



tice in Ohio," he explained. "If I wanted to work anywhere else I'd have to go through all sorts of bullshit—taking exams, flying clients to wherever I wanted to practice and having them testify to my competency. Expensive as hell and a pain in the ass." Working for the government allowed him to circumvent the red tape and head west. "Cheap housing, beautiful country and the weather's a helluva lot better than Ohio. But I have to drive an hour and a half round trip just to get a pizza."

We went to a place called Charlie's Bar to tie one on. After I told him about my life in New York City, he started in on his.

"It's a whole other world out there. You can't imagine the shit I see," he said grimly. He wasn't enamored of the local fauna—poisonous spiders, hissing lizards, scorpions. "Last summer we had a swarm of grasshoppers hit the reservation. I walked outside and they were flying around me and landing on my head. The whole parking lot of my office was covered with them. I must have killed hundreds just walking to my car."

We talked a little about the history of Fort Apache. In 1891 Benjamin Harrison finished a long war. By executive order he sequestered the Apache to the remote 1.6-million-acre reservation. The shooting had stopped, but the battles continued. Since day one the Apache have taken the government to task for the failure to provide adequate schools and healthcare, encroachment on their water rights, the theft of Apache relics and remains, and efforts by the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service to limit their economic development and create preserves for the loach minnow and the razorback sucker. A few times these disagreements have erupted into armed conflicts.

While the city of Phoenix has boomed

thanks in part to water diverted from White River, the Apache have struggled to survive, suffering terribly high rates of unemployment, alcoholism and diabetes, as well as internecine violence. Recently, there were four murders in one month. As Ronnie Lupe, the White River Apache Tribal Council chairman put it, "Fort Apache is a symbol of genocide."

And here was my friend Bob, a tall, gangly white man, in the middle of it. Not surprisingly, the Apache haven't quite taken to him. "They won't speak to me. I fix up their heads one day and the next day I see them on the street and they ignore me. They know English. I'm the damn doctor and they only speak to my Apache assistants."

He shook his head and lowered his voice. "Working on them is a nightmare. They think I'm trying to hurt them. They scream in my face and grab my arms and shirt. It's like a damn wrestling match."

Bob had hated the brief time he worked in a snooty Ohio suburb. It had been a terrible bore—routine checkups and cleanings, bland exchanges with parents over what a fine job their children were doing brushing their teeth, all that.

Now he seemed to miss it.

"I get Apaches coming in with teeth knocked out all the time. Last week I had one who had been hit with a two-by-four. Another one had his jaw cracked by the butt of a rifle. The best of all was this idiot whose jawbone was sticking so far out the side of his face it almost ripped through the skin. He told me that he had been slugged in the head with a can of peas." By Bob's count, he handled emergencies 5 to 10 times a day, five days a week. "You have any idea what that does to your nerves?" he glared at me.

We left Charlie's when a local band

started up, and walked a few blocks to the Monte Vista Hotel. Over \$2 whiskey and cokes Bob continued to speak with a mixture of outrage and despair. "Ninety-five percent of the people who come into my office are screwed up because of poor hygiene, alcohol rotting out their teeth or blows to the head. It's always emergencies, never cleanings or preventative care. Half the ones coming in with teeth knocked out are women. The guys just beat the shit out of them... Though I had one woman who got her teeth knocked out because her sister hit her with a handheld stop sign, like the ones crossing guards use."

I inquired how the kids were. His look got even darker. "I hate those little fuckers. They're horrible. They come in with their teeth all fucked up because they have Coke and candy all the time. They are completely out of control, screaming and kicking me. It's nuts. We have this papoose board that we strap them to. We put their arms and legs in leather straps to hold them down. But I can't work on them because they keep jerking their heads around." He raised his hands and clenched them. "So I squeeze their little skulls until they keep still."

We sat silent for some time, ordering more drinks and staring at nothing. When he accidentally knocked one of our empty glasses on the floor, I took it as a sign that it was time to go.

As we walked to the car, he rubbed his bony hands together, though it wasn't cold, and turned his head from side to side. When we got to the car he turned and looked at me, his eyes large and his face slack. "I gotta get the hell out of Fort Apache," he said. "Soon."



I Squeeze Their Little Skulls

Kevin R. Kosar

Since graduation from college, Bob and I had made it a point to keep in touch. We kept promising each other we'd get together and go on a bender. Either he would come to my town and crash at my place or vice versa. Unfortunately, it didn't happen. I had seen him twice in the past six years, once at Christmas in 1997, and then at last summer's high school reunion, each time for less than a half an hour.

So now here we were, standing in a room in the Best Western in Flagstaff, AZ. He had forbidden a meeting at his place in White River, 190 miles northeast of Phoenix and tucked 7000 feet above sea level in mountainous terrain. "There's nothing to see. Just my little prefab house. Besides, it's hard as hell to find and you don't want to get lost out there."

Bob had been on the Fort Apache Indian Reservation for 20 months. He was one of three young dentists serving an Apache population of 12,000. Though the pay was less than what he could get in the private sector, joining the U.S. government's corps had provided him with a ticket out of Ohio.

"Since I got my dentistry degree in Ohio, my license was only good to prac-

