FOREWORD REVIEWS THE INDIE WE LOVE.

General

Washaka: The Bear Dreamer
Jamie Lee
Rusty Speidel, illustrator
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The passing on of stories has for centuries been of seminal importance to North American Native tribes, whether creation stories, humorous narratives with moral lessons, supernatural stories, historical legends, or prophetic tales. Today, in order to counter the gradual drifting away of young indigenous peoples to urban areas far from their ancestors, there is a growing movement among Native peoples to record and preserve these stories before they disappear; and to instill a love and respect for these stories in the young, so they will carry these crucial fragments of cultural identity on into the future.

With this captivating tale (based on a recurring dream experienced by Leon Hale, a member of the Lakota people), the author is making an enormous contribution to that effort. Lee grew up on the Leech Lake Reservation, and is now a creative writing teacher in Rapid City, South Dakota, near the Black Hills. Hale saw the author in a restaurant with her laptop, found out that she was a writer, and asked if she would write down his dream.

He had no way of knowing that he had chosen the perfect person for his endeavor. Lee and her husband have collaborated on Native programs for public radio, including a fifty-two-week series titled *Oyate Ta Olowan*, which features the songs of more than fifty Native American tribes. They also have operated youth camps on the Pine Ridge Reservation, and together they want to give “native people their own voice in the modern world.”

Lee captured Hale’s dream and transformed it into this mesmerizing and enlightening tale of Little Chief, a young Lakota boy in the early 1800s, and his recurring dream of a white bear tied to a tree, struggling to get free. His grandfather tells him that in the future he will see something that will be similar to this dream, and that he must then act on it. Years later, the bear reappears as a white youth, tied to a tree by his abusive father merely for being less clever and strong than his twin brother. Little Chief rescues him and brings home to his village, where he is

called *Mato Ska* (“White Bear”), and treated as family.

The author’s website, www.manykites.com, contains a wealth of information about current Native cultural programs, and includes a video of Leon Hale explaining his dream, which tells a story that he hopes grandmothers and grandfathers will tell to their grandchildren. This book will enable that wish to become a reality; at the same time, it offers an intimate glimpse into Native traditions, making it a valuable resource for anyone interested in Native histories or storytelling traditions.

Deborah Donovan