

Listening to the Beat of Our Drum: Indigenous Parenting in Contemporary Society

Carrie Bourassa, Elder Betty McKenna and Darlene Juschka, Editors
Bradford, Ontario: Demeter Press, 2017

REVIEWED BY MARGARET MACDONALD

The book, *Listening to the Beat of Our Drum: Indigenous Parenting in Contemporary Society*, edited by Carrie Bourassa, Elder Betty McKenna and Darlene Juschka, opens with a powerful discussion by Elder Betty McKenna on indigenous epistemology and practices. She provides the reader with a reminder of protocols that are necessary when conducting research and generating knowledge, and she likens research practices to ceremony. This first chapter sets a tone around understanding an enduring world view and reminds us (as researchers and inquirers) of the harm that has been done in the exploitation of ideas in the name of research.

In a detailed recounting of the laws, policies, and governance that systematically altered parenting practices and cultural traditions, Darlene Juschka in Chapter 2, discusses the ways that traditional parenting practices have been extinguished by religious authorities during the residential school era through white domination, discrimination against Indigenous women, and the eugenics movement. Juschka discusses how our government robbed indigenous women of their identities and rights and disrupted their traditional ways of parenting and caring for the earth. This powerful chapter further reminds us of the travesties that Indigenous families have faced and are continuing to face in North America and leaves the reader lamenting the deep cultural and sacred traditions that were stripped from these families and the scarring of First Nations communities.

In Chapter 3, “Reclaiming Indigenous Practices in a Modern World,” Carrie Bourassa dialogues about her lived experiences reclaiming her use of and understanding of Anishinaabe and Metis traditions with Elder Betty McKenna. In this chapter Bourassa shares her journey with traditional practices such as her daughter’s berry fasts, tobacco offerings, as well as moon and other ceremonies. In her description, she shares how she has come to know these traditions through Elder Betty McKenna and her own daughters; her daughters claiming them first hand while she re-claims them through her children and learning alongside them.

In Chapter 4 Janet Smylie and Nancy Cooper each share their experiences and connections as Niso-okâwimâwak (two mothers) gifted with twin boys from a “two spirited” Indigenous physician and friend. The chapter walks

the reader through the many ways that the pregnancy and birth process has brought this family together across extended family relationships, across time (generations) and place (Northern Ontario, Toronto, Saskatchewan and British Columbia) through nurturing, love, and healing. Throughout the chapter the reader gets a sense of the strength of these mothers and the power of the community to receive the gift of these children who are welcomed by both biological and non-biological kin over and over again through ceremonies, visits, conversations, and love.

In Chapter 5 we hear from Sacred Voice Woman Paulete Poitras about her journey as an Auntie. She begins with her early experiences growing up in the traditional ways of the Dakota and Cree with a strong connection to her father and her *musbum* Calvin and the Dakota traditions. Paulete's writing like the other authors in the book is captivating as moves the reader from story to story as she traces her youth, early adulthood and later career and relationships as an Auntie and youth worker. She articulates generously her world view and the ways of indigenous people who believe they have a responsibility for all members of the community. This world view and sense of community is sadly lacking in many peoples' lives in North America and shows the strength of these teachings and ways of being and becoming in the world.

A deeper look at parenting is provided from Metis Mother, Tara Turner in Chapter 6. Here Tara shares her journey as a PhD student trying to understand her own identity as Metis and as a Metis mother as she interviews members of her father's family and tries to piece together their experiences of being separated after the sudden and tragic deaths of her grandparents and other key family members. She remarks about the good fortune she experienced growing up with memories of a stable family and strong sense of place. Later she discusses coming to better understand her Métis background through her studies and the experiences of talking to other role models like Maria Campbell, a mentor and indigenous scholar who took the time to contribute to Tara's understanding of her Metis identity.

Finally, Chapter 7 closes with some memories of traditions and ceremonies by Elder Betty Mekenna as she recounts ways of being in her community. Overall, this book provides a powerful account of the events that have shaped the lives of these indigenous scholars and gives generously to other mothers, fathers, and academics (indigenous and non-indigenous) by demonstrating a sense of the beauty of community when strengthened by Elders, family, and role models.