

CHICO BEAR ADVENTURES

THE AWAKENING

Mark Tomita and Vic Sbarbaro

North State Academic Press

Chico Bear Adventures: The Awakening
By Mark Tomita and Vic Sbarbaro (Editors)

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Printed in the United States of America.

ISBN 978-0-9820648-6-3

Library of Congress Control Number: 2009925942

Published by:

NORTH STATE ACADEMIC PRESS
Department of Health and Community Services
California State University, Chico
Chico, CA 95929-0505

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Chapter 1

How It All Started



Chico is a magical place where legend has it that ancient mythical creatures once inhabited the land before the great California Gold Rush in the mid-1800s. Most Californians have heard about many of the famous pioneers such as John Sutter, but one person in particular, John Bidwell, has long been forgotten outside of Chico. John Bidwell arrived in California in 1841. He founded the City of Chico (90 miles north of Sacramento in the heart of the Northern Sacramento Valley), and was a former California State Senator, US Congressman, US Presidential Candidate, and military general. While his many career achievements have been thoroughly

explored by historians, there is one part of his life that is still unexplained, even to this very day.

John had an immense devotion to the Native Indians and the Chinese living in California in the 1800s. This led to many instances of violence against him and his ranch, Rancho Chico, for protecting them. John Bidwell employed many Native Indians and Chinese, and tried to make a better life for them. The Chinese had come to California during the California Gold Rush, and settled in small camps of their own in gold mining towns, for they were not permitted to mingle with the white settlers. Why would a man, wealthy from the California Gold Rush, and famous for his public service, protect these groups of people who were viewed as animals by 19th century society? He had nothing to gain. Historians have never understood why John Bidwell went through great lengths to protect them, but now they will.

Pioneers and gold miners had tales of unexplained lights and unusual creatures wandering the land in Northern California. The forests of the Sierra Nevada Mountain Range all the way down to the vast Northern Sacramento Valley were filled with unidentified creatures before the settlers came looking for gold. In the outskirts of civilization where the Chinese immigrants lived in squalid conditions, there were stories about “heavenly creatures.” The Chinese believed the creatures far exceeded the might of dragons, and were led by a *Xi*

Wang Mu, and lived in the land of *Yao Chi*. Some Native Indian tribes called these creatures *Nûññē'hī*.

Today, Chico seems like any other college town in America, with a public university, shopping malls, movie theaters, schools, municipal parks, and the never-ending suburbs. Chico will never be the same from this day on, for the world will now know the truth about these mythical creatures, and Chico will be known as the *Home of Chico Bears*.

This is where our story begins once upon a time in Chico, California. There was a young California State University, Chico, health education professor named Dr. Ben Hamilton, who just moved to Chico. He is an All-American kind of guy, the “boy next door,” single, young, tall, good looking, and charming. He loves life, loves little children and animals, and rarely has a bad day. He lives in a house on Hooker Oak Avenue, just down the street from Sierra View Elementary School.

Ben grew up in a sheltered world, is an obedient son, and the perfect citizen. He even goes to bed at 10pm every night. He never did anything bad in his life, and has little excitement in his life other than watching a good movie. He is socially awkward, and doesn't drink, smoke, or take drugs. He doesn't listen to music other than quiet tunes without too many notes, with no drums, and preferably no guitars. Listening to American thrash metal music by *Exodus*® (exodusattack.com) is not even on his radar screen.

Ben is charming, though a little strange, and has an eclectic (this means strange) group of friends. Ben loves to eat at buffet restaurants in Chico, especially *Kwando*® and *Hometown Buffet*®. When old ladies meet Ben, they often say, “He’s a nice boy.”

One Saturday morning as Ben was working out in the yard with Kirby and Gracie, his pet Welsh Corgi dogs, he saw two very large almonds hanging on a tree in his backyard.

“Oh my!” said Ben. “What in the world could that be, Kirby?”

Kirby was surprised to see such large almonds, and he blinked his eyes, wondering what they were. He ran to Ben and stood at his side in case something bad happened, and began honking. His honking is something like a reverse sneeze for dogs, and Kirby does this when he is excited, upset, or when he has allergies. Gracie, on the other hand, ran up to the almonds, growled, and pretended she was in charge of the situation.

A word about Kirby and Gracie. Kirby is the “challenged” family pet. He is a red and white, not-so-bright, Pembroke Welsh Corgi dog. He is the same type of dog owned by Queen Elizabeth. When Kirby was a baby, Kirby’s mother did not want him. He kept chasing his mother for attention and food, but she used to bite him while trying to run away from him. He was the last of the litter chosen at the breeder’s, and no one wanted to bring him home. Ben wanted him, and brought him home from the

breeders. It took Kirby four months to learn his name. He pretends he is brave, strong, brilliant, and full of energy, but in reality, he possesses none of these traits. He has a good heart and means well, though. Kirby has medical problems, and must be on several medicines.

Kirby needs to be protected. Kirby likes to hang out of the window of a moving car, but must be held tightly or else he will fall out. He even falls out of bed, so Ben bought him a bedrail. Ben is protective of Kirby to prevent him from hurting himself, especially because he is clumsy and is often completely unaware of his surroundings. If he walks under a short table with a table cloth, for example, he may end up dragging the table cloth without knowing what he is doing.



In the park, other dogs instinctively know he is the “special kid on the block,” and try to ignore him or don’t take him seriously, even when he is annoying. Kirby hates puppies, but when he was their age, all of the dogs hated him because he was rambunctious. He also hates dogs smelling him. Some dogs pursue Kirby because he smells funny from his medicines.

Despite his shortcomings, many people love him. They love his giant head, vacant expression, short attention span, red fox-like appearance, albeit obese fox, pink triangular spot on this nose, wavy hair on his back, and his cute Corgi butt. People cannot resist petting his head, and for some reason, always must gently spank his butt several times.

Gracie is the other family pet. She is a smaller red and white Pembroke Welsh Corgi who is sassy, feisty, bold, brilliant, and energetic, and loves to boss around other dogs, especially boy dogs. She is bossy and in-your-face, but in the mornings and late night, she likes to cuddle, and acts like a baby with Ben. She does not like to be touched by other dogs or people unless it is on her terms.

By day, Gracie loves to chomp and squeak stuffed animals, but by night, she loves to snuggle with those same toys. She steals food, loves to chase bugs (she’ll spend all day chasing bugs in the back yard), prefers being outside than inside, and is an expert at catching treats in her mouth.

In the park, she loves to herd other dogs, especially large ones. When she runs, she looks like

a little wind-up toy unwinding, with her butt bouncing up and down. She has no interests in boy dogs other than to dominate them.

Over the next few weeks, Ben watched the almonds grow bigger and bigger. The almonds were growing much faster than any he had ever seen. They looked like they were ready to be harvested, but it was too early in the season. Ben's neighbor, Craig, who works in the nut industry, told him almonds should never grow larger than a golf ball, but the almonds hanging on Ben's tree were more the size of a basketball.

"Hmm, this is a mystery," thought Ben.

It was the day before the Fourth of July, and Ben and Kirby went in the backyard to see the two large almonds while Gracie slept. One almond was larger than the other. As they got near the tree, they noticed both almonds had fallen to the ground.

"Oh my goodness, Kirby, the almonds have fallen!" said Ben.

