

*The Knowledge Seeker: Embracing Indigenous Spirituality* by Blair Stonechild. Regina, Canada: University of Regina Press, 2016. 244 pp. ISBN-10: 088977417X

Blair Stonechild has dedicated his entire career to Indigenous education. Like his previous books, *The Knowledge Seeker: Embracing Indigenous Spirituality* is a testament to this pursuit. In this book he investigates in-depth the nature of Indigenous spirituality in the Cree-Saulteaux tradition, recovering and reclaiming it to fulfill the urgent need of Indigenous youth to learn who they are.

To fulfill this desperate need, Stonechild takes a bold step from the traditional dissemination of spiritual knowledge through oral transmission to the use of written technology. His work forges a new path for decolonization by arguing for the tangible nature of spirit and the necessity of developing a meaningful relationship with spirit in order to deal with questions of identity, individual purpose, and to open the way for the healing of families and communities.

This book is a personal memoir, a socio-cultural and political history, and a narrative of Cree-Saulteaux philosophy and sacred teachings. Stonechild's educational history and his academic career form the framework upon which these threads are woven. He claims that his education began with 'a strong curiosity about, and desire to pursue, knowledge' (12). It included nine years at Qu'Appelle Indian Residential School, three years at Champion High School in Regina, an undergraduate degree from McGill, and an M.A. and Ph.D. from the University of Saskatchewan.

Stonechild's love of learning motivated his foray into activism, beginning with his own struggle for the treaty right to education. He asked the Department of Indian Affairs (DIA) to fund his undergraduate degree at McGill. A battle he eventually won despite the fact that DIA preferred he attend the University of Saskatchewan for those years. While at McGill he became acquainted with other Indigenous students who had similar goals and who have made their mark in the promotion of Indigenous rights. These people included Roberta Jamieson, Alanis Obamsawin, Gail Valaskakis, and Harold Cardinal. Cardinal was a key player in a teach-in at McGill that Stonechild attended.

At the heart of this book lies a discussion and explanation of First Nation spirituality. In researching this volume, particularly the chapters entitled 'The Great Principle' and 'The Great Law', Stonechild enlisted the assistance of Saulteaux knowledge keeper and elder, Danny Musqua whose knowledge of the nature of the spiritual system, the sacredness of learning, the spirit of creation, and the laws governing relationships that are infused with these values, beliefs, and philosophies, is central to Stonechild's argument.

Musqua encouraged Stonechild's documentation of spiritual knowledge, and promoted the use of written technology to 'recapture our way of knowing in books' and to 'capture back the stories of the old people before we lose them all' (6). He noted further that: "we have to encourage our doctoral and masters students to help us...in order that we can pass on to the world the way of peace." (6) Musqua believed that Stonechild was the one to write such a

book. Similarly, Stonechild's endeavour was endorsed by Noel Starblanket - former Vice-Chief of the Federation of Saskatchewan Indigenous Nations and twice a former president of the Assembly of First Nations - who stated in the foreword that the central focus of the volume is 'the necessity of documenting spiritual information' to 'meet the needs of the younger generation that is crying out' (x). He noted, too, that Indigenous academia needed this type of publication (ix).

Having probed the metaphysical understanding of spirit in Cree and Saulteaux culture, Stonechild explores the role of science in matters of the spirit. He finds, for example, an ally in Einstein whose scientific observations came not from experiments but from 'meditative thought' and 'fields of energy' (192, 193).

Stonechild is well aware of the difficulties that the actual rebirth of spirituality entails. Nonetheless, the book closes with reassurance from Elder Danny Musqua that the 'creator does not lose his children' which reinforces the Indigenous belief that all people are spirit and they eventually return to that state.

This book goes farther than any other in its emphasis on the recovery of spirit for healing, for community rebirth, and for the education of today's youth. For this reason it breaks new ground and offers a challenge to others to reconsider their methodologies. Educational institutions of all levels will benefit from the wisdom in this volume and would do well to implement Stonechild's goals.

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