Rainy's Powwow

Linda Theresa Raczek
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“When I dance, I am filled with reverence for Mother Earth. I walk slowly, with great respect. My moccasins touch the ground so tenderly, touch-step, touch-step . I carry the fan of sacred eagle,” Grandmother White Hair tells Lorraine (Rainy), a young Native-American now old enough to select her own tribal dance.

But unlike other children at the powwow, Rainy and her little brother, Raymond, have not been raised in a tribal family. She has “no uncle to give her an eagle feather.” She has no relatives who could help her learn to dance. As she watches other children and their families, Rainy is overwhelmed with the choice of dances and her fear of failure. She knows she must choose her dance—one that will be hers for life. The frail Grandmother White Hair shows her the traditional dance. Then, Saleen, the powwow princess, explains: “I feel like a bird with jeweled wings when I dance” the fancy-shawl dance. Her friend, Celeste, extols jingle dancing: “I feel like music. My silver cones bounce and jingle with the drum beats.”

Rainy is embarrassed at her first attempt at dancing, and flees the dance arbor. Wise Grandmother White Hair provides the right words of encouragement, as Raymond wipes his sister’s tears. Rainy is able to overcome her fears and returns to the powwow’s warm welcome into her cultural heritage.

An adoptive mother of two Native American children and founder of a tribal youth shelter for Ute Mountain Ute Tribe, Raczek is a contributor to an anthology of female writers. Her first book, Night that Grandfathers Danced, won a national award as an outstanding book for juveniles.

Gary Bennett’s colorful illustrations are imbued with the terracotta and brilliant colors of Native American art and western skies, and the texture of buckskin and feathers.

The book includes a glossary to further explain dances and powwow traditions.

Rainy’s Powwow is rare and a magical treat. The writing is beautiful, controlled and at times almost poetic as Raczek creates the mood and rhythm of the dances, and passing of traditions from one generation to the next.

LINDA SALISBURY (May / June 1999)

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