She remembers the fishing trips by the river, when the old man always seemed so serene. They would settle in on the bank, where the black waters swirled past the cypress trees and the great blue herons waded in the shallows, and sometimes they would talk. He would tell her of the prophecy his grandmother gave him, a spiritual gift handed down for generations, going back to the days before the white men came and mingled their blood with that of the Lumbees. Like most of his people, the old man was a Christian. He worshiped every week at a little Baptist church, where the people were touched and moved by the spirit. But Vernon Cooper believed—in fact, he was certain—that there was something in the soul of the Lumbee people, something more ancient than imported Christianity, at least among those who were willing to believe.

His grandmother had been the first to explain it. When he was eleven, she told him of the wisdom that had been handed down—the gift of healing that ran in the family, through generations reaching to the fifteenth century—and she said that one day, he would possess it. As the years went by, Vernon knew it was true. There were herbs in the ground to cure any ailment, if the white man's pesticides didn't kill them, and there was also the power of the human touch. He could feel the fever sometimes in his fingers, and the jolt of pain almost like a shock, as he laid his hands on the people who came.

One of those people was Daystar Dial, a troubled young woman who was barely eighteen, newly married with a child, grieving over the recent death of her father. She had never met Vernon Cooper, but something in a dream had told her it was time, and as they began their fishing trips to the river, she found herself on a journey of discovery that led her, she says, to her Indian past. There was a time when she might have been tempted to deny it. Coming of age in the 1960s in the rich coastal farmlands of North Carolina, where the tobacco fields gave way to the swamps, she understood the sting of segregation and prejudice. But there was also a comfort she
DAYSTAR DIAL, TRADITIONAL LUMBEE HEALER,
PENBROKE, NORTH CAROLINA, 1997
felt in that place. She was surrounded everywhere by extended family—cousins, grandparents, uncles, and aunts—whose identity was tied to each other and the land. They grew their tobacco in long, flat rows, and some of them worked at the meat-processing plant, turning turkey into cold cuts, and even those who moved away for better jobs—to Baltimore and other cities to the north—came home when they could. Later, she knew it was an Indian thing, this homing instinct that brought them back. She remembered the words of Vine Deloria, the great Sioux author, who argued that the core of Indian identity was an instinctive attachment to a people and a place.

In Daystar's case, the attachment was enriched by the spiritual powers of her friend Vernon Cooper, and later by the people she encountered in her job. She was assistant curator at the Native American Resource Center, a museum at the University of North Carolina at Pembroke, and she loved the art of the Lumbee people—the acrylic paintings of her cousin Karl Hunt and the pine-needle baskets of Loretta Oxendine, made in the traditional Lumbee style. But perhaps as striking as any of these were the hardwood carvings of Bernice Locklear.

The Lumbees have always worked with wood, functional items as much as anything else—bread pans carved from tupelo gum, much like those of other eastern tribes. Locklear's work was a little bit different. He had picked up the chisel maybe six years earlier and had begun to produce his impressionistic pieces—a mixture of styles, part Picasso, part Native American. His mother made quilts, and his father was always good with his hands, and Bernice set out to preserve that tradition with carvings that sprang from the struggles of his people. His walnut statue *A Cry for Hope* was done for the Lumbee children, he said, in an era when some of them were drifting into drugs or were confused by what it meant to be an Indian. Another of his pieces, *Canoe Water Spirit*, was a warning against the persistent abuses of the earth, and still others were intended as a tribute to God, creator of the land and the Lumbee people.

As far as Daystar Dial was concerned, there was an Indian spirit that lived in the work, a pride in the native identity of her people. She knew, however, that not everyone felt it. Bernice Locklear told the story of his teenage daughter, who declared one day that she and her family were not real Indians because, she said, "we don't wear feathers."

It's a point of view heard often among those outside of the Lumbee community—particularly from the Cherokees to the west and the office of Senator Jesse Helms. The Cherokees and Helms have led the fight against tribal recognition, an official acknowledgment from the United States government that the Lumbees, in the end, are like the Navajos and Sioux—Indians in the fullest sense of the word. The doubters point out that the Lumbees generally are a mixed-blood people.
lacking the outward symbols of identity. They speak no language other than English and wear the same kinds of clothes as their neighbors. Most of their religious ceremonies are Christian, and if many of the people clearly look like Indians, with jet-black hair and dark, olive skin, there are some whose hair is brown or even blond.

