

## Warrior Is

**Harley L. Zephier**

**Robin L. Zephier**

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*Warrior Is is a generous and openhearted sharing of cultures that illuminates American history.*

Set on the northern plains in the decades leading up to and including the Battle of the Little Bighorn in 1876, *Warrior Is*, by Harley L. Zephier and Robin L. Zephier, illuminates a famous historical moment through the eyes of Native Americans. The result is an important, deeply interesting, and wonderfully unique contribution to the fields of both history and the historical novel.

In the nineteenth century, the Lakota—also known as the Sioux—constituted a vast nation of related tribes, subtribes, and bands. Master horsemen, they enjoyed a wide-ranging nomadic life that provided social stability, buffalo for food and hides, and an unusual level of freedom.

The discovery of gold in the Black Hills changed this, accelerating western settlement and igniting a war that ran for years, as the United States sought to take the Lakota's land. Through the experiences of a Lakota warrior named Saved By Bear whose life spanned these years, the book provides a detailed panorama of the Lakota way of life and the Plains Wars that ended it.

The first several chapters of the book are devoted to describing Lakota history, beliefs, and society. Readers eager for the plot to begin may be impatient with this choice, but the material is interesting, and the logic of the choice becomes clear soon enough: By the time Saved By Bear enters the novel, the reader has been given much of the knowledge that a child of his age would garner from the world around him. This sharing forms a bridge to bonding with and understanding the book's main character.

The technique of backing away from the immediate story to provide factual history is used several times throughout the book, and expands to include communiques and conversations between military personnel sent to clear the land of Native Americans. This mash-up of techniques is a risk that pays off.

Writing is straightforward and interesting. The text also has a personal feel because its authors, who are great-grandsons of the real-life Saved By Bear, add fascinating details previously known only within their family, a feature that should make the book a must for Little Bighorn buffs.

Though Saved By Bear is the book's main character, his friends, family, and fellow warriors come to life through his eyes, and tension mounts as the final confrontation with Custer draws near. The battle sequence itself, detailed and tightly focused, creates a verisimilitude seldom encountered in historical fiction.

The book also comes with a series of useful appendixes that provide further cultural notes, notes from both authors, a chronology, a list of sources, an index of maps and photos, a general index, and a glossary of terms.

History, biography, and a work of creative storytelling—*Warrior Is* is all of these, and crosses genre borders to

become something more: a generous and openhearted sharing of cultures that illuminates American history.

SUSAN WAGGONER (December 11, 2017)

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