

## A Friend on the Train - Sidney Byrd - OSEU #6

I met my first black man. I'd never seen a black man before and he wore a funny cap and a black coat with shiny buttons. Bored. I thought he was saying bird. Saying all aboard, but he didn't say all aboard. Bored. Yeah, go grandson. Make us proud. Remember, we'll be here for you. Then I left and he helped me. I got on this train. I'd never been on a train before. I'm fearful. I'm sitting there. I looked out and all of a sudden that train started moving and all I could see was all the things that remind me of home passing.

And I uttered a prayer that the Great Spirit will take care of my grandparents, my grandfather and my grandmother and help me do my best, the things they want me to learn and do. This train rocking motion. You know, I got an extreme case of motion sickness. Before I got on, when we went to town, I had my first ice cream cone. I never had ice cream before. I had two of them. So when that train took off and I'm sitting there and rocking motion, I got an extreme case of motion sickness. I lost all the ice cream. Made a mess. The black man came.

He knew my name. Sid Bird. I couldn't know. He could read it. I didn't know that. And he cleaned up the mess and he did this. So I grabbed him by the coattail and he took me into a room. Little room. There was a white bowl. I don't know what that was for. He was talking to me but I couldn't understand. So he demonstrated. He sat down on this bowl and there was a roll of toilet paper. I didn't know that. He took the paper and then he pressed a little lever and the water all disappeared. At home we had an outdoor toilet. We didn't have any water.

I couldn't believe it. We came out and then this black man reached in his pocket and pulled out a knife. Now I'm going to defend myself as a Lakota warrior. I have to be brave. I'm trying to think of how I'm going to disarm this man or run. He held out a knife and while I'm undecided what I should do, he reached into his other pocket, pulled out an apple. He sliced it in half and gave it to me. You talk about relief. But during the night I went to sleep earlier. I woke up. I had a problem. I had to go to the bathroom.

At home we had an outdoor toilet and I was trying to open the window. I probably would have been the first Native American mooner but I couldn't. Then I looked back. I saw a little door so I kicked off their shoes and I tiptoed quickly. Everybody was asleep and I got on. We were the last car on the little platform. I cannot describe the relief that I came up and that's when he took me to the bathroom and showed me the room. And he came down, sat next to me and he gave me part of his apple.

And my grandmother made me a little lard pail of lunch and I offered to share it with him but he refused but I insisted. So he took a piece of fried bread and he sat. So he and I talking to each other, neither one of them knowing what the other one was saying. But

he was the kindest man and I could see in his eyes how he was kind. He wanted to help me. And after a long time he indicated that I should put on my shoes because this is where I got off. I would have to get off. So I quickly put on the shoes.