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Review of *Behind the Man: John Laurie, Ruth Gorman, and the Indian Vote in Canada*. By Ruth Gorman.

Laurie Meijer Drees  
Vancouver Island University

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*Behind the Man: John Laurie, Ruth Gorman, and the Indian Vote in Canada.* By Ruth Gorman. Edited with an introduction by Frits Pannekoek. Calgary, AB: University of Calgary Press, 2007. lvi + 277 pp. Photographs, appendix, notes, index. \$39.95 paper.

Ruth Gorman was a powerful person. When I encountered her in the early 1990s at her home in Calgary I was immediately impressed with her indomitable spirit. At that time she was engrossed in writing a biography of her dear friend John Laurie. Her writing task was complex, and yet she was clearly driven to complete it. The end result of her tremendous effort is *Behind the Man*, part biography of John Laurie, part personal memoir, and part history of midcentury Alberta and Laurie and Gorman's work advocating civil rights for Canada's Indian peoples. Frits Pannekoek and his editorial team completed the book after Gorman's death, and the work now stands as a testament to the will of Gorman and her views of Western Canadian history.

*Behind the Man* can be read in a variety of ways and appeals to readers from different disciplines. Editor Pannekoek has gone to some effort to present Gorman's work in the context of relevant academic literature on Western Canadian Aboriginal and women's history. Gorman's manuscript itself is quite lengthy, and in this version is amply augmented with archival photographs, additional explanatory references, a timeline appendix, as well as a thorough index. The story of John Laurie, as told by Gorman, moves chronologically through his life, beginning with his childhood and ending with his death. The book's last chapters then move into Gorman's story about her own role in Canada's amendment of its *Indian Act* in 1960.

*Behind the Man* is striking for its revelation of attitudes and beliefs held dear by a middle-class Euro-Canadian generation in politically conservative Alberta after the war. A form of “moral imagination,” these attitudes resound in Gorman’s writing, exuding an authority not universally endorsed, not then or now. For Gorman, her story is heroic: “her Indians” needed help; she and Laurie provided it. Memoirs such as this are not readily critiqued—despite occasional factual errors—because of their personal nature. Yet they do invite dialog. In this case, Aboriginal people affected by Gorman and Laurie’s actions might be interested in responding to the various claims made in Gorman’s work. Surprisingly, Pannekoek refrained from citing Aboriginal perspectives on the history and attitudes featured by Gorman. Readers should beware that although this book does not suggest as much, there exists a substantive and growing body of Aboriginal writing that does just that. As the rear dust cover of the book suggests, “there is always more than one point of view when it comes to recording history.”

Laurie Meijer Drees  
Department of First Nations Studies  
Vancouver Island University