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Silvermoon

important trademark

By Gwen Jackson



Caddo Artist Spanning Two Cultures

Silvermoon spanned two cultures with his paintings. Red roses on black velvet. A butterfly on his wife's stockings. A picture of Jesus praying in the Garden of Gethsemane. A lone buffalo bull atop a knoll. A solitary Indian brave smoking his pipe. These works were part of the white man's world and the Caddo world. An Indian ahead of his time, Silvermoon traveled between both cultures.

Michael James Martin was born in the Caddo village near

Binger, Oklahoma, in 1891. He lived in a tepee and later a log house with open fireplace. His mother died when he was two years old, so he was reared by his grandmother, Choah. As a young boy, Michael peeled labels from cans. He crushed berries in the cans and then painted on the backs of the labels using bird feathers for brushes. He frequently had to leave his art to hoe corn or herd his grandmother's horses and cattle.

Michael attended St. Patrick's School in Anadarko, which was a Catholic boarding school. He took frequent holidays from St. Patrick's, however. Once he got lonesome for home and walked across the prairie. After four days, an Indian policeman on horseback came for him. He was placed on the horse behind the policeman. Four or five miles from home, Michael slipped quietly off the horse, ran home, and hid. The policeman returned and found him.

When Michael was fifteen, he went to Carlisle Industrial School. As part of his training, he worked in the Famous Shoe Repair Shop in Phillipsburg, New Jersey, earning \$12 a month. He also worked in the farm shop at Carlisle. He received good academic grades and excellent conduct reports, but he took holidays from Carlisle just as he had from St. Patrick's. In a Ft. Worth newspaper interview, Michael told of playing football with Jim Thorpe and running the 440 and 880 in track. He missed the Olympic tryouts because of his runaway status and regretted his truancy.

After Carlisle, Michael joined the Army and was sent to France. However, World War I ended, and Corporal Martin came home. Michael used the name *Silvermoon* and became involved with Paul Whiteman's band. He played the flute for the Youngbloods, an all-girl chorus who wore white evening dresses. He took stand-in movie parts for Richard Dix and other actors. A feature in which he starred was *LIBERTY BOYS OF 76*.

Michael had a German Shepherd named Chief Geronimo. He was competitive with Rin Tin Tin in several movies. Chief was also a model for animal-life sculptors in New York.

Silvermoon worked in the library of the American Museum of Natural History in New York, translating the Caddo language for a Caddo Indian-English dictionary. He also posed for Hubard Zettling, sculptor at the museum; and Silvermoon's likeness was used by one of the companies manufacturing Big Chief tablets.

The 1920's and early 1930's were busy years for Silvermoon, but he never ceased painting. According to a New York newspaper, Michael was painting in Central Park, and his wife became restless. He told her if she wasn't still, he would paint her socks. She dared him, so Michael painted a butterfly on her socks. A crowd gathered and from this incident came the patent for decorating women's hose.

Silvermoon's Indian heritage was reflected in his painting. He grew up listening to old Caddo men tell of trading with the French in Louisiana. At one tribal council, many braves came with axes and hoes across their shirts as decoration. He remembered when a group of Caddos traveled north to Sioux country to learn the Ghost Dance ritual and songs. This group established an annual ghost dance near Anadarko.

Silvermoon continued to paint on unusual bases such as buckskin, rough wood, velvet, and murals on various textures of cloth. His favorite models were Oklahoma landscapes, Quanah Parker, buffalo, and his daughter LaRue. She was Indian princess at Anadarko in 1956 and later married one of Quanah Parker's grandsons.

Wynema Lindesmith, who was married to Silvermoon for more than thirty years, said in an interview that the Caddo artist was asked to paint an eight-foot mural of a wagon train with Indians in the background. The mural hung in an Oklahoma City bar for years and when the area was renovated, it was taken to the Cowboy Hall of Fame. She related that they never had to pay a doctor bill when they lived in Oklahoma City because their family physician, Dr. Dupree, wanted Silvermoon's paintings. Many others felt the same way. Mrs. Jerry Douvall owned thirty-seven of his water colors, oils, and panel wood paintings which lined the walls of her San Bernadino residence. Midwestern University Museum in Wichita Falls, Texas, has twelve of his paintings. Comanche School purchased five. Today, his art is considered collectors' items.

Michael James Martin was away from home for weeks at a time, but his spirit was in the heartland of America. He loved the golden sunsets, buffalo on the prairie, and his Caddo heritage. Although his art shows took him from New York to California, Michael Martin--or Silvermoon--has remained in the minds of those who knew him. Like the Plains Indians, who followed the buffalo herds, Michael followed art shows. He supported his family of thirteen despite his Grandmother Choah's warning that an artist can't make a living. through the successes of his talents, Silvermoon has spanned the two cultures that he loved most.■

GWEN JACKSON, a graduate of SOSU who enjoys researching stories of early Oklahomans, teaches reading in the Amber-Pocasset School.

SOUND OF TOMORROW — CONT'D FROM PAGE 12.

Mrs. Whitney frowned at Jessie's reaction and slowly mouthed, "No matter what the hardship, Jessica, there is always a tomorrow. Always more to learn, and always another sunrise."

The wind picked up its speed as leaves were tossed around Jessica's feet. She blinked her eyes and swept away a tear as reality returned.

The sun was high now, and its golden touch seemed to bring the entire clearing to life. As she stepped past Abby's rock, Jess took one more look over her shoulder at the blowing leaves and the sparkling sky. Her eye moved to the horizon where tomorrow's sun would rise.

Jessica knew she'd come back here, paints and all. She had a strong desire to welcome the next day, thanks to Abby. As for more schooling, why not? In fact, that's the best idea

she'd had in ages!

In honor and respect for her teacher, Jessica was determined now to finish "The Sunrise" and to paint many more.

As she faced the new day, Jessica gripped her colorful mittens tightly and knew that her tomorrows would be much brighter--not through sound, but through her art and her dearest friend and teacher, the late and lovable Mrs. Abigale Whitney.■

BECKY BOND of Morrison, 1986 SOSU Homecoming Queen, shows another talent, fiction writing, in this issue. In the past 5 issues, she has helped Art Director Don Wood with layout, paste-up, and illustration.