

NINA SAVES ROAN

(Shoalwater Bay)



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Nina Saves Roan is a story about Nina Charley Bumgardner as a young girl on Shoalwater Bay in the early 1900's. Nina is a Shoalwater Bay Indian who now lives in Taholah, Washington on the Quinault Reservation. She is the daughter of Chief Roland Charley. Her love and respect for animals saved the life of a colt named Roan.

The Shoalwater Bay Indians lived for hundreds of years in the area now called Willapa Bay which is on the west coast of the state of Washington. Long ago Nina's people traveled back and forth from Bay Center to Nampsch'ats, visiting friends and relatives. Nampsch'ats was the name of the old Indian village that is now called the Shoalwater Bay Indian Reservation. In the Quinalt language, Nampsch'ats means "Behind The Big Water." Back then, the Indians traveled in dugout cedar canoes and lived in long houses built of long cedar planks. Nina's family, however, lived in a wooden house much like you might find in your own neighborhood. During Nina's youth, travel across the bay had changed from canoes to steamboats.

While Nina was home on school vacation, she visited her older sister Lizzie. Lizzie married Johnson George the previous year and had moved to a small town called Bay Center. At that time there were as many as three hundred Indians living in Bay Center. Mail was carried to Bay Center on the steamboat Shamrock. Nina rode the Shamrock when she went to visit her sister. The cost of riding the Shamrock was 25 cents.

She had only spent two days at Lizzie's house when there was an urgent knock on the door. There was a young boy standing on the porch with a paper in his hand. "Hi Nina. Mr. Tom Olsen from the store asked me to bring this message to you. He said it was an emergency." He handed the message to Nina and ran off. Nina wondered if it was bad news. She stood in the door and looked at the wrinkled piece of paper. There in the storekeeper's big handwriting were the words, "Emergency! From your Dad. Come home!"

Nina said to herself, "Dad wouldn't send for me unless it was a real emergency." She hoped no one was hurt or sick at home.

Lizzie had been standing behind Nina the whole time. "We better get you into the washtub," Lizzie said. Bathing in a washtub was not an easy task. Lizzie heated a large kettle of water on the wood stove in the kitchen and then poured it into the metal washtub with some cool water. Nina scrubbed from head to toe and then got dressed for her trip home. She stood in the doorway of the kitchen as

Lizzie scurried around packing things into Nina's carpet bag. "We had better hurry. The mailboat gets in at noon and it's already 11:30!" exclaimed Lizzie.

As the two sisters started down the wooden walkway toward the dock, they spotted the Shamrock. It was just arriving. "Just in time," gasped Lizzie. She gave Nina a hug and a kiss and said goodbye. Nina stepped onto the Shamrock. "Goodbye, goodbye, come back soon," called Lizzie.

Nina reached into her pocket for her fare as she walked toward old Captain Reed. "Your fare is all paid, Nina. Mr. Kindred paid it for you." Nina was even more puzzled now. Why would Mr. Kindred pay her fare home?

"I don't understand."

"Well, they want you home, that's all I know," replied Captain Reed.

Nina stood at the side of the steamboat watching the ripples in the water and the seagulls gliding overhead during the twenty-minute ride to the other side of the bay. Her eyebrows were furrowed, "I wonder why Papa wants me home." Looking up, Nina realized the Shamrock was already pulling in to the dock at Tokeland. Tokeland was named after a chief in Nina's tribe called Old Toke. She had heard many stories about him from her father, Chief Charley.

As Nina stepped off the boat, she saw a big black car waiting for someone from the steamer. Oh, how she wished it was for her. "What's going on? What's going on, anyway?" she asked Joe, the handyman from the Tokeland Hotel. Joe was driving the car. He opened the door for her.

"Get in! You'll see in a few minutes," he answered. Off they drove toward the Tokeland Hotel two miles away. Although the hotel was four miles from the reservation, it was a place often visited by the Indians on the bay. Mrs. Kindred, the owner's wife, collected many baskets and much beadwork from the Shoalwater Indians. People came from miles away to see her famous collection. (Today that collection is on loan to the State Capitol Museum in Olympia, Washington.)

As the car drew near the hotel, it slowed down and Nina could see a group of people gathered near the corral. There was Mr. Kindred and Chief Charley waiting for her. Nina hurried to her father who was holding a bundle under his arm. "Hello, Papa, what's the emergency?"

