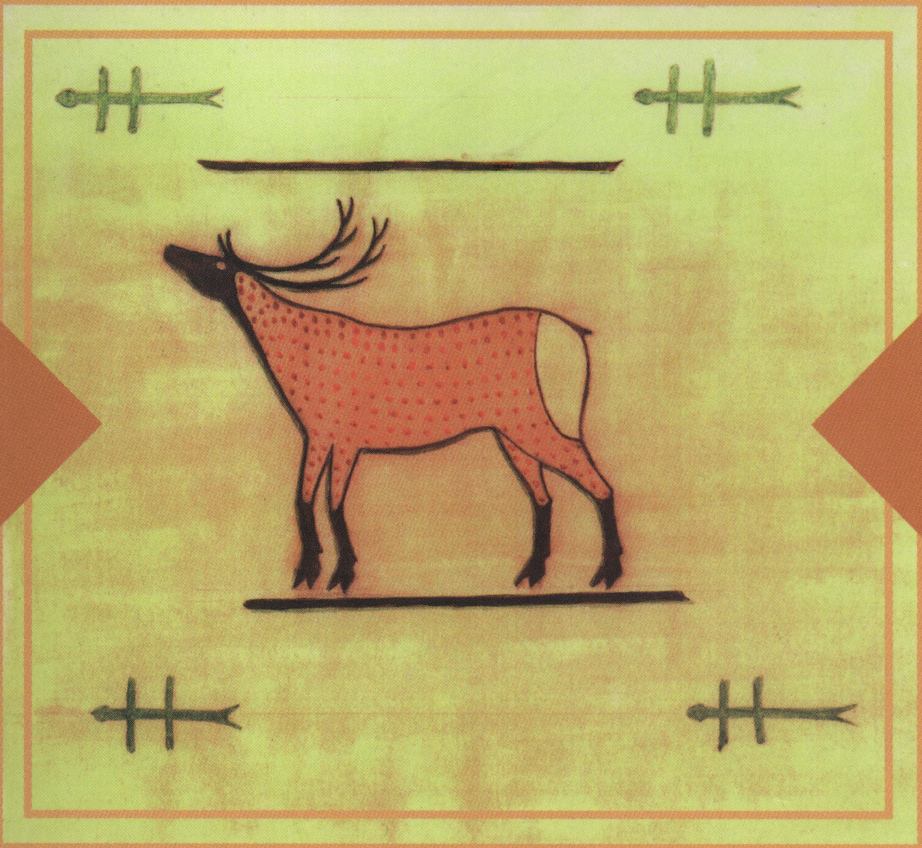
Reginald & Gladys Laubin, American Indian Dancers



Starr West Jones

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To the soul of the American Indian,
whose dancing feet have, for centuries,
caressed the soil of this planet,
in harmony with
the Great Mystery—the source of creation

Contents

Acknowledgments

In the construction of this biography, I was fortunate indeed to be able to spend the summer of 1997 on the Urbana Campus of the University of Illinois in lengthy interviews with my old friend Reginald Laubin, whose memory was jogged by one hundred folders of research materials put together by our mutual friend Samuel Senkow.

Throughout the summer our efforts received much encouragement from B. A. Nugent, executive director of the University of Illinois Foundation. The manuscript that resulted was due to the technical skills of Christine and Ray Smyer.

Other generous friends whose help contributed to the success of this project include Michael Day of Carle Foundation Hospital, Denise Cribley of Windsor Court, Ben Williamson of the Orchard Downs maintenance staff, and Nancy Testory. My gratitude also goes to J. D. and Tanya Evans of Washington, D.C., and Charles Bishop of Waverly, Virginia, for their hospitality as I brought together the final pages of this work. Last but not least, I am grateful for the patient, wise counsel of my dear wife, Virginia, without whose loving support this challenging writing assignment would never have been undertaken.

Thank you all.

—Starr West Jones

Ke-Ke-Ah-Noquah (Boy Who Grew Up Overnight)

Reginald and Gladys Laubin, American Indian Dancers

Prologue: Outline for Adventure

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I first met Gladys Tortachel and Reginald Laubin on a September afternoon in 1926; she was nineteen, he was twenty-two, and I was twenty. I had traveled from New York City to Springfield, Massachusetts, to place my newly made tipi in competition at the Eastern States Exposition, the huge annual fair that climaxed harvest festivals for New York and six New England state fairs.

Fourteen tipis (most of them brown canvas, only three were white) had been pitched in the area designated as the Mohawk Indian Village. My brown entry had six red horsetails gaily whipping in the breeze from atop several of its fifteen lodgepoles. One side of the tipi's base was rolled up for ventilation and visitor inspection.

"May we come in?" asked a young woman as she ducked her head under the rolled-up canvas.

"Certainly, and welcome!" I replied as the petite, dark-haired visitor, followed by a tall, blond young man, entered the tipi and surveyed its interior appreciatively

"I see you have placed your hearth-stones carefully, to encourage the best draft," he said, glancing from the stones in the ground to the smoke-hole above.

"Haven't had a fire in it yet," I replied. "Fairgrounds safety regulation."

"Of course," replied my visitor, holding out his hand. "I'm Reginald Laubin and this is Gladys, my fiancée. We're from Hartford."

"And I'm Starr Jones," I replied, grasping his hand. "I'm from New York City."

"We were intrigued by the decorations on the outside of your tipi," said Gladys. "Most of the others have traditional designs such as we've seen in library books. Yours are different."

"They are my own designs," I replied. "Around the bottom I've told the story of my Indian heritage. The middle symbols relate to events in my life. And the top-level designs are from my imagination—the animal names of my Indian ancestors. Come outside and I'll show you."

As we ducked under the rolled-up side of the tipi I loosened the tie-ropes, allowing the canvas to drop down again and thus reveal the complete design. A ten-inch stripe of red and white was painted around the bottom of the tipi. "The solid red is for my Indian blood, the white, edged with red, my Scottish ancestors," I told them. "Technically I'm about a thirty-second descendent from the tribe of Powhatan, the people who caused so much trouble for the English colonists at Jamestown, Virginia, in the early 1600s. Powhatan's daughter, Pocahontas, was my grandmother on my father's side some sixteen generations back."

"Interesting," commented Reginald. "But those tribes didn't have tipis. That was the home of the Sioux and the tribes of the great western plains."

"I know. People of the East Coast had wigwams, and some of their homes were longhouses built of light poles covered with slabs of bark. But because I go camping a lot I wanted a tipi. So I built this one."

"And what do the other decorations mean," Gladys asked as I followed them around the outside of the conical tent, "the sign for thunder, the buffalo skull, the standing bear, the beaver pelt, and the turtle?"

"They stand for events of my life as I remembered them—the storm that wrecked the tents on our cross-country automobile trek many years ago, the bear we saw, the cow skull we found."

As we walked and talked I remembered my boyhood, so few in actual years, so long ago in reality to the twenty-year-old man I had become. I smiled to myself at the incongruity of the scene—three young people discussing ancestry against the background of a twentieth-century county fair, its strident carnival music competing in their thoughts with ghostly drumbeats summoned from the past.

Back inside the tipi I turned to the visitors. "Enough about me. Now, how about yourselves? What intrigues you so much about the Indian way of life? Do you also have Indian blood?"

"Not me," Reginald replied. "My ancestry is German."

"Me neither," said Gladys. "I'm a mixture of English and Belgian-French, I think. Indian blood may not flow in the arteries of our hearts, Mr. Jones, yet in our brains, where empathy and understanding flow to meet the universal hungers of mankind, Reginald and I both have deep sympathy for the original inhabitants of this land—the people from whom we have taken it."

"Gee!" Reginald exploded. "Just listen to the girl I'm going to marry. She sounds like a poet or a professor of philosophy."

"Now don't you make fun of me," replied Gladys, shaking her head so vehemently that her dark braids broke loose from their coils over each ear and whipped her face. "Reginald once told me that Indians, as we know them today, were a race of people fighting extinction, and he thought it would make a great theme for a symphony."

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"Wouldn't it indeed," I replied and turned toward Reginald. "Are you a composer?"

"No, I just play the fiddle," he laughed.

"But he could *write music* if he wanted to," Gladys replied with spirit. "Reginald comes from a musical family. His father plays in the symphony orchestra, and his mother plays the piano, and you should hear Reginald play his violin—he's got music in his soul. I only wish I had such talent."

"Have you any idea how long it would take to write such a symphony?" Reginald scoffed.

"Years certainly, collecting data and doing research," replied Gladys. "But what better way to spend your efforts? Everyone's life is really a symphony of itself, if only there were a way to record it."

"Most lives aren't that exciting," Reginald replied with finality.

"But the sum total of *many* lives—." Gladys refused to let the subject go. "Somebody should be recording individual Indian stories—how they once lived, the changes they are facing—it's a culture in transition. Can't you just hear the music interpreting it?"

"Interpreting what?" Reginald was skeptical.

"Their dances, their songs, ceremonies, and religious beliefs," Gladys replied, warming to her subject. "Oh Reginald, let's do it! We could. We've already been experimenting with developing ourselves as an Indian dance team. We have the dream."

"You're saying," Reginald picked up on Gladys's theme, "that we should now go out to some reservation, make friends with the Indians (maybe start by living in a tipi), learn their customs, and try to record, for posterity, exactly what they are thinking about this moment of history?"

"Yes, yes!" Gladys's eyes were sparkling with anticipation. "What do you think of the idea, Mr. Jones?"

"A truly monumental task," I replied, "trying to interpret the culture of one people for future generations of another yet unborn. But a magnificent undertaking to contemplate. Are you sure you want to do it? Are you equipped mentally? It could take years."

"Or a lifetime—what's the difference as long as we are doing it together." Reginald was looking fondly at Gladys. "I think that's what so many of us are hoping to find—something bigger than life, bigger than ourselves, to challenge our talents, to throw our efforts into. Actually, when you analyze it that's what constitutes the first movement of a symphony—statement of theme."

"Yes, I think that's a trail we could follow," Gladys spoke with decision. "Mr. Jones, I believe we are walking around the edge of something momentous for our lives. Can we come again tomorrow and talk some more about it?"

"I won't be here tomorrow. I take the train back to New York City tonight. I have a performance to give on Monday night."

"Are you in show business?" Reginald asked.

"By force of circumstances beyond my control, yes, I am an actor. But to the question at hand, if this Indian adventure you are contemplating is something you truly believe in, I say go ahead! As they say in college sports, 'Grab the baton and run with it.' I'm a great believer in taking up the challenge when God lays it across our trail."

"Those are my sentiments, too," Gladys agreed.

"I once thought of becoming an actor," said Reginald, smiling ruefully, "but my father put a violin in my hand. 'Master that first,' he told me, 'then you'll have a way of making a living when nobody cares about watching you act.' What's the play you're appearing in, Mr. Jones?"

"Call me Starr. I'm in *The Garrick Gaities.* It's a Broadway musi-

cal by Richard Rodgers, with lyrics by Lorenz Hart. Their song 'Manhattan' is our biggest hit. I dance the Mexican hat dance in the first act finale. I got the part because I had performed an American Indian war dance for the Theatre Guild's Tapestry Ball last year. If you get down to New York, come see me at the Times Square Hotel. I'll take you to the show."

And so they did. And so our friendship has continued throughout more than seventy years. Reginald and Gladys did go west and became friends, and cultural historians, of many Indian families among the Sioux, Crow, and Shoshone-Bannock. They acted upon the challenge I had given them, and it became their lives' work.

They began by learning songs and dances from the rapidly vanishing Native Americans. But Reginald and Gladys perfected the art and delighted their teachers; soon, because of the beauty and technical excellence of his dancing, Reginald was earning recognition from entrepreneurs of the concert stage. Much of that phase of the Laubins' careers took place during the war years, when I was out of touch with them.

Drafted into the army in April 1941, I spent six and a half years on active duty, including two years with the Occupation Forces, and returned to the United States in the fall of 1947. In the spring of 1948 I began building a concrete-block house on my family's farm at Pawling, New York. There, I finally caught up once more with Reginald and Gladys when their much-traveled sedan rolled up to the farm gate. It was great to see their smiling faces again. A bundle of very long, tapering poles was tied securely to the car's ingeniously contrived steel roof rack.

My friends were between concert engagements, so Ginny and I prevailed upon them to spend the interim weeks at our farm and have a long, catch-up pow wow. Virginia and I, like so many other

couples, had married in the middle of the war, on April 20, 1944. Seven months later I shipped out for France with the Forty-second Infantry Division. After the war, Ginny had joined me in Austria for my last year of Occupation duty. Now, as Gladys was quick to notice, we were expecting our first baby.

Gladys and Ginny were immediately attracted to each other, and it was not surprising when Gladys spoke up a few days later. "Reginald, isn't this place lovely? A hundred feet above the valley floor, with a clear view for over three miles, looking west to the next ridge behind which we've been watching the sun go down every evening. It's so peaceful."

"I've been thinking the same way," replied her husband. "Maybe it's time we built a house of our own, like Starr's doing."

"It would be wonderful if we had a place to come home to between concert tours and visits with our Indian families on the reservations." Gladys heaved a wistful sigh as she glanced across the quiet valley.

"Shall I start looking for some acreage?" Reginald was in a mood to cooperate.

"Don't have to look," replied Gladys. "If you like the view from this hill, Ginny told me yesterday, there's a five-acre piece for sale adjourning their west hayfield. We could be enjoying sunsets like this for the rest of our lives. I'd say let's buy it!"

Ginny was delighted at the thought of having Gladys for a neighbor, and in a few days Reginald had signed an option on the five-acre parcel of land.

"We'll come back next spring and pitch our tipi on it while our house is being built," Gladys said enthusiastically as Reginald and I unloaded the tipi poles from their car and stacked them against a giant sugar maple near our barn.

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"Don't let anything happen to these lodgepoles," said Reginald. "They belonged to Pretty Shield Goes Ahead. She gave them to us with a special blessing."

But the trails of our lives took unexpected turnings. After the sojourn in the East, where they earned high honors for the "interpretive skills of Reginald Laubin's Genuine Indian Dances," our dear friends did not return to take up their option on the piece of land adjoining our farm. Instead, they built a log cabin on the rim of Grand Teton National Park in Wyoming, just thirty miles south of Yellowstone. Beside their cabin home they pitched three tipis and furnished them with household items given them by Indian friends—things the Indians had made and used when they still lived in tipis and hunted buffalo on the Plains.

While their research on Indians continued, Reginald's success on the concert stage led to several engagements abroad. But he and Gladys never let such recognition sidetrack their devotion to their adopted brothers and sisters, and after each engagement they would return to the heart of reservation territory.

