



GALLUP

cable hoover



I never knew D's first name, I still don't. He asked me never to use it, never to ask. He said, the families wouldn't understand and people would be upset.

D drives the wagon, the drunk wagon with the locking cage in the back. When the men are too inebriated to refuse it becomes implied consent. D picks them up, locks the cage and drives them to the detox facility where they stay 24 or 72 hours.

Every time D hoists them off the sidewalk or the ditch he calls them Cheii.

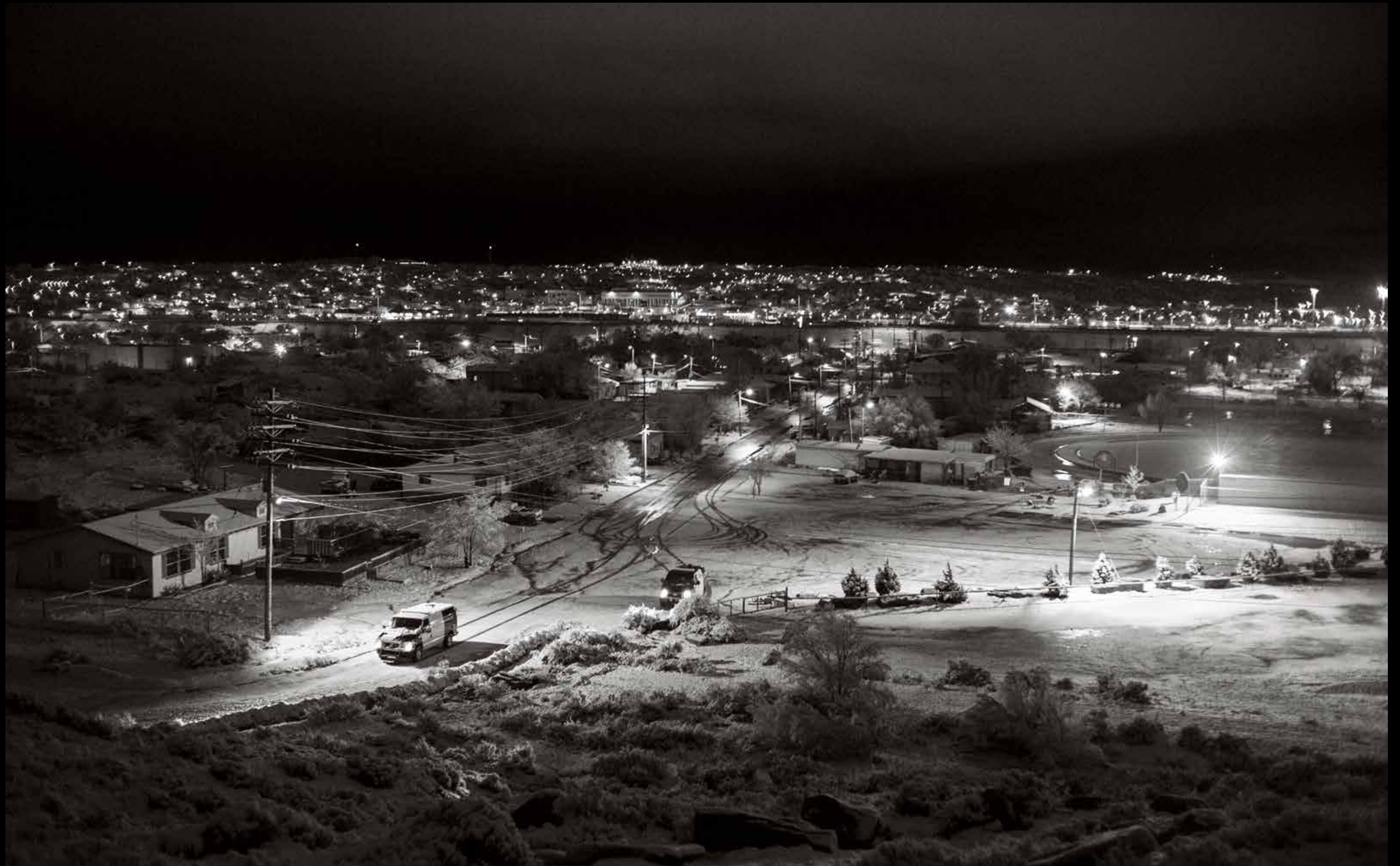
"C'mon shíCheii, c'mon."

He tells me "everyone calls them glahnii..."

I know this. Glahnii won't quite translate. Drunk, a noun, like drunkard, derogatory. "But I call them all Cheii," grandpa, elder cousin, a term of respect.

"I call them all Cheii because I know one day it could be me."











D

Fri, Dec 20, 10:16 AM

Exposure death in field west of
flea market

Ok, I'll be there

Thx

You still keeping count?