Like most other Lumbees, Daystar Dial disagrees with those who question her identity, mainly because she has no doubts. She has emerged near the close of the twentieth century as a Lumbee healer, heir to the wisdom of Vernon Cooper and respected by those familiar with her quest. She knows that her story is not unique, her journey of discovery that she shares with others of her own generation—with the Lumbee scholar Linda Oxendine and community organizer Donna Chavis, and lawyers Dale Deese and Arlinda Locklear, and artists Karl Hunt and Michael Wilkins. These are people in their thirties and forties, some a little older, who represent a bridge to the past. They have connected through the years with other native people—the Mohawks, Apaches, Lakotas, and Cheyennes, even the Hulchols in southern Mexico. But they’ve been inspired also by their Lumbee elders. In Daystar’s case, it began with her grandmother Ester Dial, who taught her how to fish and tell time by the sun and revere the troubled history of her people.

It is a powerful story, the grandmother said, full of struggle and triumph, and it continues along those same paths today. Some of it is lost in the mists of antiquity, but much of it is clear—handed down not only in the history books but in the stories that Lumbees tell to each other.

Some people say the story first started to assume its shape in the autumn of 1587. According to the Lumbees’ oral tradition, the remnants of several native tribes from the coast made their way over time to the fertile swamplands of what is now Robeson County, where the game was abundant, the dark river waters teemed with fish, and the corn crop flourished in the long summer season. According to the legend, there were others who had mingled with the Indian people—survivors from an early expedition of whites who had settled on the coast at Roanoke Island. They arrived too late for the planting of corn and were about to starve when the natives took them in.

Historians have debated the truth of that story, but this much is clear. In 1587, the English soldier and poet Walter Raleigh sent forth a group of about 120 people—including 9 boys and 17 women—to establish a permanent colony for the queen. They arrived in the summer and ran low on supplies, and as their situation became more desperate, their leader, John White, went to England for more. His return was delayed by the Spanish Armada, and when he finally made it back nearly three years later, he discovered that all of the
colonists were missing. They had built a fort, which now stood empty and had the single word CROATOAN carved near the gate. White was encouraged by that enigmatic sign. Croatoan was a place where the Indians were friendly, and though he never located his people, he set sail for England assuming they were safe.

In the years after that, stories began to circulate along the coast of Indians who spoke in the white man's tongue and had gray eyes and lived in cabins much like the English. Then, sometime around 1730, Scottish settlers trickled into the area and were astonished to discover upon their arrival that many of the Indians who had settled in the swamps spoke in a peculiar dialect of English. They farmed like the British and lived in houses but retained their Indian ways also—holding their land, for example, in common. They abandoned that practice only when they had to—when the new arrivals began to carve up the land, claiming vast pieces of the earth for themselves. The Indians adapted to the white man's practice, filing individual claims of their own, but they remained in their minds a people set apart. Some of them fought in the newcomers' wars, and voted in elections when the day finally came. But as Indian people, it was never their intention to simply disappear, melting away into the white man's world—and the time soon arrived when they couldn't have even if they tried.

After almost a century of peace, attitudes changed in North Carolina. For people not white, the 1830s were a terrifying time. The tribes to the west—the Cherokees, Choctaws, Chickasaws, and Creeks—were ripped from the lands they had occupied for generations, and while the Indians in the swamps of Robeson County were unobtrusive enough to escape that fate, they could feel their status begin to slip away. When the slave Nat Turner launched his rebellion in 1831, killing sixty white Virginians before he was through, the wave of fear that swept through the South quickly hardened to a new kind of hate. Four years later, at a constitutional convention in North Carolina, the delegates agreed on a sweeping assumption. "This," they declared, "is a nation of white people."