Over the years, Reginald and the ebullient Gladys wrote and illustrated three books about the First Citizens of America: one on tipis that was expanded in a second edition, one on dances of American Indians, and one on archery of Indians. All are filled with fascinating stories told them by the Indians themselves. It is hoped that this volume will reveal more details of the Laubins' exciting careers. They are perhaps the most erudite and personally informed historians of the culture of the Plains Indian tribes that the twentieth century produced.

I had asked Reginald while we were unloading the tipi poles of Pretty Shield Goes Ahead whether he had made progress on the symphony, the discussion of which had been part of the decision

to take up their careers. "I've made some notes," he replied, "but no more. I have no trouble with the first three parts: theme, development, and dance. Plenty of material there. But the fourth part, the allegro—the climax! Where are the Indians going? I'm afraid only history can tell."

Thus the years passed for Reginald and Gladys, making quiet history—good history, and certainly informative for future generations. Then in the fall of 1995 I had a call from Gladys. "Oh, Starr, we have just received wonderful news!" she said, her voice bubbling with joy. "We haven't even called our families yet. But we have to tell you first because you were the first to encourage us in our career choice. Listen to this: The University of Illinois at Urbana-Champaign is building a new museum. In it will be galleries where each ethnic group of people will have a display of artifacts. The North American section of the Americas Gallery will have a tipi, one of *our* tipis maybe, plus many items on display from our lifetime collection of Indian artifacts. Oh, isn't that great?"

"Yes Gladys, and congratulations. It's well deserved, very well deserved. Bravo to you both. Tell Reginald that it's a fitting climax, the allegro to his 'Symphony of a People Facing Extinction.'"

But the very next year, while the museum project was still in the planning stage, dear Gladys, who had always been the spokesperson for this unusual team of archeologically inspired Indian dancers, had a stroke and lost her voice. Time, the inexorable force that scrambles the best-laid plans, was closing in: Gladys was eighty-nine and Reginald was ninety-three. I suggested that it was time to write a fourth book, a short biography that would fill the gaps of the other volumes—the dream that inspired them and the surprising realities their adventure had uncovered.

"You write it for us," replied Reginald. "My heart is too burdened

with caring for the woman I love. Do you realize that except for a two-week period after we got married in 1928, when Gladys went to visit her family, Glad and I have been together every day for some seventy years! I don't know what I'd do without her."

What a love story. Could I capture it in words?

Starr Jones's tipi at the Springfield, Massachusetts, Eastern States Exposition, September 1926, where the Laubins' dream took form.

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Gladys and Reginald Laubin in costume for Sioux Social Dance. (Bruno of Hollywood)

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Chief One Bull paints lion tracks on Reginald Laubin's face before adoption ceremony. (The Spurlock Museum, University of Illinois at Urbana-Champaign)

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Chief One Bull. (The Spurlock Museum, University of Illinois at Urbana-Champaign)

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Gladys Laubin wearing Sioux dress. (Bruno of Hollywood)

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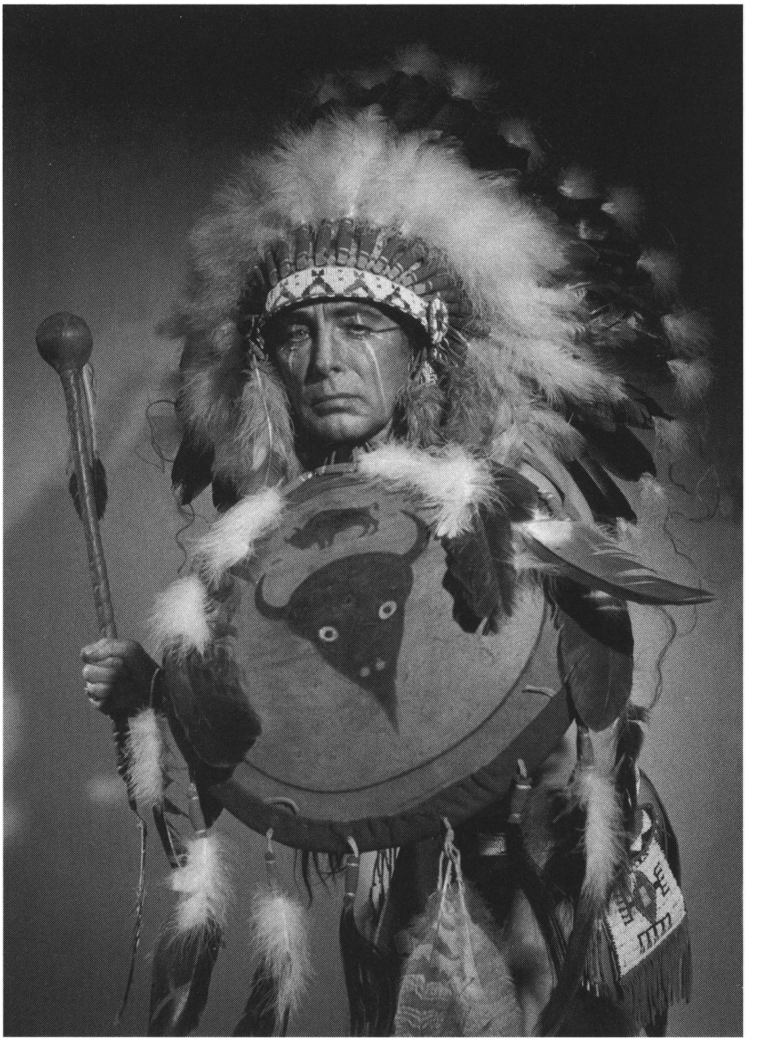

Reginald Laubin with the stone war club given to him by his adopted father, Chief One Bull. (The Spurlock Museum, University of Illinois at Urbana-Champaign)

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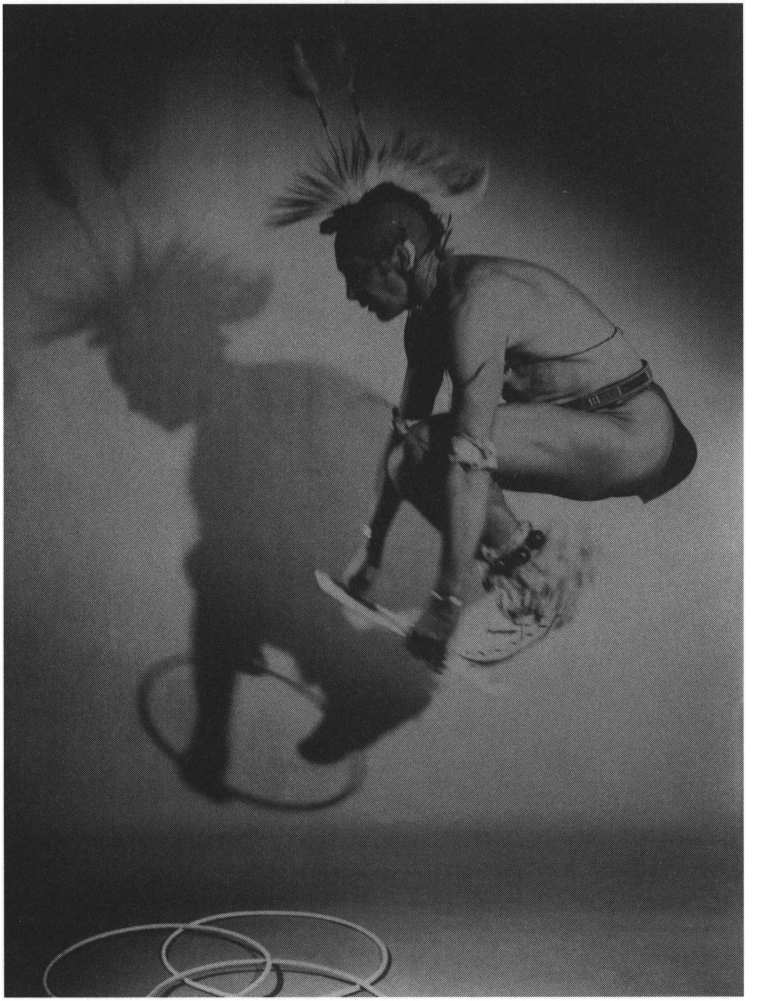

Reginald Laubin dancing the Ottowa Hoop Dance. (The Spurlock Museum, University of Illinois at Urbana-Champaign)

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The Crow dance troupe that toured Europe in 1954; left to right, Tom Yellowtail, Hank Old Coyote, Reginald Laubin, Bobby Warrior, and Fred Townsend. (The Spurlock Museum, University of Illinois at Urbana-Champaign)

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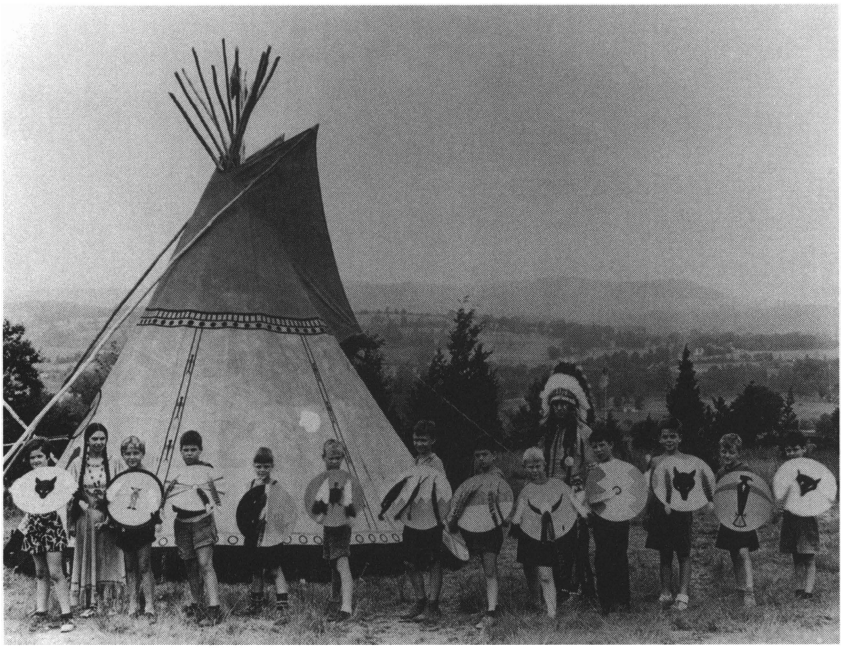

Gladys and Reginald Laubin with twelve boys and the shields they made at the Teton Valley Ranch, where young people would spend parts of their summers. (Paul Parker, New York City)

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Gladys and Reginald Laubin inside the tipi with six young women at the Teton Valley Ranch. (Crandal, Teton Park)

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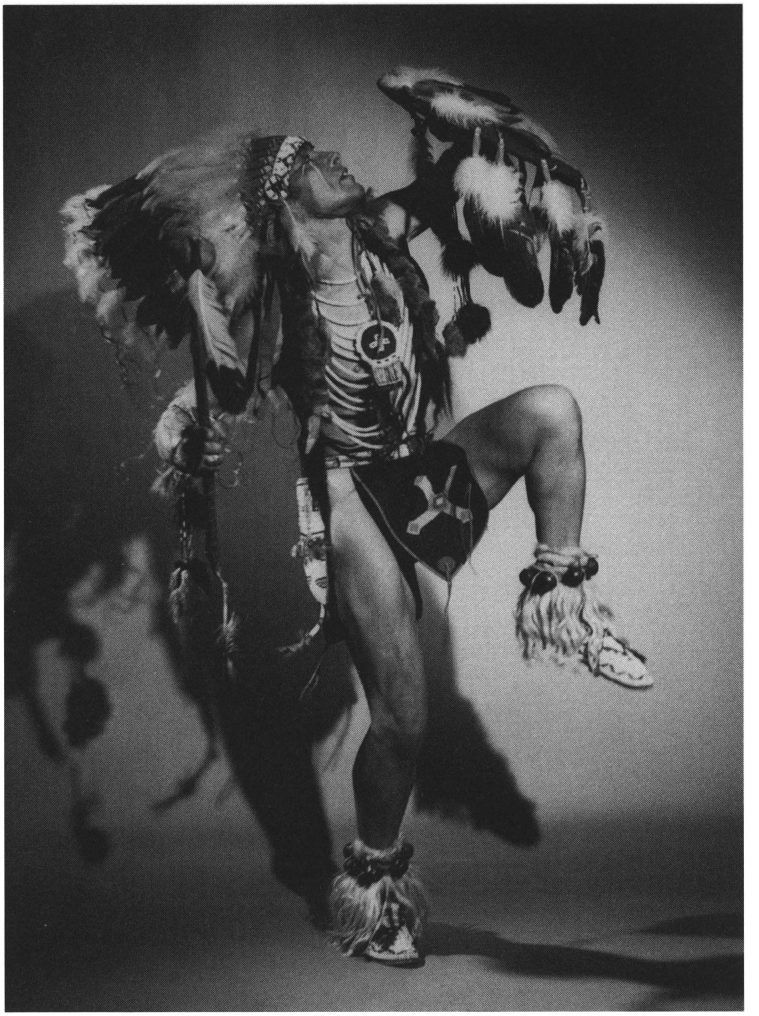

Reginald Laubin dancing the Sioux Bad Boy Dance. (The Spurlock Museum, University of Illinois at Urbana-Champaign)

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Reginald Laubin dedicating a Sioux dance bustle. (The Spurlock Museum, University of Illinois at Urbana-Champaign)

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I

A Young Heart and Ancient Drumbeats

Reginald Laubin has always been interested in American Indians. Even as a child, when he and his friends played cowboys and Indians Reginald wanted to be the Indian. His mother had made him a small feathered headpiece, and his father cut pieces of cardboard into long triangles to form a tipi, to be set up in their Detroit backyard.

Reginald was ten when his family moved to Lima, Ohio, where he met his first Indian, who was wearing buckskin, beads, and feathers. A movie theater near where they lived was showing a film, likely a documentary, about Indian life. To encourage attendance, the theater hired two Indians to perform a lively dance in its lobby and on the sidewalk in front of the theater. In those days, most movie houses showed films five times each day, and each showing would be preceded by a performance of the dancers, accompanied by an Indian woman beating a hand-held drum, in front of the theater. Almost always, the ten-year-old Reginald would be peering out from among the curious crowd, eagerly watching every step.

"I was fascinated," he recalls. "By the second day I had learned most of their dance movements and had made up my mind that I, too, was going to become an Indian dancer." He had also learned

that one Indian was a Sioux named Gray Wolf and the other, a Cherokee, was Red Dog. They had been friends at the Carlyle Indian School in Carlyle, Pennsylvania. The Sioux wore a beautifully beaded vest and a crown eagle-feather headdress. "Each night after going to bed I would dream that I was wearing them."

