

Editor's Note: The Feminist Press gave birth to Hadley Irwin with the publication of *The Lilith Summer* (1979). She has published five books since then. Hadley Irwin is the fusion of Lee Hadley and Annabelle Irwin, but they both declare that "Hadley Irwin is a better writer than both of us put together—she's really her own person." Hadley and Irwin decided to look at two aspects of Hadley Irwin, the writer, and share their insights about how she attempts to portray a realistic cultural landscape from their separate identities.

"The Lone Ranger Lied: Tonto Wasn't Real" and "White Like Me: A Problem Or a Plus" were presented at the Twelfth Annual NAIES Conference in Kansas City. Hadley's discussion centers on *We Are Mesquakie, We Are One* (1980), a story about Hidden Doe and her people returning to their ancestral homeland, and Irwin's focus is *I Be Somebody* (1984), which examines why Rap Davis and his people had to leave Oklahoma for Alberta in search of freedom. The presentations by Hadley and Irwin are published here for reasons congruent with the purpose of the journal.

The Lone Ranger Lied: Tonto Wasn't Real

Lee Hadley

Momma, Where Do Books Come From?

Whenever Hadley Irwin speaks to school children or to adults, for that matter, someone always asks, "Did the things in the book really happen to you? Are the characters in your books real people?" Writing is full of bits and pieces of the past, but what goes on paper is an amalgam of thousands of things, consciously and unconsciously remembered—experiences, overheard conversations, stories, imagined events. For a child, at least this writer as a child, all things had equal validity; all were equally true, even though she finally learned that growing up was a mixture of reality and myth.

Explorations in Ethnic Studies, Vol. 7, No. 2 (July, 1984)

“From Out of the Bygone Days of Yesteryear . . .”

Reality was five years in a one-room country school house (1940-1945) in the middle of Iowa cornfields, and a Quaker community that had been settled by *everyone's* great-grandparents. Reality was going barefoot and wearing overalls except for Sunday when both Sunday School and Church had to be endured.

The myths were many. The best books in school were two volumes, illustrated in color, of Greek and Roman mythology. The words were difficult, but the stories were exciting, and they seemed perfectly reasonable to a third grader. Zeus romping on and off Mount Olympus, turning himself into swans and golden showers of rain was just as possible and a lot more exciting than the Old Testament God, who just made plain, ordinary rules and floated old Noah away on the ark. Of course, those were neat stories too and obviously factual. Why else would a grandmother teach a kid to read them and remember them? And since everything in the *Bible* (King James version, of course) was true, it seemed perfectly all right to like David better than Jesus, who was always pictured as sitting around with a sappy expression.

Some other things were true, too. Black Beauty was a thoughtful horse; Lassie really did come home; My Friend Flicka had a foal named Thunderhead. But more real than the Greek myths, more real than Job getting boils, certainly more real than a long-discarded Santa Claus were THE THUNDERING HOOF BEATS OF THE GREAT HORSE, SILVER.

Yes, the Lone Ranger rode again with his faithful Indian companion, Tonto, whose horse's name was Scout. Who can ever forget a first love? The sound of the voice, the words used — so full of truth. Of course, I could not see him, but, curled up by the radio at 6:30, Monday through Friday, I knew exactly what he looked like. Tonto, I mean. There were a few problems. All the bad guys, and most of the good guys, called him “Red Skin,” and that did tend to create a bit of doubt in my mind since the only person I'd ever seen with truly red skin was Swede Barnett, a classmate who was almost albino and couldn't stay in the sun very long. Actually, as lovely as his voice was, Tonto had little to say except, “Hiiiiiee, Kimo Sabe,” “Ugh,” and “Him heap bad medicine.”

On the other hand, Tonto, even though he did not go around shooting guns out of villain's hands with a single silver bullet, did keep the Lone Ranger in business. In fact, it was Tonto who found the Texas Ranger and nursed him back to health and turned him into the

Lone Ranger. He also must have found the silver mine where all those bullets came from, and he probably captured the Great Horse Silver. I have a nagging notion that he did the cooking and the cleaning and the laundry and would have done windows. It took years to discover his basic flaw:

THE LONE RANGER LIED, BUT SO DID TONTO.

And he didn't do me any favor. There weren't any Native Americans back then, not in my world, anyway. There were only the "injuns" in Zane Grey books, forever "skulking" around Zanesville, ready to carry off helpless white women and children (who were usually so whippy I couldn't understand why anyone would want them) or else a Tonto. It took a long time to figure out that the "noble Indian" was just as false a picture as the "dirty redskin," and maybe just as prevalent.

