



Becoming Story: A Journey among Seasons, Places, Trees, and Ancestors

Greg Sarris

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Greg Sarris's resonant memoir explores identities, heritages, and the legacies of places.

Adopted as a child, Sarris grew up in midcentury Santa Rosa, then moved to a smaller city surrounded by expansive natural beauty, where Native "beginning stories were first told, when Coyote ... created the world as we know it today." He discovered his Native American lineage decades later, when he learned that his birth father was of Filipino and Coast Miwok descent. His inclination toward Native culture deepened, until he became an author, educator, activist, and Chairman of California's Federated Indians of Graton Rancheria.

The book details California's troubled history of European conquest, Manifest Destiny, and the suppression and subversion of Indigenous ways of life. It laments that the state's mystical, resourceful Indigenous cultures were invaded by Spanish rancheros in the 1800s, after which California's environmental harmony began to suffer. No longer seen as a "sacred book" filled with symbolism and spirits, the land was exploited, and Native people were treated like heathens and chattel. And even now, California continues to overdevelop its resources, replacing "fields and orchards" with "housing tracts and strip malls."

Sarris's prose includes wonderful imagery, as of unexpected meadows found amid dense redwood forests, and wildflowers so bright it seems that they've swallowed "a share of the sun." Personal recollections complement these observations, as of the wisdom of a Pomo basket weaver and medicine woman, Mabel; and of an ancestor who was a Coast Miwok doctor, known for his healing charms, "supernatural feats," and many wives.

Testifying to the impacts of people on the land, the powerful memoir *Becoming Story* lauds the power of language when it comes to leaving tracks for others to follow.

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