

Sandra Royal  
Spirit of the Rainforest  
Summer 2020

The Spirit of the Rainforest by Mark Andrew Ritchie was a revelation of how various cultures have similar life experiences. The story of the uncivilized Yanomamo people, as told through the vision of Jungleman (one of his many names) lives in the jungle of South America. Their stories have some similarities to the ones of Black Americans and Asian Americans, that are rooted in kidnapping, murder, rape, theft, and other tragic stories. The violence was both internal from other villages and from outside sources with the pretense of giving help to the villagers. One of the visiting naba (non-Yanomamo) presented himself as a friend, only to deceive the villagers in the worst imaginable way, even to the point of taking advantage of the male boys and treating them as women. On the other hand, there were some naba, also known as missionaries, that came to offer a better way of life for the villagers. Although, the tribe is not large in stature, their faith in their spirit is their source of strength, protection, and belief. The Shamans are the spiritual leaders for the village. A good spirited shaman was successful in finding food for his people. They believe that smoking ebene (a hallucinogenic drug) helps them to get in touch with the spirit world. This parallels the ritual use of marijuana or ganja that is the practice of the Rastafarians religion. A Christian's way of connecting closer with the Spirit of God is through fasting and prayer.

Jungleman tells the story of his people because their tribes did not write it. His call to be a spiritual leader, shaman, started as a child when he often walked alone. It was his belief that everything in the jungle was talking to him. As he became a young man and ventured out on his hunting trips, he believed that the animals would come up to him and speak. He believed that everything in the jungle was talking to him. Since he was fearful, running home was his defense. When he told his mother of his experiences in the jungle, her encouraging words proclaimed that

Sandra Royal  
Spirit of the Rainforest  
Summer 2020

Jungleman was special and that he should not be afraid. According to his mother, the voices were great spirits that wanted to help him. Although, he disclosed at that time, he had not been trained to be a shaman, nor had he taken ebene, or had ever spoken with the spirits, it was in his destiny according to his mother for him to be great. Therefore, his mother instructed him when the voices spoke to him the next time, that he should follow them. In the Hebrew Bible, we find the story of Hannah, a mother of faith that gave her son Samuel, back to God for all his life. As Samuel was lying down in the house of the Lord, he was called, although he did not know the Lord at the time. However, each time the Lord called Samuel, he thought it was the prophet Eli calling him. When the prophet realized it was God calling Samuel, he instructed him how to answer. As a youth, living in the temple, the Spirit of God called him, and he had favor with the Lord and with men. In the New Testament, the angel spoke to Mary informing her that she is highly favored, and the Lord is with her. She was told that this son would be great and would be called the son of the Most High.

The birds that spoke to Jungleman sounded like a human, so he followed them all through the jungle. Although, he was frightened, he pursued them to a beehive where he was repeatedly stung by either real bees or the spirits in the spirit world. When he looked up, he visualized the most beautiful jungle that had ever been seen by the Yanomamo people. He saw tall warriors and perfect women. Believing that they wanted him, his pain turned into an amazing feeling and he was taken to Omawa, the leader of all spirits. To be in Omawa's presence, Jungleman described it better than getting a thrill from ebene. He viewed the things spoken about by his mother. He remembered seeing Omawa visiting the Yanomamo people to teach a young shaman how to grind bones of their killed loved one so the tribal villagers would drink it and seek

revenge. They believed that it would make them locate the killer that caused their loved one's death. The exception was the death of a child, since they thought the enemy spirit took their souls. Each visit that he received from the Omawa gave him wisdom. This is how God visited and prepared his people in battle. Pharaohs held God's people in slavery for four hundred years preventing them from being able to worship Him freely. Therefore, He used Moses to lead them out of Egypt. After ten plagues, Pharaoh agrees to let the people go but not without another attempt to stop them. The route God instructed Moses to take did not lead them on the shortest route. He led them along a longer path around the desert road toward the Red Sea. God chose this route to avoid them having war with the people of Philistine. After the people left Egypt, Pharaoh and his officials changed their mind and wanted to bring the Israelites back. Therefore, they ordered the best of his chariots and his army to get ready to follow them and bring the Israelites back to Egypt. As they were camped by the sea, Pharaoh's army was closing in on them. At the same time as the Israelites saw the Egyptians, they were terrified and cried out to God. They started asking Moses if he brought them to the wilderness because there were no graves in Egypt? They continued to question him, and he declared to them, not be afraid, because the Lord will fight for them. Obedient to the voice of God, Moses lifted his rod and God departed the sea allowing the Israelites to travel to the other side without any losses, while destroying the entire army of Pharaoh.