"We are going to have a feast tonight!" he said, as he dreamed about toasting and eating the two magnificent-sized almonds.

"Wait a minute, it's a little early for almonds to dry up and fall to the ground," as he thought out loud to himself.

"Hmm — oh well," said Ben, as he shrugged off the odd situation.

He carried both almonds back inside the house. The almonds were large and bulky, but did not weigh much. Kirby could not help because the

almonds were too heavy for him so he picked up a little rock in his mouth, pretending he was helping Ben, and carried it back to the house

Ben placed the two large almonds onto the kitchen table when he noticed that the almonds were partly split open. This was not unusual because the outer skin of almond fruits dry up, the skins split open, and the almond nut pops out and falls to the ground to be gathered by a farmer.

Gracie, hearing the activity in the kitchen, woke up from her nap, a little annoyed about being disturbed, and came to the kitchen. She insisted on Ben carrying her to a chair to watch. With Kirby and Gracie watching, Ben inserted his hands into the larger almond where the skin had split open. He pried open the almond skin with his bare hands. To his amazement, instead of seeing an almond nut inside, there was what looked like a teddy bear! There was a great flash of light with brilliant colors, radiating from the inner core of the almond, exiting the open kitchen window, and traveling toward the Sierra Nevada mountain range. There, the brilliant colored lights clashed with darker lights coming from within the mountain range.

Ben screamed, “Ahhhh!” and jumped backward in shock.

Kirby yelped, and ran under the couch in the living room, and began honking. It was his fastest speed ever! His little stubby legs weren’t accustomed to moving that fast. Gracie jumped on

the table and started attacking the almond skin. Ben had to tell her to stop.

After regaining his composure, Ben stepped closer to the almond, looked closely at the still-glowing bear, and noticed it was not moving, but the inner lining of the almond had a thin film of sparkling gold dust, as he shook some off of his hand. He walked up to the bear and petted it on the head, but it did not move. The bear was covered in the gold dust, where Ben will later learn this dust is special.

“It’s alright Kirby, it’s only a bear,” said Ben.

Kirby came out from under the couch, and tried to jump onto the dining table, but he was too short and too fat. Ben reached over and picked him up and placed him on the kitchen table for a better view. At first, Kirby growled at the bear because he was afraid. Gracie still had her mouth around one of the almond skins, gnawing on it as a snack. Kirby cautiously approached the bear and nudged it with his nose, but nothing happened.

“Kirby, Gracie,” as Ben whispered, “watch how beautiful the lights are when I open the other almond.”

Ben pried open the other almond skin, the same flash of light occurred, and in it there was another bear, although this one looked much smaller than the first. There was again a thin lining of gold dust surrounding the bear. Gracie was still gnawing the first almond, with a little smile on her face as if she was saying, “What? What are you looking at?”

By now, Ben was confused but excited.

“Where on Earth did these glowing bears come from?”

Kirby looked on with a pose as if he was solving this great mystery, a “Sherlock Kirby,” if you will.

Ben did not know how these bears got inside the almonds. He then remembered an old wise lady who might be able to help him. The town’s people called her, “Old Wise Muzza” (pronounced Mōō’ zah, a Russian name). No one knows her age, but rumors in Chico say she is over 200 years old, and is said to be a *Guardian of Pora*, who is something like a keeper of secrets of the universe. Rumor has it she was born in Russia, and served as an advisor to the Czar of Russia before coming to America. There are rumors she was a friend of the founders of Chico, John and Annie Bidwell. John Bidwell founded the city in 1853.

Ben grabbed both bears and rushed out of his home. Old Wise Muzza’s home is on Centerville Road. When he arrived, Old Wise Muzza came out of her home and waved hello to him (Ben had met her when he first moved to Chico). Old Wise Muzza’s servant, Norman, was busy working out in the yard raking leaves because he had not done a good job the previous week, and had to perform extra chores around the yard.

“Norman!” barked Old Wise Muzza, “I want all of the leaves raked this time.”

“Yes, ma’am,” said Norman, in a very timid voice.

Her neighbors, Mark and Donna, just watched Norman from their porch, shaking their heads and thinking, “That poor Norman...”

Ben hopped out of the car with his arm around the bears. Kirby and Gracie followed. Old Wise Muzza looked down at the bears and knew exactly what they were.

“Old Wise Muzza, please help me!” said Ben. “I found these bears in large almonds in the backyard, and there were great flashes of light.”

He explained to her how two large almonds were growing in his backyard, the almonds fell off the tree, and he found a bear in each.

“Do not be afraid of them, Professor Hamilton. I remember my grandmother in Russia telling me a story about Chico Bears,” she said.

“Come inside and I will explain it to you,” as she turned around, heading back to the house, while motioning him to follow her.

Her house looked like something out of a fairy tale, with a fireplace, dark and dingy wood panels, and wooden everything that looked very old. She had no electricity, cooked over the fireplace, and still used a lantern for lighting.

Kirby and Gracie wandered around the house, looking at all of the strange little creatures. Kirby kept trying to escape from being bitten by the creatures. Gracie, however, decided to make lunch out of several of them, as she burped.

As Ben sat quietly, she explained, “There is an old legend that a young man will come to Rancho

Chico and find two Chico Bears. He, and he alone, will have the power to give the Chico Bears life!”

“Rancho Chico?” asked Ben.

“Rancho Chico is the old name that was given to Chico by the pioneers,” replied Old Wise Muzza. “There were native people who once lived on Rancho Chico.”

“What must I do?” asked Ben.

“You must make a *Centaurea Potion*, and feed the Chico Bears the potion. The potion must be carefully made with:

- 1 cup of magical water from under the Honey Run Covered Bridge*
- 1 pinch of magical dust from Upper Bidwell Park*
- 1 pinch of gold dust from inside of the Chico Bear Almonds*
- 1 pinch Cherokee Gold Dust*
- 2 ounces of crushed Magalia Rose Quartz*
- 5 yellow starthistle thorns*
- 5 yellow starthistle flower petals*
- 1 fish scale from a migrating female salmon from the Feather River*
- 4 California poppy petals picked along the Big Chico Creek*
- 1 yellow feather plucked from the left wing of a Maidu honeycreeper*
- 2 red hairs*

“After you mix the potion, feed the Chico Bears, and then dip them into the Big Chico Creek. You must recite the ancient words:

*In the heart of the Sacramento Valley in Rancho Chico,
From the sacred waters of the Sierra Nevada,
Let us give life to this Native Son,
Let us give breath to this Chico Bear,
As its ancestors were brought into this land,
To bring harmony in nature and joy to the human race.”*

“But you must dip the Chico Bears into the creek right where Chico State is now located,” she cautioned.

“There is a large cement bridge right in front of Butte Hall,” she continued. “You must climb down to the creek and dip them there before sundown, or else you will never be able to give them life. When they come alive, you will see them as they really are, Chico Bears. But others will see them only as little children. Only people who have the power to give Chico Bears life will be able to see them for what they really are.”

“Why dip them there?” asked Ben.

“Legend says that John Bidwell also found a Chico Bear at that very spot, and brought the Chico Bear to life,” explained Old Wise Muzza.

There are great and unexplainable forces in the creek at that spot. John and Annie Bidwell’s old mansion is not far from there.

