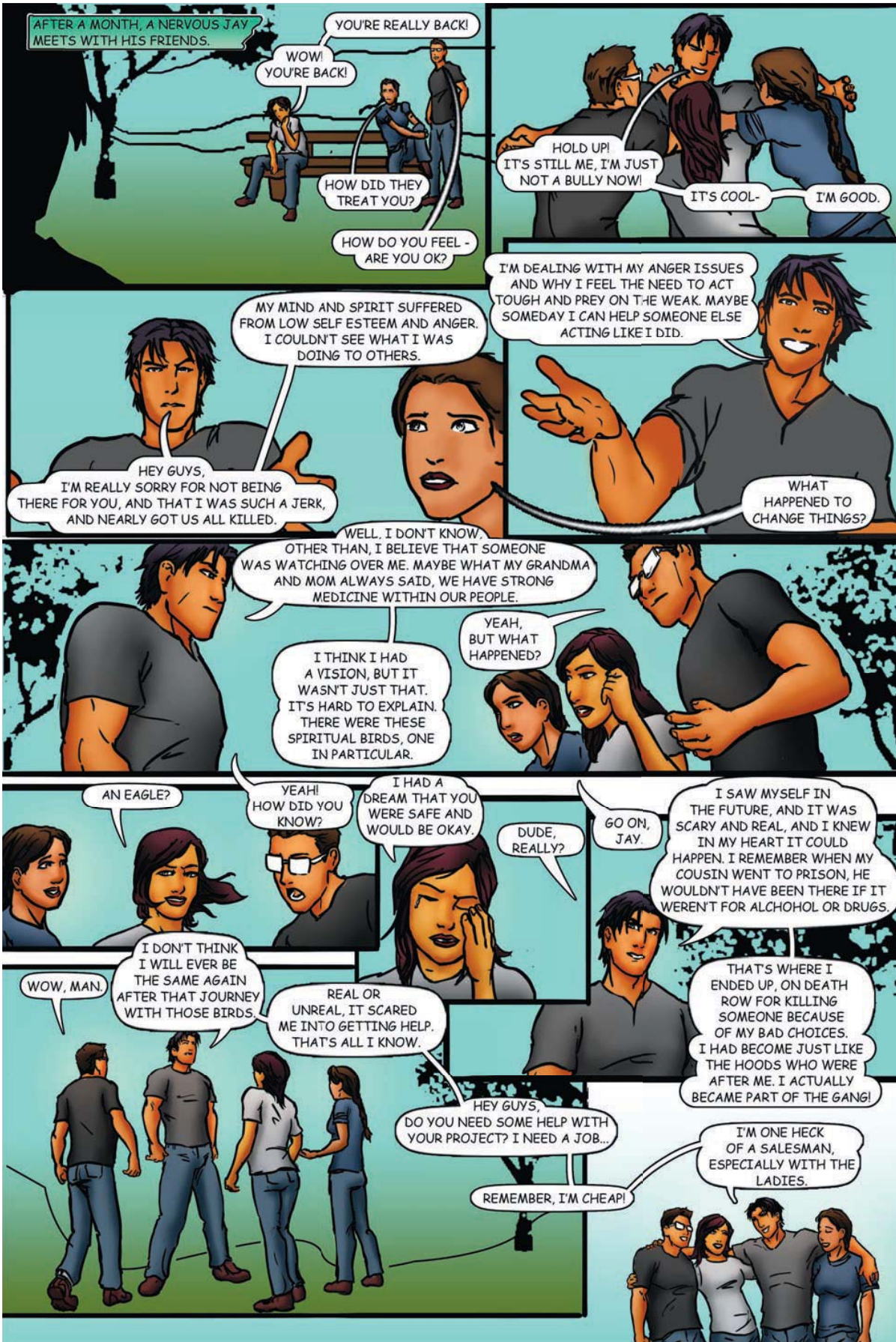












AFTER A MONTH, A NERVOUS JAY MEETS WITH HIS FRIENDS.

YOU'RE REALLY BACK!

