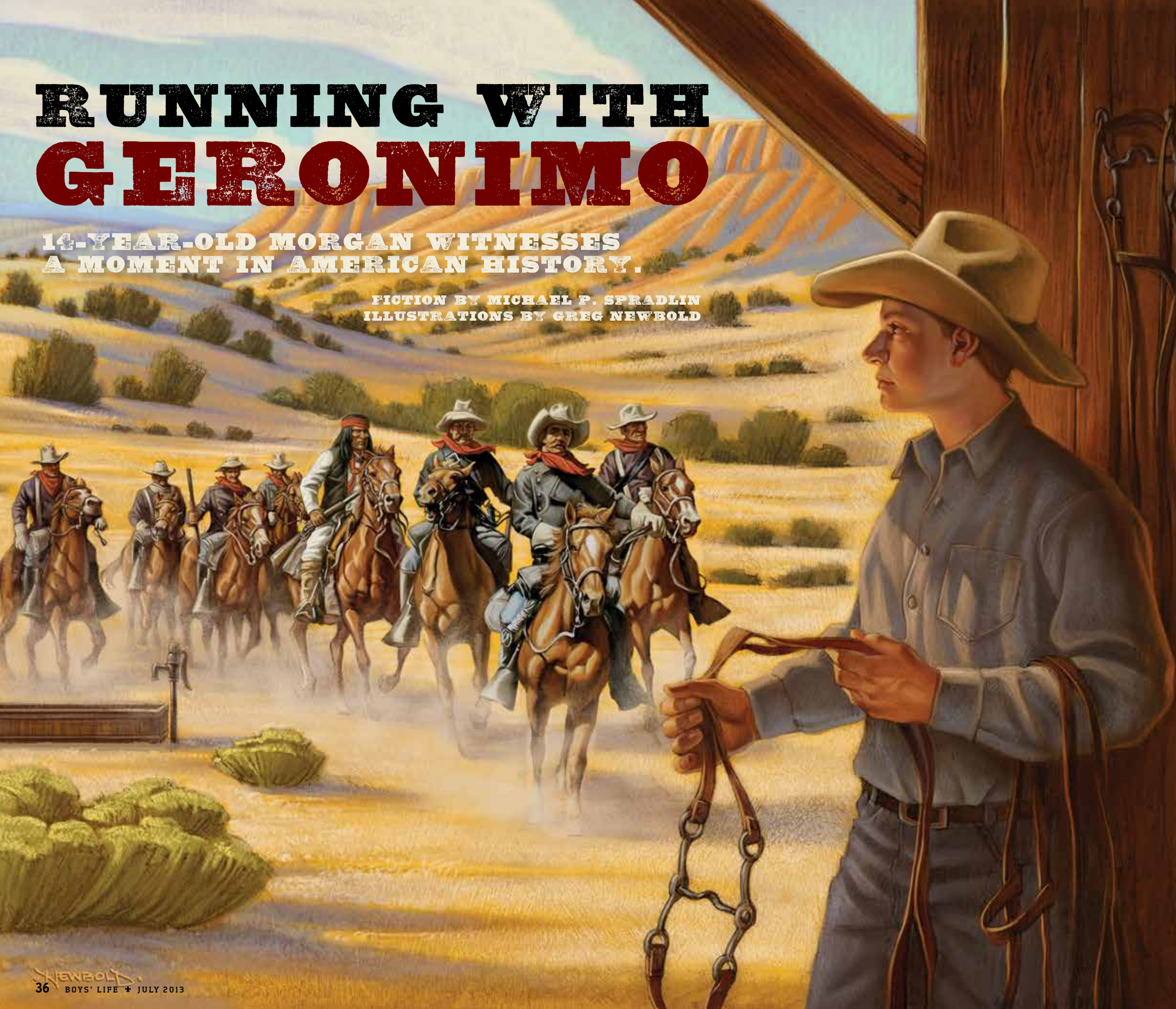


RUNNING WITH GERONIMO

14-YEAR-OLD MORGAN WITNESSES
A MOMENT IN AMERICAN HISTORY.