For 135 years after that—some would say even longer—the Lumbees would feel the pain of that view. The Civil War was the worst. The Confederate States conscripted the Indians against their will to help build their forts. Many of the Lumbees retreated to the swamps, where they made common cause with runaway slaves and Union prisoners who had managed to escape. In the eruption of guerrilla warfare that followed, the Lumbees found a leader to admire—a handsome teenager with flashing eyes and a heart full of rage. According to the stories handed down in the tribe, Henry Berry Lowry had seen his father and his brother both killed—both forced to watch while their grave was dug by a Negro slave. Henry Berry vowed to exact his revenge, and
REEDY CHAVIS, GRANDDAUGHTER OF LUMBEE HERO HENRY BERRY LOWRY, 
WITH HER GRANDDAUGHTER, SHANNON AHLFELDT, 
ROBESON COUNTY, NORTH CAROLINA, 1997
for the next ten years, he and his band of a dozen young men—nine Lumbees, two blacks, and a white—staged their deadly raids from the swamps. To the whites who lived in Robeson County, Lowry was merely a bushwhacker and a bandit, killing from ambush and then retreating to his hideout deep in the bush. But to the Indians, he became a folk hero, a fighter in the war against the white man’s oppression.

His only living granddaughter, Reedy Chavis, who was born shortly after the turn of the century, remembers the stories handed down by her mother. “I don’t think much about it until somebody comes around and starts rooting it up,” she says, “but my mother well remembered her daddy. She said it was no scandal, no disgrace. He was forced to do what he did. That was one way to get a fight out of her, if you said something you shouldn’t about Henry Berry Lowry.”

Throughout the Lumbee community, in fact, there’s the same fierce pride in a legacy of resistance that grew even stronger in the twentieth century. Sanford Locklear says it was crucial. Born in 1933, he came of age in the era of segregation. He is a strong-willed man who worked as a farmer and later as the foreman of a dry-wall crew, and though he was proud of being an Indian, he understood the limitations of his status. There were places where he and his people couldn’t go—local restaurants that refused to serve them, except perhaps at a window on the side.

“So we’d go to the window,” he says with a shrug. “It was hurtful, but you had to do it.”

But the Lumbees decided to draw the line when the Klan paid a visit to Robeson County. On January 13, 1958, crosses were burned at the homes of two Indians—retribution, apparently, for crossing the invisible lines of segregation—and a Klan leader by the name of Catfish Cole announced plans for a rally in the community of Maxton. Locklear and others decided to stop it. They talked about it first at a barbershop, and somebody suggested that they storm the meeting with guns and gasoline and a torch and burn every Klansman in the county to a crisp.

Locklear argued for a little more restraint. “I said, ‘Just take our guns and tell ’em to leave,’ ” he remembers, which is what the Lumbees eventually decided to do.

They gathered at dusk on a Saturday night. It was bitterly cold as the Klansmen were making preparations in a field—setting up a speaker’s stand, a mike, a single light bulb at the end of a cord, and a record player that was blaring Christian songs. As Locklear remembers it, he approached the person who seemed to be in charge, a skinny-looking man in khaki trousers with a look of fear and defiance in his eyes.

“I said, ‘What are you all here for?’ and the guy says to me, ‘We’re having a meeting.’ I said, ‘You’re not gon’ have no meeting here tonight,’ and then I slapped him, and my brother-in-law shot out the light.”
GRANDSONS OF SANFORD LOCKLEAR, LUMBEE LEADER OF 1958 RAID AGAINST KU KLUX KLAN, ROBESON COUNTY, NORTH CAROLINA, 1997
With the blast from Neil Lowry's .22, the scene erupted into pure pandemonium. There were maybe three hundred Indians and only a handful of Klansmen, and as the Lumbees fired their weapons in the air—shotguns, rifles, whatever they had—the Kluxers made a howling dash for the trees. The Indians ripped the robes off those they could catch and turned over cars and seized Klan weapons, which they gave to police. Remarkably enough, nobody was killed, but in the minds of nearly everybody who was there, the message was clear. The Klan was not welcome in Robeson County, and the Indians were not afraid of anybody.