WOW! YOU'RE BACK!

HOW DID THEY TREAT YOU?

HOW DO YOU FEEL - ARE YOU OK?

HOLD UP! IT'S STILL ME, I'M JUST NOT A BULLY NOW!

IT'S COOL-

I'M GOOD.

I'M DEALING WITH MY ANGER ISSUES AND WHY I FEEL THE NEED TO ACT TOUGH AND PREY ON THE WEAK. MAYBE SOMEDAY I CAN HELP SOMEONE ELSE ACTING LIKE I DID.

HEY GUYS, I'M REALLY SORRY FOR NOT BEING THERE FOR YOU, AND THAT I WAS SUCH A JERK, AND NEARLY GOT US ALL KILLED.

MY MIND AND SPIRIT SUFFERED FROM LOW SELF ESTEEM AND ANGER. I COULDN'T SEE WHAT I WAS DOING TO OTHERS.

WHAT HAPPENED TO CHANGE THINGS?

WELL, I DON'T KNOW. OTHER THAN, I BELIEVE THAT SOMEONE WAS WATCHING OVER ME. MAYBE WHAT MY GRANDMA AND MOM ALWAYS SAID, WE HAVE STRONG MEDICINE WITHIN OUR PEOPLE.

I THINK I HAD A VISION, BUT IT WASN'T JUST THAT. IT'S HARD TO EXPLAIN. THERE WERE THESE SPIRITUAL BIRDS, ONE IN PARTICULAR.

YEAH, BUT WHAT HAPPENED?

AN EAGLE?

YEAH! HOW DID YOU KNOW?

I HAD A DREAM THAT YOU WERE SAFE AND WOULD BE OKAY.

DUDE, REALLY?

GO ON, JAY.

I SAW MYSELF IN THE FUTURE, AND IT WAS SCARY AND REAL, AND I KNEW IN MY HEART IT COULD HAPPEN. I REMEMBER WHEN MY COUSIN WENT TO PRISON, HE WOULDN'T HAVE BEEN THERE IF IT WEREN'T FOR ALCOHOL OR DRUGS.

WOW, MAN. I DON'T THINK I WILL EVER BE THE SAME AGAIN AFTER THAT JOURNEY WITH THOSE BIRDS.

REAL OR UNREAL, IT SCARED ME INTO GETTING HELP. THAT'S ALL I KNOW.

THAT'S WHERE I ENDED UP, ON DEATH ROW FOR KILLING SOMEONE BECAUSE OF MY BAD CHOICES. I HAD BECOME JUST LIKE THE HOODS WHO WERE AFTER ME. I ACTUALLY BECAME PART OF THE GANG!

HEY GUYS, DO YOU NEED SOME HELP WITH YOUR PROJECT? I NEED A JOB...

REMEMBER, I'M CHEAP!

I'M ONE HECK OF A SALESMAN, ESPECIALLY WITH THE LADIES.



IT APPEARS OUR SMALL RESERVATION IS NOW TAKING ADVANTAGE OF COMMERCE.

AND OUR KIDS ARE DOING WELL IN THEIR BUSINESS, ALONG WITH SO MANY MEMBERS OF THEIR TRIBE.

I WAS BETTING AGAINST HIM BUT JAY HAS HAD QUITE THE TURNAROUND.

YES. IT SEEMS THIS COMMUNITY MAY HAVE REALLY GOTTEN A HANDLE ON FINANCIAL GAIN AND PROSPERITY. I KNOW THEY WON'T LOSE SIGHT OF THEIR TRADITIONAL VALUES AND CULTURE, DESPITE ALL THAT THEY'VE LEARNED. IT IS OUR JOB TO GUIDE THEM TO CONTINUE TO LEARN, AND PROTECT THEM. WE WILL COME BACK WHEN WE ARE NEEDED HERE AGAIN.



WHEN I SAID, 'OUR WORK HERE IS DONE,' I WAS THINKING MORE 'VACATION' THAN 'NEW JOB!'