Here is a description I just unearthed from my 94-year-old-mother's library. The book had been a gift to her mother. *The Heart of the Desert*. Originally *Kut-le of the Desert* by Honore Willsie, 1912:

Despite his breadth of shoulder, the young Indian looked slender, though it was evident that only panther strength could produce such panther grace . . . Rhoda was surprised at the beauty of his face, with its large, long-lashed Mohave eyes that were set well apart and set deeply as are the eyes of those whose ancestors have lived much in the open glare of the sun; with the straight thin-nostriled nose; with the stern, cleanly modeled mouth and square chin below . . . (p. 3).
Two Indian women: Their swarthy features were well cut but both were dirty and ill kept. The younger, heavier squaw had a kindly face, with good eyes, but her hair was matted with clay and her fingers showed traces of recent tortilla making. The older woman was lean and wiry, with a strange gleam of maliciousness and ferocity in her eyes. Her forehead was elaborately tattooed with symbols and her toothless old jaws were covered with blue tribal lines (p. 58).

Which is a more demeaning picture? It's a toss up.

Goodbye Kemo Sabe

When Hadley Irwin began thinking about *We Are Mesquakie, We Are One*, based on an event in Mesquakie history, it was apparent that Tonto and the Lone Ranger had to die. Myth had to be replaced by reality and the bare bones of history—dates, treaties, places, events—were too shallow. But where to find at least a facsimile of the truth?

The single most valuable source was "An Autobiography of a Fox Woman." It supplied some basic information about attitudes, beliefs, cultural patterns, and language—things that any Mesquakie child familiar with her own past would know, but which were discoveries for Hadley Irwin, though it is painful to admit, include:

- Fox Indians in the Iowa history books were really Mesquakie.
- Mesquakies did not live in teepees.

- A written Mesquakie language exists. It does not translate directly into standard American English; the rhythm is different.
- Names of individuals depended on the particular clan to which the person belonged.
- The Mesquakies and the Sioux were not exactly best friends.
- On the Kansas reservation, disease and alcoholism were real threats.
- The proud and stubborn refusal to become acculturated and homogenized was a force in Mesquakie life.

The writer glimpsed a world that was different, but a world that held logic and beauty when it was viewed as it is for what it is.

Hi Ho Hadley Irwin . . . Away

Then came the not inconsiderable problem of taking history, taking what had been learned, and creating a story that could be enjoyed by young adult readers. Few historians really enjoy the *facts* of history. A psychologist friend said, after reading the first draft of the Mesquakie manuscript, “But Hidden Doe is only eight years old and she’s so serious. Don’t she and her friends ever have any just plain fun?”

“Your names for your characters are accurate — too accurate,” a colleague commented. “These two names belong to people at the settlement.”

Editors at Feminist Press were worried. “Can’t you make the female characters more assertive?”

And there was the problem of simply reversing stereotypes and suddenly realizing that every white person in the book was evil, greedy, and manipulative. No people are always anything.

Hadley Irwin listened and returned to the typewriter and finally the book was finished and on the market. And then came MORE THUNDERING HOOF BEATS.

Reviews of the book arrived. One review by Paulette Fairbanks Molin and Diane M. Burns made it clear that MESQUAKIE was a fraudulent failure:

The characters speak the usual stereotypic, stilted, broken-English dialogue . . . The names given characters . . . seem to come straight from Hollywood. They bear no resemblance to beautiful Mesquakie names. The entire story is a fictionalized version of the author’s own interpretation of events. Although the Mesquakies are portrayed as struggling to maintain their culture, their actions will not inspire readers to act against *injustice* by working in cooperation with others.¹

Fortunately for the writer’s frail ego, a few days later she received a plaque that said: “Jane Addams Peace Association and Women’s International League for Peace and Freedom Honor Award to Lee

Hadley and Annabelle Irwin for **WE ARE MESQUAKIE, WE ARE ONE** for its effective contribution to peace, social *justice*, and world community.”

It is very confusing to be the writer of a cross-cultural book. Is the negative review correct or should she believe Joyce Flynn in *SOJOURNER*, September of 1982?

The non-Indian reader is given the sense of Hidden Doe's whole world, different but internally coherent, and its role in shaping actions . . . provides for young readers a paradigm of the delicacy and democratic sentiment that could form the basis for a friendship with a “different” person — whether the difference is one of race, gender, age, or culture.

It is the risk one takes when she attempts to write from a heritage other than her own. Is there such a thing as a criss-cross cultural review? Was the writing worth the effort? Hadley Irwin would prefer to believe the criticism of Adeline Wanatee, a Mesquakie, who said, “There is one thing terribly wrong with your book. It is too short. You stop in the 1800's. Couldn't you bring it up to the present?” Come to think of it, that is a wonderful idea.

THE LONE RANGER RIDES NO MORE
AND TONTO DOES NOT DO WINDOWS.

Note

¹Paulette Fairbanks Molin and Diane M. Burns. “Review of *We Are Mesquakie, We Are One*.” *Interracial Books for Children Bulletin*. Vol. 12, Nos. 7 & 8 (1981) 22.

White Like Me: A Problem or a Plus

Ann Irwin

In a tiny Iowa rural community, stuck like a mud dauber's nest on the banks of the Little Sioux River, a WASP was born and brought up thinking everyone in the world was just like her. As she went on to be educated, she was told she was the product of a culturally deprived childhood. Everyone was not like her. Didn't she know people were different? Didn't she know there were minorities in the world?