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Alcatraz Recollections

TIM FINDLEY

I have always been reluctant to write anything that might be taken as an “insider” piece on Alcatraz and the Indian occupation. To those who have asked for more than just a journalistic rehash of my reporting for the *San Francisco Chronicle*, I have tried to say, over the years, that the story belongs to the Native Americans who were there and not to a white reporter who came eventually to be resented by at least some of the Indians whom he had once counted as friends on the island.

That’s not just liberal guilt or “political correctness” I feel, and I certainly don’t regard it as some kind of racism. It’s just that I know that a number of Native Americans, whether they were on the island or not, would disagree with my perception of the details, and I have never found it worth damaging the significance of the Alcatraz occupation by haggling over my own credentials and memories connected to it.

As far as I’m concerned, any Native American who was living at the time and claims to have been on Alcatraz was on Alcatraz. In one sense, anyway, they all were.

I remember John Trudell on that cold day in March 1971, when everyone knew it could not last much longer and when the exhilaration of invasion had, in some ways, worn down into the bitterness of exile. “You can be certain we will not leave Alcatraz,” Trudell said, “We have come too far and through too much to start giving land back to the white man.”

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Three months later, Trudell and what looked to be a discouraged handful of others were finally removed from the island by federal authorities. But Trudell was right; they never really left. In fact, the presence of Indians on the bleak, old prison "Rock" might be more significant today than it was even then.

As a story, I prefer to hear about the Alcatraz occupation as it is still told in oral legend, almost like a folk tale. In fact, like a folk tale, it's a story that does not really have a clear beginning or a certain ending. It's still going on, and it seems to me to get better with every telling.

The early part of it is certainly Adam's to tell, although even he has to recall that old McKenzie had the basic idea years before he did. Richard's story is the story of the invasion itself, but it turns out even more sadly than most people realize. And, in the end, it deserves to be Trudell's story, because he was there when it ended and because he carried that off with a certain nobility that wasn't always part of the rest of it.

It is also Stella's story, an angrier version than others, I suppose. And LaNada's story, which, I would only guess, rides high and low over changing emotions. Myself, I'd like to hear Joe Bill tell it from the beginning as only he could, in that devilish, good-natured way of his. Or maybe Annie, Richard's wife, who just seemed to have stopped talking to anybody.

Many more people than were ever there in person have told their own stories. I think that, too, is okay. Alcatraz in 1969 was not a place; it was an idea, an electrifying moment like the March on Washington or the Chicago convention. If you say you were there, I believe you, even if I didn't see you.

For all the many Indian versions, there are also the white guys' stories of Alcatraz. Mine is only one of them, and maybe not even the most significant one. I was, after all, a reporter who not only was paid for most of what I did but was also quite aware of its potential for my professional reputation. Many others gave to the cause without any expectation of payment or recognition and even with some considerable risk to themselves and their property.

That's the big problem I have with Alcatraz. I find my own involvement to be ultimately compromising: something mixed up and locked in place between pride and humility. I keep having this feeling I should apologize for it to some Native Americans and not even mention it to others. Getting "correct" with what happened at Alcatraz is a process I have witnessed evolving over all the twenty-five years since it began.

It leaves a lot out to say it began with that Halloween party at my house in Sausalito, but that is where I remember it first coming into focus. You have to keep in mind what an incredible year 1969 really was for its sense of young people all over the world thrashing out from under the old, cold hand of restraint and bigotry that held the planet forcibly together after World War II. Everywhere in the Western world, at least—France, Germany, and the United States especially—there were eruptions of dissent and self-expression that surged into the streets in overwhelming numbers but still seemed powerless against the grim, gray institutions of wealth and worn out social policy. In San Francisco alone that fall, more than a quarter of a million people—some still say half a million—marched in just one of many rallies against the war in Vietnam. They flooded into Golden Gate Park and sprawled out across the green to hear and see the very cream of contemporary culture express their opposition for them.

