

PK-Interview

Interview with Dave Matheson

1) To those of you who have Native-American backgrounds --- when did you first become interested in writing about your culture? To those of you who have non-Native American backgrounds, what fueled your interest to write about Native American culture?

I had long wished for a telling and moving story that reflected all that is good about our native people and contained not only the ceremonial aspects of our cultural way of life but also the deep teachings. These teachings are the reason our people have lived a cultural, traditional, and ceremonial life. When that story I had always hoped for never materialized I became more and more interested and motivated in writing the story myself. We native people have a rich and beautiful heritage. We come from ancestors of a beautiful and powerful nature. Our ancestors knew a lot about life, love, and the natural environment. They utilized that knowledge to build a culture a tradition and a ceremonial life that fit together perfectly with life, family, responsibility, and a harmonious living for nature.

2) Which Native American group(s) and geographic region(s) are the focus for your books?

"Red Thunder" is a coming of age story that spans several generations of Schitsu'umsh Indians now called the Coeur d'Alene Tribe in northern Idaho. Schitsu'umsh country is a beautiful landscape that in itself is one of the primary characters of the book. The land was alive, and is alive today to our folks of previous generations. They understood life from their relationship to nature, the animals, fish, water, to the land, to the sky and the four winds. They found a great strength in humility and sincerity. They never forgot how to be thankful for each new day. They sang a song with each holy dawn, and offered prayer for they said the great Kolunsuten, creator never promised anyone a tomorrow. When the new day comes be thankful for it and all the many blessings that you have. Life is a precious and thankful gift.

3) How has writing about a Native American culture impacted you personally? What have you learned along the way?

I poured much of my deepest feelings from my heart into the story "Red Thunder." I purposefully retained and kept out of public display the detail of our ceremonial doings. However, I put for the first time much of our

teaching about our ceremonial life, about why we call the earth our mother, why we call the animals our brother, why we are related to the four winds and the sky above. I had heard these things over the course of my lifetime and felt like they were never portrayed correctly in the non-Indian media. I hope that in sharing these teachings that some readers might learn enough about our native culture to find their own sense of inner peace and gain a sense of understanding and appreciation for the native people. Perhaps along the way people might be somehow more mindful and more kind toward native people of this continent.

4) Can you give us a brief description of the particular Native American custom or ceremony that you found most fascinating to write about?

I tried to write about the broad aspects of our culture so that people could understand why our people are the way that we are. We really are the children of the mother earth and the great Creator Kolunsuten. My own grandparents have said that the foundation of our culture is being thankful. When you know how to be thankful, truly thankful, it will make you humble. When you have humility you will gain true strength. When you have this true strength you are going to be a blessed and powerful person among mankind. Then you can go out and do in the world what you must. I wanted to capture and contain the depth of this way of life, what this way of life is really all about in a story. I want people to see the humility and what really was the true strength of our people. I enjoyed telling the story and it was easy for me. I only had to write about what I had seen in my parents and grandparents and what I try to practice every day in my life.

5) Tell us how you conduct research when writing about Native American customs, language, and spiritual beliefs.

Since my life has been filled with our cultural beliefs and customs I did little research in the traditional sense. However, over the course of a lifetime, decades, I talked to all the elders I could. I tried learning as much of our language as I could. I collected stories of creation. I collected stories of the events that happened before mankind was put here, how our people came to be, and how things happened in the old stories that helped form the historical basis for our cultural understandings. With that knowledge I tried to practice them in our own ceremonial ways in our own ways of prayers, use them and pass them on. In the book "Red Thunder" these were not studied in an academic sense. They were learned in a traditional sense and portrayed as accurately as I could.

6) What are some of the key issues for Native Americans that you hope to convey through your books?

