

What Inspires Thomas?

[Thomas Builds-the-Fire is a Spokane Indian living on the Spokane Indian Reservation.]

So Thomas went home and tried to write their first song. He sat alone in his house with his bass guitar and waited for the song. He waited and waited. It's nearly impossible to write a song with a bass guitar, but Thomas didn't know that.

He'd never written a song before.

"Please," Thomas prayed.

But the song would not come, so Thomas closed his eyes, tried to find a story with a soundtrack. He turned on the television and watched *The Sound of Music* on channel four. Julie Andrews put him to sleep for the sixtyseventh time, and neither story nor song came in his dreams. After he woke up, he paced around the room, stood on his porch, and listened to those faint voices that echoed all over the reservation. Everybody heard those voices, but nobody liked to talk about them. They were loudest at night, when Thomas tried to sleep, and he always thought they sounded like horses.

For hours, Thomas waited for the song. Then, hungry and tired, he opened his refrigerator for something to eat and discovered that he didn't have any food. So he closed the fridge and opened it again, but it was still empty. In a ceremony that he had practiced since his youth, he opened, closed, and opened the fridge again, expecting an immaculate conception of a jar of pickles. Thomas was hungry on a reservation where there are ninety-seven different ways to say fry bread.

[...]

As his growling stomach provided the rhythm, Thomas sat again with his bass guitar, wrote the first song, and called it

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