The year had already seen the government's pathetic and outrageous attempt to blame the riots at the Democratic convention in Chicago on a conspiracy of seven young men who became instant folk heroes. In Oakland, the trial of Black Panther founder Huey Newton for the murder of a police officer had become an indictment of the system itself, in which rallying public opinion would acquit Newton and then condemn him to an ultimately more fatal status as social martyr. In May, James Rector, a rootless young adventurer without real connections to any of it, was shot to death and given posthumous fame by police carrying out the orders of Governor Ronald Reagan to stop the Berkeley riots over Peoples' Park, "even if it takes a bloodbath." The "Summer of Love" in San Francisco's Haight-Ashbury was only two years past, and mysteriously aging hippies still wandered about in confusion over the rapidly changing styles that had incorporated them into a camouflage of colors and trends and drugs and had made them almost invisible in the new "Woodstock generation."

Everywhere it was happening in 1969, but possibly nowhere else as much and with as much variety as in San Francisco. The Panthers, Peoples' Park, and the antiwar movement were "mine" at the *San Francisco Chronicle*. My forte was to cover "them" from their point of view, while other reporters took respectable places behind police lines. I partied with the Panthers, got arrested and beaten up at Peoples' Park, and promoted the hell out of antiwar marches whenever I could. That wasn't especially unique or

brave either, because the truth in San Francisco in 1969 was that the political establishment of the city itself was evolving with much the same sympathies, even if they weren't always translated down to the street cop level.

The *Chronicle* and its publisher were as hidebound backward conservative as any other major paper—probably more so because of the influence of the paper's city editor, who refused to see any demonstration as more than an act of overfed and undereducated kids. He did not like what I wrote, but the times were just too overpowering for him to do more than try to put it—and me—in a wiggly box of our own labeled *analysis*.

Parties at my house were becoming fairly common events. It was a dream place for a young, pseudo-intellectual reporter like me, with a panoramic view of the bay and San Francisco, looking all the way to South Oakland in the distance. At night, the beam from Alcatraz traced a steady pulse, even through the fog.

Everybody I knew was invited, including Black Panthers, student radicals, professional Marxists, local politicians, a horde of other reporters, and the bartenders from the places where we drank. If you couldn't find some excitement at one of these parties, it was a sign of cortex rot.

Adam and Bobbie Nordwall were unusual in the mix, not because they were Indians, but because they had been my friends longer than anybody else in the whole party, except my wife. Adam and I had worked together in my days as a field representative for VISTA Indian projects. He and Bobbie had been there when I ended my Washington, D.C., career by punching a bureaucrat sent to reduce the federal commitment to Indian recruitment.

You have to know Adam, of course, to really understand how an Indian could make an impression on that crowd without getting at least as drunk as they were. Other Indians will complain about Adam's out-front salesmanship as long as Adam lives, and even Bobbie still cringes at his sometimes shameless good nature. But I'll tell you what, I also knew Browning Pipestem at the time and Lee Brightman and even Russell Means. None of them could have gotten it done the way Adam did, nor would they even have tried.

The truth is, Adam sometimes still embarrasses me with his reckless self-confidence and his certainty that everybody is bound to like him and his ideas. I think he sometimes is unaware that there are people who don't take him seriously.

Adam may have been serving as a mentor to Richard Oakes at

that time; I think that's one reason why Richard was with the Nordwalls that night.

It's well-known that the federal government put Alcatraz up for grabs after it closed the prison in 1962. The hypocrisy of that is revealed now as the U.S. Parks Service rakes in the cash from possibly its biggest money-maker, which it would have given away if the Indians hadn't taken it. The Park Service owes Adam a medal.

But in that early fall of 1969, nobody was sure of what to do with Alcatraz. The only thing certain among the rising breed of new politicians in San Francisco was that they did not want to turn the island over as some gaudy amusement park and casino proposed by Texas magnate H.L. Hunt. It was a near thing, though—so close that designer Alvin Duskin was paying for a public campaign to head off the federal giveaway to Hunt.

Alvin Duskin was out of my league. Alcatraz was just a good spot in the overall view from my house. But I had an interest in the San Francisco Indian Center, which had burned down only two days before. Most Indians blamed it on the Samoans, but I was not about to get into that particular turf war in the Mission District. My interest, dating back again to those federal days, was in trying to help scare up some financial support to rebuild the center.

As I was later prepared not to tell any grand jury that asked, it was Adam's idea to take Alcatraz. "What?" I'm sure I must have said when he called me with the idea. "You mean claim the thing and keep it? Or just take it and trade for it?"

Adam, I think, saw it first the way I did—as a dramatic demonstration, meant to show the numbers and needs of American Indians in the Bay Area, that would eventually bring some return in financing for a new Indian center. A week, maybe, was all I thought the story might run, and then people would get behind building a new place in the city.

