

# BOOK REVIEWS

## **ENOUGH IS ENOUGH: Aboriginal Women Speak Out**

Janet Silman (recorder). Toronto:  
Women's Press, 1987.

### *Loretta Meade Kocsis*

This book was published at a time when emotions in the Native community were running high. Bill C-31, the federal government's legislation removing gender bias from the *Indian Act*, had recently been proclaimed. Unfortunately, many of the First Nations, who were just beginning to exercise a modicum of self-government, resented this as being an infringement of their governing power to decide who is an Indian. In the middle were the women who had lost their status. For the most part they have been forgotten, despite the fact that it was they who precipitated this legislative change. *Enough is Enough* is an attempt by the very participants in this historical development to have their stories told.

The format of this book is straightforward and is divided into two parts. Part One undertakes the task of providing the reader with an insight into reserve life. Personal accounts of individual women, and their experiences of growing up on the reserve, are used in accomplishing this task. Part Two describes the many events that led to the legislative changes of the *Indian Act*. Personal accounts of the women are effective in demonstrating the many obstacles they faced in their attempts for change. It is quite evident that the author was unable to decide whether the book should be educational or expressional. There were instances of both throughout the book; however, there is insufficient information for it to be truly educational.

The Introduction sets out a good description of the *Indian Act*. However, the

author's historical analysis of the Act is too short. What is needed was a more detailed account of what the laws were and how they affected Native People, and how these women were treated differently from the status women in the day-to-day reserve life. Furthermore, the author could have provided the reader with a bibliography of reference material in order that future research and understanding of the reinstatement issue could be realized. The book raises many questions regarding the *Indian Act* and reinstatement but yet fails to give further direction to the reader.

The author's use of a chronology of events proves quite useful in putting together an overall picture of activities. However, the author fails to provide a clear image by assuming the reader is knowledgeable about particular details in the history of the *Indian Act*.

The author is better able to portray the expressional aspect of the book: the thirteen women were able to present their personal perspectives. Although the points of view are clearly expressed, it is difficult to fully understand their positions if one has no knowledge of Native affairs. The differences between being status versus non-status is not completely described, nor is the effect of losing status adequately stated.

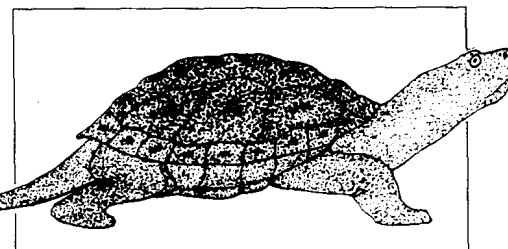
Overall, I found this book quite interesting. Being Native, it served me as a reminder that, although reserves differ in many ways, we as Native people face many of the same problems.

The book does quite well in both its attempts to demonstrate what reserve life is like and the impacts the *Indian Act* has on Native people. It would be unrealistic to think that one could fully describe such a lifestyle in one book.

However, the author's lack of reference material makes further research difficult. Its easy reading makes the book accessible to the lay person. Unfortunately, due

to the lack of more background information, I only recommend it to those who already have knowledge in the issues.

Nonetheless, this book is an important step for Native women in educating the public about Native issues. I sincerely hope this book will lead to greater public awareness and will initiate discussion.



## **CHILDREN OF THE SUN: Stories by and about Indian Kids**

Adolf and Beverly Hungry Wolf. New  
York: Quill William Morrow, 1987.

### *Aki-Kwe/Mary Ellen Turpel*

This recent book by Adolf and Beverly Hungry Wolf is offered as a collection of short stories "by and about Indian kids." The authors state that their intention in collecting *Children of the Sun* was to create a record of traditional tribal childhood and adolescence which would be of value in educating children to be proud of their ancestry. It is not, they suggest, intended to create a longing for bygone days or nostalgia for the past ways which have been somehow lost. The authors reveal that they "began to study the material in this book some years ago as part of our own efforts at living as a united family, following a simple life-style and practising some Indian traditions." They made the selections for the book based on the enthusiasm received for the stories by their own four children.

While the book is ostensibly jointly authored by Beverly and Adolf Hungry Wolf, who have written several other earlier books on aboriginal life, it is clear from the tone and narration throughout the collection that this has been mainly the project of Adolf Hungry Wolf. Beverly Hungry Wolf is the author of a previous collection of Indian stories, *Ways of My Grandmothers* (1980), which was a vivid and moving presentation of customs among the Blackfoot Nation from the perspective of its women. In this earlier book, Beverly Hungry Wolf carefully collected firsthand narratives about customs, recipes, and craftwork; it continues to stand as an important 'alternative' work of Indian history.

Adolf Hungry Wolf is the author of *Shadows of the Buffalos* and *The Blood People* which although interesting books, are clearly different from Beverly's. He has been adopted into the Blood Nation and his work frequently bears the tone of an outsider learning the ways of his new extended family. On the other hand, Beverly Hungry Wolf's work bears the markings of someone with the gift of speaking for her ancestors to the future generations of the Blackfoot Peoples. Her reflections on childhood, included as a brief story in the collection, is by far the most interesting work included in *Children of the Sun*.

