



# TONAWANDA

*The 2nd book in the Oak Orchard Series*

BY BRIAN DURSKI

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This is a work of fiction. Any similarities to those persons living or dead is purely coincidental.

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This book is dedicated to:

*My wife Cathy*

*My children and grandchildren.*

Consultation and cover art assistance -Michele Hinton.  
An individual that is passionate about helping new authors. I can attest to that fact!

## CHAPTER 1

**T**onawanda Creek's water was inundated with topsoil and it ran muddy. A heavy downpour the previous night had pushed its swiftly moving flow high along the rocky banks.

Indian Falls was wide and many feet above the deep pool below. For thousands of years, the limestone rock under the cascade of water had been eroded. The result was a steep gorge lined with brush and large slabs of stone that had tumbled from the sides. Tall trees grew on the tops of the ravine and prevented direct sunlight from penetrating to the bottom during the majority of daylight hours.

Yesterday, he'd found a length of clear fishing line tangled on the rocks. A rust covered fishhook was still attached at the end. The boy followed the streambed's course until he found a relatively quiet pool behind a large boulder. Tom fished from the rocks alongside.

Only a few more minutes until the sun would retreat behind the trees to the west. Either a fish bit, or he'd go hungry again tonight. He could feel a deep ache in his gut. It had been two days since a bird egg, or small creature had fallen into his grasp.

He felt a fish very gently nibble the worm on his hook. Tommy paused, barely breathing while he waited. He felt a tug from the fish at the end of the line attached to a stout willow branch that served as his makeshift pole.

The branch bent, the boy jerked it abruptly upward. The fish was hooked and he dragged it onto the bank. It was a large sucker. That was what his dad had called the bottom feeders. Tom quickly picked up a rock and slammed it onto its head. The fish stopped thrashing after the third blow.

## *Tonawanda*

He glanced to the west and realized it was too late in the day to light a fire. They'd be hunting soon and he couldn't chance any smoke that might reveal his location.

The scales were so fine that they didn't warrant removal. He was immediately rewarded with the rich taste of raw fish and sustaining fluids when his teeth penetrated the flesh. After just a few minutes, only bones, gristle and internal organs now remained on the rocks for scavengers. Tomorrow would be another struggle to survive. At least tonight, Tommy could sleep with his belly full.

Two weeks ago, the thought of eating a fish raw would have revolted him. Not anymore, the fish was certainly better than the grasshoppers he'd eaten a few days ago in an alfalfa field. His life had certainly changed. Adolescent fat had melted away almost magically. He was down to the last notch in the worn black belt that held up the ripped and ragged jeans around his waist.

A shallow cave on the side of the gray limestone gorge was his refuge and he felt secure within its rock lined depths. Tom crawled into it. The space was wider just inside the entrance and he sat looking out at Tonawanda's rushing water below. He moved out into the light and sat on the side of the gorge with his legs hanging over the lip of the cave.

People had fled from the area or been taken weeks ago. No humans were left to enter his small domain. There was nothing to restrict his movements, except the deep fear generated by the terrible memory of the school parking lot. Mom, Dad, and his sisters were dead. He'd seen them taken. Animals that were things from a bad dream had killed them. Now, only he was left hiding in the deep ravine that Tonawanda Creek flowed through.

His father used to call it a creek. It was more than that. The volume of water pouring over the falls every few seconds was incredible. Tommy watched it stream into the air and cascade into a deep bluish green pool. The location of the falls was named by a sign the state had erected at the old concrete bridge spanning the swiftly flowing water. He'd been there several times with his family in the past. They'd eaten at the now burned restaurant that had overlooked Indian Falls.

The small crevice in the rocky side of the ravine had a thin seepage of water slowly dripping from inside it and down the limestone rock that comprised the side of the gorge.

He'd climbed up to look inside what seemed so long ago now. The rock

was wet at the entrance. Once inside, he'd seen the limestone was hollowed out. Tom had collapsed inside and felt safe for the first time in hours. The recess into the rock saved him that day, a month ago, when he was running for his life. Now, it provided his only haven.

Tommy became bolder each day. He felt as if the things had either moved on, or somehow, intentionally avoided the gorge. He hadn't seen any sign of them since the school parking lot.

It was impossible for him to avoid thinking about what happened.

### ***No Big Deal***

The initial reports from last year had been vague about what was taking place just twenty miles from his home. Something was going on near Oak Orchard Swamp. Small bits of information were reported only sporadically on the local news, but always reassuring to the people listening.

He'd heard his father say to his mother one evening after a small piece of news about Oak Orchard was reported during the evening news.

"They're holding most of it back from us, Nancy. I'm worried about what's really going on. This is all happening only a few miles away and now they've cordoned off large sections near Medina, East Shelby and Albion. Nobody can get in, or out of there. Harry Butler's brother is a sheriff in Orleans County. He told Harry about it and he gave me the details."

"Should we leave now, Richard?"

"No, Harry said they got the army in there controlling everything. Supposedly, it's no problem anymore. You know, that's still pretty damn close."

Tommy had listened closely from the hallway and waited a few minutes before he entered the living room. He asked his father about it and his dad looked very serious. "We may go on vacation early this year, Tom. If things continue to deteriorate with some problem north of us we're going away for awhile. Don't say anything to your sisters about this, but keep a close eye on them when they're outside." His father smiled up at his tall son. "Just to be sure, can you do that for me? Another few days and maybe we'll just leave for a bit."

Everyday life quickly returned in the small community for almost a year. Incidents in the areas to the north were forgotten, or pushed away into

the recesses of people's minds. Most, including his parents, just didn't want to think about their narrow little niche and personal comfort being disrupted.

It started again when several adults and high school juniors disappeared from the top of the hundred-foot high limestone escarpment that formed a semicircle around his village. They'd all been members of the school's Science Club. A long awaited midnight vigil to see a meteor shower predicted for that night was supposed to be the culmination of the group's activities that year.

Reporters and other people flooded into the quiet village the next morning. Numerous police and other official looking vehicles were parked on top of the escarpment near where the old town garbage dump once stood. Tommy and his dad walked there to see for themselves what was being reported on television as a mysterious disappearance of several people. They couldn't get within a mile of the place. Cops motioned them back and his father seemed very concerned. They walked together to the small town's center.

Several people were standing in groups up and down the small town's Main Street talking. He followed his father into the *Sporting Goods Store*. It was very crowded and Tom saw the man behind the counter trying to wait on a long line of people as quickly as he could. Most of them were buying firearms or ammunition. Tom heard the owner say, "Folks, that's the last of them. I haven't anymore weapons of any kind left, try McKinney's on Route Five." He followed his father out of the store and they walked quickly toward home.

### ***The Evacuation***

Four days later, on a bright Saturday morning, the town fire whistle started to wail. He could hear it continuously in the distance for almost fifteen minutes. He turned to his father while they sat eating breakfast. "Dad, that's the longest I ever heard that whistle. It must be a big fire."

His father had a concerned look on his face. "Yeah, I wonder what's going on. Come on, let's go outside and see if we can spot smoke." They stood on the front lawn.

Elderly John and Josephine Williamson came outside from the house next door. "Richard, what's going on? That whistle has been going off for almost twenty minutes."