I want the public in general to feel that our people are just deep feeling people, like any other of the good people of the world. Our old folks and our people today have strong hopes and powerful wishes. We have a deep love for our children and grandchildren. We have a deep respect and loving admiration for our elders, the ones with the long braids and talk our language, and gather the Indian foods. These elders took care of their children and grandchildren in the times of economic depression over the last century. I want readers of all backgrounds and races to know that our people stand for something good. For faith, determination, survival, and that we have a right to be. In a sense we are an endangered species. What makes us unique is what God gave us. He gave us our own language, culture, our own beginnings, and our own land. These things need to be preserved to us. They were given to us and preserved for us by a higher power than this nation or government. Yet thru the laws of modern society we have treaty agreements that restate our right to be on our own land. These things must be preserved.

7) How do you combat "Indian stereotypes" in your writing? Do you feel most writers adequately portray the cultural diversity among Native Americans?

I believe in my book "Red Thunder" all the Hollywood stereotyping is totally smashed and broken and a new image is portrayed. The new image is one of family, hope, the beauty of togetherness, and unity with nature and a higher power. Our people made their own way in the world. Our people were independent, strong and powerful. They made their own homes, they gathered their own food, and they took care of all the family needs. In their time, they had no old age homes, no orphanages, no prisons, or mental institutions. They made a beautiful society and they raised their children to know about prayer, and being a good person. Our ancestors fought to preserve their way of life, their notion of freedom and their right to be who they are in their own land with every measure that they had. Some gave their own life for the foundation of today and what is represented in treaty and other agreements between our nations and the United States. Our ancestors are patriots and heroes. I believe this new story and this new image of our people needs to be told again and again, and I intend to do that.

8) What are the unique challenges you face in writing about the Native American culture? What do you find most rewarding?

I think the most challenging part writing about native America is being careful around the ceremonial aspects of our living. I think everyday life, religion, and ceremony were inseparable. You could not separate religion from every day life, you could not separate ceremony from religion. We are very prayerful and thankful people. Our ancestors and people today

try to live a good life but it is difficult to write about the ceremonial aspect. In fact, much of it has never been photographed and never been written about and I do not intend to be the first to do so. The ceremonial aspect of our way of life is the part that if it is not written correctly, even in the general way that I do, it could be misunderstood. My parents told me to never talk about our deepest religious beliefs and ceremonial ways. Our ceremonies and beliefs are so sacred and so beautifully powerful it would be wrong for people to talk about them or make fun of them in a disrespectful way as they read about it or hear about it.

I enjoyed writing very much. I learned a lot about what art really is. When you create art, whether it is a painting, photograph, sculpture or writing a story, people look at what you created and they get a feeling like what you had when you created it. The observers can often times share the feelings of joy, happiness, laughter and tears. I get overcome with a deep feeling of satisfaction when I can portray these feelings to the reader. To me that is the greatest reward an artist could get.

9) How has the Internet impacted your writing career? Did you or your publisher use the web to promote your book? Do you have a website? How are you using your website?

The Internet has changed everything in publishing. Our book is offered on the Internet at amazon.com. I have a website davidmatheson.com. We get a lot of hits on our website from people across the nation, and probably worldwide in the near future. The Internet is obviously the wave of the future. As much as things have changed, you can probably expect that change to multiply seven times over again. It will become more and more important. We will probably see people doing more electronic shopping as the years go by. We expect to continue updating my website, and make our site and our books available to the public through them.

10) Tell us about your current project(s).

I have started several books and publishers/agents have changed my direction a number of times. I really have several books unfinished. One of the unfinished books is a sequel to Red Thunder. Another is a non-fiction about some of the life lessons that I put in Red Thunder. My current project is a non-fiction book about native principals in managing life, projects, organizations, etc. I believe native people have a lot to offer. We have contributed a lot to the world today. Medicines, foods, American history, and character wouldn't be the same if our people were not here to interact with the European settlers. We have much more to offer. Our people have been the first to volunteer to defend this land, this nation and to fight under its flag. Of all the ethnic groups in America, Native Americans proportionately have been the first and have

volunteered to fight for democracy and freedom because it is our land and our country. Not in historical and ownership sense, but because we really are all in it together. I want to be able to bring something new something more to the table that will bring us all together as a people and as a nation.