On the third day Reginald bought a ticket and went inside to see the show. The ten-year-old found it difficult, however, to follow the intertitles, which often changed before he could finish reading them. "To this day," he says, "I can't remember exactly what it was all about, other than it appeared to be a travelog by some white man who had visited an Indian reservation." One aspect of the show elicited a strange response from the boy. Rather than accompany the film with traditional piano music, the theater used a phonograph recording of soft Indian music. As Reginald remembers the experience:

> I wasn't aware of it at first until I felt a great sigh welling up inside of me, like I might have lost a great friend. It was only a momentary feeling, but I realized it was connected to the music created by some wind or reed instruments, flutes maybe. Remember that my father played oboe in the Detroit Symphony Orchestra and I've played the violin since I was seven, so my ears were accustomed to analyzing instrumental differences. That haunting musical moment has remained in the recesses of my mind ever since.
>
> I did not go back inside the theater to hear it again. But for the remaining four days of the film I tried not to miss a single appearance of the two Indian dancers out front. They literally danced their way into my subconscious. Sometimes, even today, when I'm practicing or even just planning to use certain dance steps, I will think I hear that music.

Reginald tried to teach a few schoolmates some of the steps he had learned from the two Indians. The boys were clumsy, however, and he failed to arouse their enthusiasm.

Yet curiosity about Indians in general persisted for two classmates who helped Reginald erect the small lightweight canvas tipi he had made to replace the one his father had constructed years earlier from cardboard triangles. When the replacement was finally finished, the three surveyed their work with pride. Then they entered their conical masterpiece, and the helpers watched solemnly as Reginald built and lit a small fire at the center of its floor. Smoke rose majestically toward the smoke-hole at the apex of the cone before the wind promptly blew it back. Soon the same wind was forcing smoke back at the tipi door as well, but it did not stop the three teary-eyed boys who plunged through the doorway of the smoke-filled tipi, coughing and spitting.

Reginald looked up at the noncooperative smoke-hole and then smote his hand against his forehead. Of course. He had forgotten to make smoke flaps. Quickly putting out the offending fire, he took down the tipi and carefully measured the space where the flaps should have been.

With mandatory time out for school, it was several days before the two necessary "smoke-ears" (as some Indian tribes referred to them) were cut out and sewed in place above the lacing pins holding the two sides of the tipi together. Reginald called his tipi builders and demonstrated the use of the two longest lodge poles, which were used to manipulate the smoke flaps. They could either close them over each other, which would cover the smoke-hole during rain, or be set as a pair of wind shields, parallel with the direction of wind flow, which would cause the air sliding by the smoke flaps to suck the rising smoke from between them.

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If his helpers would secure their parents' permission to camp out that night with him in the tipi, Reginald would make a small council fire, sing some Indian songs, and maybe demonstrate a few Indian dance steps. Gleefully, the two hastened home to secure the required permission. Returning in a few minutes with their blankets, they sat by the tipi to await the return of "Chief Reginald," who had gone to town, said his mother, to buy groceries.

Young boys are never long without motion, however, and soon Chief Reginald's braves decided to be helpful and get things ready for the chief. One began to collect dry branches for the council fire, and the other gathered dry grass and leaves to make a bed for their blankets. Again they sat down to wait—but not for long. Soon they were active again, trying out the smoke-poles, moving the smoke flaps a little to the right or left, looking at the sky, and gauging the wind. Once more they entered the tipi and waited, and then a wisp of grey showed between the magic flaps.

Reginald was half-way home when he smelled smoke. Shifting the load of his grocery bags, he began to run. As he turned the corner into his street a fire wagon was disappearing down the block. A few bits of water-soaked canvas still hung from the bare and blackened lodge poles, and a wisp of steam rose from the ground beneath them. His mother was talking to a few neighbors, but there was no sign of his two erstwhile tipi-setting-up helpers.

The loss of the newly made tipi had Reginald on the verge of tears, but he was too embarrassed to let the neighbors see him give in to such emotion and bluffed it out before them. He forgot his sorrow the next day at school when he heard the two classmates boast of how *they* had helped Reginald set up the tipi, attach the marvelous smoke flaps, which they, themselves, had made to work, and draw the smoke out of the tipi. It was only accidental, the boys told awed

listeners, that the fire they lit had produced sparks, one of which landed in the dry grass they had brought in to make a soft bed.

Thus, through the boasting of his helpers, Reginald found himself a semi-hero to classmates, not because of his personal loss but because he knew how to build a tent, inside of which a campfire could be made to burn without overcoming occupants with smoke.

When Reginald returned from school, the sight of the smoke-blackened lodge poles reminded him of a similar scene in a film about an Indian tipi village burned by raiding soldiers. In the movie, the Indians had performed a "dance of mourning" to appease the spirit of the forest where the lodge poles had been cut. Reginald decided he would do the same thing.

Calling his helpful braves, Reginald explained the dance of mourning to them, and the two boys, glad to once more be in the good graces of their chief, eagerly cooperated. While Reginald created dance steps between the smoke-blackened poles, one boy shook two rawhide pouches filled with pebbles, accenting the rhythm with deep, guttural grunts, and the second beat slowly on a small drum Reginald made from a cheese box. Over one side of the drum he had tightly stretched a piece of parchment discovered in the attic of the family's rented house. On the parchment in faded but graceful hand lettering was a salutation from the 1800s: "On Graduation from Divinity School of a [long-gone] Minister of the Gospel."

Some days later, Reginald heard his father speaking German with his Uncle Ed, the language of their parents.

"Father," said Reginald, "I've asked you before and I'm asking you once more, why won't you teach me German, the language of our ancestors?"

"Because," replied Karl Laubin, "I was born in New York City a few days after your grandfather got off the boat from Hamburg.

I'm an American now. I don't need that language anymore. And neither do you."

"Then why are you using it now when you talk to Uncle Ed?"

"Don't be impertinent to your father!" was the harsh answer. "I was talking to my brother in German because I'm sending him home to Leipzig to study at the conservatory there. Ed has considerable talent. I believe it should be encouraged. Leipzig has some of the world's best teachers of the organ. Someday son, if you would apply yourself more diligently with your violin, you might develop an equal talent. Who knows—do you?"

Reginald knew his father was trying to challenge him, but the elder Laubin's understanding of the deep fires that heat talent or build a pressure that pushes one toward success did not extend beyond Karl's own field—music. Yet Reginald loved his father deeply and admired his generosity in paying for his uncle's further musical education in spite of the very modest income Karl Laubin earned from his tailor shop. Reginald decided he would encourage his father by practicing harder.

Reginald took out his violin case, opened it, and removed the three-quarter-size instrument that had been purchased for him when he was seven. He was proud of the violin. A wave of affection for his father, whose love had provided the fine instrument, brought tears to the eyes of the sixteen-year-old as he carefully put it back in its well-worn case. Then he picked up the bow, the part of the violin that transfers the soul of the player to the strings of the instrument, and fingered it gently. Reginald gazed at the bow for a long time, asking himself an unanswerable question: Did he possess the talent, dedication, courage, and desire to make those strings cry out? He did not know and could only hope that time would tell. He put away the bow and went to the library.

Reginald realized that he could remember only one subject that really intrigued him—what talent he had continually sought satisfaction in activities related to American Indians. He knew there was no Indian blood in his Teutonic heritage, yet the pull was so strong that perhaps, he reasoned, some distant ancestor had crossed the narrow isthmus of land connecting Asia to the North American continent and sought out a woman who might have been a progenitor of those whose descendents became American Indians.

A wild stretch of imagination? Perhaps. But the imagination of a sixteen-year-old is capable of unlimited reverse extrapolation, as history has often recorded. Reginald laughed about such convoluted thinking, although he had to admit that the case at hand proved his point. He had honestly tried to consider his father's desire that he follow a musical career. Yet when he held the violin bow, his thoughts drifted to Indian bows and arrows. He would go to the library to research that subject.

To his distress, Reginald discovered that the Lima library contained nothing on American Indian archery. The only work it did have, which he took home to study, was a slim volume on English longbows. During the weeks that followed he searched out the various wood sources available—lumberyards and archery supply stores. The most popular bow woods were English yew and osage orange. Reginald secured an osage orange stave, six feet long and two inches square, from an archery supply shop. Then he patiently whittled and tapered it at both ends until he had transformed it into an acceptable longbow that any yeoman would have been proud to use. He frequently carried it to school and used it for practice shooting after class. The bow thus became the mark of his identity.

High school days were almost over for Reginald in 1920, when an influenza epidemic swept through Lima. His mother, Carrie,

died, and less than six weeks later so did his father. Suddenly, without warning, their four children, six to sixteen, were without parents. No longer would Magdeline or her brothers Alfred Barr, Karl William (Bill), and Reginald Karl be able to draw inspiration from the gentle touch on the piano keys of their mother, Carrie Vanette, or be moved to dream beyond themselves by the haunting tones of the oboe when the talented lips and martinet hands of Karl Wilhelm, Sr., were in command of that strange instrument. For a brief moment, the music of life for Magdeline, Alfred, Bill, and Reginald had been silenced.

The family rallied, however. From temporary guardianship under social worker Ana Moore, Magdeline was adopted by the Woods family in Lima. Uncle Earl, his father's brother, took Alfred; Bill went to live with Ana Moore; and Uncle Ed, having returned from studying in Germany, wrote to invite Reginald to live with him and his family in Hartford. The change of home background and personalities were not too difficult for Reginald, although his uncle was outspoken toward the pursuit of Indian lore. "When are you going to grow up and stop playing Indian?" he would ask.

The objections were intended kindly, however, for the uncle was truly grateful for the assistance Reginald's father had extended in sending him to the conservatory in Leipzig and happy to be able to reciprocate. When Reginald completed high school in 1922, Uncle Ed offered to send him to college, but Reginald asked for courses at an art school instead.

Reginald was on the move once more. While continuing to live in Hartford, he commuted daily, driving south in a Model-T Ford for some thirty miles to Norwich, Connecticut, where he was enrolled in the Norwich Art School. Next door to the art school was a high school, the Norwich Free Academy. The coeducational, pri-

vately endowed institution had been operating for more than a hundred years but had no connection to the Norwich public school system. It was administered by the same people who ran the art school, and several times a week academy students would be sent over to the school for general orientation on art appreciation.

One day, a young woman, an academy student, stopped Reginald in the hallway and asked, "What's the big stick for, mister? I've seen you several times, and you're always carrying it."

Reginald looked down at his questioner. She wouldn't measure five feet, he calculated, squinting from the top of her dark hair to an invisible mark on the six-foot stave he carried. "Ma'am, this stick, as you call it, is an English longbow," he replied, "favorite weapon of British yeomen in Shakespeare's time. Carved it out myself from a very choice piece of osage orange wood, although a true Englishman would have preferred yew. That's a tree." Reginald grinned as he watched her face break from serious attention into a merry smile when he added, "I sound like a professor, don't I?" Gladys laughed outright.

Thus, through the medium of a "weapon of choice" did the young German, who chose to be an American Indian dancer, meet the woman who would be his choice for a wonderful life together.

2

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Reginald and His "One Woman"

Once Reginald realized he had met "the one woman in the world" with whom he would want to spend his life, he set about testing his discovery by teaching her some Indian dance steps. To his surprise and delight, she responded with alacrity.

Gladys had always wanted, she told Reginald during their "teaching dates," to help people who were alone or lonely. Of course, she knew he wasn't lonely, but the task he wanted to undertake—creating better understanding between Indians and whites—sounded like a lonely job that no one else was interested in doing. She could help, she told him. The lessons became a serious matter.

One day a "lesson session" took them to a grassy meadow on the edge of town. Reginald was trying to create, out of the several steps he had taught her, the continuity of a particular dance. After an intensive hour of exertion, both dancers stopped for breath and looked up from their absorption.

"Well, look at that, will you," exclaimed Reginald. "We've got an audience!"

Gladys turned in the direction he was pointing. There, lined up behind a stone fence, their eyes registering lively interest, were nine Holsteins. "Whoopee, we're a success!" cried Gladys.

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"I think we will be," replied Reginald as, hand in hand, they left the field. A few days later he slipped a ring on Gladys's finger. "I think," she said, "ours must be the only time on record that Cupid's arrow was shot from an English longbow."

After art school, Reginald secured a job as draftsman with the U.S. Finishing Company, also in Norwich. The company printed color design on bolts of raw cotton cloth. Gladys also took a job with the same company. On weekends they continued their efforts at constructing a review of Indian dances. Their endeavors were guided by lengthy visits to the public library, reading and copying lengthy extracts from every book or historical document they could find on American Indians.

On one such weekend in September 1926, having read in a newspaper about the Mohawk Indian Village to be exhibited at the Springfield Exposition, they drove there in Reginald's old Model-T. Once arrived, they parked in the huge meadow opposite the main entrance gate. Inside, the big harvest fair was in full swing. Concessionaires' booths dotted the streets and crowded the space between the many fine permanent buildings—one for each of the six New England states and New York. People in holiday mood streamed in and out of the buildings to admire the exhibits of state industry and agricultural products and crowded in front of concessionaires' stands for burgers and orange drinks. People also filled their hands with tennis balls to hurl at moving targets that seemed impossible to miss—but they did.

Reginald and Gladys moved with the crowd, Reginald enjoying people's faces as only an art student can. Suddenly, above the crowd, he picked up the graceful whorls of long poles reaching for the sky—the tops of the Indian tipis that composed the Mohawk Indian Village. The couple pressed forward around low-sided livestock

pens that housed the sheep and goats of 4–H Club exhibits, beyond which the semicircle of tipis, mine included, beckoned.

As they drove home that evening, a long silence lay between Gladys and her fiancé. Finally, Reginald uttered a low exclamation: "All right. So be it."

"Meaning—what?" she asked and then waited patiently for his answer as the Model-T chugged doggedly through the twilight.

"What we were talking about today in the tipi. That man, Starr, laid a challenge in my lap. I think I could meet it, somehow, through my dancing."

"You're a very good dancer."

"I know. I have good techniques, always have. It seems to come naturally to me—so that's no credit. But what does it say? Does my Indian dancing have soul?"

"I think our talk in Starr's tipi was moving in that direction. But where do we start?"

"Tomorrow, my dear Gladys, we begin by making an Indian costume for yourself and putting dance numbers together to make an act that we can try out on the public. Our days with good old U.S. Finishing will soon be past."

Reginald wrote to a friend he had made while corresponding with the Museum of Natural History in Buffalo, New York. The result of that correspondence was an offer to present an afternoon dance recital in the museum's auditorium some weeks hence. It would be their first professional appearance.

Filled with wild expectation, Reginald and Gladys completed their costumes and readied an act. Except when performers brought musicians and instruments with them, the couple was to discover, concert stages (of which museums were an important adjunct) provided only a piano. The couple brought Victor Herbert piano scores

with them, as well as Charles Wakefield Cadman's traditional Indian melodies. Tom-tom beats (supplied, alternately, by either dancer) and many-toned bells on their ankles or costumes, along with occasional bird whistles between drum beats and snatches of songs rendered in Plains Indian languages, formed the program's orchestral accompaniment. In later years they would drop the piano entirely, leaving only drum beats, bells, and bird whistles to provide background melody against which their magic would bring alive the creative art of American Indians.