The genuine spirit of sharing and kindness with which the authors preface their approach to *Children of the Sun* should be of real interest to First Nations families trying to reconcile raising their children in an environment which promotes awareness and understanding of First Nations cultures, yet is unavoidably intertwined and influenced by the surrounding dominant culture. They say "many of us parents want to make the lives of our children more meaningful than were our own, yet we have few examples to go by. Let these stories, then, be such examples." In a sense, the book is for First Nations parents and not really a book to be read to children. Perhaps it might play a role like that of Dr. Spock's infamous book on child-rearing, but with an Indian twist. Just how genuine a twist seems to be a problem with the collection.

Unfortunately, the stories included in the anthology are not all by Indians. Moreover, apart from some teen stories written in 1920s in a newspaper from an

Indian boarding school, none were written by Indian 'kids' (indeed most were written by those who have long since grown up). I was expecting from *Children of the Sun* something along the lines of *Children of the Great Muskeg* (1985), a wonderful collection of poetry, stories, and illustrations by Cree and Métis children of Moosonee and Moose Factory. However, this is more a book circling around the theme of traditional childhood — covering both its important sacred elements, and harsh difficulties of family life without 'modern' amenities.

*Children of the Sun* does contain some firsthand narratives told to Beverly and Adolf Hungry Wolf by Elders and Traditional people of the Blood Nation, but regrettably, these are few and far between in the anthology (there are only five, including Beverly's own childhood recollections). The majority of stories are from anthropological papers and ethnographic writings from around the turn of the 20th century. The presence of these stories in the collection is troubling, because they have been either entirely constructed by non-Aboriginal anthropologists, and consequently bear the hallmarks of all the problems with how anthropologists 'see' Aboriginal life — as exotic with a cast of noble savages, or as uncivilized and undeveloped, or they are based on interviews of Indians written up by anthropologists or ethnographers.

In some of the stories taken from anthropological collections (the book is full of references to publications such as the Report of the Bureau of American Ethnology, and special publications of the Bureau of Indian Affairs), you will find an Indian story which was told to an anthropologist but which has been written in the first person by the anthropologist in order to sound authentic. These selections are extremely interesting, not only because of the actual content of the stories, but also because of the way in which they have been recorded by the interviewer-anthropologist. However, the value of these stories in providing examples of customs and traditions of the First Nations, or of reaching children is quite dubious: they lack that immediacy which stories and teachings have within the oral tradition of Aboriginal culture — perhaps a unavoidable loss when the culture is translated and written in English. The more ethnographical stories are little fragments

or vignettes (usually no more than two pages long) of some things quite distant and remote — almost more a reflection of how the dominant culture views Aboriginal Peoples, instead of stories of how it is or was or could be.

These stories from anthropological records should, I believe, be approached differently than some of the others in the anthology. Indeed, a certain ironical reading of them is almost unavoidable (optimistically, we could surmise that they were intentionally included for this purpose, in which case it should have been alluded to in the introduction), given what they tell us about the lives of non-Indians writing about Indian life. For example, in a short story on Hopi children and education entitled *Conversion of a Dozen Young Hopis* excerpted from an issue of the *New York American* in 1912, we learn of the "emancipation from paganism and the old life of opposition to progress and education" of a group of twelve Hopi students (not children but adult leaders) taken from their community as prisoners and forced into an English school. The story tells of their remarkable denunciation of their traditional ways and conversion "to education and civilization. Where before they were sun worshippers and the snake dance was one of their principal ceremonies, they have all joined the Christian churches." The story applauds the new converts' commitment to fighting for righteousness and education of their people in Hopi country. It tells of the desire of the Hopi students to have their hair cut like all of the other students and of their quick adaptation to the "civilized" world.

While I found this story, and others with a similarly patronizing tone, offensive and arguably anomalous in this collection of stories by and about Indian kids, perhaps it plays an important role in a book of stories about tribal life (or at least the harsh elements of the early colonial period) in North America. It tells the naive story of a simple conversion from being a Hopi to being a "whiteman" — a story no Indian would take at face value if they heard it, nor could retell without a sarcastic purpose. What this kind of incredulous story seems to really be about is racism and paternalism. Because these two problems are such a part of Aboriginal life, and especially part of the education system when it occurs in an institution or a reserve or in an urban centre, they do seem

to 'belong' in the anthology. However, reading them with or telling them to children would call for a discussion about problems with these stories, so as not to perpetuate the idea that Aboriginal customs and traditions are pagan, uncivilized and savage. For education by negative example, these stories might be quite useful in a classroom setting. Perhaps reading this story about the Hopi conversion along with Beverly Hungry Wolf's reflections on her childhood would be an interesting juxtaposition of attitudes and experiences.

