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## MY BROTHER

### Chantelle Cheeknew

While I was going to the Powwow with my brother, my Kokum and Moshum and four of my brothers' friends, I got this feeling in my gut that something bad was going to happen. I didn't know why I was feeling this way so I ignored it. One of my brothers' friends, Justin, had asked me if I was going to dance at the Powwow and I replied in a sarcastic way "Nooo ..." and gave him a weird look. He laughed and said "well are you?" then I laughed and replied, "Yes, of course!"

As I was entering the dance floor, just as I was going to dance, I could hear my brother in the distance calling my name so I ran up to him and said "What, what do you want?" He replied "Here, you stinker, here's that money I owe you" and gave me forty dollars to pay for a bet we'd made and I won. Lonnie is twenty years old and I am fifteen. Lonnie always babies me and is so overprotective of me like all brothers are to their little sisters.

Lonnie was the type of guy who knew everybody. He partied, but not a lot though he didn't do drugs - he smokes but that's it. Lonnie was always a ladies man. I always tease and ask him why he doesn't have a girlfriend and his reply would be "I'm taking my time ... when I find the right girl out there for me, I'll let you know ...so cut me some slack little sister" and he'd poke me in the belly.

Lonnie had always had disrespect for men who were women abusers because when he was growing up he had seen my mom get hit from my dad a lot. When I was born my dad had left us and my mom died giving birth to me. Lonnie and my grandparents would often tell me stories about my mom...sometimes they would end up crying while telling me a memory. I felt like it was my fault that she was gone because if she didn't have me she would still be here but Lonnie always told me it wasn't my fault.

"Well, Lonnie, I'm going to go and dance now ok bye!" I tried to rush off but he yelled "Hey, hey, hey, not so fast. Come here you little stinker!" I was thinking to myself when he said that 'ohh my god - there he is again babying me!' I walked up to him and said "what what what!" He replied "You're not going anywhere without me telling you this: go out there do your thing little sister .... make your ol' brother proud!!! WHOO!!!" "OH MY GOSH, LONNIE, STOPPIT - YOU'RE EMBARASSING ME!" "Oops, sorry about that. I sort of got carried away! It's just I'm so proud of you! Ok, ok, I'll let you go and dance now! But I'm going to get something to eat. What do you want?" "Hamburgers, French Fries and a Coke, please and thank you!" I said and he smiled, "Ok, go on now, you little monkey" I laughed and walked off.



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As I dance on the floor in my jingle dress, I'd listen to the drummers pore out all the love in their hearts and manipulate it into their singing. I'd wait for my moment when I have to wave my fan in the air, that's when they would bang the drum three times. When I powwow dance I feel so free...so happy and excited ... I could feel my heart pounding along with the beating of the drums. I love that feeling so much ... it's better than any other feeling in the world! I always had passion for powwow dancing since I was a little girl.

I heard a gunshot in the distance where Lonnie was sitting with my grandparents and his fiends and I thought to myself "Oh no! Lonnie!!"

I could hear women scream and little children crying. I rushed to the area where the shot came from, leaving everyone else out there on the dance floor. When I reached the scene, I saw Lonnie lying on the ground. I ran towards my brother and tried to pick him up. Lonnie screams in agony telling me to leave him on the floor! I get his blood all over me. I cry, wiping away my tears of deep sadness and frustration. I screamed at everyone to call an ambulance but no one moved a muscle. When my kokum and mushum reach the scene, my mushum used his cell phone to call an ambulance. While we wait for it to arrive my mushum was telling Lonnie not to go to sleep... but like always, he didn't listen.

I hold my brother in my arms. He coughed up blood and whispered, "Tessa I want you to do a favour for me ... be all you can be in life.. .don't make the same mistakes I made ... smarter people learn from other people's mistakes ... its not that you're constantly making mistakes it's just that, I don't want to end up like me... getting involved with gang shit and being involved with murders. Tessa, I know that you can do so much better than that, so don't do that kind of shit ok! Make me proud lil' sis!" He smiled and said "Fuck I'm so cold," then I replied "Lonnie it's so hot out I'm sweating." He flashed me another smile and I cried "Lonnie don't give up! Don't leave me! I need you here with me!!!" At that moment he died, just as the ambulance arrived.

I was holding Lonnie in my arms crying and swearing, yelling at his dead body "Lonnie, don't leave me," then one of the paramedics grabbed got Lonnie off of me and put his body on a stretcher. Just as they took Lonnie I told them to be careful with his body.