Family, especially women and children were very important to the Yanomamo people. The men were strong fierce warriors. Each village was set up in a large round circle and had hammocks for sleeping tied to trees. Each hammock was lined up in order of family ties. At night, the villagers would gather around to hear the many stories about the spirits of one of the father's'

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fights. Their weapons were arrows, clubs or other methods that caused slow death to their enemies. When Potato village was attacked, some of the survivors such as Deemeoma, was spared because she was healthy and could have lots of children and Fredi because he could be used to carry the warrior's meat. After victory from a village, they would celebrate by taking turns raping women. This abuse of the women continued each time they would stop while they traveled back to their own village. The warriors had to go through a cleaning ritual after killing someone and returning from a battle. They were not allowed to touch their family members until after the purification process. Touching any part of their body with their hands would make them sick because of the dirty blood. Women were responsible for gathering food while the men were going through the ritual process, therefore the supply of food was usually be low. This is like the Old Testament teaching of the purification rituals requirements before being allowed in the presence of Deity. After the purification, both the Yanomamo Indians and the Israelites would seek the advice of their Spiritual Deity for directions on how to proceed. The Yanomamo believed that other Indians (Myc Indians) were not like them, especially since that worked for a naba named Noweda. The Myc stole food that resulted in a long-term war between the two tribal villages. The Yanomamo would win because they would wait until the village was asleep before attacking or they would attack on the trails. As their way of celebrating, they would take the powdered bones of their relatives and mix it into banana juice before going to war for revenge. The Myc Indians were strong people. Noweda, the naba had a supernatural grasp on them because he was able to get them to do everything for him. They built his houses, cooked his food and anything else he told them. He always had women around him and if the urge hit him to be with a woman intimately, he ripped her clothes off no matter where he was or no matter who was watching. He shot and killed a Myc boy that was swimming in the lake for no reason.

Sandra Royal  
Spirit of the Rainforest  
Summer 2020

The boy's family did not take any type of revenge against Noweda. They feared being cut off from receiving the things that he was able to give them. He was good at providing supplies such as axes, machetes, pots for cooking and so much more for the Indians. He used his ability to supply merchandise as a stronghold to rule over the villagers. After Noweda was to return home, a lot of the Yanomamo got sick and died. The death toll was so great that they were unable to bury their dead and left the bodies along the trail. Some of the ones that were able to remain on the trail had to crawl on their hands and feet to make it back to their village. Once they regained their strength, they returned to find the bodies of their dead and the supplies that they were unable to take with them. The villagers were not able to understand why the Jaguar Spirit let it happen and they mourned the death and loss of so many of their warriors.

The people from Tigerlip's village knew about the naba named Padre Coco, as he tried to encourage them to change their ways from killing. Tigerlip traveled with Padre and received the blessings from "The Papa" as he laid his hand on the head of Tigerlip. In the Bible the laying on of hands was the transfer of an anointing. Padre warned him that others would come offering them gifts so they could have sex with the women. That resulted in the villagers becoming infected with diseases that their spirits were not able to cure. A doctor was one of the naba and he had medicine that was used to heal them. This made Tigerlip remember what Padre told him, especially about the Great Spirit they called Yai Pada who created everything. In the New Testament, after the elders laid hands on Timothy, he was charged to keep the faith for edification, exhortation, and comfort (I Timothy 4:14).

