

The Gathering: Stones For The Medicine Wheel

Copyright Gregory Scofield. Originally published by Polestar Book Publishers under the title, *The Gathering: Stones For The Medicine Wheel*. Vancouver, 1993. These poems are for research purposes only.

Barter Tongue (p. 23)

Not so easy doin' a kohkum's job: up all night
Pushin' a needle.

Takes patience to steady fingers, manoeuvre
Beads into place. Impress myself. These baby
Moccasins look like her work.

Throw in braid ties and keychains for fifty.
Get thirty if I'm lucky.
Smoothing my barter tongue is an entirely
different craft.

Only natural to put on my bush accent.
That dealer likes to think
He's supporting a dying art not to mention
A dying race.
Hey, that's fine by me. I work damn hard for my
drinkin' money.
Would give her a good chuckle
If I took up bingo.

Last Night's Rebellion (p. 24)

Up too early
Breakfast of coffee and cigarettes
Somewhere drifting
The whine of a steel guitar
Or is it a fiddle?

Fresh snowfall
Erases last night's goings-on
At the Avenue Hotel
Jigging til my moccasins blew a hole—Okay,
I got another pair.

Up too early
Fist connecting to cheekbone
Still hurts
Could have been worse
At least I said my piece: To hell with you!
We never lost Batoche or Seven Oaks.

What a Way to Go (p. 29)

Middle of the month

We're so hard pressed
Hunting through every pocket

Hoping I stashed

A little something away
Teasing gum wrappers show up

My lucky prize jingling

Deep down between the lining
Escaped coins just frustrate

What is her majesty

Doing for supper tonight?
Fry bread sounds good

We might have moose

If we were bush Indians
But our appetite is city cuisine

Back home our elders

Have ancient taste buds
Wintertime they stock up

Long distance hunting stories

Confirm who is a good grandson
Staying put keeping freezers filled

Coming together to feast

It all seems so simple
Taking from the land, being thankful

In the city we hunt each other

Looking to borrow some flour, sugar, tea
Just enough to get by til the end of the month

Divided (p. 45)

My beigey-pink shade
Unlike you with bronze skin
I'm a Skin without colour; I get the brushoff
Ego-tripping on me again
Deciding if I am pure enough Red enough
To be whole but the whole of me says
Enough of this colour crap
I am not your white whipping-boy

Growing up in an all-white town
I never forgot my red half It counted big
Especially if you looked not right white
But wrong white To white people that's off-white
Dirty white in Sally Ann clothes
You got followed in stores
They just asked a lot if you needed help Not help
To find the right size but to the door To the cop shop
If you got caught stealing
That was it no second chance
They just nailed your raggedy ass to the wall
Never mind in school
You kept your head down Ducked the put-downs
Shoved it all down

Between Me 'n' Hank (p. 46)

Something to be proud of a hand-to-mouth existence
Growing up moaning along with Hank Williams
I learned the blues first-hand
Even tho it was from another era
Poverty looks the same in every generation
Only I didn't know the half of it
Like my mom, my aunt
They were the real unsung heroes
Making something out of nothing
I always got my fair share even more
When I think about it
He must have had a strong halfbreed mother

God of the Fiddle Players (p. 48)

The wilting sun catches them centre stage, taking a
Well-deserved breather. Safely shielded by the big top,
Easy for me to applaud for more. An old-timer's
Favorite, my mom would say.

Surveying the dance floor, my generation is damn-near
Lost. Even me, I don't know how to promenade
Properly, let alone that quick heel-toe-on-the-spot
Step. Gyrating to a techno-beat is more my history.
Then again, who can dig roots in the city?

I have to ask a friend about being Métis, what there is
To be proud of. Because she's an elder, she says just
Watch, listen. Later, we join the pilgrimage to the
Graveyard, go to the museum.

They have a special show using mannequins to
Re-enact the Northwest Resistance. Weeping openly, I
Got to meet the heroes I was ashamed of in school.

That summer, the God of the Fiddle Players visited
Batoche. I bought my first sash; wearing it proudly
Around the house, practicing the ins & outs of jigging.

Call Me Brother (p. 50)

“You never know when you’re talking to an Indian,” he says wisely because I am only half which we both know is not the real issue but the way I look which makes it next to impossible not to spot me sticking out at a powwow because I have the tourist look that offends my darker relations who don’t see me as related but a wannabe muzzling up around the drum to sing 49ers except I feel the beat like my own heart racing when curious eyes study if I am just mouthing the words or actually belting them out because I am a true die-hard Skin with blue eyes that really screws up the whole history book image except my roots can’t be traced to the Bering Straight but nine months after European contact which to this day hasn’t been forgiven even tho we all have some distant grandpa who at one time or another took an Indian wife which we tend to forget because anything but pure is less than perfect and we all secretly need someone to be better than so the next time you see me up dancing call me brother

Between Sides (p. 81)

Where do I belong, way up north?
The first white trader
Must have felt this way

on the reserve a curio being looked over
my skin defies either race I am neither Scottish
or Cree

So why those disgusted stares?
I speak the language
Eat my bannock with lard

I am not without history Halfbreed labour built
this country defending my blood has become a
life-long occupation

White people have their own ideas
How a real Indian should look
In the city or on the screen

I've already worked past that came back to the
circle my way is not the Indian way or white way

I move in-between
Careful not to shame either side

Answer For My Brother (pp. 82-83)

Who Are The Métis?

His question a clever way to get me thinking where is my place but I detect something else because he's an Indian having been through the wringer only he came out with a strong sense of self going to back to the sacred teachings

My writing is no comparison but I write to heal so I find sacredness in the captured thought which brings me to all the volumes written about Indians be that pre-history or prophetic insights that will lead us into the future but

There is so little written about the Métis because we are not one or the other but a shaded combination that is easier to figure out lumping all of us together because some Halfbreeds look like they have a dark past which to

The outsider appears an Indian past & then there are some so white you wouldn't think twice they have an immigrant history even tho they gave birth to the Province Manitoba getting the short end of the stick because greedy land

Grabbers wanted the whole damn country so whoever looked dark enough got treaty covering up their tainted blood & their not-so-passable cousins were sent packing to the backwoods being written right out of history except for

Brief mention of our leaders who were a thorn in the government's ass they made it to the N section in the encyclopedia under the "North West Rebellion" which more or less infers we needed to be put into our proper place

Which might as well have been a zoo because the city is a zoo & we're on display at your local beer joint talking about uncle Gabe & buffalo-hunting days which was the very essence of our survival even tho Indian politicians claim compensation for each & every buffalo we never forgot the hungry years.

If anything, we are Katipamsoochick.

Making New History (p. 84)

Making new history
Columbus bashing is passe
Insider secret: we all grew up on bannock & baloney
No shame here
Uncle Tomahawk working hard to cut off those
In between Indians
Don't fit the blood criteria
But expect us to support your constitutional demands
In limbo
Out back your reserve
Squatting
On road allowance
Those better-than stares
Looking down on us
We're still homeless
Ironic
We all got screwed
Five hundred years later: a new Half-breed rebellion
Brewing