

About Rivers in My Veins

Kara Briggs is an American writer who spent two decades as a journalist for two of the leading Northwest daily newspapers and a columnist for Indian County Today (ICT). Her roots in creative writing and the art of poetry are even older, beginning in her childhood in Spokane, Washington and Spirit Lake, Idaho.

Briggs' Tribal Ancestry

A tribal citizen of the Sauk-Suiattle Tribe, she is descended from the Sauk, Wenatchee, Chelan, Entiat, and Skagit peoples on both side of the North Cascades on her maternal side. She is an enrolled citizen of Sauk-Suiattle, and direct descendant through her mother of the Yakama Nation.

Her poetry like her life has been defined in many ways by the cultural gathering seasons of her tribal homelands in the North Cascades, on either side of this range, and in proximity to the snowcapped volcanos of the region and the rivers, specifically the Columbia and Skagit river systems.

Briggs' Journalism Informs her Poetry

As a journalist covering the rural poor, tribal rights, the sprawl of continued urbanization, and the defining landscapes of the Northwest for two decades inspires Briggs's poetry. Her time listening to her tribal family's history: her uncle's fight for salmon in the Columbia River and the right of tribal fishers to harvest them; her aunt from Sauk-Suiattle fight for the homelands and unique identity of this small tribe; inspired by the historical and genealogical research Briggs has conducted herself.

Briggs has obtained permissions from her key tribal informants to publish what stories are contained in this book. Not every tribal topic poem is based on interviews; Some are based on Briggs' past reporting, historical research and inspiration from these. Any conclusions presented in the book are her own.

Briggs' Use of Poetic Form

Briggs employed poetic form in her writing as a means of distilling her ideas, of forcing poetic lines to their essence. Poetic forms from the English language and from language around the world are time tested literary devices that work in the languages that devised them. Many international forms have over decades and even centuries have been refined for the English language.

Like many contemporary American poets, Briggs adapts poetic forms to her cultural and social perspective. This is exemplified in the acrostic series "**Edward Curtis' Subject in Three Parts,**" which uses haiku, the Shakespearean sonnet and the pantoum to comment on Curtis' iconic and often stereotypical photographs, and finally poke fun at ourselves, as contemporary Native peoples and use of photography and social media platforms.

Briggs has made an extended study of haiku, relating to it not only as a form that American poets have to some extent made their own in the last 100 years, but also as a form from across the Pacific Rim that Coast Salish poets can adapt from our Japanese neighbors to express our own cultures. This is exemplified in a series titled **“Passage,”** which explores Coast Salish modifications to the haiku form to reflect the diversity of our cultures.

Briggs’ adapted her own forms from the ancient social dance songs of the Yakama and related tribes on the mid-Columbia River. Her poem **“Swan Dancers”** is based on the dance of that name and references a recording from the 1950s of Warm Springs women singing social dance songs.

Her documentary poetry includes the extensive use of etymologies of common words in U.S. federal Indian law. The poems themselves are words and concepts from the origins of the word. Similarly, her **“Acknowledgement”** series provides new perspectives on land acknowledgements, with poems offering acknowledgements that she as tribal author might provide. These poems also draw upon Briggs’ Master of Public/Tribal Administration from The Evergreen State College. Her poem **“Expressing our Indigene”** references multiple years she reporting on the United Nations Permanent Forum on Indigenous Peoples for Indian Country Today (now ICT).

Briggs carries forward the tradition in American poetry of dedicating poems to other poets as a type of literary conversation. The poem **“By the Creekside”** speaks to feminist poet Carolyn Kizer, referring to their shared hometown of Spokane and its stereotypical images from the Yakima War, while at the same time demonstrating a shared history with this great American poet.

Her poem **“Girl in the Lake,”** dedicated to the Round Valley poet Janice Gould, a leading Native poet of the late 20th Century. The poem references a time in Gould’s early childhood that was spent at a military facility on Lake Pend Oreille in North Idaho. Briggs, who grew up and lived many years, at a family home at nearby Spirit Lake, Idaho, imagines how Gould’s poetry was inspired as Briggs’s was by these inland fresh water seas and their dramatic climate.

For more information and sample poems from **“Rivers in My Veins,”** visit Saint Julian Press https://m.saintjulianpress.com/uploads/3/4/2/2/34226345/press_release_2.0.pdf

For more information about Kara Briggs and **“Rivers in My Veins”** visit www.karabriggs.com. Or contact Kara Briggs at kara@karabriggs.com.