Shoefoot, the warrior shaman that became a leader of Honey village, thought the good spirit was the enemy spirit. But Spear, Jungleman's lifelong friend, encouraged him that the spirit he was

Sandra Royal  
Spirit of the Rainforest  
Summer 2020

receiving was good. He was the Spirit that really cared about the people. Eventually, Shoefoot wanted the new spirit because they heard how wonderful he was. They learned about love and being kind. Subsequently they learned that everything the bad spirit did they imitated. But, on the other hand, they acknowledged the nabe's did not do what their spirits did. Yet the Indians were not willing to let go of their spirits at that time.

The people from Honey accepted the teachings and belief in the new spirit that the nabe introduced them to. Shoefoot threw away his spirits that cause him to do bad things. One of the Yanomamo shaman said he had found peace. They had even made peace with their enemies and were able to work their gardens without being fearful of attacks. Regardless of anything someone tried to do against the village of Honey and its people, it did not work. The people continued to be successful and prospered because they accepted the power of the real Spirit.

Redhair, a young man in the village, was sick in his hammock for two days after being beaten in a fight and his family thought that he would die. One of the villagers was preparing to seek revenge on the people that caused Redhair's injuries. To everyone's surprise Redhair was able to sit up pain free, causing his family was surprised and became speechless. He started telling his family that he was a child of the great spirit, Yai Pada. He saw angels and thought that his family was able to see them too. Again they were stunned when he told his family that the angles had come for him since they did not see what he was talking about. He stressed the importance of them not taking revenge when he died. He was at peace and wanted to go with the angels that were only visible to him. Although his family wanted to take revenge Shoefoot and Spear were not in agreement with it. He tried to tell them that they could not go back to the old way of seeking revenge through more bloodshed. They had found a better way to live in peace.

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Redhair's brother, Bighead said that he loved his brother, but he refused to take any action against anyone. His brother was already in Yai Pada's happy land and that he was not going to the pit for taking revenge. Because he spoke in love and kindness, the people of Forgetful Village returned to their own homes quiet and thinking about what was said regarding Redhair. The soft answer turned away the expected anger and wrath. The old ways of the Yanomamo were changing. In the words of Ritchie, If we let Yai Pada take care of vengeance, then our fights will always be smaller. The evil spirits that had provoked them to live in war was being overcome by the new spirit that brought love and peace.

This is the story of every non-believer. Everyone has spirits that they follow. The path they choose either good or bad is the result of free choice. Consequently, there are some events that will happen in a person's life that will cause them to seek change. The great New Testament person of Paul always comes to my mind because he went around persecuting the Christians. His Damascus Road experience was his turning point. I believe that God always put certain individuals in our life at various times that we can be an example for or have a word of encouragement. As lights of the world we must let that be shown so others will be drawn to it and subsequently they will want to know the God we serve. Every event in life is designed to draw humankind back into that perfect fellowship that was intended from the beginning. It is best that people are not beat over the head with the gospel. Believers are to live a life according to the scripture that will be an example for non-believers, and they will want to come into relationship with their Creator. God uses every event bad or good in a person's life for His good. These events are used to establish the need in the heart and mind of the person of their necessity to depend on a power beyond their own wisdom and strength.

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The stories of the bloodshed, rape, kidnapping and other acts of violence that we see in the Yanomamo people, is a part of the history of all humankind. Reflecting on the history of every nation, although it may not be talked about, a glimpse through history will reveal chapters of similar instances. The Bible tells us that there is nothing new under the sun. It is the desire of man to control and conquer. In this process, although nations were civilized war still occurred. I viewed this story with the lens of seeing God, the good Spirit and seeing the spirit of opposition. I believe we all battle with spirits. Paul said even when I would do good evil is present. I felt anger for this mistreatment of the people, I cried for the death and murder of babies and small children. The abuse of the women and boys were very painful however, that reveals that the minds of humankind are still wicked. It is only when repentance is truly sought that people will seek God with their whole heart, see people as God sees them and love people as God love them. Then we have the Good Spirit.