Later that night I was lying in bed crying thinking of the accident and Lonnie's last words to me ... then out of nowhere I see my brother at the end of my bed. He stared at me with a cold look on his face. I was really startled. Lonnie was talking to me, saying, "Don't be scared Tessa, it's only me!" he laughed. "Look Tessa you can't be crying because I'm gone ... I'm always by your side and watching over you! I'm in good hands now so you don't have to worry about me now ok!" Then my startled-ness went away and I wasn't afraid anymore. I said to him "I love you, Lonnie. I still need you here with



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me..." Tears swelled up in the corner of my eyes. He replied, "I love you, too, and I miss you... and girl, I'm always with you I'm watching over you! Well, Tessa, I have to go, that's him calling me...so see you around."

"Bye, Lonnie."

"No, Tessa goodbye ain't forever...as cheesy as that sounds." I chuckled and a lot of tears fell down my cheeks... then he disappeared.

I wake up out of my sleep sweaty, and confused wondering if that was all just a dream or if it was real. I got up and looked outside. It was noon so I decided to go downstairs. Everything was quiet. My mushum went out hunting and my kokum was scrubbing my Powwow outfit, trying to get out the bloodstain that Lonnie had made when I was holding him. I can see a lot of sorry and rage in my kokum's eyes. I can also tell by the way she was scrubbing and the frown on her face. I said, "You how you don't have to do that," and she yelled, "WELL IT ISN'T GOING TO COME OUT BY ITSELF ..... YOU WANT TO DO THIS?" I replied as calmly as I could and without raising my voice, "Just because Lonnie is gone, you don't have to get angry and take your anger out on me." She looked at me for half a minute then continued scrubbing. She broke down crying, "Oh, Tessa, I miss him so much. It's too quiet around here. I'm just so used to hearing him play his rap music loud ...all the arguing you guys did over his music being too loud or dumb things .... or even him being cheeky and gross by farting in your face while you were watching t.v." We both chuckled, and just remembering all these precious moments we had made me cry... because tears were running down my cheeks now. I rubbed away my kokum's tears and she rubbed away mine, like we always did when we cried together.

After that I was telling my kokum to be strong like I was trying to be. I said to her "Kokum, he's gone and he is in good hands now and someday we will all be reunited and I will finally get to meet my mom for the first time!" Excitement ran throughout my body and I had a big smile on my face. My kokum noticed and she said "I bet you can't wait to meet her ... she ...was a good woman but just met up with the wrong person ... and you're right: Lonnie is gone and we have to face reality, we have to be strong and hold our heads up high. Things will be so different without him here with us, but I guess it was the Creator's choice to take him back home ...so we must move on with life." She sighed and gazed out the window.

I watched *Sweet 16* on MTV. While lying on the couch I got this weird feeling like I was being watched and ohhh.. I just knew it was Lonnie. It felt great knowing his spirit is still with us. I wanted to say something but thought I might look like a crazy person so I just continued watching the show. Later on my kokum asked me what I wanted to eat for lunch. I joked and said "bannock and tea." She chuckled, "How does bannock and duck soup sound??" and I replied quietly "Mmmm good!" My mushum had gotten back



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from hunting and had caught a couple of rabbits. Just as he walked in I ran up to him and gave him a big bear hug. He hugged me back but the hug lasted long enough that I could feel his tears in my neck. I looked at my mushum and I said the same thing that I had told to my kokum... except he didn't give me heck.

My mushum went to sit on the couch and popped a smoke in his mouth. My kokum joined him and together they smoked and spoke in Cree. They thought I couldn't understand but I knew exactly what they were saying. My mushum was saying how it got too quiet in the house ever since Lonnie had passed on and how he was used to going hunting with Lonnie and that it felt awkward for him to go alone this time. My kokum was agreeing, she also said that it wouldn't be too long until they were reunited with my mother and Lonnie. I got mad and went to my room and cried. My mushum and kokum came in my room and asked me what was wrong "What's wrong? You guys are going to be leaving me ... then who will I have left? Nobody! My mom is gone, my dad ran out on me when I was born, so I don't want NOTHING to do with him... I don't know anyone else ... it's just not fair... life ain't fair" Tears ran down my cheeks. My kokum and mushum gave me a hug and told me that I'd be an older woman by the time they pass on, and I'd be having my own little family by then.

Somehow the things they always told me made me feel a whole lot better ... they both were my medicine ... they could make me feel better after feeling down and depressed and that was awesome ... I loved my grandparents so much!