Ya, 18 or 19. Not sure

Editors will sort it out in the
morning

Delivered



The winter of 2014-15 was the season when we started the Count.

After the first exposure death we asked the police chief, on average, how many exposure deaths did Gallup endure every year. He couldn't answer the question, couldn't even make a reasonable guess. He blamed it on a kind of bureaucratic hiccup, said the numbers weren't available because the bodies weren't catalogued consistently. Instead he cited the same statistic we had all heard before. Gallup police, he repeated, field alcohol-related calls at sixty times the national average.

After the sixth or seventh body that winter the Count started to generate some attention and that's when D first became an ally. He became something of an inside man. He understood what we were doing and why we were doing it, so he made a habit of tipping us off early and sharing any info that he could.

D had already been working the streets long enough to know most of the drunks by name. When they passed out in the ditches and alleys in the winter they regularly froze to death overnight. D always knew who they were long before they were officially identified. Most of them weren't homeless, they were just lingering in town because alcohol sales are still prohibited on adjacent tribal lands. In Gallup, the liquor trade is poorly regulated and there's frequent accusations of it being deliberately exploitative.

D said he wasn't interested in the politics, he was just sick of seeing people die.















I never did call D a friend. Professionally, he was something like a ‘source’ or a ‘contact.’

Dehumanized labels meant to reinforce a sanitized distance for ethical standards and objective credibility. For several years, the professionalism worked. We both had bosses and institutions to answer to, we both did our jobs and we got along well. We were friendly but never really friends. It only ever got personal when it went bad.

D hadn’t called me about the kid, someone else did. A friend, a non-professional acquaintance was driving by and saw the yellow tape, she called me and said it looked serious. When I got there D was stationed by the edge of the tape and he tried to stop me. He urged me to take it easy, even asked me to just back off. I had assumed that D’s presence there with his drunk wagon meant more than it really did and I believed any boundary was worth crossing to make a point about what the alcohol was doing to the community but I was wrong.

It wasn’t a drunk driver, this time it wasn’t alcohol at all. A toddler had darted away from his mom while she lifted a laundry basket from the trunk of her car. The pickup passing by wasn’t even over the speed limit, it was just a tragic accident. Everybody at the scene took it hard, D took it out on me. He said I invaded their pain, cheapened the mother’s anguish just to get paid. He said I was, “just another white guy trying to capitalize on Native suffering.”

After that, I didn’t hear a word from D for more than three years.









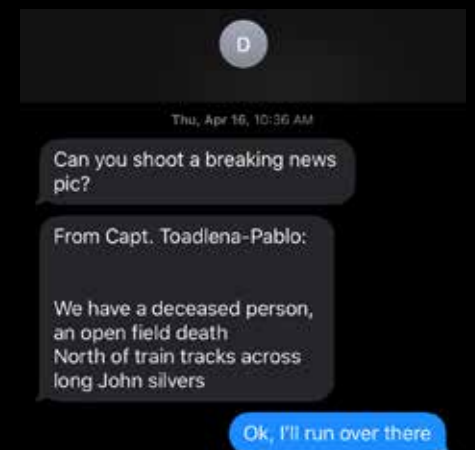
















I never expected the virus to reach us here. I'm so used to Gallup being removed and insulated from the national and global currents, I thought it would pass us by. It was never as bad here as it was in denser cities but, per capita, we had one of the worst outbreaks in the country.

As the death toll rose, D and I fell back into a familiar routine. He again became an inside source and we shakily patched up the rift from three years ago. For me, it was comforting to reconnect just as the lockdowns and social distancing severed so many other ties.

The bureaucracies here like to refer to Gallup as a bordertown but the virus, of course, had no regard for any border. The spread in town was a spillover from a worse outbreak in adjacent Navajo lands. I know that eventually this too will just be another notch in a long rally of plagues and inequities. Its no secret that in the four hundred years since the colonization began native people all over this continent have endured smallpox, famine, war, genocide, forced relocation and untold generations of theft, rapes and other brutalities. What's less understood is that those crimes were never left in the past. Gallup is only the latest skirmish in this four hundred year battle.

It feels like our worlds should be re-written after this crisis. I especially wanted to believe that it would shine a light on Gallup and begin to make clear what has been happening here all along. Covid did exactly the same thing here that it did throughout the country, it prayed worst on the most vulnerable and exposed the deep flaws that already existed. In truth, it was just like the alcohol, it only moved faster.

The communities in Gallup and the surrounding reservation lands are accustomed to loss. They have already been hardened by generations of trauma and tragedy but the virus was still shocking. Within a few months everybody knew someone who was sick, then everyone lost someone; a cousin or a neighbor or a friend.

D

Saturday 7:20 AM

PIO said some in the dept r
infected

You good?

Delivered

Tuesday 1:14 PM

They're not releasing names -
you alright?

Wednesday 10:15 AM

You ok?





