

AN ERROR IN JUDGEMENT: The Politics of Medical Care in an Indian/White Community

Dara Culhane Speck. Vancouver: Talonbooks, 1987.

Gertie A. Beaucauge

Dara Culhane Speck took on an enormous task and has carried it off with style.

An Error In Judgement is more than a description of a single tragedy in the lives of one Native community. Speck forces us to realize that the health care system we depend on is prone to the weaknesses and negative attitudes which affect the rest of society.

As sociologist and writer, she examines all of the factors which contributed towards the death of an 11 year-old Native girl, and forces us to realize that Native health care services came at a very high cost. The illusions we hold of health care providers are ripped to shreds. Every human weakness — alcoholism, stress, protectionism, racism, bitterness, paternalism — which contributed to this tragedy is identified in the book. Speck focuses on two main problems, quality of health care and racism.

An Error in Judgement exposes attitudes which suggest that Native people should be grateful to receive health care services, no matter how inadequate. She points out very clearly that we, as Native people and recipients of health care, have little influence and fewer options when the services received are perceived as a favour to those less fortunate. Speck leads us through a process which should have resulted in changes in the health care services delivery system in Alert Bay but, as in most bureaucratic tangles, the system can wear down the energy of those involved and nothing is changed.

Racism is an intrinsic part of the relationship between Natives and non-Na-

tives in Alert Bay. Going "down the road" means leaving behind all sense of belonging and right to be. Whether subtle or very obvious, the impact of racism remains the same.

The painful death of 11 year-old Renee Smith at the hands of an alcoholic doctor was an avoidable tragedy. Dara Culhane Speck describes the tragic results of allowing racism to become an acceptable norm. Speck reveals the racism which pervades the relationships of the Native community with the helping professions intended to serve their needs.

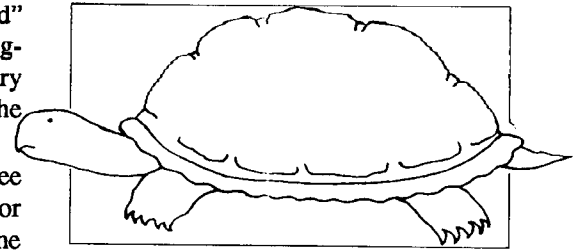
This book should be read by any person who continues to believe that racism does not exist in Canada. *An Error in Judgement* shocks us out of our complacency and forces us to examine the attitudes which support the status quo.

In the end, we realize that what should have been changed wasn't: the people have been left with the same unanswered question, "Why did Renee Smith, a Native child, have to suffer and die for Canadian society's unwillingness to deal with it's problems?"

An Error in Judgement, points out very clearly that we, as Native people, as the recipients of health care, have very little hope when we attempt to change the status quo. In effect, if the regulating body (in this case, the B.C. College of Physicians and Surgeons) refuses to remove a doctor, then we have no options available. The Federal Government, as represented by Medical Services Branch, cannot influence these discussions.

The message is very clear: the people who rely on the health care system have little or no recourse when they are not satisfied with the service. Any person, group or community trying to change or improve the system should examine the Alert Bay experience and be prepared.

Gertie A. Beaucauge was born and grew up on the Nipissing Indian Reserve in Northern Ontario. Gertie is Anishnawbe-Kwe and is of the Bear Clan. She was raised by strong women in her community and tries to apply these teachings in her role as mother and auntie. In addition to travelling, Gertie enjoys working with children, sharing tea and talk. She is currently working as a Trainer with the Ontario Federation of Indian Friendship Centres.



VOICES OF OUR ANCESTORS: Cherokee Teachings from the Wisdom Fire

Dhyani Ywahoo. Boston & London: Shambhala Publications, Inc., 1987.

Ruby Miller

Voices of Our Ancestors is basically a manual for "peace, harmony and a good life." This is to be achieved by following Ywahoo's step-by-step instructions.

It is quite interesting to find out that the Iroquois people are actually descendants of the Cherokee, and that all the teachings that the Iroquois have, we must thank the Cherokee Nation for. At least this is what the author says. All of the Iroquois I told took great exception to this myth. This is the message that the author presents in a rather mystical fashion, almost beyond the point of recognition. The question arises whether other nations would find themselves similarly surprised to be represented in this book as children of the Cherokee.

I found this book disturbing and irritating, as I am accustomed to being encouraged to follow my own path with the aid of traditional teachings passed on by the Elders of my nation. The strength of the oral tradition lies in its applicability throughout the generations. Once written, it tends to become limited in its capacity to address the needs of changing times. The continuing value of these teachings has been proven among all of the nations, without the need for a self-appointed guide on the road to enlightenment and truth.

Voices of Our Ancestors reads like a step-by-step manual for any person willing to believe that, by taking another's thoughts as one's own, one can achieve "planetary peace."

I do not challenge Ywahoo's right to print anything she cares to write; however, *Voices of Our Ancestors* fails its readers as to the reality of the wisdom it proposes to share. The first step on the