

## The Turtle's Beating Heart: One Family's Story of Lenape Survival

**Denise Low**

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*The Turtle's Beating Heart: One Family's Story of Lenape Survival* opens with a tribal elder's explanation: "Delawares are like clouds....They never get together." Thus, Denise Low tackles one of the longest diasporas of any US tribal nation, in her searching memoir about family, identity, and history. Written in three parts, Low speaks profoundly about difficult truths, teasing apart family stories and reweaving them into a larger narrative of historical trauma, where "the past is a presence, beyond language, memory, and culture."

An accomplished poet, Low's well-honed prose flows with lyric intensity. In Kansas, a place "where eternity has a real valence," she searches for documentary evidence of her ancestors' passage through history and for the timeless threads of culture—familial and tribal—that could offer an unbroken legacy. As she uncovers family history, the personal becomes devastatingly political as the outcomes of government and social policies emerge in the vastly different, often fractured identities her relatives have claimed in an ever-shifting, often hostile, world. She swiftly discovers tribal heritage is latent in her family's culture, from consistent settlement patterns in riverine geography to glyphic writing discovered on family tombstones. Yet her family also exists in the penumbra of history, unregistered by the US government, off tribal rolls and reservations, and the ramifications are far-reaching and complex. Ultimately, Low resolves, "We are made up of many fractions of bloodlines, but family inheritance is not a single pattern so easily measured by mathematic abstractions....The heart beats extra blood to the dominant side. No fourth is equal [but] a human's single heart is critical to existence, no matter which quarter holds it."

LETITIA MONTGOMERY-RODGERS (March/April 2017)

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