But Duskin had made some converts already, whom I underestimated. It seems to me that, in my kitchen, around the old whiskey barrel where people were bobbing for apples, something happened between people the likes of Willie Brown and Dianne Feinstein, Adam Nordwall and Richard Oakes, and a bunch of bleary-eyed reporters and bartenders, and that something seemed to make it all possible.

I'm not saying that Willie Brown or Dianne Feinstein were in on some kind of conspiracy. Maybe they didn't even hear it, but I do know that, before the party was over that night, there was tacit

agreement from political forces in San Francisco that the invasion would have no serious local opposition, and general agreement among what I thought to be the best reporters in the Bay Area—including representatives of the *New York Times*, *Newsweek*, and Reuters News Agency—that they would await word from Adam on when the invasion would begin.

Only in 1969, I think, could such a deal have been struck in my lifetime.

It's also significant to keep in mind that, for all the rising social consciousness of those times, Indians were not well recognized or understood in cities like San Francisco. They were still the "vanishing Americans," all but invisible to most urban dwellers who were distant enough from a reservation to continue to draw their opinions from romanticized old movies.

In some ways at least, it seemed to me that young Indians were choosing to remain invisible; they consistently opted out of participation in civil rights demonstrations and antiwar rallies. A few, like Lee Brightman, made angry appearances to accuse the federal government, but most young Indians I knew did not want a place alongside Black civil rights activists or tie-dyed peaceniks. There was not one single cause or overwhelming outrage that seemed capable of bringing them into lasting focus among the "movement" in the late 1960s.

Richard, unlike Adam and Bobbie, had gotten as drunk as the rest of us by the time the party finally dribbled out into dawn. His part in that night's fledgling plan would have to be translated through whatever pieces of memory survived through the next morning.

I was not yet thirty and certainly no model of wisdom for organized behavior, but even with my background in federal Indian affairs, I had only a vague understanding of what was forming as a Native American youth organization at San Francisco State University. My experience with the National Indian Youth Council years before had convinced me that the leadership would be distrustful—almost to the point of wasting better effort—of white people meaning to be helpful. I knew the stories, already almost legendary, of Clyde Warrior; I had a sense of a brewing militancy among Indians that I could not approach even as easily as I had the leadership of the Black Panthers. As far as I knew, Richard alone would serve as the link between a possible idea and the young people who would carry it out.

Adam, of course, was more unrestrained than ever. Now I was

talking to him on the phone at least once a day, and usually more. Immediately he was everywhere, like some messenger running from village to village with a new torch. Whatever Richard was doing at San Francisco State, it could not have kept pace with Adam's rapidly and relentlessly broadening network of phone calls and personal visits to people, many of whom he hardly knew at all.

But I have to say that I do not think Adam could have done it by himself. Even then, there was jealousy and resentment among Indians in the Bay Area about what they saw as Adam's desire for publicity—something to which I suppose I had contributed in earlier stories about the United Bay Area Council. Lee Brightman, a rising star in the media himself, resented Adam, I think, and so did Stella Leach, who felt slighted by Adam in the organization and activities of the council. If it had been a matter of Adam's organizing his own generation, the Alcatraz invasion might not have happened.

But Richard certainly could not have done it or even conceived of it without Adam, either. Some things about Richard seemed just too obvious to accept easily.

He had sculptured good looks and a full, muscular stature that kept calling up media comparisons to Victor Mature—an Indian who looked like an Italian who played an Indian. He was a Mohawk; when asked, he would confirm that he, like all cliché Mohawk men, had worked in high steel. He had a beautiful wife and six children, and he was working his way through college toward some uncertain degree. Richard seemed ready-made for the media.

I took my own job rather self-importantly as being beyond such shallow veneers; I felt that my work was directed at the greater insights and issues that would influence the times (and even the *Times*).

Adam was always available and ready for a quote, but I thought he was wearing out his originality and becoming a celebrity without enough depth of standing. If the affair of Alcatraz was to be seen seriously as a means to create support for urban Indians, it needed more raw, unpolished material than Adam himself could provide. Richard would serve that purpose for much of the media, but few of them knew of Richard's difficulty in organizing and maintaining support among the young Indians who would be vital to the effort.

