

Stone Fox

by John Reynolds Gardiner

An Excerpt

It is the late 1800's. Little Willy and his Grandfather are living on a farm in Jackson, Wyoming, that Grandfather has lived on for a very long time. Grandfather is sick and won't leave his bed. Little Willy is very concerned about his Grandfather and goes to get help from Doc Smith, the town doctor. Doc Smith says that there is nothing physical wrong with Grandfather. He is very depressed because he does not have the money to pay the taxes on his farm. Grandfather knows he is close to losing his farm.

Little Willy turns to his trusted dog Searchlight to help harvest the potato crop, hoping the harvest will bring in the money needed to pay the taxes. Little Willy and Searchlight are very attached. Willy takes Searchlight out for a ride in the snow so he can think about how else he might help his Grandfather save the farm.

When Little Willy and Searchlight return to the farm, they discover a stranger. The stranger turns out to be Clifford Snyder, the tax collector who informs Little Willy that Grandfather owes years of back taxes in the amount of \$500.00.

Little Willy tries desperately to figure out how he is going to get \$500 to pay off the back taxes. His attempt to get a loan from the bank fails. The townspeople think he should sell the farm to pay off the taxes. Little Willy does not want to sell the farm.

Little Willy sees a poster for the National Dogsled Races, a race with a \$500 prize to the winner. He decides to take his \$50 college fund and pay the \$50 entrance fee for the race. Little Willy and Searchlight are going to enter the race.

Only nine brave racers enter the race. One of them is Stone Fox, an Indian with a beautiful dogsled team. Stone Fox has never lost a race. Willy sees Stone Fox's dogs and begins to pet them. Stone Fox pushes Willy away from the dogs. Little Willy turns to Stone Fox and tells him he is going to beat him in the dogsled race.

On the day of the race, all of the townspeople come out to cheer Little Willy on. Willy gets an early lead and keeps the lead until they near the finish line. Then, without warning and only 100 yards from the finish line, Searchlight falls to the ground and dies. Stone Fox reacts immediately by firing his rifle and ordering the other racers to stop. He then motions to Little Willy to pick up Searchlight in his arms and cross the finish line. Little Willy is declared the winner.

The question: Did Little Willy really win the race?