When Reginald and Gladys reached the museum in Buffalo, they found its auditorium filled with young people. The hour-and-a-quarter program that Reginald had prepared offered a variety of tribal dances, ranging from the sedate Chieftain's Dance of the Sioux to the humorous Shoshone Dance of the Prairie Chicken. Complementing the beautiful performances of a now-fast-disappearing art were short songs rendered in hauntingly melodic Indian languages.

The audience responded enthusiastically, and the museum promised a letter praising the program as very educational. With such encouragement and the challenge resulting from the visit to my tipi, Reginald and Gladys decided that it might be time to break with their old way of life and embark on a concert career, offering lectures and dance programs of American Indian art.

By the time the old Ford reached home in Norwich, they had worked out a plan. First, they would prepare a brief brochure stating their program; second, to seek engagements they would mail copies of the brochure to schools and colleges in the New England states, New York, New Jersey, and Pennsylvania; third, they would get married; and, fourth, they would start saving money from their jobs with U.S. Finishing Company so they would have a nest egg.

"We'll have to seek out some other endorsements beside the let-

ter that's coming from the Buffalo Museum," said Reginald. "Maybe I can get a local group to sponsor a performance and then ask them for an endorsement."

"Well, said Gladys, "we already have *one.* Just say, 'We got a standing ovation from the audience at Holstein and Company!'"

Reginald and Gladys Laubin with Blackfoot Chief Wades in Water and Julia Wave in Water. (The Spurlock Museum, University of Illinois at Urbana-Champaign)

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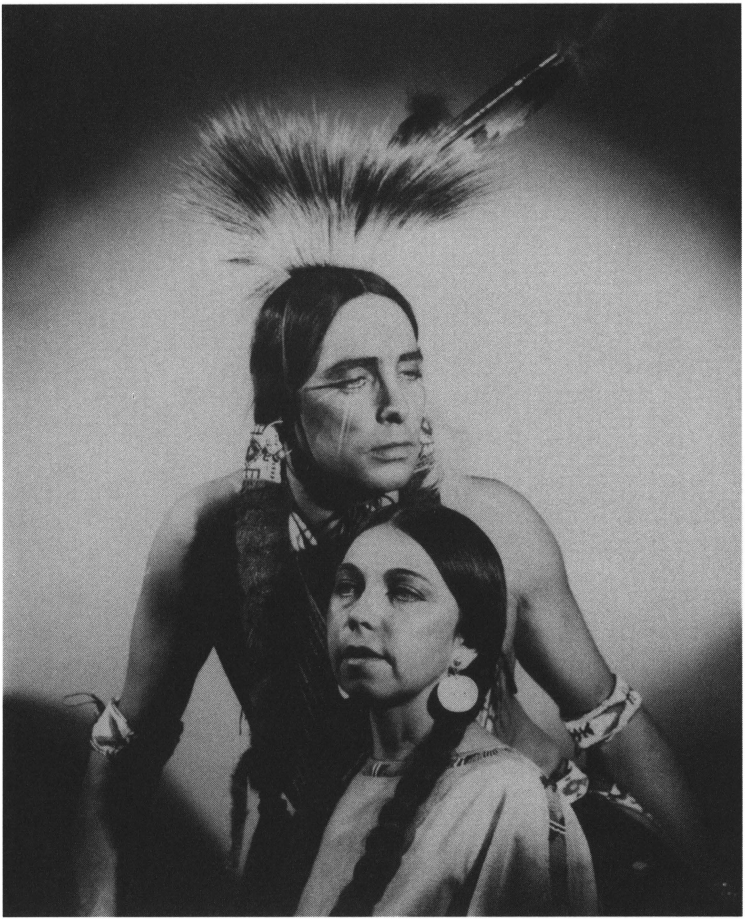

Reginald and Gladys Laubin. (The Spurlock Museum, University of Illinois at Urbana-Champaign)

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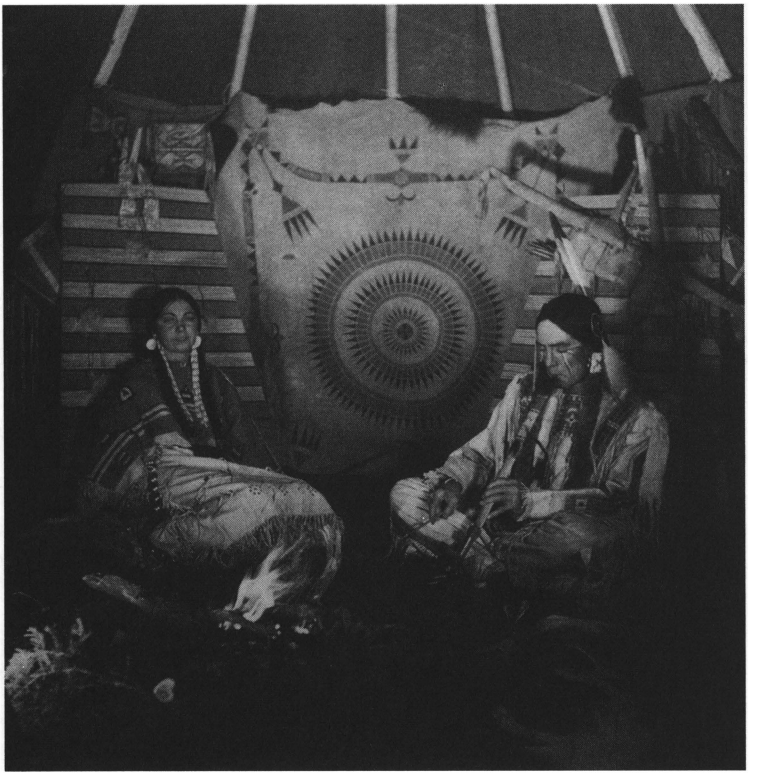

Gladys and Reginald Laubin in their tipi, furnished as the Sioux decorated their lodges in the days of the buffalo. (The Spurlock Museum, University of Illinois at Urbana-Champaign)

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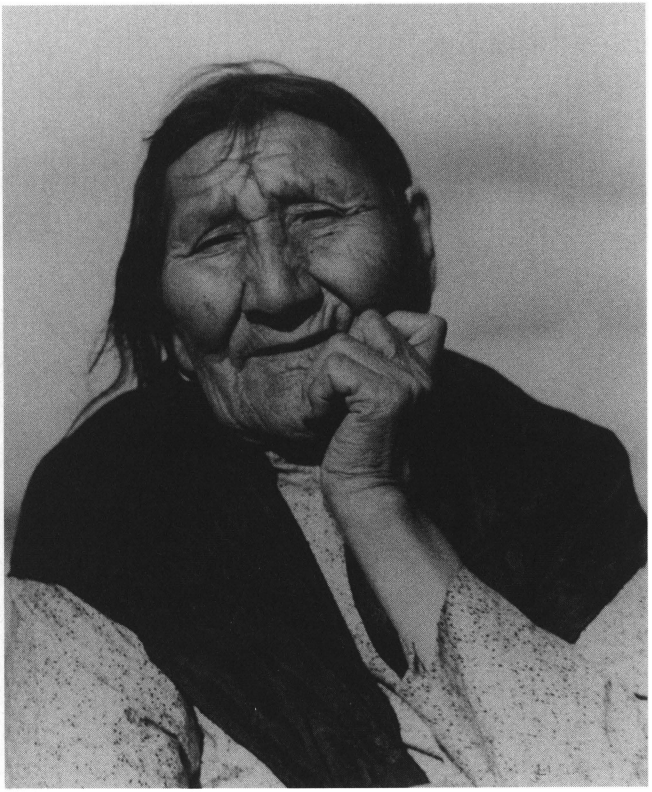

Pretty Shield Goes Ahead, widow of Custer scout Goes Ahead. (Crandal, Teton Park)

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Gladys and Reginald Laubin with Suzie Yellowtail. Her Crow dress is decorated with elk teeth. (Crandal, Teton Park)

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Gladys and Reginald Laubin. (The Spurlock Museum, University of Illinois at Urbana-Champaign)

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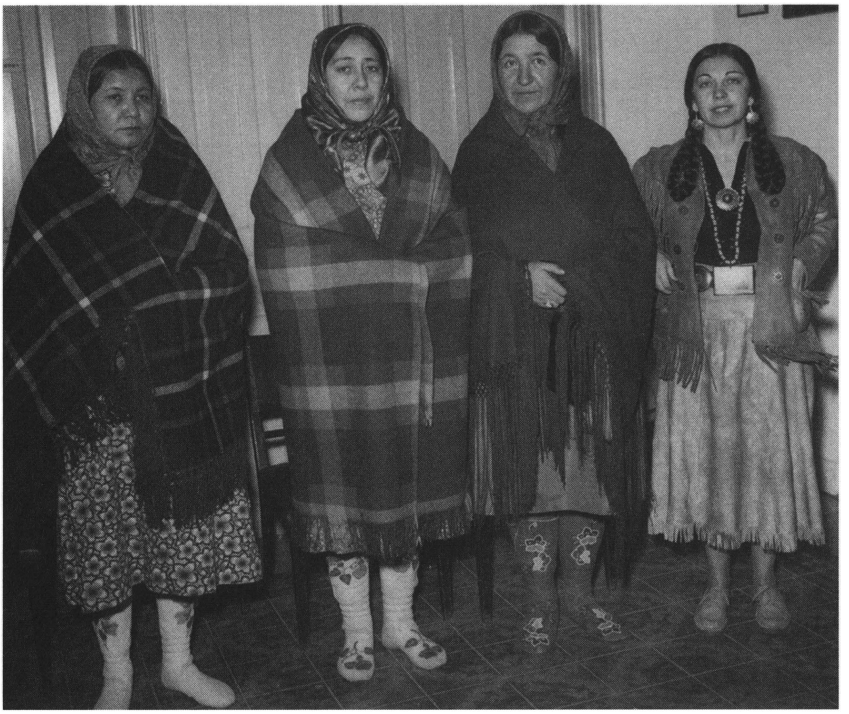

Ethel Old Coyote, Agnes Deernose, Suzie Yellowtail, and Gladys Laubin were all part of the dance tour. (Isaac Berez, Tel Aviv)

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Gladys and Reginald Laubin dressed for the Sioux Buffalo Dance. (The Spurlock Museum, University of Illinois at Urbana-Champaign)

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The Laubins' tipis behind their cabin in Grand Teton National Park, Wyoming. (The Spurlock Museum, University of Illinois at Urbana-Champaign)

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Reginald Laubin, violinist. "The true music of life is written in the good we create in the lives of others." (George Schuler, Jackson, Wyoming)

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3

Dancing around Adventure's Edge

Responses from the brochure mailing began to arrive. Following up by telephone brought positive results, with bookings scattered throughout the school year beginning January 1929. When Reginald asked Gladys's father for permission to marry her, the signed contracts from many school principals constituted a persuasive argument in Reginald's favor. Thus, on October 20, 1928, in the face of a looming depression spreading over the country, Reginald Karl Laubin and Gladys Winfield Tortachel resigned from their jobs with the U.S. Finishing Company of Norwich, Connecticut; went to the home of a Rev. Banning, a Baptist minister in Norwich; married; and headed west to Colorado in their redoubtable Model-T for a honeymoon on the Ten-Sleep Ranch of Ralph Hubbard, who taught Indian lore to Boy Scout groups across the country.

A number of years earlier, Hubbard, eldest son of the noted author and lecturer Elbert Hubbard, had staged American Indian pageants for Boy Scouts in the Hartford area. There he met a seventeen-year-old Eagle Scout, Reginald Laubin, who professed to be an Indian dancer. Hubbard put him into a pageant, admired his obvious talent, and invited Reginald to come see him sometime in

Colorado. Seven years later Reginald and his new bride were driving west, intent on accepting that open-ended invitation.

True to the often-repeated reputation for western hospitality, the Ten-Sleep Ranch welcomed the newlyweds with open arms, and they spent several weeks there, exchanging information with Hubbard about American Indian culture.

Ralph Hubbard was impressed with the sincerity of the Laubins' project as well as with Reginald's skill as an Indian dancer. He had seen and trained many, but none possessed Reginald's elegance of movement. It was a gift. He was a natural-born dancer, the grace of whose performances, like those of Fred Astaire, mesmerized audiences. In motion, Reginald had charisma, and his interpretation of American Indian art and culture carried conviction.

In the 1930s, as the Great Depression deepened, Reginald and Gladys stubbornly held to their determination to gain a foothold on the concert stage circuit as an Indian dance team. Strangely enough, although the depression devastated the professional stage (thousands of actors were out of work), vaudeville died, and even Hollywood languished from a shortage of new material, the concert stage, or the part of it that booked performers into high school and museum auditoriums, was steady because its product was considered more educational than entertaining. Thus the Laubins, by dint of personal effort and a willingness to perform under extremely difficult situations, continued to find bookings for their American Indian dance and lecture programs. Thousands of students across the country were treated to a new and realistic view of Indian art and culture.

While he was still an art student, Reginald had visited in the home of a fellow student, Winifred Tantaquegeon, who was a Mohegan Indian. There he met Frank Speck, head of the anthropology de-

partment of the University of Pennsylvania at Philadelphia. Speck, whose wife was a Seneca, had been conducting research on the Algonquin tribes of the East Coast, among which were the Penobscots, Senecas, and Mohegans. Reginald's interest in Indian culture intrigued Speck, and they became friends. Almost a decade later the men would meet again when Reginald and Gladys appeared at the university's auditorium.

After the performance, Speck came back to see his friend. "Reginald, I congratulate you," he said. "It was a beautiful performance, truly. You're not only a fine dancer, but the way you explained the dance afterward shows you're an anthropologist as well."

"Me, an anthropologist?" Reginald laughed. "I never even heard the term until I saw it on your card."

"Well you are, indeed, believe me," replied Speck. "The question is, what kind of an anthropologist are you?"

"What kind?"

"Yes, are you a table anthropologist, a fireside anthropologist, or a bedside anthropologist?"

"Well, I guess you'd have to say I'm a fireside, because I've spent some nights in your home."

Not long after that incident the Laubins were booked to give three performances daily—during the afternoon, at supper, and later at night—at a colonial village planned for the Century of Progress exposition in Chicago. Between their performances, the stage would be used for a pageant. The engagement was a bonanza for them, particularly because the Great Depression showed no signs of easing. A lengthy appearance in one place would offer a pleasant respite from the one-day stands of the high school circuit.

