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## Review of *Son of Two Bloods* By Vincent L. Mendoza

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*Son of Two Bloods*. By Vincent L. Mendoza. Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 1996. Photographs. 164 pp. \$25.00.

Vincent Mendoza's *Son of Two Bloods*, the 1995 winner of the American Indian Prose Award, is an honest and at times heart-wrenching autobiography. The son of a Mexican father and Creek Indian mother, Mendoza conveys his struggle to locate himself within either community. When Vincent was a child, his father moved the family away from a predominately Mexican neighborhood, and his mother allowed the boy to attend Indian school. Both circumstances contribute to the author's feeling "lost" about who he was: not quite Mexican or Indian. He is moved by the Mariachi music his father and uncle play, and although he does not understand the words, feels the music is a part of him. He has a similar experience with Grandpa McIntosh's preaching at the Baptist church, but when the service is delivered in the Muskogee (Creek) language, Mendoza feels destined to be an outsider.

Affectionately constructed on the page are intimate scenes of friends and family, from both cultures, who have helped to shape Mendoza's life. And while the author is candid about the discrimination and bigotry he faced, he does not make these issues central. What resonates throughout the text is his love of family and a strength he gains from such individuals as "Weleeta," "Little Grandma," his parents Concepcion and Martha Mendoza, his brother Junior, and his "son" Bucky DeGraw.

Mendoza also pays considerable attention to his brief military experiences. After his friend Wayne Hamilton is killed in Vietnam, he joins the Marines, vowing to avenge his friend's death. But instead of an assignment on the "front lines," Mendoza is attached to a military post office, sorting letters and packages. Frustrated at not "seeing some action," he comes to understand that he is a lifeline for military personnel, their only means of connecting with family and loved ones at home.

When finally reassigned to a dangerous post, he quickly has his fill of war and longs for home.

After returning safely, Mendoza marries Debbie, whom he first met years earlier at a Mexican dance. At times his almost naive devotion to his first wife is painful to witness as she lies, cheats, and accumulates debts. In spite of her behavior, he depicts her with great tenderness and affection. His all but tireless dedication to his wife and his refusal to abandon her, even as she faces and loses a bitter struggle with cancer, reveal his deep loyalty and affection for the mother of the daughters he cherishes.

Throughout the work, Mendoza's writing reflects his evolving identity as a mixed-blood who is seeking to define himself. He visibly vacillates between the "we" and the "they" of the Mexican and Indian worlds, but ultimately defines himself as both, a son of two bloods.

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