

# The Eighth Wonder of the Modern World

Alec Bunn

Martin woke up suddenly. He had been dreaming. The afternoon light poured in from the gaps in the wood and fabric of his big teepee, big for a member of the Colville Indian Tribe at least. Martin's thoughts started wandering to how his teepee compared to the white dam workers' houses. He had been to the workers' homes before when he had gone a few times to protest the building of the dam that was destroying so much of his life. Their houses there were much bigger than his, and Martin knew that these were the poor white people. He thought of his small teepee as he lay there on his bed. He tried and couldn't even imagine what the house of a rich white person would be like--giant, towering over the trees, and reaching to the sky. What would the white people even keep in there? Martin, himself, owned only a handful of small items and could only think of a dozen more that one might want in a house.

Martin tried to remember what he had been dreaming about. He closed his eyes and thought back. He remembered that it was a good dream, that he had woken up happier than when he went to bed, and that he had been with his family. However, as he tried to grasp the details of his dream, they slipped away, being pulled from Martin's mind like the current of a rapid-flowing river.

Martin sat up on his bed, straw mattress that had been stacked up on some boards and looked at the water. It was in his teepee all over and had risen more, a quarter or half an inch, while he was asleep. He despised the water. The white people had come to Martin's tribe a few years back to ask for their permission to build the dam, the "Grand Coulee Dam," they called it. They said it wouldn't affect the tribe, but recently flooding has not only affected the tribe but

also forced them to leave their village soon and move somewhere else. The flooding started on the burial grounds, which was on lower ground, and has slowly climbed higher and higher, trying to reach for him, with its ever grasping current. At the start of the week, the water was only a quarter inch deep. Nothing to worry about. But over the course of the week, the long and treacherous week, the water has risen. Trying to pull Martin down, pull the entire tribe down, and away.

Martin stood up. The water was at his knees. *It is rising faster now*, he thought. Earlier in the week, as soon as it was apparent that the water would keep on rising until everyone drowned, members of Martin's tribe started to leave, to escape the water. Martin knew in his mind, that eventually, he too must leave but his heart despised this and wouldn't allow it.

He walked outside his tent, slushing his feet in the water. He looked around, seeing only a few tents left. Another member of his tribe had apparently left, without so much as a goodbye. Martin looked up and saw the sun was high in the sky. He had slept in late. Had his father or mother been here, they would have scolded him and told him he should be working: fishing for salmon, or chopping wood for a fire, or preparing food. But alas, the salmon had all but disappeared from the river, unable to get past the dam to reproduce. A fire was a near impossibility in the water, and they were nearly out of food. Plus, his mother and father were no more. They had died a few years ago, from sickness. A lot of Martin's friends had died from sickness. Martin knew that the diseases had come from the whites. They had first brought gifts of great power, such as food and medicine, then they brought the guns. After this, they brought disease and now a towering giant, the dam, which brought the water that was wetting his feet even now.

Martin looked for the drum that he had left in the center of the circle of tents. It was typically used to call everyone together, especially for mealtimes. Martin had heard that drum sound every single day of his relatively short life. It had been there last night, and the night before that, and back to before the flood it was before Martin, before Martin's father, and before his grandfather, and before anyone could remember. But now, all had gone, and the drum was likely washed away by the flood. Just like everything else in my damned life. Martin thought to himself.

"Time for midday meal everyone," Martin hollered, as enthusiastically as he could manage. "Time to eat," he added, a plea to everyone, to not leave.

About ten people appeared out of all the teepees, splashing through the water as they gathered around Martin. They crowding around him as if he was their only hope. "Chief," one of them said, "we are running out of food."

Martin responded, for he was the chief, and a pretty lousy one in his own opinion, "How much food left?" He had known they were running out. The salmon, their main food source, had disappeared and all the other animals had fled also. It was because of the leftovers from last year that they had survived even this long.

"Only enough left for a single last meal," one of his faithful tribe member replied, taking a step back as if Martin were going to strike him upon hearing this.

Martin was stunned. They would have to leave. They couldn't live without a source of food on their own sacred land anymore. The land of their forefathers would have to be abandoned and forever lost to the rushing river. He didn't know what to tell his people. What could he tell them? He wanted to offer them a grain of hope, to tell them that everything would

be okay, but no words of inspiration could find their way to his lips. He could not find the silver lining to his situation. "Okay then, let's eat," he replied emptily after many moments of silence.

They went to the only dry place left inside what once was their village. It was the cooking area, with about one hundred square feet of dry land at the top of a hill. They cut down a few trees and started a fire. It was a relatively small fire, as they didn't have many people to feed or warm, and not much food to cook. They all sat around, in total silence, all thinking the same thing. *We're going to have to leave and never return.*

Then, Martin decided to break the silence. "Do you all remember when we were young, and everything seemed right with the world?" He said, trying to bring up everyone's spirits.

After a short pause, a member spoke up, and said, "I remember,"

Then another member said, "I remember,"

And then all the members spoke up, "I remember."

Martin, seeing a new-found fire in his people, decided to try to continue to rally them. "Do you remember the one year at the salmon ritual when my dad accidentally fell into the river? I laughed so hard that day." They talked and laughed for hours on end in this same way. Everyone had a story to tell and everyone else remembered and turned what little food they had into a feast. At this point, the water had risen a considerable amount, and now, there was about five square feet of dry land left - just enough for the fire. Then with a final splash, the fire went out, and with the fire went the talking and the happiness that the members had just shared.

"We have to leave," said Martin, standing up. "We have to leave now before it's too late."

They agreed to meet on the trail out of the village in five minutes. Martin went back to his house to take one last look. He looked at all the items that had meant something to him. He saw the ax that his father had taught him to use at a very young age. He found the baskets and pots that his mother had used to cook with, underneath the water, which was now up to his thighs. He looked at his bed, which he had already raised on stacked boards many times to escape the freezing water while he slept. He loved his bed. It had been his father's, and his grandfather's, and back and back to who knows how long ago. He remembered sitting on his grandfather's lap on the bed while his grandmother told him a story about why the fish came back every year and why we see rainbows after it rains, and where the water goes when it rushes down the river. Martin, once again, tried to imagine a big white man's house with piles upon piles of things in it, all meaning absolutely nothing. He hated even the idea of it and knew that he would much prefer his own house that had everything in it that meant something to him. He knew where he was going, he would have to get used to their houses, their music and their rituals. He would have to work for them and be surrounded by them. He knew, as he had known for a while, that his tribe would soon be long forgotten and what had once been a good world for him would ever after be corrupt and ugly. He said goodbye to his house for the last time and waded outside.

Fifteen minutes had passed when they finally met, and it was getting very dark very fast now. They had to get a move on. "Let's go," commanded Martin. They splashed and splashed along, going slower than walking pace at first because of the water, that was now hip height. Half an hour later it was only shin height and about twenty minutes after that they were on dry land. They agreed to stop and admire the sunset and then continue in the morning. The sun was big in the sky and seemed to take up at least a quarter of the horizon. It looked unstoppable, and

yet, the sky swallowed it up quickly. The day had ended. A day that would shortly be forgotten by the world. The day the Colville Indian tribe had died. Martin knew however, that he would not forget and he would tell his children and they would tell their children about this day. He took a final look back in the direction of the dam, what the white people had called the “Eighth Wonder of the World”, and laughed bitterly and thought about all the tragedies it had caused and how despite all of the tragedies he and his people would live on. And then, he laid down on the earth, and let the darkness consumed him and he at once, found himself asleep again.