Throughout the ever-increasing activity of the Laubins' now fully committed career, they continued to read omnivorously. On one

trip to the library they discovered a volume by Stanley Vestal on the new-book shelf: *Sitting Bull, Champion of the Sioux.* Reginald was captivated by the story, which brought alive for him one of the greatest Indian personalities of the nineteenth century. From earlier reading, he knew that Sitting Bull had been one of the principles in the Battle of the Little Big Horn and at Wounded Knee. Vestal illuminated the inner character of the man and made Sitting Bull understandable to contemporary readers.

Reginald wrote to Vestal, whose real name was Walter Campbell, to thank him for the book and praise his insight. He also outlined what he was doing with his dance program and asked Campbell how he could contact older Indians who might remember dancing from the buffalo days.

Campbell was quick to reply, encouraging Reginald to continue dancing and suggesting that he write to Frank Zahn at Fort Yates in the Standing Rock Indian Reservation in the Dakotas. "Frank is a very accommodating person and is called the best interpreter in the Missouri River basin," he advised.

Throughout the summer, Reginald and Gladys continued to correspond with Zahn, who proved to be a veritable fountain of knowledge about Indians. He knew the names and tribal affiliations of many of the Indian craftspeople and artisans in the booths of the Indian Village of the Chicago Exposition. Reginald had to tell Zahn, however, that they performed only at the *Colonial* Village, quite a way from the *Indian* Village, and he never saw those people. He and Gladys would come out to the Dakotas right after the event closed, however. "Okay," Zahn replied, "but if you could get to Fort Yates for the *first* week of September you'd be in time for the Indians' own fair, which takes place at Fort Yates for one week. We usually have over five thousand Indians here for it, and many

of the 'Old Ones' come in just for this event. While it is essentially a Sioux affair, many other tribes, Shoshone, Crow, and Bannok, come too, as do the Yankton Sioux."

Reginald decided that the opportunity was too good to miss, and he terminated their engagement with the fair a week earlier than planned. On August 23, 1934, the Laubins loaded all their costumes and traveling gear into the Model-T and headed it west once again. It would be a journey that would change their lives.

4

Adoption into the Sioux

The heavily loaded Laubin tin lizzie headed west out of Chicago. It was crammed with camping gear and suitcases and decorated with rawhide boxes filled with beautiful items of Indian costuming. Most of the latter were copies of museum pieces, carefully crafted by Reginald and Gladys.

There were no broad interstate highways in those days cutting a swath through the countryside to connect cities. Instead there were only a multitude of secondary roads running through small towns and villages. Such roads were usually two-lane (one in either direction) and surfaced with asphalt, a few were concrete, some were covered with loose gravel, and others were dirt. Most had sod shoulders, and few were painted with white guide lines. Over these often inadequate highways the Laubins rolled merrily along through Wisconsin and Minnesota and into the Dakotas. Gladys's diary provides details of their trek from Chicago, the third-largest city in the United States, to Fort Yates, South Dakota, the last redoubt of the once great Sioux Indian nation:

Friday 31 August 1934

Up at 8:00. Heading west on Route 12. Countryside here in western Minnesota pretty flat and uninteresting all the way to

Aberdeen, South Dakota where we arrived at 7:30 P.M. Camped in a roadside cabin. Good we did as it rained all night. Folks at the cabins said coming from the west of Aberdeen they had seen cows dead along the road from lack of food and water.
Saturday, 1st September

In Aberdeen, where we stopped for grub (about two miles from the cabins) people said they hadn't had a drop of rain!—Reached Mobridge at noon—typical western town, but Reginald said he couldn't understand the "lack of big hats!"

Crossed the muddy Missouri River after lunch. Flat and full of mud. The first sign of green we had seen since Aberdeen were the patches along the river. From Mobridge we turned north to Fort Yates. The country here is great—rolling patches of green on the sides of the buttes.

Picked up a cowpuncher about twenty miles south of McLaughlin. He was going there to visit his brother in a CCC [Civilian Conservation Corps] camp. Our Lizzie was so tightly packed (he couldn't get in the back and there is no room on the front seat of a Model A Ford for a third passenger) so he rode on the running board and we had a nice chat with him.

He said this part of the country (the west side of the Continental Divide) hadn't seen rain since May of 1933. He told us his mother was bit by a rattlesnake and she chopped a chunk out of her foot. He, himself, had a rattler slip down his shirt, once, while he was pitching hay. Said it made him do a war dance for fair. He said his buddy camped on the prairie one night and in the morning a rattler was curled up right beside his friend's head, watching him. So he threw his poncho over his friend's face to protect him.

We dropped the cowpuncher off two miles from McLaughlin at a spot where he could hike over the hill for ten miles to see his mother.

The road out of there was awful—wet gumbo, ruts, and we

> slewed all over. We thought we would never get to Fort Yates—the road seemed endless. Then we spotted the white village along the river, surrounded in green grass and hundreds of white tents—beautiful!

The Laubins drove into Fort Yates, headquarters of the Standing Rock Indian Reservation, and inquired where they could find Frank Zahn (known among Indians as Frank Flying Cloud). The clerk at the headquarters building told them that he was "probably down at the fair" and gave them a map of the area. Reginald and Gladys were left to their own devices.

They drove up Elk Hill to view the entire camp. There appeared to be more than four hundred tents pitched in concentric circles to the west of the town, which boasted only one street and fewer than thirty or forty houses in addition to the government building and five or six stores. Most of the visiting Indians' tents had white sidewalls. The camp contained only two tipis because the government and the missionaries, in a blind effort to discourage Indians from following old ways of living, frowned upon tipis and the traditional furnishings made during the days of the buffalo herds. Indians, deprived by their conquerors of the visible implements of their culture, gave away, sold, or sometimes hid many priceless artifacts.

Before going down Elk Hill to search among the hundreds of tents for Frank Zahn, whom they knew only through correspondence, Reginald decided they should visit the grave of Sitting Bull, which they did. In a back corner of the small military cemetery of Fort Yates, marked only by a simple wooden stake, they found the gravesite of the hereditary chief of the great Sioux Nation. Then they located Zahn, who took them to a large tipi and introduced them to a Mr. and Mrs. Two Bulls (unrelated to Sitting Bull), who

were well into their eighties. The Laubins were invited to have supper with the family. Although the tipi had been full of other visiting Indians, they politely took their leave as Mrs. Two Bulls prepared to serve the guests from a big iron pot that sat directly on the coals at the center of the tipi.

Only as the visitors left did the Laubins realize that the tipi was bare of furnishings. There was no painted dew cloth lining suspended around the lower half of the inside, no reed back-rests, and no other household conveniences of traditional tipi living—so successful had the government's and missionaries' ban on these artifacts been. But such prohibition could not suppress an innate sense of the proper courtesies in the order of seating guests. The Two Bulls sat on the south side of the tipi door, then Henry Agard (a half-breed), then Frank Zahn, then Reginald, and then Gladys. The Two Bulls' nine-year-old granddaughter served each guest first from an iron kettle—a chunk of meat on a tin plate—and also provided soup in a tin bowl. When they left the Two Bulls, the granddaughter gave Gladys a bead necklace she had made, it being the custom among Indians to give presents to guests.

Because of Reginald's keen interest in Sitting Bull, Zahn had wanted the Laubins to meet Chief One Bull, nephew and adopted son of Sitting Bull. He was late in arriving at the fair, so Frank Zahn took them to his camp. As Gladys recorded the event in her diary:

> One Bull had come to the fair with his wife, daughter and her husband, Joshua Spotted Horse, in a little old Model-T Ford so loaded down with bedding and camping equipment that there was no room for costumes. Flying Cloud [Zahn] wanted us to take a good picture of the old man, but, when he learned that One Bull had no costume with him, Frank was very much disappointed, until Reginald offered the use of his own, which saved the day.

At about the same time a crowd of Indian women collected around me. Before I knew what was happening the old women had gathered around me like bumblebees, admiring and measuring my long dark braids. One Indian woman after another ran her hands up and down my hair, measuring it as the boys do when using a baseball bat to choose who is up at bat. It was a new experience for me and to say I was frightened is putting it mildly, until I caught Flying Cloud's laughing eyes assuring me it was all right.

One Bull's wife held up her small hands showing that my hair was nine hands long! The women squealed their delight in little high-pitched voices. I looked up and now One Bull was holding my braids and Flying Cloud said he was telling the people, "The Indian girls cut their hair. They are neither Indian nor white. They ought to stay Indians. I like this nice long hair. She's more Indian than our Indian girls are."

That was the first favorable impression. The next came when Reginald went to the car to get his costume for the chief to wear in the picture. The Indians standing around were at once interested in the painted rawhide boxes and cases in which the Laubins kept their costumes. "How is it this white man and his woman have all these old Indian things?" the old man said immediately. "They have been telling us for fifty years that these Indian things are no good. If they are no good how come these two white people have them?"

"This man and his wife have been studying about our people for a long time," Zahn explained. "They are missionaries from the Indians to the white people and are trying to bring about a better understanding between the two races through interpreting the life and lore of our people." That reply seemed to please One Bull, who took the leather leggings, beaded shirt, and eagle feather war bonnet to his little tent to prepare for the picture.

What a difference clothing makes! One Bull went from being a poor old man in store clothing to a dignified chief. Frank Zahn showed him Reginald's shield, which had a cover of red, blue, and yellow. One Bull took it up, looked it over, made a few feints with it, and exclaimed, "Waste, lila waste! [Good, very good!]" Zahn told him that Reginald had made it in true Indian fashion, steaming and shrinking the thick bull hide over hot rocks. One Bull nodded but would not ask Reginald to uncover the shield. Shields were considered to be sacred possessions, and often their designs were personal secrets.

When Reginald offered to uncover the shield himself, One Bull at first seemed startled and then happy as he talked excitedly to those around him. Flying Cloud hastened to explain to Reginald why he was so elated: "You have One Bull's *name* on your shield!" Reginald recorded the event in his journal:

> I had been using the name Black Buffalo as my Indian name and a picture of a black buffalo on my red shield could just as well be One Bull. Flying Cloud then told One Bull that we did Indian dancing and he immediately invited us to dance with the Indians that night.
>
> I wore an extra pair of beaded leggings I had with me and stripped to the waist. The governmental ban on Indian dancing had recently been lifted and they could once more dance and dress as they pleased. We took part in the Crow, Victory, Buffalo and Grass dances. One Bull still wore my costume and danced every dance from 7:30 to midnight. He was only eighty-two then.
>
> The next morning Flying Cloud told us that One Bull had taken a great liking to us and that all the Indians were glad to have us dance with them. The coincidence of the shield was really the opening to One Bull's friendship. The old man came to us and

said, "I am going to adopt you tonight." He didn't ask if we would like it or not. He was just going to do it. Needless to say, we were as happy as meadowlarks.

One Bull painted our faces that afternoon in preparation for the ceremony that night. To me he gave the "mountain lion paint," yellow dots representing the tracks of a mountain lion, the paint he had worn on the warpath as a young man. Gladys's face he painted with a design that showed he had rescued a wounded comrade in battle.

After the Indians had gathered in the evening One Bull counted coup. In order to show that he had the right to adopt us into the tribe he *had* to count coup, which is the relating of one's exploits in battle. A man cannot count coup until he has touched an enemy—not necessarily killed him but just touched him with his bare hand, or a stick or club held in his hand. One Bull strutted back and forth, waving his stone club and my shield, telling the people in a loud voice and dramatizing for them his exciting experiences in the famous Battle on the Little Big Horn, "where Custer and his soldiers met the same fate they had meted out to the Cheyenne on the Washita a few years before."

It was a rare privilege to witness this, for One Bull was one of the few old men left who could still count coup. We never failed to thrill to it whenever we heard him, as we did on many occasions afterward. Several years after the adoption, when I had proven myself worthy of such an honored possession, One Bull gave me [the] stone club which he had carried on that fateful day of June 25, 1876.

Following a Grass Dance and a Crow Dance came a lull in which the *ikoncan* [master of ceremonies] announced that One Bull would speak again. The old chief got up, his war bonnet waving in the cool night wind, and he called out in a strong voice so that the four quarters of the entire world might hear him: "Ho,

wana taku wan epinkta [Now I am going to speak]! I am the head chief of all these people here and you all know it. These two people that you see here tonight came a long way, from the land of the sunrise, the eastern ocean. You see them dressed in the garb of our people but they belong to the white race. They have come a long way to see us and I am going to adopt them into this great nation. Upon the man I confer the name of One Bull, the name of your chief. Upon the woman I bestow the name Wiyaka Wastewin, Good Feather. Good Feather is the name of my mother, as you all know. So now, my friends and tribesmen, recognize these two people by the names I have given them. Ho hecetu [It is well]!"

Flying Cloud answered for us, saying: "For four hundred winters there has been a misunderstanding between the white man and the red man. We are trying to bring about a better understanding between the two. The Indian dances that we do on the stage are reproductions of those you Indians have been doing for centuries. Through them we are trying to make the white man understand the Indian and to bring the two races upon an equal footing. You have greatly honored us by conferring upon us the names of your leading people."

Then we gave tobacco to the Master of Ceremonies and the drummers and One Bull and I exchanged gifts. I gave One Bull a big box of provisions and Gladys gave One Bull's wife, Nakiwizipiwin [Jealous] some beads and cloth for a new dress. Her name really means "They are jealous of her" for she is the wife of the chief. In return, she gave Gladys a rare old sewing bag with an awl and sinew, and One Bull gave me a picture record, on skin, of his part in the Custer battle.

After a great handshaking all around everyone went back to his place and sat down. I sat on Chief One Bull's left, the place of honor, on the men's side of the circle, and Gladys sat with Mrs. One Bull and the Indian women on the opposite side of the circle. Soon

the drummers began a song, using our new names, and we were expected to respond by dancing alone before a thousand Indians. The song was slow at first, requiring a slow Chief's Dance, then suddenly changed to a fast tempo and soon all the dancers, about fifty men and forty women, joined us.

Following this dance, Mrs. Long Chase, daughter of Lieutenant Bull Head (who was in charge of the Indian police sent to arrest Sitting Bull) asked me to dance Crow Dance with her. I was the only man in this dance and I felt quite conspicuous, but I was informed that I was highly honored to be asked to participate in the women's dance.

We learned the next day that many Indians had taken us for real Indians, One Bull's relatives from a neighboring reservation. Mini Capi [Spring of Water], one of One Bull's daughters, told us, "Our friends, they come to us and ask if you are our relatives from up north." She mentioned this to us twice and seemed to be quite proud of us. It was nice to know that we had not let them down.

Every so often Chief One Bull would tell me: "This name, Tatanka Wanjilia, One Bull, is no longer mine. It is yours, forever." I would have been pleased with any name he gave me, but for him to part with his own name I knew was the highest honor he could bestow upon me, according to old Indian custom.

He went on to say: "I give you this name because you are alone in your work. I know you will face opposition in bringing the Indian's message to the white man but when you do, you put your head down like an old buffalo bull and push right on through."

