

Beginnings: The Homeward Journey of Donovan Manypenny

Thomas D. Peacock

Holy Cow! Press (Dec 6, 2018)

Softcover \$15.95 (188pp)

978-0-9986010-5-2

In Thomas D. Peacock's *Beginnings*, Donovan "Little Wolf" Manypenny is an Ojibwe descendant who was raised by a white family in Boston. When his grown daughter digs into his family's past, it sets him on a geographical and emotional odyssey. Mirroring his own tribe's original migration from the East Coast to the Great Lakes a thousand years ago, his travels take him to the heart of his heritage, as well as to his birthplace in Wisconsin. Along the way, Manypenny encounters all aspects of the Native American experience, including a visit to an Indian casino that is a near-phantasmagorical experience, and the sharing of stories with other Native Americans he meets on the road that cast light on his people's trials and triumphs.

Both a personal tale of self-discovery and an introduction to Ojibwe culture, *Beginnings* is mainly told from Manypenny's point of view, and is peppered with crucial scenes seen from other characters' perspectives, as well as explanations of Native American folklore. Manypenny himself, bereft of his immediate family at a young age, has lost touch with his roots; it's moving to witness his gradual reconnection to his native language and heritage.

Peacock's sympathy for him and the other people he meets invests the audience in their struggles, and although the narrative progress of Manypenny's journey and the historical footnotes feel dry at times, there are memorable vignettes aplenty, including an evening with a tough Seneca waitress that ends on a note of shared loss and companionship, and a brief incident involving an abused child that concludes with hope.

Beginnings works toward a surprising reunion of long lost relatives; this and similar moments of heartfelt connection are the book's highlights. Although the storytelling is sometimes rough around the edges, *Beginnings* is a compelling look at the legacies of Native Americans, and is a potent tale of reclaiming personal and cultural history.

HO LIN (January/February 2019)

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