OH, QUIT YOUR SQUAWKING! SPIRITUAL GUIDES DON'T TAKE VACATIONS!

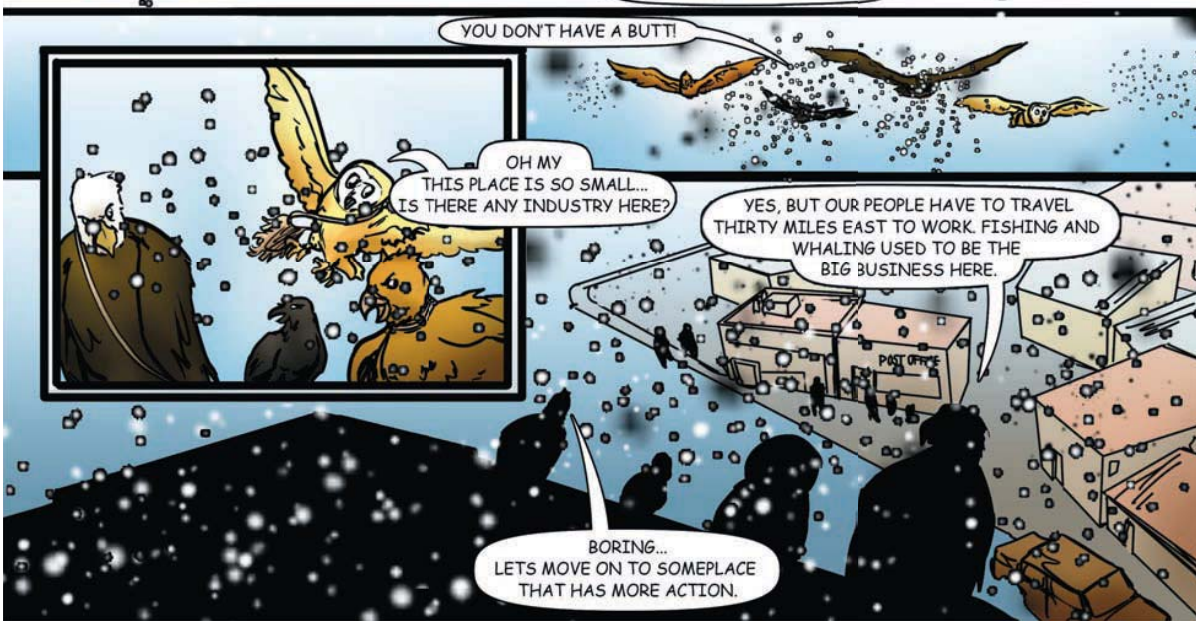
NOW LET'S GO AND SEE WHAT'S HAPPENING BY THE SEA.



DUDE, IT'S COLD HERE! I DON'T SEE ANY PEOPLE.

THEY ARE FURTHER INLAND.

WHAT ARE WE WAITING FOR? I'M FREEZING MY BUTT OFF!



YOU DON'T HAVE A BUTT!

OH MY THIS PLACE IS SO SMALL... IS THERE ANY INDUSTRY HERE?

YES, BUT OUR PEOPLE HAVE TO TRAVEL THIRTY MILES EAST TO WORK. FISHING AND WHALING USED TO BE THE BIG BUSINESS HERE.

BORING... LETS MOVE ON TO SOMEPLACE THAT HAS MORE ACTION.



IT HAS BEEN MANY YEARS SINCE THE SHAPE-SHIFTERS VISITED SHINING STAR'S NOW BUSY RESERVATION TOWN.

IN THE ARBOR, A POWWOW IS IN FULL FORM. THE BEATING OF THE DRUMS SYNCHRONIZE WITH THE HEARTS OF THE DANCERS, TWIRLING WITH RADIANT COLOR. THE ANCIENT SPIRIT OF THE PEOPLE STILL LIVES.