After telling me about my name he always ended up by telling Gladys why he named her Good Feather. "Look at me," he said. "My mother took good care of me and I have lived to be an old man. So, I give you my mother's name, for I want you to take good care of my son, as my mother took good care of me."

I assured him Gladys would do just that.

In our quest for knowledge of the earlier life and lore of the Sioux Indians we had come to Standing Rock Reservation, to attend this largest gathering of that tribe. Our friend, Flying Cloud, had taken us to see Chief One Bull, nephew and adopted son of the famous Sitting Bull of history.

Sitting Bull had lost a son and it was only natural that he adopt his sister Good Feather's boy, a lad of nearly the same age. Thus from the time One Bull was four-years-old he lived in his uncle Sitting Bull's tipi. Even after he grew up and was married he always camped next to Sitting Bull. He took part in many of his famous uncle's campaigns and was one of the last survivors of the Custer Battle. Who else would know the life history of Sitting Bull, and the lore of his people, better than this adopted son, One Bull. Naturally we were eager to meet the famous old chief, but we never had any idea he would adopt us into that famous family.

It changed my entire outlook on life—I had come home, I had Indian kinsfolk, now, with whom I could dance and sing, and share stories about "the old days." I was two personalities in one, but we were both Americans.

I told Gladys that night: "For the past dozen years our dancing has spoken from our research in libraries, museums and third-hand retold stories. But, now, here at the horses mouth, so to speak, we should carefully review every movement, of every dance, to ensure its accuracy in the eyes of our kinsmen." It was a lofty thought. I knew, now, that my dancing would have soul.

5

New York's Town Hall: Concert Heaven

Reginald and Gladys remained in the Dakotas and Montana until late October. During those weeks they enjoyed visits with many other Indian families on the Standing Rock, Pine Ridge, and Rosebud reservations. Their adoption into the Sioux tribe by Chief One Bull proved to be an "open sesame" with all Indians in the area. Everywhere they found themselves warmly welcomed as relatives of the Sitting Bull clan. For Reginald and Gladys, it was a new and richly rewarding experience, especially when the Indians found that the Laubins were deeply interested in preserving the "old ways," the tradition and culture of the tribes as they were before whites had come.

The Laubins were invited to return the next summer, bring their own tipi, and camp with the Indians as one of their own, something they readily promised to do. They pitched their tipi next to that of Frank Zahn and his wife at Standing Rock for the following sixteen summers.

During that first memorable summer, Reginald noted the names of many Indians in his logbook as newly made friends in whose homes they had visited: White Bear, Afraid of Hawk, Phillip Romero, Little Soldier, Mission Eagle, Allen Killswave, Return from

Scout, Charly Blunt Horn, Walking Bull, Big Hawk, Good Buffalo, Spotted Crow, and Pretty Shield Goes Ahead.

One sad factor left a grim impression on the Laubins: The homes, whether tent or cabin, all lacked furniture. It was tragic that the government and clergy had worked together to wipe out Indian culture. One bedroom, for example, contained only a bed, a pile of quilts, and a table—a poor home by any standards. Walls were not bare of decoration because the Indians lacked a sense of the artistic or an appreciation of beauty; their costumes and manner of decoration contradict such a premise. Many artistic practices are evidence of the cultural soul of the American Indian. A love of color was attested to by the designs of porcupine quillwork (and later beadwork) that decorated cradles, moccasins, belts, pipe bags, and other articles of everyday use. An appreciation of design has always been evident in the beautiful motifs worked into Indian weaving and pottery and in the simplicity of the pictography used to record Indian history.

Reginald and Gladys completed their visits on the reservations and headed for home. Their last night's camp was east of Wounded Knee. While Gladys was preparing breakfast on the morning they left, Reginald made friends with an inquisitive magpie that repaid his outstretched handful of raisins by flying off with his shaving soap and then stealing a chocolate from Gladys. Reginald's patience, however, was equal to the magpie's curiosity. Without dropping his out-stretched hand, he sat slowly on a convenient rock and spoke to the bird softly in Sioux. Perched on a nearby post, the magpie cocked his head from side to side as if analyzing the situation. Reginald remained unmoved. The bird tested its wings and then flew to his hand, picked up several raisins in its bill, and flew back to the fence, where Reginald's raincoat hung on a post. Quick-

ly the magpie hid the raisins in the buttonholes of the raincoat and then flew back for another and another and another. Finally, the bird came back and ate the raisins, one by one, from the small pile on the ground under the raincoat. The meeting was a delightful conclusion to the Laubins' adventures among the homes of the Indians. Reginald was certain that the magpie had been the pet of some Indian family, because semi-tame wild creatures often lived close to their homes.

For the balance of the 1930s and most of the 1940s, the Laubins continued to book their dance program into schools, museums, and concert halls across the country between September and May. Every June they would load their tipi poles onto the rack on top of their car (the Model-T had been replaced by an Oldsmobile coupe) and travel to reservations in Wyoming, Montana, and the Dakotas and camp with the Indians for the rest of the summer.

Once there, they would learn from the Old Ones ancient lore and crafts as the Indians had practiced them during the days before the whites. In the evenings they would join tribal gatherings in traditional dances and song. The three summer months, a time of joy for Reginald and Gladys, enhanced the quality and authenticity of the programs they presented during the remainder of the year.

Their school program became more popular each year as word of its excellence spread. Sometimes a school district would sponsor them at all its schools; in cities that could mean several shows only hours apart. But there were many more performances in small towns that could be miles apart. An ideal schedule would have been five to eight performances in a five-day school week. Sometimes, however, because of a school board's enthusiasm, they found themselves booked for ten or eleven shows a week. The Laubins' dedi-

cation to their cause—a better understanding of American Indian culture—required strong commitment.

A surprise came in December 1947: The Laubins were invited to dance in a concert series being staged by Fern Helscher at New York City's Town Hall Auditorium on Forty-third Street just east of Broadway. It was professional recognition of the highest order. Town Hall was the showplace of the concert stage. Just as playing the Palace Theatre on Broadway was the ultimate goal for a vaudeville act, so was an appearance at Town Hall Auditorium the dream of every concert performer, whether singer, dancer, or solo musician.

Thus it was with considerable trepidation that Reginald and Gladys left the home of Reginald's brother in Scarsdale on New Year's Eve of 1947 to drive to New York City for their scheduled performance at Town Hall. It had been snowing all day, and by the time they reached Manhattan fully twenty-two inches silenced the sound of tire chains and hushed the slowly moving traffic. As they started down Riverside Drive they were stopped by traffic police diverting cars so snowplows could keep main thoroughfares open. Explanation of their destination and purpose as performers, however, sufficed to get them through.

At the concert hall, they were surprised to find the lobby already filling. By the time the curtains parted, the auditorium had been sold out and people were standing along the back of the hall. Such a large audience despite the weather relaxed the Laubins about this very unusual performance, and they went to their dressing rooms.

When they came onstage dressed for their opening number, the Buffalo Dance, a stagehand on the curtain ropes told them, "The critics are out front tonight, folks. Give them your best." Reginald sucked in his breath. New York critics, he had heard, could be caus-

tic when performers of one race offered the original works of another. He smiled wryly and muttered to Gladys, "Okay sweet, here's our chance to count coup."

Gladys smiled understandingly, raised the small tom-tom she carried, tapped it smartly in a rapid beat, and nodded to the stagehand. He pulled mightily on the curtain rope, and the velvet drapes parted with a swoosh.

The holiday audience received each number with resounding applause, and critics seemed to agree. Walter Terry, dance critic for the New York *Herald-Tribune,* wrote on January 1, 1948:

> Fern Helscher's holiday dance series at Times Hall came to an end last night with a performance of American Indian dance by Reginald and Gladys Laubin. In this, their second program of the series, the Laubins not only sustained the remarkable qualities of indigenous American dance manifested at their first appearance, but also revealed still further beauties in a dance form still generally unfamiliar to non-Indian Americans. That it is unfamiliar to the conquerors of the New World is a pity, for much of the flavor of our land, many of the qualities of character and of behavior which we consider distinctly American are celebrated in the dances of our first citizens.
>
> In those dances that Mr. and Mrs. Laubin have performed we have seen suggested in steps and in body movements the activities of free and independent men, men of dignity; we have seen feet caress the earth or pound power from it; we have seen arms and head raised to face a horizon, a frontier; we feel man's closeness to nature in the imitation of birds, in the stance which is as firm as the deeply rooted oak; we have seen capers as well as processional, humor as well as profound dedication and above all we have seen in the body of Indian dance a love of beauty and of simplicity. Surely these are characteristics all Americans experience or

seek, and if the dances of the American Indian do not belong to us by blood heritage they belong to us through the heritage of the land itself. At least the Laubins, dedicated to the task of creating greater unity between the first and the later Americans, make us feel, through their dances, that this is so.

Their final program offered social dances, both ancient and modern; stories in sign-talk or in song; dances of a ritualistic nature, dances which defined character and dances of sheer beauty of movement, of physical skill. One is hard put to know which to single out for comment.

Certainly the sign-talk dance "Sitting Bull's Vision," was fascinating both in movement and in subject. The gestures themselves, though less refined than those of the classic Hindu dance, had a rough eloquence about them, and since the majority of Americans believe that there are always two sides to a story, it was appropriate that we should learn, through dance, of Sitting Bull's version of Custer's last stand. A satiric dance, one which poked acute and lively fun at a hunter who, surprised by an enemy band, fled silently to safety and then emitted a pompous challenge was contrasted with the dance of a true hero who described in dance the exploits which brought honor not only to him but also to his people. Highly amusing was "Rabbit Dance," a comparatively new creation of the Indians and one which combined the dignity and the rather off-hand romanticism of the Indian with the jazzy steps of an adapted foxtrot.

Repeated from the earlier program were "Sun Dance" and "Hoop Dance," the former an impressive ritual of prayer, intense in manner, stately yet by no means lethargic and touched with lovely symbolisms, the latter a dance of great virtuosity and beauty of pattern. But one should not and cannot judge the scope of the Laubin's material by a dance or two or by descriptions of them. The technical, the choreographic, and thematic areas of Indian

dance appear to be endless, and these aspects of dance are to be respected, but more important is the richness of spirit which underlies these dances and which leaves the modern theater-goer refreshed, stimulated and, if I may speak for myself, cleansed in heart and in spirit. Obviously, Reginald and Gladys Laubin are showing us not only the dances of the American Indian but also are disclosing the spirit that underlies them.

The costumes used by the two dancers are literally gorgeous. In color, in cut and in functional value they are far superior to the work of any single theatrical designer, no matter how gifted he may be. The memory of these beauties, of costume, of dance and of spirit, will linger long with all of us fortunate enough to see the Laubins on Miss Helscher's fine and rewarding series.

The other critic who attended the snowy New Year's Eve performance was John Martin of the *New York Times,* who wrote that their work presented "real choreography in our sense of the word" and that the dances made "technical demands of a high order." "It is no wonder that the Indians themselves are warm in their praise," Martin concluded his review, "for no one of their own people has come before the white man with as eloquent or winning a presentation." Indeed, the Indians were warm in their approval of the Laubins' program, as a letter of March 7, 1950, from Louis R. Bruce, Jr., attested:

As Executive Secretary of the National Congress of American Indians and representing 130,000 Indian members of our organization, I want to take this opportunity of expressing to your our appreciation for the grand performance you gave at our National Conference in Rapid City, South Dakota. Without question, it was one of the finest I have ever seen, and I have seen many Indian performances.

You know, we Indians are very skeptical of non-Indians interpreting our dances, but I know I speak for our members when I say that we are proud to have you two grand folks as our envoys. We consider you one of us. Your dances are authentic and we want to sponsor you both in N.C.A.I. and our ARROW organization on a concert tour to create good will and understanding of our cause.

Success to you both and I myself could never tire of witnessing your performances.

Our thanks to you for all you have done for us.

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The Laubin Troupe on Tour

When Reginald and Gladys read the glowing reviews of their Town Hall performance, they felt sure they had arrived. Agents would now come, seeking them with fat contracts. When nothing like that transpired, however, they shrugged off their disappointment and resumed making contact with schools. "Remember what old One Bull told us at our adoption ceremony?" Gladys asked Reginald after a discouraging day making the rounds of concert agencies in the New York area.

"Sure do," he replied. "One Bull said we would continue to meet resistance to our efforts. But when that happened, we should draw in our shoulders like an old buffalo bull and push right on through! Well I guess this is one of those times. Maybe we should go back to the reservation for a while and reevaluate our priorities."

Gladys agreed but suggested that while they were in the East they might visit me and my wife, who had told them at Christmas of our return from overseas military duty. Although Ginny and I were keenly disappointed when Reginald and Gladys did not return after that visit and become our neighbors, we realized that it was best for their careers that they build a cabin in Wyoming. From that cabin in the Tetons they were within a short drive of the reserva-

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tions of which they became an accepted part. Had they built adjacent to our farm at Pawling, New York, they would have remained forever just a couple of eastern white folks who happened to like Indians. The Laubins belonged to the West, even as the tipi and the culture of the American Indian who created it were the very fabric of the Old West.

About this time, 1951, the Laubins received an invitation from the historical society of North Carolina to spend a summer at the Cherokee Indian Reservation, working on an Indian pageant for tourists. Happy to have an opportunity to learn more about the East Coast tribes, Reginald signed the contract.

In early June, when the Laubins arrived in the town of Cherokee in the northwestern corner of North Carolina, they found it to be within the Cherokee Indian Reservation, the boundaries of which extended a distance into the state of Tennessee. Their contract called for them to appear in an annual pageant, *Unto These Hills.* Although the event took place on a reservation and was about Indians, whites dressed as Indians played all the parts but one (an Indian was cast as a Presbyterian minister). Reginald found that the script contained many historical inaccuracies and asked to be relieved from appearing in the nightly show. To fulfill their contract, he offered to perform Plains Indians dances every afternoon and one evening each week. The Chamber of Commerce, which managed the show, agreed, and the summer proceeded.

The Laubins made many friends among the Cherokee while living on the reservation during that summer. Although their dance program consisted primarily of dances of the tribes of the Western Plains, Reginald took the opportunity of being in North Carolina to learn two dances of the Cherokee tribe and included them in the afternoon program. That program became so popular that it drew

larger audiences than the pageant held at night, which perhaps concerned its producers. As late as halfway through the summer, posters advertising both shows were displayed side by side. One day, however, and without comment, the Laubins' posters were taken down and not replaced. But it was too late to discourage the tourist audience. Word of mouth had its effect, and each afternoon large groups of expectant people gathered at the spot where the Laubin magic held sway.

Through long years of living with Indians and careful study of the personal characteristics of many individual Indians on reservations, the Laubins learned much about Indian behavior and came to admire their stoic endurance of injustice and even neglect and enjoy their sense of humor, especially under trying circumstances. In 1953 and 1954 they would have an opportunity to make such observations in a totally different setting—before audiences in other countries. They had been offered a contract to perform their dance program abroad, supported by a troupe of American Indians whom they would select and train. It was a challenge and opportunity they were delighted to accept.

