

Maria Campbell: *Stories of the Road Allowance People* (Penticton: Theytus Books Ltd, 1995) \$12.95

review by Patricia A. Monture-Angus

This is a book that is written for the people. This is intended, in the "Indian" way, to be high compliment. The majority of books about Indigenous people are still not written in a style or form that is clearly for the people who form the subject matter. Maria Campbell (Métis) has collected and translated nine traditional stories passed on by her teachers and by her family. Equally important is the fact that Dr. Campbell shares these stories with the express permission of her teachers and the holders of the stories. The book is elegantly illustrated with paintings by Sherry Farrell Racette who is a member of the Timikaming Band of Algonquins in Quebec.

The language of the book is equally important. In describing her work in the forward of the book, Dr. Ron Marken, a member of the English department at the University of Saskatchewan notes:

... we must do more than simply read this book. Book culture is eye culture. Most of us imagine through our eyes. Of course, we should feast on these stories with our eyes, but it is essential that we read them with our ears first. Say them aloud. Listen to them with our friends. Light a fire and speak them to the children and grandchildren. These stories and poems have come a long journey to be with us from Mitchif through literal translations through the Queen's Imperial English and back to the earth in village English. Listen to their tales. The main reason for their tortuous route is Maria's need to have us hear the voices - breathing, laughing, sighing human voices.

This book brings to life the people, their culture, their dreams, their sorrows, their passions. This book lives and the words dance and teach as I read them out loud.

I have gone back to these stories time and again. I have read the stories to my children. They bring laughter, joy and comfort in times of hardship. Having this book around is like having an "auntie" at my fingertips sharing a story every time the going gets rough. It's as though there is always a teacher sharing tea and stories at my kitchen table when this book is around. What I like best, is it respects the way I was raised. As the old ones told me of the story telling tradition, "You have to do the figurin' for yourself."

The magic of this book is also that it holds no age limits. It is a family book, a school book and a university book. In its use and purpose it also

knows no bounds. It would be a useful classroom text across many disciplines. Native Studies is an obvious choice for this book; but it also must have an impact on the disciplines of law, religion, cultural studies, English, women's studies, and history. In fact, I have just put the book on the reading list for my third year justice class. Dr. Campbell combines history with lessons, humour with wisdom, and at all times pride in her people and her own identity.

I wanted to share just one part of one of Maria's stories with you. I had the worst time making up my mind which one to share. In the end I decided on a selection from "Big John" because it best identifies the scope of this book and the rhythmic beauty of the village English. It is also a story that illustrates why this would be such an important addition to a justice class. It is also my daughter Katie's favorite. Katie is just four years old. She will curl up on my lap and ask to hear about Uncle John.

Big John's "a treaty" and this story is told in his nephew's voice. The nephew is a half-breed. The treaty process often cut through families just in the way Big John and his Uncle are different. In this story, Big John went with his nephew to see the farm instructor, who was also a half-breed, requesting permission to kill a cow to feed his family in times of hardship. And this is what the nephew next describes:

Well!

Dat Farm Instuctor you tink he own dat damn
reservation he act so smart.

He tell my uncle Big John
hees never gonna be a farmer
if he keeps on killing hees cows
He talk to him like a kid dat don know nutting.

Me

I can hardly believe what I hear him say
cause I knowed dat man real good.

I knowed hees family too.

An none of dem

including him

knowed a damn ting about farming.

None of dem was every any good for anything.

How he ever get dat job

nobody he knows.

All dey ever good for my Mudder he use to say
was to give dah res of us Breeds a bad name

Dats true you know
dare was some peoples dey was like dat in dem days.
Just plain no good.

Well anyways
when he finish giving my Uncle a big talk
he say
"No Big John, I can give you pimmishion to kill dah
Kings cows.
Dah King he give you dem cows so you learn to be
civilize like us."

Dat damn shit.
I don know where he learn dat word "civilize."
All dem cows
dey belongs to dah Indians
not dat damn King dat nobody he ever seed.

Dat Halbreed you know
he must of heerd somebody use dat word "civilize"
an hees so stupid him he have to use it too.

Me
I'm damn shore
he don know what dah hell dat word he mean
cause non of us peoples we use dem kine of words.
We was civilize
cause me
I learn when I get older
dat word
he mean somebody hees got good manners
an hees got respec for his ownself
an udder peoples.
An dats someting dat man he shore as hell don got.

Well my Uncle him
he get so mad he was gonna hit him
An you know he was a big man my Uncle.
Noh dah kine you fool wit dats for shore.

Well
dat Farm Instructor he gets real scared

an he run behine dah table.

"You get dah hell out of her Big John" He yell.

"Or I'll report you to dah Mounties an you'll go to dah jail."

Well my Uncle him

he come to hees senses damn quick

cause he don want to go to dah jails so we go home an when we get dere

Big John he grab dah axe.

Far as hees concern

dah King and dat Farm Instructor

dey can go to hell

he was gonna kill dat cow.

My Aunty him¹

he gets real scared.

He cry and he beg Big John not to do it

cause dah Mounties dey might kill him

like dey done to Almighty Voice over at One Arrows reservation.

Dat was over a cow too you know.

Almight Voice him

he kill a cow wit no pimmishion

cause dey was starving

and dah Farm Instructor he report him.

Well dah Mounties dey throwed him in dah jail an

dey tell him dey was gonna hang him.

Well what dat man he was suppose to do?

He run away of course.

Me too I'd run away if somebody he say dey was gonna hang me.

I'd be a damn fool if I don.

So dats what Almighty Voice he do

an he stay hiding for two years I tink

den dey fine him.

Dey come wit a whole bunch of policemen an white mans to help dem

all from around dis country too.

Dere ancestors dere our neighbours now.

Dats hore funny isn it what peoples dey'll do?

Anyways

dey kill Almighty Voice over a damn cow.

Hees jus not right how dey can do dat.

Jus kill a man for killing hees own cow.

Dats how bad dat Indian Department he use to be in
dem days. [pp. 73-79]

That's not all the story, but that's all I am going to share with you here. When I read, I can hear and feel the nephew. I can hear and feel his love and respect for Uncle Big John. This is one good book that will always keep the stories alive. It's a good way to be. I send my regards, respect, and thanks to Maria and Sherry for this book, a real gift.

Note

1 In Indian languages there are no male and female pronouns. Only he is used.

Annalisa R. Staples and Ruth L. McConnell, *Soapstone and Seed Beads: Arts and Crafts at the Charles Camsell Hospital, A Tuberculosis Sanatorium*. Edmonton: Provincial Museum of Alberta, Special Publication no. 7, 1993.

review by Dorinda M. Stahl

For many historians, incorporating traditional archival sources with more contemporary methods of research, such as oral tradition and material culture, continues to be a challenge in the re-construction of the past. The difficulty, however, lies not in recognizing the legitimacy of once ignored sources, but rather, in choosing an appropriate method that allows for the integration of those sources in a manner that is flattering and complimentary to the subject matter. *Soapstone and Seed Beads: Arts and Crafts and the Charles Camsell Hospital, A Tuberculosis Sanatorium* provides a plausible answer to this sometimes difficult question. By using sources from a multitude of disciplines such as history, archaeology, anthropology, sociology and epidemiology, Annalisa Staples and Ruth L. McConnell, with the assistance of Jill E. Oakes, re-construct the history of the Camsell by allowing the sources to, in effect, consult one-another and speak for themselves. It is this collaboration of sources that not only promotes harmony and balance in their historical research and interpretation of the Charles Camsell Hospital, but also allows for a work that is written with creativity and integrity.