Locklear says he was much too angry to feel any fear. He was thinking of his wife and the baby she had begun to carry in her womb. He wanted something better for his child to inherit—a world more just than the one he had known—and he is pleased today that things have improved. He is careful, of course, not to take all the credit. The work of Martin Luther King, he says, profoundly altered the moral climate of the day, touching the hearts of his neighbors who were white and giving greater courage to those who were not. But Locklear believes that the Lumbees also have a right to feel proud. In addition to their hundred-year history of resistance—their refusal in the end to back away from a fight—they set about the task of building a community.

A major university was the cornerstone of it—a school that opened in 1887 as a place for the training of Lumbee teachers. It evolved through the years into the University of North Carolina at Pembroke, with a student body that included all races, but its Indian origins were still at its heart. More than a hundred years from its founding, a quarter of its students were Native Americans, who had at their disposal not only a traditional academic curriculum but a major in Native American studies. Under the leadership of Linda Oxendine, a Lumbee educator and writer, there were classes in Indian history and art, in archaeology and contemporary issues, and in the 1990s, hundreds of young Indians were studying their culture, searching for roots, for a deeper understanding of their own native past.

But in many ways, the role of the college has been more basic. Over the years, it has trained generations of Lumbee professionals—doctors, lawyers, and members of the clergy, politicians, teachers, and entrepreneurs—many of whom have remained in the county.

"We are problem solvers," declares Bruce Barton, a Lumbee teacher and newspaperman. "We have taken our frustrations and, as much as any Indian group in the country, we have parlayed those into a drive to succeed."

The tribal chairman, Dalton Brooks, agrees. He tells the story of the Lumbee Bank, founded in 1971, the first and oldest Indian bank in the country. It was a reflection, in a way, of an old tribal habit—Lumbees who had managed to save a little money loaning to those who might have a need. Dalton Brooks's
own brother, Martin, was a struggling young doctor in Robeson County and was working one day to remodel his office when a Lumbee man, barefoot and ragged, came by on his bike with five thousand dollars.

"Pay me back when you can," the old man said. "I see you're gettin' started."

In the eyes of Dalton Brooks and others, it was, in effect, a banking structure based on trust, and when the Lumbees decided to make it official, they sold bank shares for five dollars each—a price that nearly anybody could afford. They raised a total of three hundred thousand dollars, most of it in cash, and according to a story circulated in the tribe, one of the directors took it home in a bag and kept it there until the bank finally opened. Nobody raised any questions about it. It was simply the Lumbees' way of doing business.

Connee Brayboy, a Lumbee editor, argues that in the midst of their adversity and triumph, her people have developed a strong sense of community, a tribalism running deep in their bones. "There are other cultures," she says, "other ways to survive. I think ours is the best."

But she also admits that even those who feel most proud can see there are difficult days still ahead, problems that linger in the Indian community—and a maddening refusal in the outside world to acknowledge that the Lumbees are Indians at all.

Michael Wilkins's anger is there in the wood, a piece of walnut polished to a shine. His carving took shape when he heard the news—the word out of Washington that the Lumbees again had been turned down in their quest for federal recognition as a tribe. It is a struggle that began in the 1880s and has continued off and on for more than a century. There was a flicker of hope in 1956, when Congress in fact did pass a bill affirming that the Lumbees were Native Americans. But in the last paragraph, the lawmakers stamped the tribe with an asterisk—declaring that, in contrast to most other Indians, the Lumbees were ineligible for federal programs.

Michael Wilkins, among many others, never worried very much about the money—the government dollars that went to other tribes. As an Indian artist who came of age in the 1970s, during a period of militancy that swept through native communities nationwide, he simply took offense at the government's presumption. He worried about the message handed down to the children, including his own, concerning the nature of their Indian identity. Were they Native Americans or were they not? He knew, of course, that it was silly to care, to get caught up in the government's hedgings, when most Lumbees knew exactly who they were. But the affront somehow seemed to be so stark, so thoroughly outrageous and unprovoked, that he was grateful for the fact that the tribe's best leaders refused to accept it.
The Lumbee Regional Development Association, a nonprofit corporation that began its life in the 1960s, started preparations to raise the issue of recognition once again. Working with genealogists, archaeologists, and a battery of lawyers, it prepared a petition of five hundred pages with that much more in supporting information and submitted the material to the BIA. One of the lawyers was Arlinda Locklear, a Lumbee graduate of Duke University who had worked on the recognition of other tribes, mostly in the East, and had won other cases for tribes in the West. She knew the Lumbees’ case was compelling. They were clearly a people of Indian descent who had lived on the same piece of land since long before the coming of the European settlers. That much, essentially, was beyond all dispute. The Lumbees’ disadvantage was simple. They were the largest Indian tribe in the East—forty thousand people in Robeson County and another ten thousand scattered all the way from Charlotte to Baltimore. Full recognition would entitle them inevitably to federal Indian programs and services at a time when the national budget was shrinking.