When I went to school on Monday all I got was stares in the hallway. As people pass by me they would say "Sorry to hear.. ." or "that's her - there she is.. ." I hated it so much. I hate when people feel sorry for me. I hated it when I felt sorry for myself. ..no matter how hard I tried not to because kokum said it was the worst thing an Indian could do ... and that was why most people commit suicide was because they had felt a lot of self pity. That wasn't me though, I always tell myself no matter how hard times get I'd never take my own life because it's ridiculous and stupid .... all it really was, was just a whole lot of self-pity.

I sat in English class not paying attention to the lesson the teacher was giving. I was pondering: why do all good things come to an end? Before Lonnie died my life was all good. I was a Powwow dancer - not anymore though. I had my boyfriend. I'm not sure if we're still going out or not. I'd heard rumours that he was going to break up with me ... I knew deep down in my heart that I just had to move on because like kokum said 'life goes on' "Tessa, try paying attention to my lesson," shouted the teacher. "Sorry ma'am."

After school I went home. My kokum and mushum asked how my day went and I told them it didn't go too good.. .that all I got was stares in the halls. We got a knock at the door. It was my boyfriend Daynen. "Can I talk to you? Alone." I replied "Oh, yeah, let's go outside," then he said "I'm sorry to hear about Lonnie - is everything ok?" I



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replied "No!" and yelled at him, "Look I know you came down here to break up with me, so cut the small talk and get down to business already!" He said, "OK ... fine its over between us! We're done," and he stomped down the steps. I turned around to walk away and almost forgot, "Wait, Daynen, I almost forgot! HERE!! You can have it back, I don't need it anymore!" I threw the necklace he had given me on Valentine's .... the first time he ever told me he loved me ... it was a necklace that said I LOVE YOU with a diamond in the O in love. He replied, "Alright, I see how it is Tessa...it's gonna be like that then." He gave me this hurt look in his eyes and walked away.

My mushum drove us to the wake that day that was held at the band office on our reserve. When we entered the front doors all eyes were on me ... and I felt like screaming at the top of my lungs "What are you looking at??" Instead we just sat by the casket where my deceased brother lay. I had a good cry before the funeral. I looked at him and it just looked like he was sleeping. I remembered one time I snuck into his room when he was sound asleep and I blew a blow horn and it was hilarious because he sat up straight and screamed like a girl saying he didn't do it!!!! I laughed hysterically at him and he threw his pillow at me and I ran off. All these moments I had with my brother I'll always cherish and treasure for the rest of my life. After the funeral we just went home ... nobody really said anything to each other that day.

It is ten years later and I'm twenty-five. Two years ago, my kokum and mushum passed away beside each other, peacefully, in their sleep. I have three beautiful children and a handsome husband. Yup, I'm married...to my high school sweetheart Daynen. We ended up getting back together the year my brother Lonnie died. That same year I stopped Powwow dancing and still don't do it to this day...now I teach my daughters and my son to Powwow dance. My son, Lonnie, dances grass and my daughter Metea, dances fancy and my other daughter, Jocelyn, dances jingle. I am finally at peace with myself I might lost all my family, my brother, my mother, and my grandparents but things are ok now. I guess it is true what my kokum said 'life goes on.' I got my own family to love and care about. By the way, I'm expecting my fourth child in June, the same birthday month as my brother Lonnie ....

### **Chantelle Cheekineew – Author’s Statement**

Why I chose to write “My Brother Lonnie” is because I’m into the whole drama kind of stuff, and I named one of the main characters after one of my brother’s friends who passed on a few months back; Lonnie Tanner. I know my story doesn’t go with the contest rules, because you individuals are wanting us writers to define a moment in history. What I personally think about this is: history is everyone’s story because a defining moment can also be a private one. I write about a teenage girl who is telling her story about what happened in the past, how she had her brother die tragically. In the end of my story I write how she has kids, and is married to her high school sweetheart.



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I decided to write my story in Cree because I thought it would give it something extra. There is so much stabbings and shootings in this generation and I thought I should manipulate that kind of stuff into my story, and so I did. History doesn't have to be something that happened way back in 1877 or something it can be anything, but it doesn't have to be way back when.

My story is writing about history, she talks about her past and when she is older how she has a son named Lonnie. I guess all I'm saying is a defining moment can be a personal one. Another thing I would like to say to you individuals who are judging my story: Thank you for reading my story I hope you enjoyed it. I want to win this badly because something like this will open doors for me in the future. If you are not interested in my story, fine ok, thanks anyways but my talent speaks for myself.