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ARIZONA TERRITORY, SEPTEMBER 1886

Lieutenant Gatewood and his troopers rode through our ranch gate, dust trailing them like a brown ghost. I stood just inside the barn door, out of the hot sun, nervously mending a harness. The door swung suddenly, banging loudly in the wind. Gatewood's mare shied a bit, but he steadied it with little trouble. Next to Geronimo himself, he was about the last person I wanted to see right then.

Gatewood led a dozen troopers and two Apache scouts. I knew one, Chatto, from our time living on the Turkey Creek Reservation, but I didn't recognize the other. We'd spent three years living there while Pa had been the reservation agent, the man responsible for making sure the tribe got all its food and supplies and payment from the U.S. government. Most Apaches were real friendly, but Chatto always looked like he'd just swallowed a bee. I nodded hello, but he didn't nod back.

I'd gotten to know Lieutenant Gatewood quite well then, too.

"Hey, Morgan, how are you doing?" Gatewood asked.

"I'm good, I guess, sir," I said.

He was tall, with dark thick hair. The Apaches called him Chief Big Nose, but he didn't mind. He'd just laugh and say, "My nose is pretty big!"

"All right if we water the horses, Morg?" he asked.

"'Course, sir. Help yourself," I said.

He nodded at his sergeant and one by one, each trooper led his horse to the pump, working the handle until water splashed into the trough.

"Your pa around, Morg?" he asked.

I shrugged. "He took 'Becca over to Macklinson's ranch this morning," I said. Rebecca was my little sister.

He nodded. "You heard about Geronimo?"

"Yes, sir," I said.

My voice cracked a little and I started to sweat. Word was all over the territory about Geronimo jumping the reservation. Geronimo was about all the Apaches had left as a leader these days.

He was a powerful medicine man of the Chiricahua Apaches and, along with their chief Naiche, the son of Cochise, had fought long and hard against just about everyone in the Arizona Territory. In May, he and a small band escaped the reservation, and they'd been running the Army ragged for months. Pa always said when an Apache didn't want to be seen, weren't no Army going to see 'em.

"Ish is with 'em this time, Morg," he said.

"That so?" I said, my voice a whisper.

Ish became my best friend when I was 8 years old. His full name, Ishkaynay, meant "boy" in Apache. An Apache had to earn a warrior name.

Until then, he was just called “boy.” We’d been near inseparable. His folks died from smallpox, and he had no other family. We had just turned 11 when my family left the reservation three years ago, right after Ma died.

Since Ish had no one else, I’d tried to help him learn all the warrior ways. Geronimo and Naiche and some of the other Apache men would tell us what to do, and we’d do it. We made bows and hunted. On the hottest days, we’d drink a mouthful of water from a gourd and run far out into the desert, then run back to camp and spit it all back into the gourd. I always swallowed the water, so thirsty I thought I’d die, but Ish never did. He’d spit every drop back into the gourd. The Apache trained their warriors to do without.

Ish wanted his warrior name more than anything else. I guess with the way the Apaches were being rounded up and pushed onto reservations, he’d never get a chance to earn it

ONCE I MOVED ABOUT LIKE THE WIND. NOW I AM DONE. AND THAT IS ALL.

- Geronimo, on his surrender to General Nelson Miles, Sept. 8, 1886

unless he ran with them.

Everyone figured Geronimo would head straight for the border, but Pa said he was too crafty for that. He’d lead the Army on a merry chase before crossing into Mexico.

“We’re meeting him at Skeleton Canyon tonight,” the lieutenant said.

“Is that so?” I said, trying not to act interested.

“Yep. General Miles wants your pa along to act as an interpreter. All we want is to take Geronimo and his people back to Turkey Creek in peace,” he said. His voice had gotten louder, like he wasn’t talking only to me.

“I’ll be sure to tell him that, Lieutenant.”

“You all right, Morg?” he asked. “Looks like you got a little blood on your shirt there.”

I cringed, glancing down to find a spot of blood on my dingy gray shirt.

“It’s nothin’,” I stammered. “Just stuck myself mendin’ this harness is all.”