“The water from the Big Chico Creek is sacred, and comes from deep inside the Sierra Nevada

Mountain Range. No one really knows where the water comes from,” said Old Wise Muzza. “John Bidwell brought to life a Chico Bear, and it still lives in the Bidwell Mansion to this very day. No one can see it, but it is there!” as she spoke softly, as if she was telling a great secret.

With that explanation, Ben said, “Oh, thank you, thank you, thank you,” and kept repeating himself as he raced away.

All the while, he kept thinking how wonderful it would be to have two children in the house. He traveled to Oroville, Marysville, Yuba City, Willows, Orland, Hamilton City, Paradise, Magalia, and finally back to Chico, gathering the ingredients for the potion.

Back at his home, Ben mixed the ingredients for the Centaurea Potion in a large mixing bowl. The potion did not look appetizing, and it began to smoke as Ben carefully added each ingredient.

The final ingredient was the two red hairs. Ben reached down and plucked one red hair from Kirby and one from Gracie. He added them to the potion.

At this point, the potion began to bubble and take on a beautiful glow for a moment, and then the glow was extinguished, and the potion was now ready to be fed to the Chico Bears.

Ben was about to feed it to the Chico Bears when his neighbor Jen walked in. Jen is the nice woman who lives next door to Ben. She has a ranchette (small ranch) with three horses, twelve chickens, six ducks, four dogs, and ten cats. Kirby and Gracie

often hang out at Jen's until they wear out their welcome. They LOVE Jen.

Jen has bushy blond hair and always dresses in black clothes. She wears black blouses with black leggings. Leggings look like tights that gymnasts wear, but the leg end is looped around the foot. Jen's first name is Roberta, but she doesn't go by that name. She goes by the name Jen, a shortened version of her middle name.

Ben explained to Jen, who wasn't listening anyway, that he had to feed the potion to the Chico Bears he found in the backyard.

Meanwhile, Kirby sipped the potion when Ben was talking to Jen. He made gaseous, bodily noises, glowed, and transformed into funny shapes and back to his old self.

"Whoa!" said Kirby.

Back to the task, Ben fed the Chico Bears the Centaurea Potion, his hands trembling with excitement, while Jen chattered about something (Ben wasn't listening).

Ben picked up both Chico Bears in one arm, with Kirby and Gracie following, and said as he raced out the door, "Jen, I have to go Chico State. I'll be right back."

But Jen was still chattering, and did not realize he had left. Ben knew exactly where to go because he worked on the sixth floor of Butte Hall.

Ben ran across the Chico State campus and found the bridge. The sun was setting, and he hurried down below the bridge. The water was very shallow

since it was summer, for it doesn't rain in the summer months in Chico. A large salmon swam by as he was entering the water.

The kids from Chico State's *Camp Adventure*, a summer day camp program, earlier that afternoon had been tubing in the creek from Bidwell Mansion to the bridge, so the creek bank was a little slick with mud.

Ben dipped both Chico Bears into the creek while reciting the ancient words:

*In the heart of the Sacramento Valley in Rancho Chico,
From the sacred waters of the Sierra Nevada,
Let us give life to this Native Son,
Let us give breath to this Chico Bear,
As its ancestors were brought into this land,
To bring harmony in nature and joy to the human race.*

As he dipped the Chico Bears into the water, the glow around the Chico Bears began to grow dim. Ben waited. Nothing happened. He dipped them again, and they did not move. It was now sundown, and the glow around the Chico Bears were extinguished.

Ben began sobbing and said, "Oh no! What have I done! I failed my Chico Bears and now they will never live!"

Kirby and Gracie were also sad. Ben pulled himself out of the creek and drove home. All the while, he said nothing, holding the bears in his lap as if he was protecting them. Kirby, who normally

begs to sit in Ben's lap and hang out the window, quietly sat in the passenger's seat.

At home, Ben gave the lifeless Chico Bears a bath, dried them off with a large fluffy towel, dressed them in SpongeBob SquarePants® pajamas, and tucked them in bed in the guest bedroom. His life and dreams were shattered.

"I know you boys are really tired, so I'll put you to bed. I love you," said Ben, as he kissed them on their foreheads good night, and turned off the bedroom lights.

Kirby and Gracie watched as Ben pretended the Chico Bears were alive. Ben, Kirby, and Gracie went to sleep that night without saying another word.

The next morning, the Fourth of July, Ben woke up because Kirby was jumping up and down on his chest, trying to wake him up.

"Kirby, go away, I'm sleeping late this morning," Ben said. "It's the Fourth of July."

But Kirby wouldn't let him go back to sleep. Ben finally sat up and opened his eyes. Standing at the foot of his bed were the two Chico Bears alive! They were alive on the Fourth of July!

Little did Ben know that at sunrise on the Fourth of July, the sun began to shine into the bedroom window. As the sun's rays touched the Chico Bears, the bears began to glow, and their bodies began to stir, first in their fingers, toes, arms, legs, and then their heads. You could see something was stirring within them, and they began to grow in size as more

and more of the sun touched their bodies. Their eyes began to open, a little baby yawn from each of their little mouths, and they rubbed their eyes gently, turned their heads, and looked at each other. The glow was still there. At that moment, they both smiled and hugged each other without saying a word. They knew from that moment they were Chico Bears.

“Hella-sweet,” said the smaller Chico Bear.

While this was all happening, Kirby, the biggest “sleepy head” in the world, was asleep on the boys’ bed. Gracie was sleeping in Ben’s room. Kirby did not wake up until he felt something touch him. The Chico Bears looked at Kirby, a funny-shaped and odd looking thing with a long body, red hair, big head, no tail, and short legs, outstretched between them, taking up much of the bed as if it was his bed.

Both boys touched Kirby’s butt, since he was facing in the opposite direction in bed. Their combined touch flashed through Kirby and transformed him into a cartoon-like character. Kirby felt their little hands on his butt, his eyes bugged out of his eye sockets, screamed, and pounced in the air, hitting the ceiling! When he landed back on the bed, he was lying on his back with a terrified look on his face, honking because he was upset, and eyes bugged out of his head. All four feet were sticking straight up in the air. He turned his head and looked into the eyes of the larger Chico Bear. While looking into the eyes of the Chico Bear, something came over him, and he understood what the Chico

Bear was saying to him. He instinctively knew who they were, but was confused about his ability to shift from mortal to non-mortal states and back.

Kirby went up to the Chico Bears, and they gently rubbed their faces against his. They both hugged Kirby.

“You’re such a good doggie,” said the larger Chico Bear, even though Kirby is often not a good boy. Kirby then jumped off the bed and told the Chico Bears that they had to wake up Ben.

Ben quickly jumped out of bed and hugged both of the boys with great joy.

The smaller Chico Bear spoke and said, “Daddy, I’m hungry.”

Ben began to laugh out loud and said, “Yes! Let’s all eat breakfast! We’re going to Bidwell Park to eat pancakes and celebrate your birthdays!”

“Boys, what are your names?” asked Ben.

“I’m Matthew,” said the bigger Chico Bear.

“I’m Andrew,” said the smaller Chico Bear.

“Okay, Matthew and Andrew it is! I’m Dad, and this is Kirby and Gracie,” said Ben, as he pointed to the Corgis.

