

## **Stephen's Salmon Legend**

**My name is Finn and I'm from the Nicomen Indian Reservation. I was born in 1955. My mother is from Interior Salish Thompson Nation, and my father was a fisherman from Finland.**

**My life is anything but ordinary because when I was born, I was born with a fishtail. At my naming ceremony, I was given the name Finn. My mother was a cowboy and a rancher. She managed the horses and cattle. She also raised 9 children, including me, her fish boy. One day my father left and never returned. He left my mother to fend for all of us. My childhood was tinged with challenges because I could not walk.**

**I knew that one day I would have to leave home and that when I did, it would be forever.**

**I stayed home as long as I could, playing with my sisters. In the summertime my mother put me on a horse, and we would spend long days swimming and playing along the Thompson River. It was here I discovered my ability to swim like a mighty salmon. The river was a place where I found solace and a**

rare sense of freedom. The river gave me an intense feeling of strength.

She spoke to me and told me of lands far away. I felt a sense of belonging, of heritage. She told me one day I would have to go with her, to trust in her to carry me to a place of calmer waters where I would be safe.

Safe from the Indian Agent who rounded us up and sent us away to Residential School, away from the protection of our mother at the end of the summer.

The authorities told my mother we had to go. We had no choice. They put us in a vehicle and took us away. Without the protection of my mother, I was left alone to face relentless bullying. The children threw rocks and taunted me. They teased me for my differences. They called me a freak. The adults in charge did nothing to protect me. And it was here in this harsh environment, that I realized how different I was from my peers. It was here that I learned the word *disabled*.

**The summer I turned 12, I returned home. We returned to our swimming hole, to play down by the river.**

**However, I knew that soon I would have to leave and this time forever.**

**The river called to me. My heart broke. To leave my mother? And my family?**

**But I had to leave, to survive. I had to carry out my mother's legacy. There was no other option.**

**My mother was proud of her boy. She realized that she had to let me go, and she opened up her arms. She allowed me to blossom.**

**With a heavy heart and unwavering determination, she laid me in the river. She kissed my cheek. A tear dropped onto my fishtail, turquoise scales glimmered in the water.**

**I opened my young arms to the mother of the river.**

**Who, who carried me away?**

**I heard my grizzly bear mother's growls grow smaller and smaller as I was carried away by the current.**