That makes it sound as if I know more than I really do about the

organizing efforts that November. All I am sure of is that a young Native American woman, a fellow student at San Francisco State, seemed to me to have done the hard logistics work that would ultimately produce a triumph for Richard. Her story, I think, deserves to be told more than any other from those days, but she herself never sought recognition and ultimately, in what I regard as a tragic incident, left it all to the fates in unplanned contention. Let me tell you about that incident now, even though it occurred much later in the narrative of the Alcatraz experience.

It was near the time for the most important action, and Richard had asked to meet with me to be certain about the details. As always, the young woman who kept track of the important names and numbers would join us. And, as always, she arrived first at the little bar behind the *Chronicle*.

Richard came in later, alone, but was instantly recognized by the other reporters and local luminaries who frequented the place. The three of us sat at a table and went over the plans, between interruptions from various people who were already in on the loosely kept secret. The young Indian woman was rightfully concerned that Richard was getting carried away by the attention and was not focusing on what could be some very problematic logistics. Richard, though, remained confident, almost boisterous, as beer after beer cluttered the table.

Suddenly, Richard's wife, Ann, came through the door. Richard had not told us that, for all the time he sat talking and drinking with us at the table, he had left Ann and their children outside in the car. Ann was furious to find Richard talking with another woman. She sat down only momentarily before bursting into a tirade against both of them. At last, in a rage, she grabbed a bottle and threw it with full force into the face of the other woman.

Richard comforted neither of them. He and Ann left together. The young woman, who was really more responsible than Richard for organizing the invasion, left alone and, to my knowledge, never had anything more to do with Alcatraz. For what it's worth to anybody, there was nothing sexual or romantic between her and Richard. Nor do I think Richard was intentionally abusive or indifferent to Ann and the children. It was just that he was carried so wildly away with his own image.

From the beginning of my experience with it, there were always those two stories about the Alcatraz occupation: One of them, as represented by Adam, was the showmanship and daring good nature that could capture the public spirit; the other, seen early in

Richard, was something brooding and ultimately uncertain about the real purpose. I know how this will be regarded by others, but I came to see these aspects as the contrasting faces of comedy and tragedy, sometimes a farce, sometimes a bitter melodrama, never really understanding each other.

Adam, of course, never doubted himself, not even in the first attempt to reach Alcatraz, when somebody in Oakland convinced the boat owners not to go through with it, and the pack of loyal media were about to record a memorable failure. Adam simply stalled them by having Richard read the statement comparing the island to a neglected and oppressed reservation, while Adam, in full Chippewa dance regalia, went to talk the captain of a three-masted barque into carrying the Indians on a bluffing sail around the island, complete with booming cannon fire.

Without the publicity of that incredibly fortuitous sail of the *Monte Cristo*, there might not have been support for a real invasion later. Yet there was near-tragedy that could have ruined all plans: Richard and three others jumped off the ship and attempted to swim to the island; strong currents very nearly carried them out to the Golden Gate before some of us in circling media boats picked them up. Joe Bill made it, however, and deserves to be remembered as the first Indian to invade Alcatraz in 1969.

Later that same day, Adam arranged for still another boat from Fisherman's Wharf and took fifteen Indians, including Richard, out for a successful landing. Adam came back with the boat and called me, and I called the caretaker on the island to inform him that he had company. Despite his denials, the Indians were found the next day by federal officials accompanied by a pack of media. I should say, actually, that the Indians found us. Richard nearly sent me over a wall when he popped out of a window to say hello.

The federal man in charge, Tom Hannon of the General Service Agency, seemed to take it all in a good spirit, asking the Indians, "You guys want a ride back to town?" "Got any food on board?" was the first response.

From then on, really, the two stories of Alcatraz began to diverge more and more from each other. Adam still held to his busy enthusiasm of rounding up support from anybody who would listen—and from many who would not. He led the older, established community of Bay Area Native Americans, whom he knew from weekend powwows and gatherings of the United Council. Richard, on the other hand, had his group of students who seemed to keep changing their title in search of one that fit.

He and the students set about with determined focus to meet an invasion date, keeping the details as secret as if it were "D-Day" but hardly able to disguise that it would have to conform to some break in the college semester schedule.

I think Adam, even though he saw the possibilities of a prolonged occupation, still thought of Alcatraz as a bargaining chip for something better in recognition of the Indian presence in the Bay Area. But Richard and the younger people wanted no compromise; they now had tasted success and wanted nothing more or less than the island.