From then on, Ben would be known as Dad. Matthew reached down and petted Gracie, and the same transformation took place with Gracie as it did with Kirby. Gracie, of course, was not amused that a boy touched her without her permission and on her terms, even if he was a Chico Bear.

“Dad, where will we live?” asked Matthew.

“You will live here in Chico with me. You and Andrew will share a bedroom.”

Ben took Matthew and Andrew into the bedroom and got them dressed. He had bought clothes yesterday as he raced around gathering the ingredients for the potion. The clothes fit the boys perfectly (don't ask how he knew their exact sizes). He also bought the boys Chico State baseball caps.

“You boys look so handsome in your outfits!” said Ben, as he placed the baseball caps on their heads.

The boys smiled and adjusted their caps. Andrew reversed the cap, and pretended he was a rap artist, but after a slap in the head from Matthew, he returned the cap to the proper position.

Just then, Jen knocked on the kitchen door and walked into the house with her shaggy dog named Mike, who had long dreadlocks. Jen's two heavy metal teenage cousins, Elias and Kiran, followed Mike. Elias attends Chico High School and Kiran attends Chico Junior High School. Elias has pink hair and a nose ring. Kiran has green hair, and is wearing a Hawaiian shirt with a sarong (people in India wear this colorful cloth wrapped around the waist). Elias was carrying his obese cat named Milo, who sleeps in a cardboard box once used to ship Florida oranges.

“Hi! Anyone home?” called Jen.

“We're in the bedroom,” answered Ben.

Jen came into the bedroom and was surprised to see two handsome little boys in the room.

“Are these your boys?” asked Jen.

“Yes, this is Matthew and Andrew,” said Ben, as he pointed to each of the boys.

Jen said hello to each of the boys. Her cousins, being heavy metal persons, just stared in space, while head banging (nodding their heads back and forth) and listening to music on their iPods®. Jen saw just two little boys, with no glow around them, and could not see that they were really Chico Bears. Elias had set Milo on the floor. Milo approached the boys, purred, and wanted to be touched by them. Mike, Jen’s dog, also came into the room and went up to the boys to be petted.

“These crazy animals sure like you two boys! Maybe you’ll baby sit them sometime when we’re away,” said Jen.

“Yes, we would love to take care of them,” replied Andrew.

“We’re going to the Fourth of July Pancake Breakfast at the One Mile picnic area in Bidwell Park. Would you like to come along?” asked Ben, as he looked at his watch and it was already 7:30am. “There will be music by the Chico Community Band, Boy Scouts Dunking Booth, pie eating contests, petting zoo, bouncy house, games, shaved ice, and all sorts of other fun things to do!”



“Thank you, but I have to get home to watch my morning program on television and eat bagels topped with marshmallows,” replied Jen. “My Uncle Morty and Aunt Bea are coming to visit me for lunch, and they are bringing my cousins Barry, Bobby, and Debby. Uncle Morty loves eating Hostess Cupcakes®.”

Ben wondered what on Earth was Jen talking about.

Jen skipped out the door with Mike, followed by Elias and Kiran doing heavy metals things.

“Hmmm...,” wondered Ben to himself.

No sooner did Jen leave, Dr. Steve Buffet, a new criminal justice professor at Chico State, who just moved in across the street, knocked on the front door and walked in. Oddly enough, Dr. Buffet loves to eat at all-you-can-eat Chinese buffet restaurants. In fact, it was he who turned Ben on to Kwando® (all-you-can-eat) Chinese buffet restaurant on

Mangrove Avenue next to Safeway®, and Hometown Buffet®, right next to Petco®. Dr. Buffet is a genius at saving money at buffets. The dinner menu is set out at 4pm, but he goes to the restaurant at 3:30pm, pays the lunch price, starts eating, and when the dinner menu is set out at 4pm, he helps himself to the upscale food.

“Hey Ben! Oh, are these your boys?” asked Dr. Buffet.

“Yes, this is Matthew and Andrew,” as he pointed to each boy.

“Oh, I didn’t know you had children. Hi boys!” said Dr. Buffet. The boys said hi. He continued, “Hey Ben, I was wondering if you could give me a hand. I want to move the dining room table.”

The professor is a dwarf or little person, and the table was much too big for him to move himself.

“Sure,” Ben replied, “Come on boys, let’s go and help Dr. Buffet with his table.”

The boys eagerly followed the men out the door and across the street. The boys looked around at their very curious surroundings. Andrew, being a touchy type of boy, put his arm around the professor because they were about the same height, and he acted as if they were best friends.

Once inside, they noticed the professor’s house was dimly lit. There was only one light bulb in each room, but none were turned on. There was no air conditioner, even though the temperature outside was already over 85°F.

“Oh, did your electricity go off?” asked Ben.

“Oh no, I never turn on a light unless I absolutely have to,” replied Dr. Buffet. “And when I do, its only one light bulb at a time, and the bulb is no larger than 30 watts. I like saving energy and money. I even turned off the gas to my water heater. The pilot light heats up the water just enough for me to take a shower in the morning.”

“You’re a real master at saving energy and money!” said Ben.

“Yes,” replied Dr. Buffet, “even my mother thinks I’m a master at saving energy.”

Just then, a sleepy dog walked into the room. It was Dr. Buffet’s dog named “Smoothie.”

“Oh, this is Smoothie, she is always sleeping. I LOVE dogs, and she is my baby.”

Smoothie immediately went to Matthew and Andrew to be petted.

“She sure is friendly,” said Ben.

Dr. Buffet kneeled down on the floor, motioned to Smoothie with his arms open, and said, “Come here sweetheart. Give Daddy some sugar,” as Smoothie playfully embraced the professor and licked his face.

They all went into the dining room to help move the table. Matthew and Dr. Buffet were on one side, and Ben and Andrew were on the other. At first, the table was very heavy, and they could not move it. But suddenly, the table felt fairly light, and it was a breeze to move the table across the room. The men both prided themselves with being “in shape” and athletic.

Matthew walked over to Andrew and said, “Andrew, you shouldn’t have done that,” while giving Andrew ‘the look.’

“But it was harmless,” replied Andrew, “and besides, that table was very heavy.”

As they were leaving Dr. Buffet’s home, he asked Ben, “Hey Ben, I’m getting together with my girlfriend and others for a political fundraiser today. We’re raising money to help feminists in Northern California. We’re hooking up with other liberal Democrats for a Fourth of July rally.”

“Sorry Steve,” replied Ben, “we already have plans to go to go to the Fourth of July celebration.”

“I forgot about that, no problem, have fun at the park!” as Dr. Buffet thanked them again and waved goodbye.

Ben and the boys were off to Bidwell Park to enjoy the Fourth of July celebrations.

Chapter 2

Visiting Old Wise Muzza



A week went by, and it was now time for the boys to meet Old Wise Muzza. It was the least Ben could do to thank her for her help in bringing the boys to life.

The boys were outside kicking around a soccer ball with Jason and Aaron. One of the boys from the neighborhood, Jason, was showing them how to play soccer. Jason played on the Chinese soccer team in the Beijing Olympics, and is definitely a “lady’s man.” He is rarely ever seen without two or three girls swooning around him. He is tall, muscular, and very athletic, and currently attending Butte-Glenn Community College. His parents moved to Chico for business from Xi’an (*shee ahn'*),

the same city in China where the terra cotta warriors were unearthed). They are international buyers of walnuts and almonds.