They discussed the composition of the touring troupe with their good friend Frank Zahn at Standing Rock and decided they would need eight individuals besides themselves, four pairs of dancers to compliment their solo work. The dancers had to be young and enthusiastic to match the vigor of the Laubins and endure the rigors of trouping—eight shows a week in addition to the strain of traveling from country to country.

Unfortunately, most of the Laubins' contacts within the Sioux were among the older generation, from whom they had sought out people who remembered the days of the buffalo hunts. Reginald knew only a few of the younger Sioux. Zahn suggested they con-

tact Robert Yellowtail, superintendent of the Crow Agency in Montana.

"The Crows have some very talented young dancers," Zahn said, having watched them at the Crow Fair in recent years. "The Sioux and the Crow aren't enemies anymore," he added. "Since the buffalo are gone from the plains there are no more hunting rights to be fought over."

Within a year, the Laubin Troupe of American Indian Dancers applied for passports. The immigration officer read off the names and residences of the group as they lined up for signatures:

Reginald Laubin American citizen	white	Moose, Wyoming
Gladys Laubin, wife American citizen	white	Moose, Wyoming
Tom Yellowtail American citizen	Crow	Crow Reservation, Montana
Suzie Yellowtail, wife American citizen	Crow	Crow Reservation, Montana
Donald Deernose American citizen	Crow	Crow Reservation, Montana
Agnes Deernose, wife American citizen	Crow	Crow Reservation, Montana
Hank Old Coyote American citizen	Crow	Crow Reservation, Montana
Ethel Old Coyote, wife American citizen	Crow	Crow Reservation, Montana
Bobby Warrior American citizen	Crow	Crow Reservation, Montana

The act consisted of six solo and duet dances performed by the Laubins, including a pipe ceremony and "Counting Coup," the

story of Sitting Bull, and five ensemble numbers performed by the entire troupe. These included elements of the Sioux Sun Dance, the Ghost Dance, a Crow war dance, the Sioux Buffalo Dance, and, for humorous relief, the Bad Boy Dance.

Many dancers brought along special costumes or items of equipment. Toward the end of the rehearsal period Reginald selected one of the Crow men to act as supervisor of the troupe (a glorified name for stage manager). As such he would be responsible for seeing that costume changes were made on time; that all necessary equipment needed by individual dancers was readily available and carried; and that performers were in their places on time. For the job Reginald selected Tom Yellowtail because his older brother Robert Yellowtail (older by some twenty years) was highly respected by all Crows. Robert Yellowtail was one of the few Indians ever appointed by the government to be a reservation superintendent.

In this instance, Reginald was in for a disappointment, because Tom Yellowtail turned down the assignment. "I can't do that, Reginald," he said. "No Crow can tell another Crow what to do. If the Crow is supposed to do something, then he is *personally responsible* to do it, and he *will!* Personal responsibility is part of the Crow philosophy of life."

And so it worked out, as Reginald discovered, and everyone in the group had a wonderful time. The tour began in Norway and ended five months later on the coast of North Africa in Oman. It covered three continents and nine countries—Norway, Sweden, Finland, Belgium, France, Italy, Spain, Israel, and Morocco—with a total of more than 120 concerts.

The three Crow women in the tour group enjoyed opportunities for unusual shopping, and the four men (Bobby Warrior was young and unmarried) occupied their free time with much walk-

ing about and food sampling. Warrior reported that French waitresses did not know how to make sandwiches, but he enjoyed talking to them anyway. They all lamented that restaurants in some cities did not serve food in the evenings until almost midnight and that Madrid had an ordinance against serving dinner until after 11:30 P.M. As any performer knows, the big meal of the day (whether called supper or dinner) is usually eaten after an evening show. Dancers in particular get hungry around ten in the evening.

The happiest people in the troupe were the Laubins because the troupe played to full houses and reviews were great:

> A "living document" . . . always ingenious, primitive, always touching rites, and sometimes funny, like the Feather Dance. Reginald Laubin has cut for himself, without any tomahawk, a real success. (*L'Aurore,* Paris)

> Here is *a magnificent show* without a doubt . . . one cannot fail to notice the savage greatness and the solemnity in this highest form of Indian art . . . Reginald Laubin is moreover *a great, a very great dancer* as well as an astonishing mime,—those dances of the Prairie Chicken, the Wild Buck, the Hoop and the Brave Heart are *masterpieces of choreography* which many occidental dancers could envy. One finds in the figures of this dancing steps which are part of the big choreographies of the world. The costumes—what can one say about them but that you cannot describe them! They burst with refined sumptuousness, from animal skins to feathers, beads, and furs: some imitate animals with a faithfulness and an invention which are the result of centuries of observation. (Jean Tordeur, *La Cité,* Brussels)

> Uncommonly rich . . . beautiful . . . attractively staged. (Oslo)

> Elaborate and effective choreography. (Stockholm)

Performed with intensity and a real artfulness. Powerful applause and stamping were the response of the spectators. (Helsinki)

It is a positively unusual performance. The success was highly visible. (Milan)

The flexibility quality, exact rhythm, feline vigor . . . every movement attuned to the tempo . . . insured excited applause, unanimous and warm. (Madrid)

A great success . . . warmly applauded for their exotic dances which greatly impressed the spectators. (Jerusalem)

We applaud Reginald Laubin, who is the talented director, and the lovely Gladys Laubin, who distinguished herself with her alluring physical and vocal freshness. (*La Vigie Marocaine,* Casa Blanca)

A show of pure art. . . . We were expecting something picturesque. They give us art, an art free from any spectacular artifice . . . a pure masterpiece. . . . The best of any Technicolor documentary pictures have never given us such colorful luxury . . . *what an enchantment!* (*L'Echo d'Oran,* Oran)

Such kudos were grand enough to turn the heads of anyone striving for recognition. The memory of the disappointment that followed their critically acclaimed New Year's Eve concert caused Reginald and Gladys to view the European tour triumph more cautiously, however.

"You know what those beautiful newspaper write-ups really meant?" Gladys asked as they unpacked at their Jackson Hole cabin when they finally returned from the tour.

"No," Reginald replied, although he suspected the audience had liked the show.

"Oh, they liked it all right," Gladys replied. Yet she felt they should know why and challenged Reginald to reconsider the write-ups and discover what lay behind the acclaim. He did so carefully and then looked up from the sheaf of newspapers with a grin.

"We did it, Glad," he said. "We convinced absolute strangers that Indian dances are, in their own world, *pure art form.* And people here in the USA had been telling us for years that it couldn't be done! Savages were just savages."

"Maybe," she replied, "it's because this time we had real Indians with us. Remember how the audience in Brussels waited in the rain for two hours just so they could talk to us after the concert?"

"Yes," said Reginald. "And when they were brought up on the stage, who did they talk to?"

"The star of the show—Reginald Laubin, of course." Gladys said.

"Yeah, for a polite 'you danced beautifully, Mr. Laubin.' But who did they cluster around and bombard with questions? Our wonderful troupe of Crow Indians, God bless them. Hank Old Coyote, his wife Ethel, and Donald Deernose were especially talkative. I'm not sure just what they said, but those Belgians ate it up. I think you're right Gladys, the Crow Indians tipped the scales of public belief. It was the common man talking."

"Common man, perhaps," replied Gladys, "but even the elite. You saw what that opera critic for *Sud-Ouest* said when we played Bordeaux? 'Never before in the world were dances seen like the ones presented. . . . We have not been moved as much by any opera or any ballet.'"

Reginald whistled. "The Bordeaux paper said that?"

"Exact words. It's there on the table with all the others."

"Must have missed it. It's an amazing statement. We can certainly use it in the brochures we send out."

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"To whom, Reginald? Where are we going from here?"

"Why to the top concert agencies, of course."

"No, Reginald my dear, my talented husband."

"You don't think I'm ready yet?"

"Yes dear, you're ready, but that wasn't our goal. Oh, if you concentrate your efforts you could become a concert headliner—for a couple of seasons. You might even get a movie contract, and the screenwriters would have a field day creating a whoop-it-up monstrosity that would destroy all the goodwill and understanding you have spent years building between the whites and Indians."

"I wouldn't let them!" Reginald was adamant.

"You wouldn't have control," replied Gladys. "A few rave notices don't make a star. Hollywood makes and breaks . . . and it has no soul."

"And I have?" Reginald was becoming nettled.

"Your *dancing* has. And because of that you have been privileged to uncover the soul of the American Indian like no other anthropologist before you."

"Anthropol—?" Reginald was really puzzled.

"Do you remember what our good friend Dr. Speck asked us so many years ago? 'Reginald, what kind of an anthropologist are you—fireside, bedside, or tableside?' Well, I could tell him now that you're none of the three. You're a soulside anthropologist, pure and simple. That was our goal—I realize now, not fame—and the task is not yet finished."

"So what is my small well of wisdom suggesting?" Reginald took Gladys's face between his hands and smiled lovingly into her eyes. What *should* we do, Glad?"

"Forget about the top-flight concert circuit and turn our attention back to the schools. Teachers think about the future and train

minds to meet it. We're in our fifties now. If God blesses us, we've another twenty-five years in which to dance the Indian's soul into the minds of young America. In that time we should be able to reach most every state in the nation. I think we must have already played in over twenty."

"All right, I'm convinced," Reginald agreed. "Let's be about it."

7

More School Performances and Ted Shawn and the Capezio Dance Award

Top-flight concert agencies heard about the Laubins' triumphant European tour only by word of mouth passed via the educators who continued enthusiastic support for their performances. Fred Graham, a Salt Lake City concert agent, booked the Laubins into every high school in Utah. There they were very warmly received, especially by members of the Mormon Church who believe that Jesus visited the Americas after being resurrected. The Ghost Dance of the Plains Indians is a religious rite based on the Indian concept of the return of Jesus as preached by Christian missionaries.

Another area to receive blanket booking by education friends of the Laubins dance program was the state of Iowa. Considering the time involved to set up, perform, and dismantle their program, in addition to travel time between engagements, their dedication to their goal of reaching as many people across the country as possible is evident. Booking schedules for two consecutive weeks in May 1958, annotated by Reginald, are provided in the appendix and provide a vivid example of the extreme constraints of time and distance under which the Laubins performed.

One of the most unusual programs the Laubins ever gave was a

lecture-recital before a blind audience. "After the lecture," recalled Reginald, "we spent an hour giving them a chance to feel our costumes and properties. Of course, they got most out of the songs and explanation, but we were told that they also enjoyed the dances! One girl, while touching a buckskin article decorated with beads and fringes, exclaimed, 'Oh, Mary, *see* how beautiful it is!' This reminded me of the comment of Black Elk, an old Sioux holy man, who, when pitied because of the fact that he was going blind, said, 'It makes little difference. Soon I shall be free from the darkness of the eyes and see only the real things of the spirit!'"

This affinity with "things of the spirit" that the Laubins had discovered existed in all Indian dances and was an aspect of Indian philosophy that greatly appealed to Reginald, who strove to interpret it in every performance. Indians also believe that the Spirit is visible in everyday events, and Reginald related one such experience:

> A great friend of the Indians had been Walter Campbell (whose pen-name had been Stanley Vestal and under that name he had written the biography of Sitting Bull). When Campbell died in 1957 he was buried in the Custer Memorial Cemetery because he had served as an army captain in World War I. Now it was Memorial Day in the early 1960s, and because of Walter Campbell's lifelong interest in the Indians we thought it would be fitting to have an Indian lance placed on Walter's grave. We talked it over with Flying Cloud [Frank Zahn] and other friends of Sitting Bull's biography. They all agreed it would be a fitting and proper tribute to their old champion.

Reginald made the Indian lance, and early on the morning of Memorial Day set it at the head of the grave. About 11 A.M., an honor guard from the American Legion came to conduct the traditional ceremony. Reginald recalled:

> It was a warm, bright, sunshiny day, and not a breath of air was stirring. The eagle feathers on the lance hung loosely without a particle of motion. Then the bugler blew taps, and all at once the central eagle feather on the lance, the one which represented the man himself who carried the lance, rose straight up and began to spin. There was still no sign of a breeze. The bugle was fifty yards away, but the feather continued to twirl until the last note of the bugle faded, before that eagle feather dropped back gracefully beside the other motionless feathers on the lance.

In 1972 Reginald and Gladys won the highest honor in the dance world by receiving the Capezio Dance Award from the Capezio/ Ballet Makers Dance Foundation and the Ted Shawn School. The award saluted the oldest and most universal dance expression, ethnic dance. It was the first time it was given to ethnic dancers, and it was presented by Don C. Anderson, program director of dance for the National Endowment for the Arts. The Capezio Dance Award was established in 1951 as a contribution to public awareness of the progress of dance in the United States. The award committee consisted of the director of the Museum of Modern Art, John B. Hightower; the director of the dance department of the Juilliard School, Martha Hill; *Saturday Review* dance critic Walter Terry; and P. W. Manchester, a dance critic and lecturer.

As the citation they received said, "Reginald and Gladys Laubin, white Americans who have learned, loved, preserved and presented to vast audiences the ancient dance art of the first Americans, the Indians . . . have been honored by the Indian himself through adoption and by electing to live a total life of dance, music, lore and dignity."

To mark the event, a reception was held on the roof of the St. Regis Hotel for the Laubins, who were surprised by the many

friends, Indians and non-Indians, who had traveled many miles to attend. Commissioner of Indian Affairs Louis Bruce, a Mohawk-Sioux, sent a telegram of congratulations, "You are true artists. We are proud of you," and Vern Johnson, executive vice president of the Grand Teton Lodge Company, added, "We, too, are proud of you."

"Our ponies have been riding the clouds ever since," Reginald and Gladys reported after the occasion. "Although New York is the heart of the dance and entertainment world, we were remembered, even if we do live in Moose, Wyoming."

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The Soulside Anthropologist

One of the first questions people ask when they become acquainted with Reginald and Gladys Laubins' dance work concerns what records have been made of their extraordinary careers. The follow-ups are, most frequently, Who will carry on their work, and do the Laubins have children or nephews or nieces who will follow in Reginald's dancing footsteps?

The answer to the first question is yes. The Laubins wrote three books: *The Indian Tipi: Its History, Construction, and Use* (1957, 1977), *Indian Dances of North America: Their Importance in Indian Life* (1977), and *American Indian Archery* (1980), all published by the University of Oklahoma Press. Six videos of them performing their dances were also produced.

The answer to the second question is no. The Laubins had no children, and none of the kin of their relatives indicated interest in following their unusual careers. That is not so much to be regretted as it might seem, because the Laubins' work filled a special need at a special time that is now past. The Old Ones of the Indian tribes (whose recollections from the days of the buffalo gave meaning to the Indian dances Reginald performed) have all taken the Spirit Trail and gone over the rainbow to meet the Great Mystery.

