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Review of *Without Reserve: Stories from Urban Natives* by Lynda Shorten

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Canada's urban Natives, like their American cousins to the south, are resilient, proud people who have weathered broken families, unemployment, pervasive alcohol and drug abuse, and rampant racism to retain a strong cultural identity and a hope for better times. Lynda Shorten's moving account of nine urban Native people from Edmonton, Alberta, reveals the complexity and diversity present in contemporary Canadian Native society. Her stories also demonstrate the havoc one culture has wreaked on another.

Shorten, a lawyer, journalist, writer, and activist, became a "walking tape recorder" to produce this book. She notes that she believes in stories; this book is a collection of autobiographical vignettes collected through extensive interviews. Although she evidently immersed herself in her subjects' lives, sometimes to the point of assisting some to cope with Canada's failed legal system, she realized the importance of presenting, not representing, those she interviewed. Although it is impossible for any reporter to remain completely divorced from their story, Shorten tried to edit only for clarity, not for ideology. Questions are left unanswered, however, and the author made no attempt to seek outside verification for the autobiographical stories she recorded. In her introduction Shorten also explains her rationale as a non-Native for recording these stories. For her the book was an educational experience, and the process of writing allowed her to learn while she helped her readers learn.

This book is not a pleasant read. Although there are tales of a successful artist, a fast-food worker struggling to anchor herself in traditional culture, and an engaging grandmother, there are also accounts of sexual abuse, alcoholism, racism, and early, brutal deaths. Although there is no way of telling from this small sample whether these autobiographies are typical,
Edmonton’s Natives, Shorten notes, are at the bottom of the socioeconomic level and often lead Malthusian lives.

Despite the bleakness in so many of these stories, there is also a pervasive optimism that flows through much of the book. Grace, the grandmother, survived a harsh Catholic upbringing and missionary education to keep her family together despite the travails which accompanied adapting to urban life. Several of the storytellers, notably Jane Ash Poitras, speak movingly of their successful incorporation of Native beliefs with the values of the dominant culture. Other accounts reveal that while some have fallen victim to the bottle and to prison, others have survived both and are using their experience to help other Natives. The book, like the lives of its subjects, is a dizzying blend of the loud and subtle, the horrific and the pleasing. It captures, as Shorten intended it would, the diversity implicit in Native life in modern urban Canada.

Although the author admits to being neither scientific in selecting people to interview nor wholly distanced from them in the interview and reporting process, the brutally honest statements her methods produced suggest that her approach—as journalist rather than historian or social scientist—allows for a much fuller picture of contemporary life among Canadian Natives. Hopefully her efforts will serve as encouragement for others to record and explore the diverse experiences of contemporary Native Americans. Steve Potts, Department of History, University of Nebraska-Lincoln.