Aaron is the other neighborhood boy, same age as Matthew, who lives around the block. His mother is a gynecologist in Chico, and a friend of Ben's.

"Boys, let's go visit Old Wise Muzza," hollered Ben. "Change into something not so sweaty, and brush your teeth."

"Who's Muzza?" asked Matthew.

"She is a very old wise lady from Russia who told me how to bring you boys to life," replied Ben. "We must go and thank her for this blessing."

Instead of taking the freeway, Ben decided to go to Old Wise Muzza's home the long way by taking Manzanita Road to Bruce Road to the Skyway. From there, they turned left onto Honey Run Road. All the while, of course, Kirby was hanging out of the car window. The Honey Run Covered Bridge is about four miles from the Skyway, and then the road splits in two; the left fork is Centerville Road, and the right fork continues on Honey Run Road. Old Wise Muzza lives on Centerville Road past the old Colman Museum and cemetery.

Ben decided to stop at the Honey Run Covered Bridge to show the boys the only three-level covered bridge remaining in the USA, and he wanted to get a photograph with the boys in front of it.

As they got out of the car, the boys began having visions from the 1800s of Chico Bears living in Butte Creek Canyon, and fighting off a predator, but

the visions were too hazy for them to see. They touched the bridge, and the visions became clearer, where the Evil One had launched an all-out attack against Chico Bears. Thousands were slaughtered. Matthew and Andrew both staggered a little from the horror, while Ben was oblivious to what they had seen.

“Boys, watch your step, it’s a little slippery out here,” said Ben.

As Ben and the boys continued their journey, they stopped off at the Colman Museum where there is also a one-room school house still standing from the Pioneer Days. They browsed the artifacts, seeing many Chico Bears in the old photos and having flashbacks to those days.

They also stood on the Centerville Bridge where Ben showed the boys where beautiful trees once stood, but now were all cut down for luxury housing. A trip to the cemetery across the street continued visions for the boys back to the Pioneer Days.

When they finally arrived at Old Wise Muzza’s home, she came out to greet them, steadying herself on her staff. Her servant Norman was again working extra time in the yard because he didn’t do a good job the day before.

As Ben and the boys pulled up to the home, the boys stared intensely at Old Wise Muzza and then at each other, and there was a flickering of the glow around them.

Just then, a car passed by Old Wise Muzza's home with a car load of teenage kids who lived down the street. She just waved at them.

"Those teenage kids are such sweet little things," she said. "That was James, Gail, Kate, David, Judy, and Andrew. They live down the road a little ways near Quail Run Road. I don't know how they all fit in that little car!" she said, as she laughed.

Ben, the boys, and the Corgis hopped out of the car. Old Wise Muzza took one look at the boys and she had a great big smile on her face.

"Welcome to my home, Chico Bears!" said Old Wise Muzza, and she gave the boys unsteady pats on the backs.

You see, Old Wise Muzza could somehow see them for what they really were, but Ben never questioned why she was able to see them. The boys were respectful and friendly, but guarded.

Ben thanked her again for giving him such a great gift. Never in his wildest dreams would he have imagined being blessed with children. Old Wise Muzza invited them into the house to have a sip of fresh squeezed orange juice. It was really hot outside. Chico is known to be very hot in the summer months, with temperatures often boiling over 110°F. As they stepped into the house, the temperature suddenly dropped, and it was quite comfortable.

"This is hella-sweet," said Andrew.

“Yes, this is, and Andrew, we don’t say *hell*,” said Ben, wondering why it was so cool in the house when there was no air conditioner.

“Norman, please serve us a glass of ice cold orange juice,” said Old Wise Muzza.

“Yes ma’am,” said Servant Norman, as he served everyone juice.

“So, tell me boys, what do you both think about your new life?” asked Old Wise Muzza.

The boys paused for a moment and Matthew replied, “We love it!” and they all laughed. The boys thanked her for telling Ben how to bring them to life.

Then Andrew said, “Uh oh,” with a funny look on his face.

“Uh oh, Dad,” said Matthew, but Ben and Old Wise Muzza did not know what was wrong.

Matthew and Andrew both leaped forward and held onto Ben, who didn’t know what was happening.

“What’s the matter boys?” asked Ben.

Just then, the ground began to shake, and the juice in the glasses swayed side to side, bounced a little, almost spilling onto the table, and then the shaking suddenly stopped. It was an earthquake!

Ben thought the whole situation was very odd that the boys knew that an earthquake was about to happen. Old Wise Muzza just looked at the boys, shaking her head as if she understood their magical powers.

“Boys, don’t be afraid, it was just an earthquake,” said Ben. He comforted the boys, telling them everything would be okay. When the shaking stopped, Matthew and Andrew both let go of Ben.

“Are you still afraid?” asked Ben.

“I wasn’t afraid,” replied Andrew. Matthew also said he wasn’t afraid.

Ben just smiled and said okay. He thought Matthew and Andrew were cute by pretending they weren’t scared. Little did Ben know, however, that Chico Bears know when earthquakes are about to begin. The boys held onto Ben to protect him. They weren’t afraid, they were protecting him!

Old Wise Muzza then said to Ben and the boys, “There are more Chico Bears, you know. It is believed Chico Bears came into this world from the Sierra Nevada Mountain Range. No one knows how they got there, but the native people first discovered them along the banks of the sacred Big Chico Creek in Rancho Chico. The native people hid them from the settlers because they were afraid the settlers would hurt them. It was not until General John Bidwell in 1853 found a Chico Bear along the banks of the Big Chico Creek that the native people felt they no longer had to hide the Chico Bears and protect them. Bidwell found a Chico Bear near his mansion, brought it to life, and cared for and loved it. But they did not know that the Chico Bears, even though adopted by loving families, had to return home one day. When their adoptive parents died,

they became spirits, invisible to mortals, and the spirits had to be returned to Chico to merge with their brethren. The Chico Bear spirit still lives in the Bidwell Mansion because the Chico Bears spirits have not returned home to the land of their birth.”

Ben and the boys listened intensely and said nothing.

Kirby, of course, was again snooping around the house and coming across the same odd looking creatures who all snapped at him the last time he was here. One even bit Kirby on his butt, causing him to turn around and make a cartoonish head to scare it. Gracie, of course, again helped herself to lunch. The creatures scattered in panic, and screamed with terror, when they saw Gracie coming.

Old Wise Muzza walked over to a beautiful, but old looking wooden chest and opened it. She picked up a brownish and weathered scroll made of leather. The edges of the scroll were torn in several places. She then unfurled the scroll, and began reading it:

“One day, a young man will come to Rancho Chico, and he will bring to life two Chico Bears. He and the two Chico Bears must find all of the Chico Bears who have not returned home. Their spirits will be joined through the *Chico Immortalis*.... [*the words on the scroll are smudged and can't be read*]. When the last Chico Bear is found, their spirits from all over the world will then return to Rancho Chico, ... [*the words on the scroll are*

smudged and can't be read] ...and will then be freed! Beware of the Evil One [*the words on the scroll are smudged and can't be read*]. Their days are numbered when the *Chico Borealis* returns to Rancho Chico. The *Borealis* possesses the awesome destructive power to send the Evil One and the dark forces back to hell. When all of the spirits have returned home, [*the words on the scroll are smudged and can't be read*].

