

Samuel's Memory

Samuel Cloud turned 9 years old on the Trail of Tears. *Samuel's Memory* is told by his great-great grandson, Michael Rutledge, in his paper *Forgiveness in the Age of Forgetfulness*. *Michael, a citizen of the Cherokee Nation of Oklahoma, is a law student at Arizona State University.*

It is spring and the leaves are on the trees. I am playing with my friends when white men in uniforms ride up to our home. My mother calls me. I can tell by her voice that something is wrong. Some of the men ride off. My mother tells me to gather my things, but the men don't allow us time to get anything. They enter our homes and begin knocking over pottery and looking into everything. Several men take my mother and me to where their horses are and are held there at gunpoint. The men who rode off return with my father, Elijah. They have taken his rifle and he is walking toward us.

I can feel his anger and frustration. There is nothing he can do. From my mother I feel fear. I am filled with fear, too. What is going on? I was just playing, but now my family and my friends' families are gathered together and told to walk at the point of a bayonet.

They lead us to a stockade. They herd us into this pen like we are cattle. No one was given time to gather any possessions. The nights are still cold in the mountains and we do not have enough blankets to go around. My mother holds me at night to keep me warm. That is the only time I feel safe. I feel her pull me to her tightly. I feel her warm breath in my hair. I feel her softness as I fall asleep at night. As the days pass, more and more of our people are herded into the stockade. I try not to think about my hunger. I am cold.

Several months have passed and still we are in the stockades. My father looks tired. We hear that white men have moved into our homes and are farming our fields. What will happen to us? We are to march west to join the Western Cherokees. I don't want to leave these mountains.

My mother, my aunts and uncles take me aside one day. "Your father died last night," they tell me. My mother and my father's clan members are crying, but I do not understand what this means. I saw him yesterday. He was sick, but still alive. It doesn't seem real. Nothing seems real.

It is now Fall. The stockade is nothing but mud. In the morning it is stiff with frost. By mid-afternoon, it is soft and we are all covered in it. The soldiers suddenly tell us we are to follow them. We are led out of the stockade. The guards all have guns and are watching us closely. My mother keeps me close to her.

We walked for many days. I don't know how long it has been since we left our home. As we walk past white towns, the whites come out to watch us pass. No words are spoken to them. No words are said to us. Still, I wish they would stop staring. I wish it were them walking in this misery and I were watching them. It is because of them that we are walking. I don't understand why, but I know that much. They made us leave our homes. They made us walk to this new place we are heading to in the middle of winter. I do not like these people. Still, they stare at me as I walk past.

My mother is coughing now. She looks worn. Her hands and face are burning hot. My aunts and uncles try to take care of me, so she can get better. I just want to sit with her. I want her to stroke my hair, like she used to do. My

aunts try to get me to sleep by them, but at night, I creep to her side. When she feels me by her side, she opens her blanket and lets me in. I nestle against her feverish body. I can make it another day, I know, because she is here.

When I went to sleep last night, my mother was hot and coughing worse than usual. When I woke up, she was cold. I tried to wake her up, but she lay there. I kept touching her, as hot tears streamed down my face.

I hear myself call her name, softly, then louder. She does not answer. My aunt and uncle come over to me to see what is wrong. My aunt looks at my mother. My uncle pulls me from her. My aunt begins to wail. I will never forget that wail. I did not understand when my father died. My mother's death I do not understand, but I suddenly know that I am alone. I will be forever denied her warmth, the soft fingers in my hair, her gentle breath as we slept. I am alone. I want to cry. I want to scream in rage. I can do nothing.

We bury her in a shallow grave by the road. I will never forget that lonesome hill of stone that is her final bed, as it fades from my sight. I walk with my head turned, watching that small hill as it fades from my sight. The soldiers make us continue walking. My uncle talks to me, trying to comfort me. I walk in loneliness.

I know what it is to hate. I hate those white soldiers who took us from our home. I hate the soldiers who make us keep walking through the snow and ice toward this new home that none of us ever wanted. I hate the people who killed my father and mother.

I hate the white people who lined the road in their woolen clothes that kept them warm, watching us pass. None of those white people are here to say they are sorry that I am alone. None of them care about my people or me. All they ever saw was the color of our skin. All I see is the color of theirs and I hate them.