

Spirit Woman

by [Debra Shiveley Welch](#)

One

July 18, 2015

7:00 p.m.

Locking the front door to her apartment, Nickie crossed the foyer and exited the apartment building. Descending the steps of the small, cement porch, she began her walk to Cedar Woman's, the upscale American Indian restaurant owned by her best friend, Lena Cedar Woman Young Bear Glass.

She walked slowly, hesitantly. Except for Nickie, there was no one else on the street. She felt alone, bereft of companionship, of affection, of love. *Why is it always just me – on my own with no one beside me? Why me? I'm so tired of this crushing loneliness, this...oneness!* Nickie continued to walk slowly, looking into windows as she passed each house: a habit she had picked up as a child. Today was especially difficult for the young woman. Today was Cedar Woman's sixth anniversary. Not just the restaurant's, but Lena Cedar Woman's wedding anniversary as well. *Six years.* Nickie thought. *Six years since Lena married my love.*

The mid-July summer evening was warm and fragrant. Unusual for Ohio's schizophrenic weather, the temperatures continued in the mid-70s, and the nightlife of Uptown Westerville was flourishing in spite of its being a Monday night.

Nickie passed Jimmy V's, the Greek restaurant one block south of Cedar Woman's, and noticed that the patio was filled to overflowing. She slowed her walk and surreptitiously took note of the scene.

A water wall of stone on the south side of the patio murmured gently. Servers wove in and out of the tables, sometimes circling one another in a practiced rhythm akin to a synchronized ballet.

Some of the guests were laughing and joking: a couple raised their glasses in a toast, yet another leaned into each other over a small table, deep in conversation. A middle-aged man and woman, hands entwined, gazed into each other's eyes, clearly falling in love and nestled within their own world.

A family of four occupied a larger table near the west side of the water wall. A two year old, chubby finger pointing, exclaimed, "Wawer wah, Mama, wawer wah!" The parents looked at each other and smiled.

A couple in a secluded two top, however, appeared to be ending their relationship. The young man's face was earnest and regretful, the young woman's cheeks and nose red, her face turned away from him.

Every aspect of life is displayed here, Nickie thought. *Well, almost. I don't see anyone grieving for the loss of a loved one.* It hit her then: of course grief was represented. The young woman, informed that her relationship with her partner was over, was grieving the loss of her love.

The knowledge almost doubled Nickie over. *The loss of her love!*

Nickie Bahiti Greene fell in love with Sonny Glass, now married to her best friend, when she and Lena traveled to Keokuk, Iowa to attend the powwow held there, and the adoption of Vickie, Lena's former employer and mentor, by Lena's unci, or grandmother, through the Making of Relatives Ceremony, or Hunkapi.

Nickie remembered the first time she noticed Sonny. They were assembling around the arena to watch a broom dance.

She and Lena were told that tradition held that a young man of a less than attractive countenance invented the Broom Dance. Tired of sitting out dance after dance at the various powwows he attended, he fashioned a woman out of straw and began to dance with her. His appearance with his "young lady" caused quite a stir of hilarity, and soon the young men around him began to take his partner from him. Thus, the Broom Dance was born.

As she continued her walk to the restaurant, the scene played out in her mind's eye:

She had noticed Sonny standing across from her and was immediately attracted by his dark good looks. A young man walked up to Sonny and threw a strong, sinewy arm around his shoulders.

"We need an ugly man, ennit," she heard him laugh, "and you're it tonight," Boy Ladd guffawed, handing Sonny a ragged broom. The crowd around the arena laughed and a few women trilled in approval of Boy Ladd's choice. A young woman leaned toward Nickie and murmured, "This will be a good one, ya. He is hilarious." Nickie smiled in answer and waited to see what would transpire as Sonny walked to the center of the arena while couples began to form around him.

The same young woman leaned toward Nickie again and explained: "The Broom Dance is also called the Ugly Man Dance, ennit. It's a variety of tag and it's a lot of fun. Watch, couples form a circle around the ugly man, and he uses his broom to try and tag a man." Nickie thanked her and watched as the dance began. Hands held and crossed in front of them, the dancers danced to the beat of The Drum clockwise around the arena.

