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Review of *Sacred Fireplace (Oceti Wakan): Life and Teachings of a Lakota Medicine Man* By Pete S. Catches Sr. Edited by Peter V. Catches

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Sacred Fireplace (Oceti Wakan): Life and Teachings of a Lakota Medicine Man. By Pete S. Catches Sr. Edited by Peter V. Catches. Santa Fe, NM: Clear Light Publishers, 1999. Photographs, notes, glossary. x + 227 pp. \$14.95 paper.

The late Oglala Lakota traditionalist Pete Catches or Petaga Yuha Mani (He Walks with

Hot Coals) has left behind a memoir that is most noteworthy for what it doesn't offer. There is no sterile, technical inventory of ritual terms and formulae and very little that could be dismissed as New Age spiritualist bromide. Instead, there is a replication of oral reminiscences as they are customarily delivered by Indian elders—seemingly wandering associations that are, paradoxically, so efficient in generating memorable images in the listener's mind.

Catches's recollections of prosaic childhood teachings from the uncle who raised him (such as, "Always make your bed, it's what keeps you warm at night") turn out to be some of the most elegantly simple expressions of the Plains Indian honor-and-respect ethos in print. He gives many interesting glimpses of life at Pine Ridge Reservation, from breaking horses and ranch chores to auto wrecks averted miraculously by the hand of Great Spirit. Catches struggled for sixteen years with the teachings of Jesuit missionaries before accepting his calling as a medicine man, revealed to him in a dream in which he appeared as a lone sun dancer. He describes his first doctoring experience and explains the humble, nearly anti-social comportment that keeps a healer worthy of rendering power. These are all pictures of human dignity that counter the gloomy notoriety that poverty casts upon Pine Ridge.

A section on "stories and lessons" moves from a Lakota creation myth to Catches's memories of the 1973 Wounded Knee occupation, showing the easy shift from remote to recent past that marks the Indian approach to narrative. There is also a review of the seven basic sacred rites—purification (sweat lodge), pipefast (vision quest), sun dance, adoption ceremony, throwing of the sacred ball, women's puberty rite, and spirit release—though the coverage here is uneven. Six sections plus an introduction and epilogue have been added by Catches's son, also a shaman, who edited the entire work from hours of taped conversation.

A bit more background would have been helpful for the non-specialist readers who un-

doubtedly will be attracted to this book. Will they know what it means when Catches says, with culturally-appropriate understatement, that he pierced and broke free during his initiatory sun dance? Use of the name "Dakota" instead of "Lakota" in a few places breeds confusion. Nevertheless, with this work Pete Catches joins George Sword and Nicholas Black Elk as a major revealer and preserver of a beautiful world of belief.

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