

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.

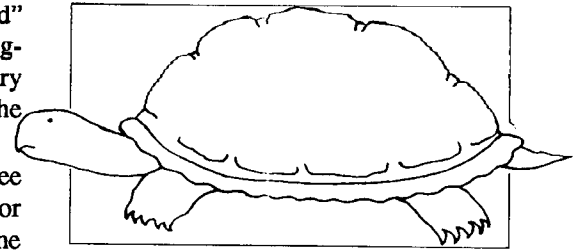
This book should be read by any person who continues to believe that racism does not exist in Canada. *An Error in Judgement* shocks us out of our complacency and forces us to examine the attitudes which support the status quo.

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.

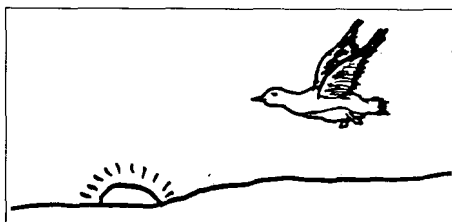
Voices of Our Ancestors reads like a step-by-step manual for any person willing to believe that, by taking another's thoughts as one's own, one can achieve "planetary peace."

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

path of wisdom is that one finds wisdom, as I understand it, through one's heart and mind, not on a bookshelf.

In the final analysis and Appendix 3, *Voices of Our Ancestors* is an advertisement for Ywahoo's Sunray Meditation Society. It appears that one must attend the lectures and workshops in order to clarify the mysteries and mystique which are generated by the book.

Ruby Miller was born into a large family of Mohawks on the Six Nations Reserve. Ruby grew up nurtured by many elder brothers and sisters, and encouraged and challenged by many younger ones. Her already strong Mohawk roots were strengthened with her recent marriage and move from the city back to the reserve. Ruby is a mother to one and an auntie to many. She is of the Turtle Clan. She has worked on the land, in a Friendship Centre and in the Courts. Ruby enjoys fishing, visiting and her work as Native Courtwork Trainer for the Ontario Federation of Indian Friendship Centres.



WATERLILY

Ella Cara Deloria. Lincoln & London: University of Nebraska Press, 1988.

Ruby Miller

Waterlily is a story about Native women from the time of their birth to the time when those women become grandmothers. In particular, it is a story about a Sioux woman named Waterlily who went from a newborn "girlchild" to mother and grandmother in a "camp circle" during the pre-contact period. As a reader and a Native woman, *Waterlily* allows me to understand the complexities of the traditional role of women and the complexities of the traditional role of members of a Native nation. While our lives today certainly do not follow those stringent ancient laws of behaviour, I found that a lot of the rules or ways our people have today are reflective of those very laws.

As I began to read this story, I became

a part of the "camp circle" and began to learn reasons and ways of our people, while enjoying the experiences of the heroine. This very appropriate Native way of learning (storytelling) allows readers of all ages to enjoy and learn from the life events — whether those events be ordinary or extraordinary. I have never before come across a book that contained so much information and yet never appears to be teaching. I can only compare this to the teaching of an Elder. Elders do not lecture and pump information into your brain but, like this book, their teaching is done very kindly and in a story-like fashion that allows you to absorb what you can understand and use.

The most impressive aspect of *Waterlily*, and the aspect that swells the pride of a Native reader, is the consistent reference to customary respect, kinship rules/obligations and honour (especially for the children). In adhering to the many responsibilities that every single member of the camp circle had, there was very little time for the distractions that we suffer from today. As a child you had to learn the kinship rules and how to treat other people. With each winter came new teachings and new responsibilities. When a girl child became a woman, there were many things to learn of the role that you would maintain and carry with honour. Honour itself was to be learned and sought throughout your life and your children's lives. The overriding desire in your life would be to attain and maintain honour for all your relatives.

Along with the many ordinary tasks of adulthood came the never-ending responsibilities of kinship. Children, from the time of birth, were to be honoured; feasts and giveaways in their honour were commonplace and expected. The entering from one phase of their lives to another required even more ceremonies and gifts to the camp circle in their honour. Children were reared to understand and expect "honour" and "respect."

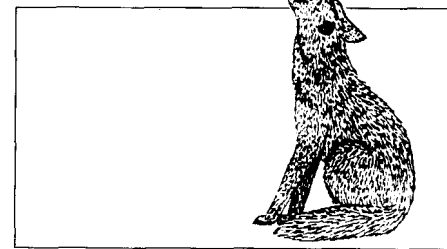
Within the camp circle, there was a connectedness that few Native communities experience today. Everyone was related and had responsibilities to one another. It was a very honourable way to behave if you gave needed articles or gifts to a poorer lodge in the camp circle. This was not viewed as charity, but as honouring, providing and sharing with ones' relatives. There was a gentle balance of

relation responsibilities and respecting a relatives' lodge. Kinship rules were respected at all times. Those rules allowed large groups of people to live together in harmony.

Kinship obligations impelled relatives to sacrifice for one another. It was only then that great honour could come to your family, when every member acted or behaved in a manner that would bring honour and respect to the family. These actions or behaviour were not singular events, but were reflected in every minute, and every aspect of ones' life.

There are many other aspects of life that are explored and experienced in this entertaining story of Ms. Deloria's that are equally as important and enjoyable. Many ceremonies are described and the reader will get a sense of actually being there. One particular ceremony, that is usually not talked about to any great length, is the Sun Dance. Ms. Deloria brings you to the Sun Dance not so much in the spiritual manner, but in a social and learning manner. You must keep in mind that the Sun Dance Ceremony is being seen through the eyes of a girl child, and not an older more knowledgeable person.

This novel is for the person seeking knowledge and understanding, for the parent seeking guidance, for the youth seeking direction, for the one seeking entertainment, for the woman seeking a sense of herself. Basically, it is for anyone who wants to learn, to understand and to connect with the past that is still our present.



THE WOMAN WHO OWNED THE SHADOWS

Paula Gunn Allen. San Francisco: Spinsters Ink/Aunt Lute, 1989.

Gertie A. Beaucage

Ephanie, the heroine and narrator, takes us on her journey, exposing her thoughts and feelings, sometimes lucid and often