The problem was that neither Adam's group nor Richard's had any boats or knew where to get any. That's where the party became important again. Peter Bowen was a scrimshaw artist and the bartender at Sausalito's No Name Bar, where every writer and journalist who could afford to live in or visit Marin County hung out, at least from time to time. It was the sort of well-lighted, well-read, wink-at-a-joint place where the newly prosperous young intelligentsia swapped lies. Peter also owned a neat little motor sailer docked in Sausalito and was the de facto leader of an equally irreverent group of ragtag young yachtsmen who also hung out at the No Name.

Brookes Townes, himself a former *Chronicle* reporter and denizen of the Sausalito yacht harbor, had the sort of practical spirit and gadfly energy that filled in whatever gaps there were between Peter and the other boat owners. Richard asked me to help also, but without Bowen and Townes and the No Name in general, I would have been useless on the waterfront.

Again, it was those times, the convergence of many events. Even if Alcatraz became government surplus again, I don't think an occupation could happen today. Even then, Bowen and the other boat owners knew they were risking the loss of their vessels or worse if they were caught by the coast guard, not to mention the considerable risk to life and limb from attempting night landings in a slip where none of them had ever before docked.

But Peter saw it almost immediately as a reckless adventure perfectly suited to his spirit and those of the other boat owners. It was the Adam part of the story. The role I played presented ethical problems as obvious to me as they would have been to my editors had they been called on to make a decision. The truth is, they knew without my having to tell them. It was a good story, and, by helping to arrange for the boats myself, I was ensuring that the

Chronicle would have an exclusive part of it.

Amazingly, however, the paper remained reluctant to permit the depth of coverage that I had prepared for by spending considerable time on the island with the occupiers. For me, covering the story was always much less of a problem than getting what I wrote past the city editor. To him, this was still just a bunch of college kids creating a “stunt” because they had too much time on their hands.

The night of the invasion has caused me some headaches for the two decades and more since. Adam was in Minneapolis, set to announce the action as soon as it was done. All the other older leaders were involved in setting up the land-based support, which remained in doubt. Richard had to handle the invasion force himself.

Photographer Vince Maggoria and I hung out in downtown Sausalito and in the No Name until the designated closing hour of the bar, by which time Indians were supposed to have filtered into the upscale tourist town unnoticed. They were about as unnoticed as eighty or more Indian men and women milling around with packs and sleeping bags could expect to be. But I think the police just did not make the connection.

Brooks insists he has been unfairly characterized as overreacting when he went out in a small boat to check on the presence of the coast guard and mistook a lighted dredge for the island, lit up as if anticipating an invasion. Still, that is how I remember it, and I know there were some uncertain moments about whether to go ahead until we determined for sure it was a dredge and not the island that was flooded with lights.

There were not enough boats to take everybody in one trip, and the boat owners were rightfully concerned about overloading. I wanted Richard with me and Vince on Peter’s motor sailer, in the first wave of the landing. Say whatever you will, there was a certain high drama and excitement to powering up to the looming shadow of the island with only one small splash of light showing around the small caretaker’s shack. Peter nervously bumped his boat into the concrete slip and hissed sharp warnings to wait for the waves before jumping off. I shared his terror at the thought of someone falling between the boat and the dock in the dark. But no one did, and, as soon as we felt the solid concrete platform under our feet, we made a commando-like dash for a crane parked nearby, where we crouched and waited to see if there would be some kind of

reaction from the guard shack.

Glenn Dobson must not have believed his ears or his eyes when he awoke. The little assistant caretaker, then at least in his fifties, had been left on his own to watch the island while the former guard who ran the place was off on the mainland with his scruffy little dog, fishing, as we later learned.

"Mayday! Mayday! The Indians have landed!" Glenn started shouting for no possibly good purpose. I immediately remembered Jake Gunn in the old *Treasure Island* movie I had seen as a child. I had lost track of Richard, and I don't think I saw him again until we had all scrambled up the long hill from the waterfront to the cellblock that dominates the island. By then, Peter and the other boats had made another trip to pick up the second wave.

