

# INTRODUCTION

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Everyone tells stories every day. Even the question “How was school today?” is an invitation from a parent to a child to tell a tale. Most of our stories are about mundane, everyday events and are meant to convey information or serve a social function by demonstrating interest in another person’s life. But some stories, those told by master storytellers, also delight, entertain, and enlighten. Luther Standing Bear could tell such stories.

Born into the Brulé, or Sicangu, Sioux tribe, Luther Standing Bear’s arrival in life coincided with the Treaty of Ft. Laramie, which would eventually result in the confinement of Sioux people to reservations. He lived his childhood in that transitional time between the freedom of the Sicangu nomadic lifestyle and the curtailment of the Sicangu as wards of the federal government. There was no time for years of slow and gradually increasing contact, no time for Standing Bear and his people to absorb what was useful from the white, alien culture and to reject what was not. Change came over a period of only a few years with the pointing of guns and waving of Bibles. In 1879, at the age of eleven, Standing Bear found himself enrolled in Carlisle Indian Industrial School in Pennsylvania.

His experience was similar to that of other American Indian children, who were suddenly ripped from their homes and placed in a foreign environment that expected them to immediately begin speaking another language and living another culture. Standing Bear recalls dismay, anger, and sadness over a forced haircut but surprise and joy over new shoes. He came back to the Rosebud Reservation in South Dakota in 1884, vowing never to return to Carlisle.

Back home, Standing Bear was employed as an assistant in the local government school, and later he went on to supervise another government school on the Pine Ridge Reservation. He went to Europe