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The Laubins met the call of history with dedication to a lifetime of self-sacrifice to the art and culture of the American Indian. Truly a gift to their country, they would have been worthy candidates for the nation's highest civilian honor, the President's Medal of Freedom.

The Indian Tipi, with an introduction by Stanley Vestal, not only describes a tipi's many unique advantages but also includes detailed drawings about how to make one and step-by-step instructions on how to set it up. The volume was an immediate hit with many outdoor groups—Mountain Men, Scouts, church outing organizations, and sports clubs. A second edition was much larger and included color illustrations; in 1980 a paperback edition of the second edition appeared. A member of the Mountain Man group once told me, "The Laubin book on *The Tipi: Its History, Construction, and Use* was, quite literally, the Mountain Man bible."

Reginald once sent a copy of the volume to a book dealer in Texas, Fred Hawkinson, who replied: "My copy of *The XIT Ranch of Texas* [was] very rare (nothing on dances) but I loaned it once to Van Brunt, an ex-cowboy from beyond the Pecos, and when I got it back, sometime later, there were six pieces of raw bacon in it as book markers, placed on those pages when he got through reading each morning while getting breakfast. Had this happened nowadays it would not have been so bad—since bacon is worth something today. But this occurred in 1938, when it meant nothing. However, he gave me eight extra coffee stain marks on the top cover, so why should I complain!" Gladys remarked that she hoped booksellers would someday consider their own books to be "very rare."

Their second venture as authors bids fair to come up to Gladys's hope. *Indian Dances of North America: Their Importance to Indian Life* was originally entitled *Dances of the Plains Indians,* and the publishing date was to have been 1975. The book was ready to go to

press when a suggestion was made that the volume would have greater sales appeal if it covered more material. Publication was postponed, and a financial grant from the Guggenheim Foundation enabled the Laubins to travel across the United States and conduct the necessary research. They visited libraries, museums, universities, and reservations, among them the Smithsonian Institution and American Museum of Natural History in Washington, D.C.; the Peabody Museum of Archaeology and Ethnology at Harvard University and the Peabody Museum of Natural History at Yale; the Field Museum and the Newberry Library in Chicago; the University of Oklahoma, the University of California, and the University of Arizona; and the Huntington, Chicago, and New York public libraries. Finally, they double-checked their findings with long-time anthropologist friends, Clark Wirsler, Frank Speck, William Fenton, Andrew Whiteford, and Arthur Parker (a Seneca related to Eli Parker of Civil War fame). When weighed against the Laubins' understanding of Indians gained from long years of living among them, the research gave *Indian Dances of North America* a ring of truth and reality and made it a rare contribution to anthropological history.

The Dance Encyclopedia, edited by Anatole Chujoy, included the Laubins in its 1948 edition. Among their observations was that "dancing was an extremely important phase of Indian life in the early days. . . . Indians went to a dance partially for the same reason we [whites] go to church. . . . dancing was feared as 'war dancing' by the whites, which partially led to its suppression. Better-informed people realized something of its real significance, yet also recommended its suppression. Why? Because thus, at one blow, the entire social, political and religious life of the Indians could be

crushed. Dancing was the most Indian thing about Indians." What was unfortunate was that "much of the art work and most of the old religious and ceremonial dances of the Plains and Woodlands have now passed away and on the few occasions when these people dance at all they do mostly social dances," which remain "an opportunity for a social, political and religious meeting all in one."

Indians regard "the making or doing of any beautiful thing was a kind of prayer, a method of appealing to, or communicating, with the surrounding spiritual forces," and thus "all Indian artwork might be regarded as sacred." Dances, Reginald said, culminate "all his [an Indian's] artistic achievement, for the dance combined all other art forms. A dance of men on earth was a dramatization, a pantomime, of the actions of the spirits above. Life was dancing—dancing was life."

Contrary to popular belief, "every costume, every color and pattern, every step and every motion in the old dances had meaning," and "each dance had its own peculiar ritual . . . Indian dancing is not a mere 'hopping up and down' or a 'crude jumping about.'" In reality, it is "often extremely difficult and complicated."

Dancers were accompanied by percussion instruments: "Various types of drums and rattles, or sometimes beating on either a rolled or flat dried hide, furnished the rhythm. Often the rhythm of the songs was different from that of the drums. The drum seems to govern the bodily movements whereas the melody of the song voices the emotion, the appeal."

As for the matter of who danced, the Laubins noted that "certain distinguished women—women who had gone to war and counted war honors like men—were allowed to participate in the men's dances. There were very few of these, of course. There were

many dances for women, however, even if they were not as spectacular as those of the men. In a number of social dances, men, women, and children all took part."

The "war dance" was described as primarily an invention of whites. It was ironic, Reginald noted, that "fear of war dances was partly responsible for the suppression of Indian dancing, but that when the white man gave the Indian permission to dance he always wanted to see 'the war dance.'"

The Laubins also discussed traditions and the diverse kinds of dance among various tribes and groups of Indians and went on to describe how dancers would be costumed:

> Originally the men wore very little clothing for dancing. The dancer's body was his instrument and he did not believe in hiding or in handicapping its movements. Such costumes and decorations as were worn often had as much ceremonial value as decorative. A man could wear only the regalia to which he was entitled. Today this symbolism is largely lost on the Plains and the dancers wear anything they choose. . . . Not so many years ago the majority of whites in the Indian country were shocked by the nude dancing. This nudity upheld the missionaries' contentions that the dancing was immoral, so added to the argument for suppression. So, on the few occasions when Indians were given permission to dance, they did the next best thing—they danced in dyed underwear. Although today such bans no longer exist, this recently acquired modesty is still in evidence.

The Laubins' concluded their contribution to *The Dance Encyclopedia* on a slightly optimistic note. "The general hope for the survival of Indian dancing," they wrote, "is somewhat encouraging. People now realize that here is a real American art and that something should be done to preserve it. . . . In some localities the

dancing shows a definite revival." They went on to discuss the renewed interest among the Crow in a form of the Sun Dance learned from the Shoshone and first performed by the Crow in August 1941. "The Crows ascribe the fact that they lost only two boys in the war to their Sun Dance prayers. Neither of these boys was killed in actual combat, although Crow boys participated in some of the severest fighting on battlefields all over the world. In 1946 the Sun Dance was given in celebration and thanksgiving for the final and decisive victory over the enemies of mankind."

The Laubins were convinced that "Indian dancing, to survive, must fit the lives of the Indian people." It was their hope that it would "remain essentially Indian" yet "continue to grow and to gain strength" and "eventually . . . become a very conscious part of our American heritage."

In addition to their books and videos, the piece in *The Dance Encyclopedia* provides a tangible record of the remarkable career of Reginald and Gladys Laubin. That record is exceeded only by the numbers of their audiences during more than sixty years of concerts—thousands of people of all ages in every state other than Alaska and Hawaii. It is an unmatched record of dedication to the cause of bringing the souls of American Indians to the world's attention.

Epilogue

Reginald and Gladys Laubin gave their last Indian dance concert in August 1988 at the Jackson Lake Lodge in the Grand Teton National Park in Wyoming. The deluxe tourist hotel built by the Rockefeller interests had opened in 1955. The Laubins were engaged to give a concert dance performance every Friday evening. These performances continued, every week, June through August, for thirty-three summers. The engagement ended only because Reginald, at eighty-four, began to feel less energy in his legs and decided the time had come to retire. He and Gladys would devote themselves to lecturing and preparing their large collection of Indian artifacts to give to museums.

Dear Gladys Good Feather One Bull would not live to see the Laubin collection displayed in the beautiful new Spurlock Museum of Natural History, which the University of Illinois would begin to build on its Urbana-Champaign campus in the spring of 1998, just two years after she took the Spirit Trail to join the Great Mystery who had created the planet she loved so well.

I was privileged to gather with her beloved husband and a host of friends, Indians from many tribes as well as whites, on a sunny

October afternoon in 1996 in the log cabin on the rim of the Grand Teton Park and bid Gladys a safe journey on the Spirit Trail.

While others continued to arrive, bearing food, three Indian friends talked quietly together in the cabin, going through traditional tribal ceremonies of preparation for Gladys's journey. Above the reverential silence, recorded Indian flute music played softly. Reginald looked fondly at Gladys, who was clothed in a beaded Indian dress, leggings, and moccasins that Sioux women had made for her many years before. Nudged by music and memory, he recalled the haunting moments of his youth, when the melody of flutes had stirred him as "at the loss of a dear, dear friend." Indeed, Gladys had been the dearest friend Reginald could ever have. Later that afternoon, on a hillside looking up at the triple peaks of the Tetons, she began her final journey.

A short time later, Reginald, deep in sorrow, allowed friends to move him from his cabin home in Wyoming, together with a lifetime's collection of memorabilia, to the University of Illinois at Urbana-Champaign. There he spent the winter and spring of 1996 and 1997, recuperating and working with the university personnel to catalog the hundreds of items in his collection.

When I joined him in June 1997, we spent the next five months working on the manuscript for this book, a record of the life's work of Reginald and Gladys. The dialogue I have used herein reconstructs conversations we had and Reginald's recollections of events that had transpired sixty, seventy, and eighty years earlier, before the Spurlock Museum came into being.

But museums are more than rooms of brick and stone and more than displays of bead or bone. They are tangible records of intangible people—those who lived and loved, but could not linger, to share the music of life. I once challenged Reginald Laubin to com-

pose a symphony and suggested that he call it "The Symphony of a People Facing Extinction." He never did so and I'm glad. The work has already been written, not in stanzas but in words (many thousands of them), and you'll find them printed by the presses of Western universities. Yet the talented violinist whom the world knows as Reginald Laubin, American Indian dancer, has, with his own life, contributed a symphony of haunting beauty. In the words of an old Indian, "The true music of life is written in the good things we can do for others."

Appendix

THE SCHOOL ASSEMBLY SERVICE

THE LAUBINS .... Engagements for the Week beginning Monday, May 5, 1958

DATE	TOWN & STATE	HALL	PRINCIPAL	HOUR	FEE
Monday					
5/5	Northwood, Iowa	High School Phone: 153	J. Earl Mason	8:45 AM	$40.00
	34 miles between towns				
	Ventura, Iowa	High School	L.J. Esbeck Supt.	12:40 PM	40.00
	18				
	Hanlontown, Iowa	High School	R.A.Wagner	3:00 PM	40.00
Tuesday	41				
5/6	St. Ansgar, Iowa	High School Phone: 6-4720	M.E. Morse Supt.	9:00 AM	40.00
	44				
	Nashua, Iowa	High School	R. M. Sorensen	12:45 PM	40.00
	29				
Wednesday					
5/7	Waverly, Iowa	Senior High School Phone: 318	Don Birdsell	9:00 AM	50.00
	19				
	Allison, Iowa	High School	Lawrence Stanek	12:40 PM	40.00
Wed. night	60 near Hampton				
Thursday					
5/8	Fredericksburg, Iowa	High School Phone: 80	R.W. Edwards Supt.	9:00 AM	40.00
	41 Thurs. night				
	Hazeltown, Iowa	High School	O.H. Snively Supt.	1:45 PM	40.00
	48 Delhi				
Friday					
5/9	Colesburg, Iowa	High School Phone: 70	G. Warford Supt.	8:45 AM	40.00
	25				
	Earlville, Iowa	High School	H. C. Rath	11:00 AM	40.00
	Friday night				

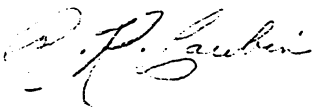
PLEASE SIGN AND RETURN ONE COPY ↓ 33 miles
Monday, May 12, you are scheduled for Dubuque, Iowa
All above dates operate on Central Standard Time

THE SCHOOL ASSEMBLY SERVICE

THE LAUBINS .... Engagements for the Week beginning Monday, May 12, 1958

DATE	TOWN & STATE	HALL	PRINCIPAL	HOUR	FEE
Monday	Bellevue	Marquette H. S. Sister M. Georgiana, Asst.		9:00 AM	40
5/12	Dubuque, Iowa	Jefferson Jr. High School	L.F. Benz	3:00 PM	$40.00
Tuesday					
5/13	Dubuque, Iowa	Washington Jr. High School	W.E. Johannsen Supt.	~~9:00 AM~~ 3:00 PM	40.00
Wednesday					
5/14	Waterloo, Iowa	West Jr. High School 1115 W. Fifth Phone AD 3-8497	G.W. Meeter	10:00 AM	32.50
	Lumpacho				
Thursday				8:15	
5/15	Franklin Park, Illinois	Leyden Com. High School 3400 Rose St. Phone: Gladstone 5-1461 (Freshman Group)	B.J. Henne Chairman	9:15 AM CDST	40.00
	Chicago, Illinois	Geo. Washington Carver High School 801 East 133rd Place Phone: CO 4-3206	O.H. Snively Supt.	1:45 PM	40.00
Friday					
5/16	LaGrange, Illinois	Lyons Twp. High School Cossitt & Brainard Phone FL 2-2350	C.J. Warkow Chairman	9:15 AM	40.00
	Whiting, Indiana	Geo. Rogers Clark High School 1921 Davis Avenue Phone: Whiting 3292	Arthur Erickson Chairman	1:30 PM 2:30 PM	72.50

PLEASE SIGN AND RETURN ONE COPY
Iowa Schools on Central Standard Time; the rest on Central Daylight Savings Time
END OF TOUR



Starr West Jones spent fifteen years in the Broadway theater and was for twenty-five years the international editor of *Guideposts Magazine.* During World War II, he served as a combat commander with the Forty-second Infantry's Rainbow Division. He is the author of *Hello God, Can We Talk?*

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Reginald and Gladys Laubin, American Indian Dancers

Starr West Jones

Friends and cultural historians of many Indian families among the Sioux, Crow, and Shoshone-Bannock, Reginald and Gladys Laubin devoted their lives to preserving a vanishing culture by presenting authentic Indian dances, costumes, and songs. Through their performances, the Laubins helped white Americans to appreciate these expressions of Native culture as an art that should be preserved.

Applauded by audiences across the United States and in Europe, Israel, and Africa, the Laubins were also praised by Indians of many tribes as worthy envoys of their cultures. In addition to live performances, which they continued into the late 1980s, the Laubins wrote and illustrated books on American Indian tipis, dances, and archery.

The Laubins' endeavors belong to a bygone age, but this little book celebrates, within the proper historical context, their accomplishments and their true dedication to serving and preserving Native American culture. Their extensive collection of Indian artifacts is part of the permanent display in the Americas Gallery of the Spurlock Museum on the Urbana-Champaign campus of the University of Illinois.

Starr West Jones, a longtime radio commentator and the former international editor of *Guideposts* magazine, is the author of *Hello God, Can We Talk?*

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