ALTHOUGH THE OLD WAYS OF HUNTING AND FISHING ARE FOREVER GONE, THE NEW WAYS OF BLENDING TRADE WITH FINANCIAL TOOLS FOR SECURITY AND A GLOBAL MARKETPLACE PRESENT ABUNDANT NEW OPPORTUNITIES. MUCH LIKE THE ANCIENT ONES HAD TO MASTER THEIR SKILLS FOR THE HUNT, THEIR CRAFTS, TRADING AND CULTIVATING IN ORDER TO SURVIVE...

IT IS TIME TO MASTER NEW SKILLS SO THAT WE MAY CONTINUE TO THRIVE. THIS FAST MODERN AGE OF OUR TIMES WILL ALLOW YOUNGER GENERATIONS TO PROSPER, AND WITH THE HELP OF OUR ELDERS, AND GOOD LEADERS, OUR YOUTH WILL NOT LOSE SIGHT OF THEIR HERITAGE.



THE SPIRIT HELPERS ARE NEVER FAR AWAY, ONLY TO BE CALLED UPON. IT'S THE ANCIENT WAY OF THE PEOPLE.



## Rose Red Elk (Sioux/Assiniboine)

Author of the Empowerment \$aga series of stories, Rose is an international performing arts entertainer, also known by her Native American traditional and stage name, Red Feather Woman. An accomplished award winning recording artist, storyteller, singer, songwriter and author from the Fort Peck Reservation in Poplar, Montana, and an enrolled member of the Sioux/Assiniboine Tribes, Rose continues to discover the realms of spiritual awareness through the gift of storytelling, in written, oral and musical forms. Her fiction is themed with traditional values, blended with ancient stories from the past.

[www.redfeatherwoman.com](http://www.redfeatherwoman.com)

## Matthew Barkhausen

Matthew worked with the Native American and woman owned small business Circuit Media as an illustrator for the Empowerment \$aga series of stories. His artwork for this and other projects focuses on Native American culture. He has provided artwork to the Rocky Mountain Indian Chamber of Commerce and other Native American organizations. Matthew is of Cherokee and Tuscarora heritage. He has a B.A. in interactive media design from the Art Institute of Colorado.



[www.matthewbarkhausen.com](http://www.matthewbarkhausen.com)

Other Circuit Media illustrators who contributed greatly to the project were **Jon Hormachea**, creative design director, **Abby McMillen**, illustrator, and **Ali Bibbo**, graphic designer.



## Joseph Arnold

Working as a freelancer for a Denver based company, Joe created the original images of the characters. His artwork reflects his philosophy that dedication and practice are critical aspects of being an artist. After serving five years active duty with the U.S. Army 82nd Airborne and three years with the Colorado National Guard, Joe completed his education in June 2102 at The Art Institute of Colorado with a bachelor's degree in media arts and animation. He has worked for Disney Online Studios Boulder and 12-6 Studios in Denver.

Original concept by J.P. Barham

## Creating the Empowerment \$aga

The Empowerment \$aga is a series of stories to engage youth 14-18 years of age in developing basic financial skills so they will learn how to build and preserve their own financial wealth. These stories, offered in colorful comic-style graphics, are reservation-based in order to bring "home" to Native youth the message of handling their finances from an early age.

Recognizing the importance of financial knowledge to IIM account holders, the U.S. Department of the Interior, Office of the Special Trustee for American Indians (OST) has been working for years to bring financial skills training to account holders of all ages. OST has partnered with other government agencies, Native community development financial institutions, Native organizations, and others to offer culturally sensitive financial education.

The Empowerment \$aga is another opportunity to expand financial skills training in Indian Country by encouraging youth-to-youth and multi-generational discussions about this topic. The stories highlight the value of knowing these financial skills, and illustrate the challenging consequences when this knowledge is not known or used properly.

The characters and stories of the Empowerment \$aga series are wholly-owned by the government of the United States and cannot be used without the written consent of the government. For more information regarding financial education opportunities in Indian Country, please contact:

### OST's Director of Financial Education

brian\_ross@ost.doi.gov

or

### Trust Beneficiary Call Center

1-888-678-6836

To contact your Fiduciary Trust Officer please visit:

<http://www.doi.gov/ost/fto>



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