

Voices of Navajo Mothers and Daughters: Portraits of Beauty

Kathy Eckles Hooker

David Young-Wolff, Photographer

Soulstice Publishing (May 8, 2022)

Hardcover \$37.95 (232pp)

978-1-73498-992-2

The interviews collected in Voices of Navajo Mothers and Daughters illuminate the everyday tasks and special events that mark their subjects' lives.

Kathy Eckles Hooker and David Young-Wolff's cultural survey gives Navajo women the chance to discuss their lives, values, hopes, and dreams.

The book notes that Navajo society is traditionally matriarchal and matrilineal, meaning that women play an important role in determining how their children are raised, supporting their families financially, and guiding their communities. And, it says, many of these traditions still survive today. In this book, Navajo mothers, grandmothers, and daughters discuss their upbringings, explaining what they've taught to and learned from each other. Each woman's experience is unique, but they all share a deep love for their families, and a desire to preserve traditional Navajo values—however they interpret that phrase—for the future.

The book begins and ends with brief, accessible descriptions of important pieces of Navajo culture and history. This helps to contextualize some of the women's experiences, such as their sometimes unpleasant years at government-mandated boarding schools. Each family's profile is accompanied by bright, colorful portraits that show the subjects as a family unit and as individuals. These photographs are taken in a variety of settings, from inside the subjects' homes to outside in the natural world that many of them grew up cherishing.

Kathy Eckles Hooker recruited many of the subjects through her contacts in local schools and is herself a former teacher, so it is unsurprising that education is a recurring theme in these interviews. Several of the older women were unable to receive the educations that they wanted, so they encouraged their own daughters to pursue higher education—and many did so. Tradition is also important, though each woman embraces and honors her roots in different ways. The older women often speak Navajo exclusively and proudly recall taking part in traditional ceremonies. Younger subjects describe the pain of being unable to speak Navajo, or lament how their own children do not have access to the nature and traditions that characterized their mothers' youths.

The book lets each woman speak for herself, presenting interviews conducted from 2009 to 2012 with a minimum of additions, asides, or commentary. This unobtrusive approach allows the interviewer's mediating role to fade into the background and makes for a more intimate text. The women's voices come through clear and strong as they relate the experiences that shaped them. The book also includes updates from 2020 to 2021, in which many of the families report on recent triumphs and losses. These segments are brief but satisfying codas to the interviews, which are a valuable look at how Navajo women band together to celebrate life's joys, push through adversity, and guide the next generation.

Voices of Navajo Mothers and Daughters is a book of interviews that illuminates the everyday tasks and special events that mark the lives of Navajo women.

EILEEN GONZALEZ (April 1, 2022)

Disclosure: This article is not an endorsement, but a review. The publisher of this book provided free copies of the book and paid a small fee to have their book reviewed by a professional reviewer. Foreword Reviews and Clarion Reviews make no guarantee that the publisher will receive a positive review. Foreword Magazine, Inc. is disclosing this in accordance with the Federal Trade Commission's 16 CFR, Part 255.