In the cabin of his boat, Peter had hung a prized walrus tooth carved with scrimshaw and held on a leather thong. When I found him on the hill, I noticed that Richard was wearing it. That was the Richard part of the story again. Peter confronted Richard about it in the prison exercise yard that night, and Richard just shrugged. A fight almost broke out, but I had the impression that Richard was already feeling secure about calling whatever shots he chose to on the occupied island. Eventually, I talked him into returning Peter's scrimshaw, and Peter remained helpful for days to come, but some real damage had already been done to the good will and support of the white boat owners who would be needed again and again in the occupation.

Just as it had been in that incident with Ann, it wasn't that Richard had intended to do anything wrong. I think he meant to give the scrimshaw back, but that night he also felt the irrepressible need for some sort of talisman, some symbol appropriate to his image. You couldn't blame Richard for feeling a sense of power, that night especially. We all felt it, even Peter. Nothing like this had ever been done before, and, no matter what happened in the morning, we were, for that night, totally and gloriously in control of our own island and our own destiny. We sat with Richard on the carpet liner that still remained in the old warden's house and, frankly, enjoyed it.

As those first exhilarating days of the occupation went on with comic encounters between yachtsmen of all descriptions eager to help us, and the coast guard clumsily trying and failing to head off their supply runs to the island, Adam and his group of older Indians on the mainland were trying quietly to pull something

together that would make permanent sense of the invasion. Adam's people weren't much older than the college students occupying the island—a generation at most, only a family and a full-time job's difference. Most of them had already served in some capacity with other Indian organizations or through their own businesses.

In those days, though, a serious and often uncrossable gulf existed between those who were under thirty and those who were older. The younger people on the island were getting most of the media attention, Richard especially, and the mainland support group was not really necessary to keep the supplies coming: Enthusiastic whites were eager to carry full banquets out to the island from pricey restaurants, just for the chance to look around. Some of it—a lot, maybe—was in support of the Native Americans and their cause, but some—a lot more of it than many admitted—was really just curiosity about the old prison, the same curiosity that today makes the island San Francisco's most successful tourist attraction.

It made good sense, then, that the Indians trying to live on the island and secure it from a counter-invasion by the federal government would establish some form of control over visitors, who crowded onto boats and bartered their way onto the island in exchange for a frozen turkey or a jug of wine. Alcatraz security even included the presence of Joe Bill himself, still as good natured as ever. But security somehow always has a way of taking itself too seriously. Even before Ann's and Richard's daughter, Yvonne, was fatally hurt that December in a fall down a stair shaft in the old barracks, talk on the mainland was that the occupiers were splitting themselves into two groups: security and everybody else.

The analogy to William Golding's *Lord of the Flies* was just too obvious to miss. I knew from the incidents between Richard and Ann and then Richard and Peter that I had become too close to the whole story to write about it with professional objectivity. What I had written had helped to create it, and what I had chosen not to write had helped to perpetrate it. I am not really sorry about that. Given the same set of facts and the same situation again, I don't think I would feel obligated to "expose" Richard or somehow tarnish the fervor of it all.

But by mid-December of 1969, I did feel obligated to correct some illusions I had helped to create, not just among white readers, but among Indian occupiers and their supporters as well.

Thanks primarily to Adam, I still had entree to the innermost circles of the organizing groups, especially the older mainland supporters. Vine Deloria was someone I had known even longer than I had known Adam; I regarded him as my mentor on Indian issues from the time I was a teenager reporting news on rock-and-roll radio. Vine's presence in the Bay Area that winter as part of an effort to head off a growing political split among Indians over Alcatraz was the most hopeful sign I had seen. But one night I was in the Mission District, within a block or two of where the burned-out hulk of the old Indian Center still sagged, when the younger, more militant Indians from Alcatraz told Adam and Vine that the mainland Bay Area Native American Council would have to take direction from the island from then on. Richard had already left the island and was involved in planning and staging a new occupation on the Pit River that I think he hoped would revive the personal image stilled and muted by Yvonne's death.

With the young occupiers' demand for control, the Adam part of the story, the part that was characterized by brash good humor and marvelous, if lucky, successes in public relations, was over. Richard's story would go on without Alcatraz, but it would always be linked to Alcatraz, and it would be more tragic than ever. The fun was gone.

I wrote a three-part series about the dissension on the island, referring to Golding and even making references to racist ditties about "ten little Indians." I showed it to both Adam and Vine before I put it across the city desk. I hated writing it, and I wished someone else on some other paper had done it so I could criticize them. When some of the article was changed by an editor, I asked to have my byline taken off the story. In the end, though, I felt it was my responsibility to say what had to be said.