Old Wise Muzza rolled up the scroll and placed it back into the wooden chest. She shut the lid, and returned to her seat. All the while, Ben and the boys just sat quietly. Ben concluded that their purpose in life was to find all of the Chico Bears who were sent away from Rancho Chico many years ago, but were not brought back to the place of their birth. They must now find all of them living throughout world, and one day, their spirits will return to Chico and be freed.

Ben thought to himself, "Matthew and Andrew must be the Chosen Chico Bears, or *Chico Immortalis*, and they must free the others."

"You must go now, find all of the Chico Bears, and bring their spirits home to Chico, but the scroll warns to beware," said Old Wise Muzza.

"Beware of what?" asked Ben.

"I cannot tell you, but I will say beware of the dark forces," as Old Wise Muzza had a worried look on her face while staring at Andrew, and while

Andrew stared back at her. Ben looked puzzled and didn't know what to make of her warning.

"We'll be careful," said Ben. "I'll protect the boys!"

With that said, Ben and the boys thanked Old Wise Muzza for all that she had done for them.

They were now on a journey, an Adventure. They could not fail, or else the Chico Bear spirits all over the world won't be able to return to Chico, the land of their birth.

Chapter 3

A Visit to Bidwell Mansion



One morning after a couple of weeks of settling in, Ben was cooking breakfast, and he called to Matthew and Andrew to wake up.

“Wake up sleepy heads!” said Ben.

He went to their bedroom, and both boys just made a whining sound and didn’t want to wake up. There were little birds chirping on their window sill, singing to them to wake up.

“Wake up sleepy head!” repeated Ben, as he poked Andrew’s stomach with his finger to tickle him.

“Ahhhhh,” screamed Andrew. Ben also tickled Matthew to wake up.

“Kirby, what are you doing in their bed?!” asked Ben.

Kirby was also still sleeping under the covers in between the boys, pretending he was one of them.

Without answering or opening his eyes, Kirby nonchalantly began sliding off the pillow under the covers to hide from Ben.

“Okay, come on, let’s eat breakfast!” hollered Ben.

All of the sleepy heads finally got out of bed, their hair all messy and eyes half shut. With pajama bottoms falling down on the boys, and Kirby barely crawling, they all managed to get to the dining table.

“What are we having for breakfast this morning?” asked Matthew.

“We’re having waffles with your favorite Chico Bear Honey!” said Ben.

“Yay!” squealed the boys, as they sat down at the table to eat.

Andrew decided to top his waffle with peanut butter, sliced banana, Chico Bear Honey, and a little whipped cream.



Matthew topped his waffle with blueberries, sliced strawberries, Chico Bear Honey, and a lot of whipped cream.

Ben, being a public health educator and trying to be health conscious, topped his waffles with blueberries and strawberries, and nothing else, a little boring for the boys.

Kirby and Gracie both received a small piece of waffle with a dribble or two of Chico Bear Honey, with both of them making an unhappy face because they both wanted “the works.”

“What are we doing today?” asked Andrew, as Ben was cleaning up the dishes.

“Well, we’re going to the Bidwell Mansion,” answered Ben, as he looked at Kirby and said, “Sorry Kirbmeister, we can’t take you to the mansion. Pets are not allowed.”

But Kirby really wanted to go, so while Ben was distracted with cleaning up the breakfast dishes, Kirby tried squeezing into Matthew’s backpack; he sat in it, stuck his head in it, and tossed it around. He was too fat to fit, so Andrew showed Kirby how to become smaller to fit in the backpack, transforming into a dog with a very little body and a somewhat normal-sized head. Kirby had trouble holding up such a large head with a little body, and he looked like a bobble head.

“Kirby, shhh. Don’t make a sound,” said Andrew, as he zipped up the backpack, two bad boys into mischief.

When they were about to leave, Ben picked up Matthew's backpack from the kitchen table and tossed it in the back seat of the car. He didn't suspect a thing.

Gracie, in the meantime, was busy chasing flies near the horse pen at Jen's place. She did not care that Ben and the boys were leaving. Gracie perfected the technique of changing her tongue into a very long chameleon's tongue, and snapping up bugs left and right.

On the way to the Bidwell Mansion, Ben explained to the boys that the mansion was once owned by John and Annie Bidwell. He explained the legend of the Bidwell Mansion, and told them Old Wise Muzza believed that a Chico Bear was brought to life by John Bidwell. He continued by saying that the Chico Bear still lives in the mansion, very lonely for friends. The boys were excited that they would meet another Chico Bear just like themselves.

Kirby, ever the mischief maker and having been given new abilities by the boys to change his body, was distracting them by poking his head in and out of the backpack. The first time, he poked his head out as a snake, the second time as a butt, the third time as President Obama, and the last time as the *Governator*, saying, "I'll be back."

Matthew and Andrew were giggling, and Andrew kept pushing Kirby's head back into the pack.

"Kirby, stop that, Dad will find out," whispered Andrew.

When they arrived at Bidwell Mansion, they could see that there was a group of people ready to take a tour of the mansion. They all went inside the Visitor's Center and bought tickets for the mansion tour.

"Dad, do we need money to tour the mansion?" asked Matthew.

"Yes, let's see, four dollars for adults and two dollars for children so that's eight dollars," said Ben, as he paid the woman at the counter.

"Where does that money go?" asked Andrew.

"Well, I think the money is used to take care of the mansion, but I don't think its enough. People donate money privately," replied Ben.

"Oh," said Andrew.

As they waited for the next tour, they browsed the displays with pioneer-day photos. In the photos, Ben and the boys could see dozens of Chico Bears of all ages.

"Okay, the next tour's starting, so everyone meet at the front steps of the mansion," announced the park ranger.

"Come on boys, let's get in line for the tour," said Ben, as they stood under the large magnolia tree planted by John Bidwell over one hundred years ago.

The boys stood in line, and none of the people there could see them as they really were, Chico Bears. The people just saw two boys.

While waiting, Andrew kept picking up leaves from the ground, and tickling Matthew's ear with it

from behind him, and then quickly hiding the leaf, whistling, and looking away from Matthew as he was not aware of what was happening. Matthew suspected Andrew, but couldn't catch him in the act.

"What? Why are you looking at me?" asked Andrew, as Matthew looked and smiled at Andrew.

"Andrew, I think you're the one who is tickling my ear," replied Matthew.

Andrew began giggling, and Matthew began insisting that Andrew tell him whether he was the person who was tickling him.

All the while, Ben was distracted by a beautiful young woman who glanced at him for a second and smiled. He quickly combed his hair and popped a mint in his mouth, thinking maybe she was interested in him. A young, single professor in Chico, you know, is a "good catch."

"Is this where we stand in line for the mansion tour?" asked the beautiful woman.

"Yes," replied Ben, as he choked on his mint. He couldn't believe this woman was talking to him.

"Hi, I'm Ana. I just moved to town," she said.

"Hi, I'm, I'm," as Ben tried to remember his name. "I'm Ben. I'm a professor at Chico State," thinking he could impress her with his title.

"You're a professor? You look awfully young," said Ana.

"Oh, I just graduated from New York University, and this is my first teaching job," replied Ben, as he searched his brain looking for something else to say to impress her.

“So, you’re a doctor?” asked Ana.