It was no real surprise when the Bureau of Indian Affairs turned them down. Officials there understood the realities, and in 1989, more than a hundred years after the struggle began, the BIA threw the issue to Congress. Congress immediately tried to throw it back. In 1992, the Republican Senate, deferring to the leadership of Jesse Helms, refused to recognize the Lumbees, and two years later, the legislation never even made it to the floor.

When word reached the people of Robeson County, Michael Wilkins was working on a carving. He had found a piece of black walnut wood, and he was chiseling out an Indian wrapped in a blanket, a look of pride and sadness in the eyes. Wilkins thought for a while about the news out of Congress, and as his feelings of rage began to take hold, he decided to make the blanket into a flag, turned upside down in a symbol of distress. On the backside of his piece, The Shadow Dweller, he carved out a delicate row of feathers recalling the verse from the Ninety-first Psalm: “Beneath His wings you will find refuge.”

Wilkins often thought about things that way. Like most Lumbees, he was deeply Christian. He went to church on Sundays and listened to the preaching, and often there was gospel singing in the evening that spilled from the sanctuaries to the corners and the parking lots outside. But there was another expression of his faith also. For many years now, he had practiced the ancient Indian ceremonies—the smudge-pot rituals he had learned from other tribes. These things were part of his Indian identity, a passion going back to his teenage years—to the day, he says, when he first heard a drum. His scoutmaster, a Chippewa-Cree, had taken him to a Haliwa-Saponi powwow, and Michael was drawn to the rhythm and regalia, the chanting and the dances that called up emotions he didn’t know he had. He became
an activist in the years after that, marching on the White House in the 1970s and wishing he could be at Wounded Knee, where the Indians faced off against the FBI.

But there was plenty going on in Lumbee country. There were issues of political power and the environment, and toxic-waste dumps proposed for the area, and questions of police brutality and justice. For a while in the seventies, national leaders were streaming through the county—people like Dennis Banks, whose American Indian Movement was perhaps the most militant organization of its time, tapping the anger that existed in the country, the pride of Indian people nationwide.

Donna Chavis remembers those days. In the 1970s, she was a Lumbee who understood her own roots—a dark-haired woman still in her teens who was raised, she explains, at her grandfather's knee. The old man, Zimmy Chavis, was born shortly after the Civil War. He ran a country store in Robeson County and preached in the Indian churches on Sunday, sometimes walking from one to another—from the city of Fayetteville, just to the north, all the way to Georgia, where some Lumbees had gone in search of better jobs. But preaching was only one part of his gift. He was also a healer in the old-fashioned way, working with herbs and the power of his touch, and people came to him from all over the county. Donna herself had to turn to him once—actually more than that, she says, but one occasion stands out above the rest. She was in a car wreck at the age of seventeen, and it left her with massive and terrifying headaches. But then one day, her grandfather took her head in his hands, and she could feel her pain disappear at his touch, never to return.

It was one of life's mysteries she never forgot, a reminder of the spiritualism of her people. Then as now, she regarded the world as the Creator's church, and the struggles of the Indian people to improve it were doomed to fail without that basic understanding at the core. It was hard sometimes to remember that fact. The Indian movement that took shape in the seventies was like many others—a blur of controversy and pain interspersed with occasional moments of triumph—and in Robeson County, the emotions only grew stronger with the years.