Beverly's story of her childhood (although only a brief twelve pages) tells of another side of the foreign education system. She recalls that she was taught by the nuns at boarding school "to be ashamed for being a 'child of the Sun' through the term they used was more like a 'little heathen,' or a child born of pagan people. They soon convinced my young mind that our tribal culture was uncouth and that our people were too savage to have a 'religion.'" Beverly shares the loneliness and confused guilt which was part of being an Indian student from a more traditional family at a boarding school.

What is particularly interesting about her recollections of childhood and education is her account of the problems with coming home to her family and a more traditional lifestyle after the attempt at brainwashing her at boarding school: "I didn't really like this 'wild life' at first; it seemed too close to the 'primitive ways' the nuns were always deriding. But with fresh air and sunshine, plus the newness and attention of my mother and other kind women, I quickly got back into the flow of my first years. This feeling was probably helped along even further by evening story sessions, and drumming songs, which brought back the pride I'd always felt around the elders of the family."

I think these sentiments Beverly expresses are equally applicable to children or young adults today, who are forced to leave their communities to get a formal education and who find, upon return, great feelings of alienation and a need to adjust their identities. The contemporary parallels with Beverly's story, and some of the others (mostly firsthand stories) in the anthology, makes *Children of the Sun* an

important book for Indian families who see their children confronted with similar problems they had — and for non-Indian families who would like some insight into the diversity of customs and socio-economic difficulties for Indian children growing up in America.

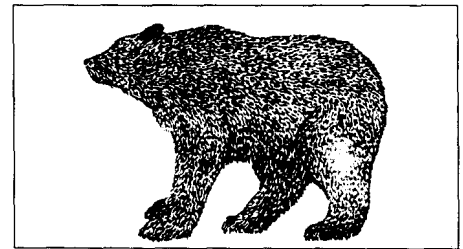
The few firsthand narratives which the Hungry Wolfs have collected, including Beverly's childhood reminiscences, are the reason to buy and read *Children of the Sun*. These have the elements of teaching and humour in them which are the hallmarks of the best Indian stories. Many of the stories collected from Blackfoot Elders presented here were told around the kitchen table of Beverly and Adolf Hungry Wolf, and have the intimacy that most of the other more 'anthropological' stories do not. One such story, offered by elder Mike Swims Under, tells of the Blackfoot Sun Dance and his childhood recollections of being raised in the Sun Dance lodge by his parents. Another, by Porcupine Woman of the Blood Reserve, tells of her upbringing as a favourite child, or *minipoka*, and of the naming of her children according to Blood custom. A particularly funny one, by Ben Calf Robe, tells of the antics of adolescent "tipi-creeping" in the chapter on 'Finding a Mate.'

*Children of the Sun* also contains over thirty pages of photographs, both of traditional Indian life (early photographs from the West and mid-West), and of the Hungry Wolf children. Most of these photographs are not specifically attributed to photographers, but only to collections. It is clear some of these are Curtis photographs, with all their customary manipulation in order to be seen as an 'authentic' representation of Indian life. Ironically, given the authors' purpose in assembling this collection, the cover photograph on the book looks like a Curtis. It is unfortunate that the Hungry Wolfs didn't (more appropriately) have a picture of their own children on the cover.

The later pictures of the Hungry Wolf family appear in between the pages of Beverly's reflections on her childhood. In these more biographical shots you see the lifestyle and goals of the Hungry Wolf family — to walk the path of the Blackfoot, and to teach this to the next generation,

while resisting nostalgia about the difficulties and responsibilities this path entails for family life. As Beverly remembers in her recollections of childhood — "the elders knew that we were being brainwashed at school to look down on the old ways, and for some reason they chose not to make an effort at holding us back. I guess this is because in the Indian ways there is not religious missionizing, though I wish our folks had thought of some ways to keep us nearer at hand when they were practicing our tribal culture."

Understanding tribal culture, and keeping the children near at hand while doing so, is a key part of the life of the Hungry Wolfs (as the pictures, introductions, and stories indicate), and clearly this is essential for the future of all Aboriginal Peoples. We should be grateful to the Hungry Wolfs for contributing some of their stories, both positive and negative, about Indian childhood and adolescence as a step in the direction of understanding and teaching, and we anticipate a future book encompassing the "full report of our [families'] experiences" in following the Blackfoot path.



#### SPIRIT OF THE WHITE BISON

Beatrice Cullen. Illustrated by Robert Kakaygeesick. Pemmican Publications, Inc., 1987.

#### *Karima Beaucage*

I really enjoyed the book. I've sat and listened to many teachings of how it had been. But in this book it made it seem you were actually there, seeing it all through the eyes of the bison, the happiness in the beginning, the heartache during the war and sickness, feeling the sorrow for the world in the end.

None of the teachings have ever come that close to making me realize what had really gone on then.

*Karima Beaucage is twelve years old.*