“Well, a PhD type of doctor. I don’t cut up people or anything,” replied Ben, with a nervous laughter, making a cutting motion as if he was performing surgery, and who, by now, wanted to kick himself for saying such lame things.

“Well, Doctor Ben, it’s nice to meet you,” said Ana.

The boys’ play snapped Ben out of his fascination with Ana.

“Boys, stop playing in the line. People will get annoyed with us,” admonished Ben.

Both boys kept giggling, looking at each other, and watching Ben in the awkward social encounter with a woman. Kirby, in the meantime, was peering out of a hole in the backpack, watching everything.

“Oh, are these your boys?” asked Ana, as she wondered how the boys could be Ben’s sons, and thinking, “Hmm, he must have been 16 when the oldest boy was born.”

“Oh, uh, yes, this is Matthew and this is Andrew,” said Ben, as he pointed to each of the boys. “I started young. I was a real man, yep, couldn’t wait,” Ben babbled, as he flexed his muscles, adjusted his pants as if he was a stud, chattered, and laughed nervously.

Ana just smiled, and began talking to another person in line, relieved of talking to a single guy with children. Ben was also relieved to end the awkward encounter with the beautiful, mysterious woman.

“Dad has a girl friend!” teased Andrew, as he whispered to Matthew.

“I heard that!” said Ben, as the boys giggled.

As they approached the front steps of the mansion, Matthew’s and Andrew’s facial expressions changed, their eyes got a little smaller, and they looked like they were in a trance. They began to glow.

“There is a Chico Bear inside,” said Matthew, as he looked at Andrew, and they both shook their heads in agreement while staring intensely at the mansion window.

“Of course there is a Chico Bear inside. Remember, I just told you in the car,” said Ben.

“No Dad, Andrew and I can feel it in here,” Matthew replied, as he pointed to his heart.

“Oh, I didn’t know you could feel other Chico Bears,” said Ben, as he then noticed the boys were glowing more than usual.

As they entered the mansion, the park ranger began telling them about how John and Annie Bidwell came to Chico, but said nothing about Chico Bears. You see, the park rangers could not see the Chico Bear living in the mansion.

The park ranger took them throughout the first floor of the mansion. Suddenly, as Matthew and Andrew stood in the dining room, they sensed that the Chico Bear was nearby, and there appeared a brighter glow around each boy. Out of the corner of Andrew’s eyes, he saw something peeking around the corner near the staircase.

Andrew turned and looked to his left. His eyes got very big and his mouth got wider, as he grabbed Matthew's arm. Kirby stuck his head out of the backpack and saw something. His eyes became very big, with his mouth hung open in an undignified pose.

"What is it, Andrew?" asked Matthew, as he turned around to see what Andrew wanted.

Andrew pointed toward the staircase. As Matthew turned around to look toward the staircase, a big smile overtook his face, and he saw it too. It was a *girl* Chico Bear! She was dressed in a beautiful Victorian gown, with lace and embroidery, and was glowing just as the boys were.

"Dad, it's the Chico Bear!" said Matthew, as he tugged at Ben's shirt.

Ben turned around with his eyes opened wide, and he saw her too! At the same time, Ben also noticed Kirby's head peeking out from Matthew's backpack, and remembered he had just told Kirby he couldn't come on the tour because pets were not allowed in the mansion.

Kirby realized that Ben was looking right at him, and he quickly pulled his head back into the backpack, but it was too late. He was busted! Ben didn't say anything, but just by his look, Kirby knew he was in trouble.

Kirby mumbled something to himself, wondering if Ben was still out there. He popped his head out of the backpack thinking Ben was no longer looking,

but he was still looking at him! He quickly pulled his head into the backpack.

As the tour group walked up the staircase to tour the upper floor of the mansion, Ben, the boys, and Kirby stayed behind. No adults in the tour group or the park ranger noticed, but a little girl kept staring in the direction of where the girl Chico Bear was standing.

They stood together, with Andrew holding Ben's hand, and stared at the girl Chico Bear. The girl Chico Bear just stood there looking at them with a big smile. She was over 150 years old, but she looked like an 11-year-old girl, the same age as Matthew.

Ben broke the silence and said, "Hi! I'm Dr. Ben Hamilton, and these are my boys, Matthew and Andrew, and the other somebody named Kirby is hiding in the backpack!"

Kirby was busted, so he popped his head out of the backpack, and he had a sheepish grin on his face.

"I'm Sierra," replied the girl Chico Bear. "I'm so happy you came to visit me!" with tears flowing down her face. She stepped forward with both her hands outstretched. The boys instinctively knew to extend their hands to join palm to palm. At the moment they touched hands, there was the same bright light that flashed earlier when Ben pried open the almonds, but this glow originated from Sierra, and it was comforting, and overcame them all. The aura extended beyond them, flashed, and then was no more. Ben and Kirby were astonished by what

had just happened. Sierra then began speaking in a language Ben had never heard before. Both of the boys just nodded their heads and smiled. The glow from all three Chico Bears gradually subsided.

“Dad, everything will be alright now,” said Matthew as he turned towards Ben.

“What do you mean? What just happened?” asked Ben.

“We joined with Sierra and we know everything will be alright,” replied Matthew.

Ben still didn’t understand, but just then, a park ranger entered the mansion through the front door and saw Ben and the boys, and thought it was odd that they appeared to be talking to an invisible person.

“I’m sorry sir, but you and your boys must wait outside for the next tour group,” said the ranger, who ushered them out of the mansion.

While outside on the front porch, Ben forgot about what had just happened inside.

“Would you like to come to our home to play?” asked Ben.

“Yes,” said Sierra, “I would love to, but I cannot leave the mansion for more than one day or else the mansion will disappear.”

“Disappear! Oh my...,” said Ben.

Sierra explained that the only reason the Bidwell Mansion was still standing was because a Chico Bear was living there. If she leaves the mansion for longer than 24 hours, the mansion will disappear, and she will then become vulnerable to the Evil

One. Sierra also explained that she became a spirit the day John Bidwell died in 1900. She didn't explain why.

"My mother could still see and hear me once I became a spirit and invisible to humans. She did what was necessary to protect me from the Evil One," added Sierra.

"Who is the Evil One?" asked Ben.

"The Evil One is the leader of the dark forces sent from hell to enslave the souls of Chico Bears in eternity," replied Sierra. "We must always be alert for the dark forces. Their goal is not necessarily to kill us, but to enslave our souls in eternity."

Changing the subject, Sierra said, "We can talk more about this later, but I want to show you where I play everyday. I play on the Chico State campus, but only during the daytime. I also play at Children's Playground next to the mansion, and sometimes when I feel really brave, I walk across the street to Chico Junior High School to watch the children play. In the summer time, I like to swim in their pool."

"Can anyone see you?" asked Ben.

"Well, I think some children can see me as a ghostly image, and they are not sure who I am," said Sierra. She continued, "Even in the mansion, some children can see me, and that is when I make funny faces to make them laugh," as she made a funny face for Ben and the boys.

"I thought only people who have Chico Bears can see you," said Ben, as he continued to laugh.

“It is possible that one or more of their ancestors were Chico Bears,” replied Sierra, “but I’m sure they don’t know this.”

“I do not go to the junior high school to play very often because my father said he did not want me crossing the Old Oregon Trail,” continued Sierra.