Donna Chavis was there for it all. With her husband, Mac Legerton, she started the Center for Community Action, a nonprofit agency that fought for social change—combating the creation of toxic-waste dumps and confronting the brutality of local law enforcement. In 1986, an unarmed Lumbee was shot and killed by a deputy sheriff, and a short time later, a black man died of asthma in the jail. In response to those events and others, a Lumbee attorney, Julian Pierce, decided to run for superior-court judge. His campaign galvanized the community, for Pierce was a popular and respected man, and most people thought he was going to win. Instead, he was murdered—gunned down in his home just before the election. The Lumbees voted for him anyway, and
he outpolled his opponent, Joe Freeman Britt, a local prosecutor who was widely regarded by the Indians as oppressive.

"We won with a dead man," declared Connee Brayboy, editor of the Carolina Indian Voice, and in the years after that, the Lumbees continued to assert their power. By the 1990s, they held a plurality in Robeson County, with more voters than either the whites or the blacks, and they were slowly taking control of the government. The clerk of court was a Lumbee now, and so was the superintendent of schools, but no office was more symbolic than the sheriff's. In 1994, when an Indian, Glenn Maynor, successfully ran for that position, even the churches got into the act. They had seldom been involved in politics before, though they had long been critically important to the people as a source of spiritual comfort and nurture. The Burnt Swamp Baptist Association, an alliance of sixty-five Indian churches, was the oldest institution that the Lumbees had, and just before the election, its leadership invited Glenn Maynor to a meeting. It was quite a scene at Mount Elim Baptist—the sheriff's candidate surrounded by the preachers, who called him forward and anointed him with oil. Such was the urgency that all of them felt. They knew that Maynor, upon his election, would help heal the rift—the corrosive mistrust between the Indian community and the law-enforcement officials of the county.

They also knew that crime was a problem. Some of the Lumbees were drifting into drugs—a reflection of the times and also of the fact that Interstate 95, one of the great drug arteries in the United States, cut a path through the heart of Robeson County. A startling reflection of the new criminality came on the night of July 23, 1993, when the father of basketball star Michael Jordan was murdered on a Robeson County highway.

"The first thing I heard in the Indian community," remembers educator Linda Oxendine, "was, 'I hope it wasn't one of our people.'"

But in fact, it was. Larry Demery, a Lumbee teenager, testified later that he and a friend, Daniel Andre Green, had talked all day about robbing somebody. Green had a .38 caliber pistol, and more and more in the past few months, the two of them were drawn to the idea of crime. Sometime after midnight, they found James Jordan sleeping in his car, a shiny, red Lexus that had to be worth more than forty thousand dollars. Jordan stirred as they approached the driver's side of the car, and according to Demery, Green shot him in the chest. The body was found a few days later by a Lumbee fisherman in South Carolina. It was a horrifying sight floating there in the creek. The arms were tangled in the branches of a tree, and the head was raised up out of the water, the face contorted as if the dead man were gasping for air.

Nearly three years later at the trial, when the killers were sentenced to life in prison, Larry Demery's mother testified for her son. She said that when he was ten, his father would threaten him sometimes with a gun, and
Larry, in terror, would have run away. For many Lumbees, it was a graphic reminder that even in the clannish world of the Indians, where the idea of family is a cornerstone of the culture, there are people among whom it is beginning to erode.

Donna Chavis isn't sure what to do about that, though she thinks it is important to keep it in perspective. For every Larry Demery, there are other young Indians who have gone off to college—to Harvard and Stanford, as well as the University of North Carolina at Pembroke. But she knows it is a time of uncertainty and crisis, and despite all the things her people have achieved—the political power and educational attainments—many of the young ones seem to be confused. The denial of federal recognition is part of it. For some of the Lumbees, especially the young, there is a disturbing ambiguity about who they are. Is their heritage something to be proud of, or merely a footnote to set them apart?

Chavis understands that the questions are out there for the Lumbees as much as for any other tribe. The answers, she thinks, are found in the past—in a history of struggle and building for the future, and in the spiritual legacy that has been handed down. The challenge at the end of the twentieth century is to find new ways to keep that legacy alive.