"The object of this dance is for the woman to protect her man, and the ugly man to tag him with the broom," the young woman offered. "If he is successful, he will get to partner the woman, and the tagged dancer then became the ugly man."

"Really? Thank you. It's very interesting and looks like it's a lot of fun."

Nickie watched as Sonny waited for the ring of couples to form. The sun was beginning its slow descent to the west and the day was a bit cooler than it had been at noon. The smell of Indian Tacos filled the air along with the scent of roasting corn.

Nickie remembered Sonny turning to the right and spotting a middle-aged couple. The woman covered her mouth and giggled. Her man chortled as he watched Sonny approach. He twirled his partner under his right arm and swung her into place.

Broom held at an angle, Sonny strummed it as if it were a guitar. Making chicken neck movements with his head, he swooped toward the couple and lunged. Squealing with delight, the woman thrust her ample body in front of her partner's, thus saving him from being tagged.

Sonny dropped the broom and looked dejected.

"Cha, beautiful one, do you not wish to dance with me?" he begged, side skipping to keep up with the couple. The woman, once again covering her mouth and blushing, laughed with pleasure.

Sonny retrieved his broom and began to waltz with it. Placing the handle on the arena floor, he twirled the broom as he would a woman on a polished dance floor. He flipped the broom back to the upright position and again began his search for his next victim.

Sonny had been charismatic and had stolen her heart. Unfortunately, his heart was captured by Lena that same day.

What a soap opera it was, Nickie cried within. Sonny loved Lena, but Lena loved Michael. I loved Sonny, but no one loved me.

Nickie began her life in the South End of Columbus, Ohio. Born in 1975 as the result of an affair between her Irish mother and a young man of the Comanche, whom her mother met when visiting a friend in Oklahoma, she realized early in life that she and her mother were set apart, different from the other families in the neighborhood. Nickie did not look like the usual German-Irish residents, and she didn't have a daddy.

Her mother married when Nickie was two-years-old, and for a while, she was happy. It seemed that her family was complete.

Nickie began praying for a baby brother, and soon her prayers were answered. She loved her infant sibling, and took on as many duties as her four years of life's experience could manage. When her sister was born, four years

later, eight-year-old Nickie was ecstatic. She did not realize that it was the end of her world as she knew it.

It took a while. Slowly, she began to realize that she was set apart. She was not part of a whole, but an appendage – in many cases, an unwanted addition. She was an outlander, an intruder. Whereas she had been loved, her parents often giving kisses and hugs, now she was ignored. Where she had been cared for and treasured, now she was neglected. Where she had been praised and encouraged, her accomplishments now went unnoticed. It took a while for Nickie to realize that things had changed, and her increasing feelings of loneliness and abandonment increased throughout the years.

When Nickie was 11, her stepfather attempted to come into her bed. She fought him each time, praying to whatever powers may be to give her the strength to fight him off. She lay awake until the early morning hours, afraid to go to sleep, lest he creep into her bed and overpower her before she could resist. Her school work suffered due to her lack of sleep, and her teacher began to treat her with scorn.

Her desk was removed from the classroom to one not in use, her teacher walking to the room with her and asking, "Why do you miss so much school?" Nickie thought about it, and desperate, told the teacher what was happening. Her teacher snorted, and walked away.

When Nickie caught up on her schoolwork, she was made to ask two students to return her desk to the classroom. She then had to stand and face the class and was ordered to tell them the excuse she had given as to why she was behind and missed so much school. Shattered by the betrayal of her teacher, she froze. Finally, all she could say was, "I have not been well."

The disdain of her peers was palpable. How could she tell them that she was unprotected, unloved?

How could she tell them that she had to lie awake, to stay on guard, to fight off her aggressor?

She came to the conclusion that you were loved only until someone better came along, that there was no one to protect you, no one to keep you safe from harm, and later, that she was unlovable, unworthy and of importance to no one.

She was nothing.