Sierra pointed out the window and said the Old Oregon Trail that brought gold miners to California once passed right in front of the Bidwell Mansion where Esplanade Road is now located.

As they all walked outside of the mansion, Sierra took Ben and the boys to the places she liked to play. Just to the left of the mansion was a bridge crossing Big Chico Creek.

While standing on the bridge, Sierra said, “My father built this bridge.”

The bridge leads straight to Children’s Playground. The playground was a piece of land Annie Bidwell donated in 1911 so that little children could play right next to the Bidwell Mansion. John and Annie also donated thousands of acres of land to create the Bidwell Park, one of the largest city parks in America.

“Over there, my father named a very short street after me, *Sierra Avenue*, that runs from Main Street to Flume Street,” as she pointed to the far side of Children’s Playground. “But the city eventually changed the name to First Street. First Street used to be named Front Street, and the city changed that name also.”

Sierra then led them to the Chico State campus where she showed them all of the places she liked to play: the outdoor theater, the old statues, the Three Sisters, the rose garden, the lawn in front of Kendall Hall, and the bridge in front of Butte Hall. Ben and the boys had to be careful not to talk to her when other people were around because people might think they were talking to no one.

“There was so much noise when they were constructing these buildings,” said Sierra, as they were walking.

“I remember when they first started construction of the Normal School building in 1887 where Kendall Hall is now located. My father was a trustee of the school. My father and I witnessed the laying of the corner stone in 1888. There was a great fire in 1927, and the Normal Building burned down, so Kendall Hall was built in its place.”

Sierra let Ben and the boys in on a secret, whispering quietly, “Mother had workers build a secret tunnel between Chico Normal School and the Bidwell Mansion,” pointing to the building now called Kendall Hall.

She explained, “The tunnel is the emergency escape route for me in case something tries to hurt me. The tunnel even includes secret rooms where I would be able to hide for many months under the mansion, and a second secret room under the Normal School. There is also a secret entrance to the tunnels right near the Three Sisters and the Rose Garden.”

To this very day, no one even suspects that there are a secret tunnel and hiding places right under Chico State. Ben was astonished to hear about the secret tunnel and rooms because he worked on campus, and never knew anything about it.

After having a snack at the Butte Station snack shop, and then hanging out in Ben's office for a few minutes, they all walked back to the Bidwell Mansion. As they approached the mansion, Sierra pointed to the old Carriage House directly in back of the mansion.

"That's where our horse carriages are kept," said Sierra, pointing to the Carriage House.

Sierra explained she liked to sit in the carriages, pretending she was riding the carriages with John and Annie.

"No one must touch the carriages except me," cautioned Sierra, speaking in a quiet voice, but she didn't explain why.

As they returned to the mansion only steps away, Sierra signaled for them to follow her. She waved her hand on the side of the mansion between the cellar windows located directly under the kitchen, and a passageway opened to a network of secret tunnels under the mansion.

They were now going under the mansion as the passageway closed behind them. There were very old gas lights strung along the walls of the tunnel, but were bright enough to see, and the air was stuffy. The tunnel was barely tall enough for Ben to fit while ducking his head. Kirby decided to jump

out of the backpack and follow the gang, walking right behind Ben's right heel.

"Mother wanted the tunnel just tall enough for her to fit through easily in case she had to protect me."

She giggled, remembering her parents in the tunnel, "My father was over six feet tall, and used to bump his head on the ceiling, but my mother was under five feet tall, and had no trouble at all."

There was a bright light just a short distance into the tunnel. As they approached the light, Ben could see that the tunnel opened into a large spacious chamber with a magical ceiling of blue sky and sunshine, and there was a gentle cool breeze flowing through the chamber.

On one side of the chamber, there was a tree shading a large Victorian bed with a canopy. Next to the bed was her family's original dining room table, the very table the park ranger spoke about being lost. The dining table in the mansion is actually a 'period piece,' and not the original.

"Dad, that's the dining table the park ranger spoke about when we toured the first floor," said Matthew, as he pointed to the table. "No wonder they can't find the original table.

"Hmm, is that something...," said Ben.

On the other side of the chamber was a manicured lawn with a creek separating the lawn from the pasture. Horses and a few cattle could be seen in the distance.

Ben and the boys were amazed by the beauty of this hidden chamber. Everything looked so real, but at the same time not real.

Sierra walked up to the wall near the bed and waved her hand. A foggy portal opened, with views of Chico Bears from all over the world. It was a live video with no sounds.

“There,” she said, as she pointed to the portal. “You must go and find all of the Chico Bears. Time is running out. They know I’m watching. They know you have both entered this world and are expecting you. They too have seen the bright lights, and have sensed your presence,” said Sierra, giving the boys their orders.

“We must prevail over the Evil One. Many of us remained in mortal form after the slaughter, but some were enslaved by dark forces I do not want to speak about.”

Ben and the boys all listened with horrified looks on their faces, as the boys continued to have visions of the Great Chico Bear Massacre in Butte Creek Canyon.

“I was born right near our home,” said Sierra. “My father found me and brought me into this world. I used to spend hours with my mother, Annie, out in the yard where Children’s Playground is now located. We would have lunch on the lawn, and she would sing me songs, brush my hair, and we would do other girl things together.”

“When my father was alive, he used to take me all over Northern California to visit my Chico Bear

friends. I have two very special friends who lived in a Chinese Temple in Oroville. They were safe there. Father especially loved them, and he thought of them as his children.”

She explained that there were few Chico Bear spirits left in the world. They were in great danger, and so were Matthew and Andrew.

“The flashes of light from Matthew and Andrew alerted the dark forces that new Chico Bears were given life.” Sierra looked at Ben and then the boys, “I knew you were coming here because I saw you with Matthew and Andrew in your kitchen, and I saw the lights from your spirits, and felt in my heart new Chico Bears were brought into this world.”

“Remember,” said Sierra, as she looked seriously at the boys, “you are in great danger at all times. Beware of the *Evil One*. The days are short, so make use of your time wisely.”

“But who is the Evil One and how should we protect ourselves?” asked Ben.

“I cannot say what it is, but it is pure evil, and there are many servants of darkness in many different forms. We are safe for now. You have nothing to worry about, but you must never be separated, and must always join in spirit to be able to protect yourselves,” warned Sierra.

Just then, all three Chico Bears began to glow, and they looked up with a blank stare in their faces. Sierra reached over and took Ben’s hand. The chamber began to tremble for about a minute and then stopped. Was this another earthquake? Kirby

was a little upset, but was quickly calmed down by Sierra's gentle stroking of his head.

"The Evil One knows you are alive," whispered Sierra, and she stared intensely into the boys' eyes, and as both boys shook their heads in agreement.

"Where are the other Chico Bears who survived?" asked Ben.

"My father hid us on our ranch, in Indian tribes, and in Chinese camps," replied Sierra.

"There were many times when we were attacked by dark forces wanting to enslave us, but my father, his friends, and the workers defended us until their dying days. Many Native and Chinese people died to save us. Father also sent the last remaining Chico Bears away so that the Evil One could not find them, and I do not know where they are, but I can see them through this portal. Father insisted that I stay here in Chico, and he reassured me that I would be safe here, but he did not explain why."

Ben and the boys now knew their mission and there was no turning back.