

Interview w/ Lyle Griffis

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p. 6

to pay for it, since it didn't look like his, anyway. The artist filed a law suit here in this country. When they had the hearing I slipped out and listed to part of it. Ben had himself a good lawyer. Both sides had experts in the art field, but the jury decided the judgement against Ben. When he announced that he still wasn't going to pay, the judge explained that the court would put him in jail. Well, Ben fired his lawyer on the spot and said he was going to get a new lawyer and they would try the thing all over again and they'd see whether he'd have to pay for that portrait. He just couldn't understand why he couldn't get another lawyer and another jury and get another judgement. Finally he paid up, though. Part of his testimony that I heard was him saying that he had given the picture away and therefore he didn't have to pay.

His life is full of funny incidents. They finally revoked it, but for a while the Bureau of Internal Revenue came out with a program for making the Indians pay income tax. It was only in effect a few years but while it was, Ben engaged his chauffeur to figure his income tax for him. I'll bet the Internal Revenue Service must have been sorry for the new plan once they saw Ben's tax return. His chauffeur had listed all those shirt tail relatives and spongers on Ben as dependents and the Revenue Service wanted to know how come he had so many dependents since it turned out that only one of them was actually related to him. They tried to explain it to him but he wouldn't change it and they kept making deficiency estimates against him. Big Ben thought the white man was the funniest person he ever saw.

(Had Big Ben attached himself to you as his personal angel?)

No, Big Ben was pretty much like many of the older Indians in that respect. They all had the idea that the government would look after them. He would come to me to discuss serious legal questions. He came constantly to me,