I know that some Native Americans on the island whom I had once counted as friends felt betrayed. I know that some of the younger people, and certainly Stella Leach among the older ones, regarded me as taking "Adam's side" in a dispute over the purpose of the invasion and occupation. But I had done it with the same intention—and with some of the same fudging of professional ethics—that had gotten me so involved in the first place. I thought that at least if people could get mad at me, they might be less mad at each other. As it turned out, the city editor was right; I did belong in a wiggly box.

Through all of that, though, the government was still looking

for some way to settle the matter of Alcatraz and the Indians without a confrontation. Since that first morning when Tom Hannon of the GSA had offered everybody a ride back to the mainland, I had maintained at least a working relationship with the federal authorities. Although Adam still held a trusted place in policymaking, I felt that perhaps I could serve as a convener and host to some kind of talks about a deal. William Daveron, who had been appointed by the Nixon administration as coordinator for the Department of the Interior on the matter, evidently held the same view. In January, Daveron asked if I could help him convene a meeting of the principals on the issue.

Daveron chose his house in Tiburon as the site for informal talks; I was there only to introduce the Alcatraz leaders and to offer what insights I could about public opinion. It was friendly and cordial, as Daveron intended, but the bottom line was that the government was willing to offer the Indians their own chosen piece of the park-like Fort Mason on the San Francisco waterfront, some of the most valuable public property in the United States, if they would give up Alcatraz.

Richard was gone. Adam was not calling the shots. None of the leaders on the island regarded me as being owed anything but grudging trust. They said, "No," and vowed to stick it out on the island, and I still regard that as a major error.

I went to Pit River with Richard and, with less direct involvement, had much the same exclusive rights to the story of the occupation of power company lands there. I continued to write about Alcatraz also, as the occupation went into its first full year, even though the people there had altered their attitudes in response to shifting pressures from the outside, including from some of my old friends from the New Left movement.

The old "Age of Aquarius" attitude of 1969 wore away rapidly with the change of the decade, and with it faded a lot of hope for an easy transition into peace, real justice, and goodwill in America. There was a fire on Alcatraz. I noticed it that night crossing the Bay Bridge on my way to some other story, but I didn't write about it, and I don't know how it started.

Richard came back from Pit River and was beaten half to death with a pool cue in a Mission District bar. Indians said a Samoan did it. This time, I did write something about it, attributing this incident to the same cultural conflict that some say set a torch to the Indian Center and touched off the Alcatraz invasion in the first place.

The last thing I did in connection with Alcatraz was, in its own

symbolic way, the most curious of all. After the fire, the federal government cut off power on the island. They had always avoided that before, because some power was necessary to keep the old lighthouse running. But now, the government said, new buoys in the water off shore made the lighthouse unnecessary.

That was too much for Scott Newhall, the executive editor of the *Chronicle*, who lived in a high-rise apartment building almost exactly across the bay from my house in Sausalito and enjoyed the opposite end of the pulsing Alcatraz light. He ordered me to find out what the Indians needed to restore the light. Aside from fresh bulbs and lenses, they said, they needed a major gas generator.

I ruined a leather coat from spiraling up inside that sooty lighthouse to help the newspaper's electrician repair the lenses, but the marks on the coat are the only tangible souvenirs I have from the occupation. I remember going out to the island earlier in the day to talk about what would be needed, and, on the way, LaNada Means told me she was so bitter about things I had written that, if she could, she would throw me off the boat.

By the time Trudell and the others were finally forced to leave Alcatraz, I had moved on to another job with *Rolling Stone* magazine. Richard had been killed. He had called only the night before to tell me that he was going to set up a deer ranch that would draw more attention than Alcatraz. Something mystical happened the night he died: I thought I heard and saw a big, dark bird call my name and fly away. Adam adopted me into his Crow family, and they gave me a new name that I try to live up to. The house in Sausalito belongs to someone else now. The No Name is not the same place. All the editors have died. Alcatraz is the money-makers of the National Park Service, which still refuses to erect anything seriously acknowledging the Indian occupation.

This year, though, Adam officially "discovered" Sweden and claimed it, by right of discovery, for Native American people. The Swedes loved it; go figure.