To my great relief, he remounted. “The border is sealed off now. A large group ain’t going to get through. Tell your pa what I said. Stay alert. First sign of trouble, you skedaddle into the house and barricade the door. Start a smoky fire in the fireplace, and someone will come running.”

“Yes, sir,” I said, a little irritated. I wasn’t any tinhorn and knew what to do when Apaches were about.

The lieutenant and his squad thundered off, and I watched until they were out of sight. I ran back into the barn to the far stall, which held a big pile of hay.

“He’s gone,” I said. The pile moved and Ish stood up, covered in straw. Blood was leaking through his shirt at the shoulder, but he looked like he always had: proud and fierce.

“You didn’t turn me in,” he said.

I shook my head.

“Why not?” he asked.

“I reckon it’s nobody’s business who visits my barn. We ain’t got much

time, though.”

As I patched his wound, Ish told me how he’d gotten separated from the group.

“There was a bluecoat patrol close by; I fell down the side of a small canyon. Sagebrush stabbed my shoulder clean through,” he said.

He’d known our ranch was somewhere nearby, and he’d staggered through the gate this morning, right before Gatewood showed up.

“I’ve missed you, Morgan,” he said.

“Likewise, Ish, but we need to be gone before Pa gets back,” I said.

I saddled two horses and we arrived at Skeleton Canyon after dark. Geronimo’s band was camped high up in the canyon. I saw him sitting with General Miles down at the canyon’s mouth. Pa sat by the council fire, so Lieutenant Gatewood must have intercepted him on his way home. We watched until Geronimo left the parley and walked slowly back toward his camp.

Ish dismounted, handing me the

reins to his horse.

“Goodbye, Morgan,” he said.

“Good luck, Ish,” I said.

He disappeared into the night. Before long I spotted him entering the Apache camp, sitting down on a log near Geronimo and the other warriors.

I hobbled the horses and crept quietly around to the edge of the canyon high above their campfire. It was a clear night, and their voices drifted up to me. I heard Geronimo say they must surrender. If they kept running, the Army would not stop until all of their people were dead or in prison. This way, the few remaining Apaches could live on in peace. Hearing him made me sad. I wondered how Ish would ever get his warrior name now.

Geronimo said there was a secret place where some of them might live on. He couldn’t go with them, because the Army would never stop chasing him, but a few of his people could live on there in freedom. He asked Ish if he was willing to lead a small group there. Ish stood and said he would.

It was almost daybreak. As the sun cracked the eastern sky, Geronimo handed Ish his rifle. He pulled him close, whispering something only the two of them could hear. Perhaps it was only the location of this secret place, but I hoped with all my heart he’d just given Ish his warrior name.

As Geronimo and the others walked down the canyon to surrender to General Miles, Ish and five others headed farther up the canyon. They disappeared from sight for a while, but soon emerged at the far end and turned south toward the border. I know Geronimo yearned to keep running, but sacrificing himself was the only way his people could live on.

High above them an eagle soared on the currents above the desert, its shadow passing over Ish and the others as they began a slow trot towards Mexico. I smiled. Ish was still free. And he was still running with Geronimo. ♣

ABOUT THE AUTHOR
New York Times bestselling author and Eagle Scout Michael P. Spradlin has written many books for young readers, including the international bestselling *The Youngest Templar* series. His newest series is *Killer Species*. boyslife.org/links/spradlin

HISTORICAL NOTE

Although Morgan and Ish are fictional characters, there is some truth in this story.

In the spring of 1886, Geronimo escaped his reservation and led a band of followers toward Mexico. For months, 5,000 U.S. and 3,000 Mexican troops chased him. Running out of ammunition and supplies, Geronimo finally surrendered in September to General Nelson Miles at Skeleton Canyon in Arizona. During the surrender negotiations, the Army counted 38 survivors in Geronimo’s band. The next morning, only 32 surrendered. No one knows for sure what happened to the four women, one old man and one young boy who did not surrender. Historians speculate Geronimo knew of a secret refuge in the mountains of northern Mexico.

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