



Text Version of Audio Story: The Rain Dancer

Imagine, of all the places for this guy to show up — McAlisterville, Pennsylvania. He didn't talk like we did, didn't walk like we did, and for sure didn't look like we did; a long-haired hippy friend of Jesus, a one-with-nature kind of guy, Mother Earth and all that. He had ideas and ways that, to the people of our little town, just seemed weird. He built a solar panel and ate wild berries and weeds.

Some folks said he could talk to birds and animals. I don't know about that. But the strangest thing of all was that dance he did, in the rain. This strange long-haired hippy friend of Jesus ,, the rain dancer ... came to our little village for a purpose and, believe it or not, as the preacher of the highly conservative Lost Creek Presbyterian Church. It's true. And, as odd as he seemed, he in no time — with his easy-going, *aw shucks* kind of personality — ingratiated himself to the entire town. He didn't look anything like the gray-haired Lutheran minister or the all-dressed-in-black minister down the street at the Methodist Church. Yeah, he sure was likable.

No one called him reverend, pastor, preacher, nothing like that. He preferred his first name — Walt. But that dance he did, it made people wonder. He looked to be possessed by spirits dancing there in the yard of the Presbyterian parsonage every time it rained. Old ladies would peak out between the slats of their blinds and burn up the phone lines as they described every mysterious twist and turn to their friends on the other end. People would drive to town just to see it for themselves.

People agreed on two things about Walt. One, he was strange; two, they liked him anyhow. As most preachers go, Walt had a favorite mission. Walt was all about kids, and he was good at it, too. Walt soon became the go-to guy for any kid in McAlisterville who had a problem and needed someone to talk to. He drove the coolest old red van. If we wanted to go camping, we'd all pile into it and go. Roller skating, swimming, bowling — we'd all just pack into Walt's van, and he was kind enough to take us. It didn't matter to him what church you went to or even if you didn't go at all. Walt never excluded anyone. Walt never judged anyone either. That's what made him so easy to talk to.

No matter what we wanted to do, Walt was in the thick of it. He was sort of — well not sort of — he was a kid at heart. Walt is now retired and still lives there in that little town, well-woven into its fabric. He doesn't seem so weird anymore to people there. He's more of a fixture.

I really get a big kick out of talking about his rain dance. Walt was a guy way ahead of his time. Today, the rain dance Walt did all those years ago is the rage all over the globe. Many people have taken up the ancient martial art exercise of tai chi. Doing it in the rain was Walt's own little twist. It was reported to me sometime back that Walt had said to his wife he had really tried to make a difference in the lives of kids in McAlisterville. But, he didn't think he ever really had much impact. Well I'm here to tell you, Walt. On behalf of all 1970s kids from that little place, we're glad you showed up. Weird as you seemed, you made a huge difference. You were one of the very brightest spots of growing up in what — without you — would have been a much less interesting, if not boring, place. Thanks, Walt.

I'm the American Storyteller.