"Here's your clothes, honey. Go change." He handed Nina the bundle from under his arm. It was her boots, leather jodhpurs and middie blouse.

Again Nina asked, "Well, what's going on?"

Chief Charley explained to Nina that Mr. Kindred's colt Roan had a terrible accident. While he was running across the field, he stepped on a large spike and it had gone right through his back hoof. "But why did you send for me?" asked Nina.

Her father answered, "You are good with animals, Nina. They trust you. Roan needs special help."

She asked her father, "Did they try to take the spike out?"

"Oh, yes," said Chief Charley, "but Roan bares his teeth and tries to bite anyone who comes close to him. He paws at them with his front hoofs."

"Well, what makes you think I can help him?"

“I think you can do it, honey. You have a special gift with animals. They know you love them. I’ll pray for you.”

Nina walked off with her clothes in hand and returned shortly. She walked toward the corral where the injured colt stood. Several people had gathered to watch. Mr. Kindred waved and smiled, “Nina, I’m so glad you are here. I do hope you can help Roan.” Mr. Kindred handed Nina a large nail puller, a small bottle of medicine and a rope to hold the horse.

Nina knew how valuable Roan was. He was a very expensive Arabian horse, and Mr. Kindred was very fond of the little colt. “I will see what I can do. I’ll try!” Nina was shaking and scared as she climbed through the pole fence and started across the corral toward Roan. Roan whinnied softly and perked his ears up as she came close to him. “Well, at least his ears aren’t down in anger,” Nina thought. She started talking to Roan and moved closer.

“What’s happened to you? What did you do that for, you poor boy? Didn’t you know that would hurt your hoof? You shouldn’t have done that. Didn’t you see that spike?” Roan kept looking at Nina and she reached out to pet him. Nina knew she must take the rope off her arm and slip it through the metal ring on his halter. She turned to the group of onlookers and signaled them to be quiet and still. They must be quiet as church mice.

Nina kept talking to Roan and patting him. “You’re a good boy. You’re a good boy.”

Roan continued his low whinny. He was saying to Nina, “That’s okay, please help me.” She got the rope tied through the ring. Next, Nina stooped down near Roan’s back hoof. She slipped the nail puller out of her pocket and moved slowly toward the spiked hoof. No one said a word. Not a single person moved. Even the birds seemed to have stopped their usual twittering back and forth. Everyone watched and waited. The loose end of the rope was on the ground next to the injured hoof, for now Nina must have both hands free. If Roan were to run, Nina would grab the rope. She carefully lifted the colt’s hoof up and looked at the spike.

Nina thought, “I must use all my strength. I’ll only have one chance to pull that spike out.” She knew it would hurt Roan. She whispered, “This is going to hurt a little bit, but you’ll be all right.” Nina carefully got a hold of the spike and yanked as hard as she could. In a flash, the spike was free from Roan’s hoof. “I did it!” she thought, “I did it!”

Roan put his hoof down and started to hobble around. Nina grabbed the loose end of the rope so Roan could not take off across the corral. “I’m not through with you yet,” she said, reaching for the medicine bottle in her back pocket. She pulled the cork out with her teeth. She let go of the rope and bent down again, talking to Roan softly. “We still have something to do.” Lifting the hoof up, she poured the medicine on Roan’s injury. Nina noticed that the hoof was already clean. Roan had been holding it up in the air for a long time. Reaching for the loose end of the rope again, she stood up and raised her hand to signal that it was all over.

At that moment all the smiling people standing around the corral fence began hollering and clapping their hands. Nina, indeed, had a way with animals. Nina

led Roan over to Mr. Kindred and handed him the rope. Mr. Kindred reached into the pocket of his overalls and pulled out a ten dollar gold piece and handed it to Nina.

“Oh, it’s nothing,” Nina said.

But he insisted, “If I had sent for the horse doctor, it would have cost me more than that.” Nina took the gold piece. She handed it to her father.

Chief Charley looked at her, “You’re the one that earned it.”

Nina retorted, “I didn’t do anything. You’re the one who sent for me.”

Nina had always been taught when you do something for somebody, you do not have your hand out to be paid. You do it because it is good to help people and animals. Nina turned to her father, “Thank you for sending for me, Papa.” Chief Charley smiled. Nina was a very good daughter.