Karl Hunt wants to do what he can. He understands the path Larry Demery chose—and those of other Lumbees gone astray. He has walked those roads himself on occasion—though not in the early stages of his life. Like Donna Chavis, he had a grandfather who showed him the way—a Baptist preacher named Alex Jacobs, who understood the tenets of the Christian faith but believed in the power of the old knowledge, too. There is a reverence Karl feels for the Lumbee community, the bonds of memory that have been handed down and that work like something in the DNA, holding the Lumbee people together. He never thought about it much as a child, never analyzed his feelings of attachment or the simple sensation of being at home. But as soon as he left, he could feel its absence—the starkness of a world that was unfamiliar and sometimes condescending and racist. Partly as a salve for his sudden confusion, his private uncertainty about who he was—and partly as a simple act of hedonism—he began to drink and dabble in drugs, and the problem got worse until the day he sold cocaine to a narc.

Beginning in 1988, he spent seven years in a federal prison. In a way, he was grateful for that opportunity, for the bittersweet chance at salvation that it offered. At first, it was merely a salvation from drugs, a chance to go straight, but in the end, it was more. Behind the cold, gray walls of the Butner penitentiary, he found himself reconnected to his past. It was a change that began when he saw another inmate working on a painting. Fascinated, Karl
KARL HUNT, LUMBEE ARTIST,
ROBESON COUNTY, NORTH CAROLINA, 1997
pulled out a pencil and began to doodle, and he found himself drawing the figure of a chief. "I was just messing around," he says, "but I started drawing, and it just came out."

Soon, he was painting a little every day, and most of his work had an Indian theme. He found a book with pictures of the great native leaders, including Geronimo and Sitting Bull, and he began to wonder about their lives. Geronimo had been in prison also—in places that had to seem alien and cold—and as he stared at the pages and tried to imagine what it must have been like, Karl reflected on his own struggles, too. He had been so eager at first to get away, to join the navy and try to see the world, but he had lost a part of himself on the way. He knew the time had come to get it back, and he knew also that his painting held the key. It carried him back to his grandfather’s time, to the sanity and perspective of his own native past, and as soon as his prison term was complete, he says, he knew what to do with his life.

He went back home. Almost immediately, he started working with the children, becoming one of many who were making that effort. He taught art classes at the North Carolina Indian Cultural Center, and he taught the old values on which he was raised. Identity, he says, is still at the heart of self-esteem, and he was pleased to discover that the young ones were curious—far more, he thought, than they had been in the past.

He knows the Lumbees’ identity is subtle—invisible to those who are not looking for it. But Karl can see the signs all around. They are there in the face of Lonnie Revels, a Lumbee farmer staring out at his fields at the age of ninety-one and asking God for one more season, one more chance to feel the dirt in his hands. They are present in the work of the Lumbee artists and the spiritual journey of Daystar Dial, and they are clear in the films of Malinda Maynor, a Lumbee producer whose work is focused on the place of her birth.

Maynor had never lived in Robeson County. Instead, she was raised in the city of Durham, where her father, Waltz Maynor, was a professor of math and her mother taught English at North Carolina Central University. But Waltz and Louise wanted their daughter to be born at home, which was the word they used for Robeson County, and when that was accomplished, they held the tiny baby in their arms and gave her a name. Malinda Morningstar, they called her, a confirmation of her Indian heart. They raised her to know she could go anywhere—to Harvard University, where she got her undergraduate degree, and then to Stanford for her master’s in film. But in the work that followed, she was drawn inevitably to Indian country, to the rich, flat fields of Robeson County, where the corn grows tall in the hot summer sun and her father owns land on the Lumbee River—a place for the family to come back home.

In her film Real Indian, she acknowledges that many people doubt her identity—even other
Indians she met in the West. But to Malinda, it is clear, and she is not alone in that. Daystar Dial, the Lumbee healer, is convinced that an attachment to a people and a place—tribal at its core—is getting stronger, not weaker, with the passage of time. She knows there are problems—the temptations of drugs and the rise in crime and the unfinished quest for federal recognition. But there is also a history on which they can draw and a core of new leaders to show them the way. She thinks they are living in an era of hope, when the century ahead seems to hold more promise than her Indian people have known in quite a while.