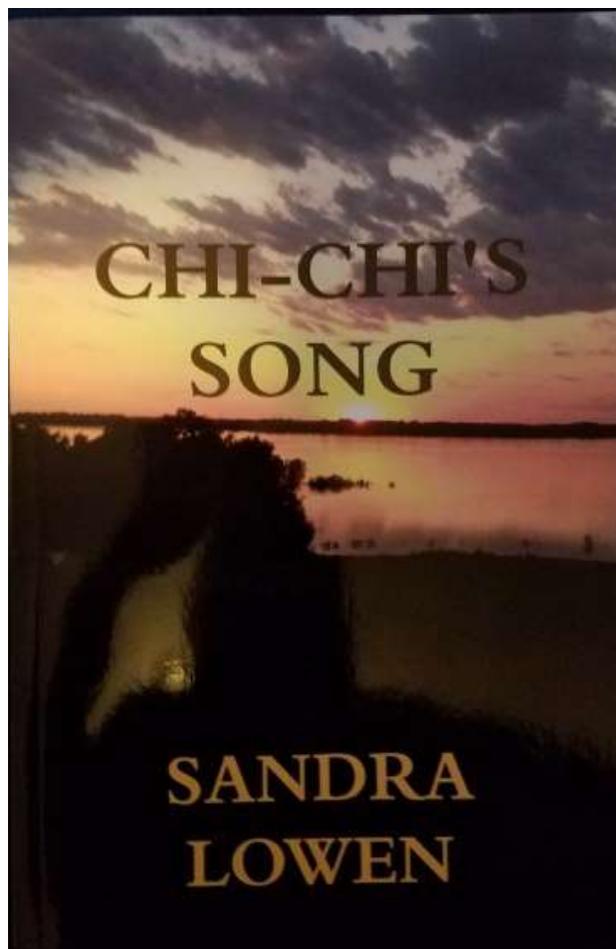


Book Review: Chi-Chi's Song

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“When I was about seven years old, I chanced upon a photo album hidden under the ‘good’ linen and placemats we never used. I looked at the Model T cars, the fashions of the 30s, the quaint old ladies and little children spruced up for the occasion of a family photograph. Then I looked at other faces: chiseled faces, faces with eyes that bored into mine and awakened at once fear and familiarity. Who were these people?” When I enquired, I was told only, “They’re family!”...(and) the albums disappeared, destroyed by overzealous relatives anxious to expunge painful family memories.”

So read the first lines of my second book, Chi-Chi’s Song, a NaNoWriMo (National Novel Writing Month), project I completed in 2013, after participating in a walk sponsored by WFWP in June-July of 2013. Nine of us set out from New Echota, Georgia to Tallequah, Oklahoma to experience the Trail of Tears, the long march of the Five Nations People (Seminoles, Cherokee, Muskogee-Creek, Choctaw, and Chickasaw tribes). These tribes were removed from their lands and forced to walk west during one of the bitterest winters on record. Without adequate food, clothing, or shelter, thousands of them, perhaps as many as one in every four people that set out, died along the bitter path. Hundreds more perished even before the journey began, succumbing to one of the hottest

summers that area had experienced, as well as to disease, hunger and other maladies.

According to family legend, the Scotts, Singletons, Peoples, and Boatwrights are descended from Natives that hid from the troops in North Carolina or managed to negotiate to maintain their freedom. My maternal grandmother was a medicine woman and my paternal grandmother was also full-blood Cherokee. Various spiritual people felt around me the presence particularly of a little Native girl who was always cold. She was my great-great aunt, whose nickname was Chi-Chi. She died without an honor song, and only wanted her meager life events on earth to be sung, so that the Creator could know what she had accomplished, and give her rest in the spirit lands. When she was liberated, I actually saw her skip happily into the world of spirit, where her family welcomed her.

This ‘historical fiction’, therefore, is only partly fictional. It chronicles through its main characters the lives of the four thousand Native saints that ended their journey along the Trail and the bravery of those that survived. It hails the heroes, Native and White, who reached beyond themselves in moments of crisis. The loves and lies, the betrayals and the rescues, the deaths and the lives converge here in this novel, which a Writer’s Digest judge said “should be in every school and library...an honor to read”.

The Indigenous Spiritual Leaders of the Americas see the chaos, unrest, and disasters of our age as the restlessness of those souls that died unrighteously, and do not understand why. Not only the Natives, but also the soldiers of the Civil and subsequent wars, the aborted, the victims of crime and abuse and neglect cry out for their voices and their pain to be heard. “People say that it is time to share some of the sacred traditions of our culture,” the spiritual leaders tell us. “The four colors of man will be coming together to unite and heal. Creator has given different gifts and responsibilities to each of the four colors to help preserve the earth for all the children. Time is running out. It is time to act.”