

Memories we won't forget

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ABSTRACT (ENGLISH)

Merasty describes navigating rough rapids, smoking fish, and drying moose meat, as well as lakes teeming with trout, a density of humming blackflies, and an abundance of reindeer who keep his family fed on the shores of Deep Bay, Saskatchewan. The 2015 publication of this memoir coincided with the release of the final report of the Truth and Reconciliation Commission (TRC) on Indian Residential Schools. While the foreground of *The Education of Augie Merasty* is a character-driven catalogue of the routine and devastating violence of residential school life, these accounts are punctuated by conversations with other survivors about collective experiences of brutality and resilience.

TESTO COMPLETO

"Memories we won't forget" Joseph Auguste Merasty and David Carpenter *The Education of Augie Merasty: A Residential School Memoir*. U of Regina P \$21.95

The Education of Augie Merasty begins and ends with the land. The opening and closing paragraphs of this short memoir describe Joseph Auguste (Augie) Merasty's warm memories of life in northern Saskatchewan. In these fleeting passages, Merasty, with co-writer David Carpenter, locates himself in his territory amidst a web of respectful and reciprocal relationships. Merasty describes navigating rough rapids, smoking fish, and drying moose meat, as well as lakes teeming with trout, a density of humming blackflies, and an abundance of reindeer who keep his family fed on the shores of Deep Bay, Saskatchewan. Framing his testimony of the years he was detained in St. Therese residential school, these moments illustrate the importance of land and self-determination to dialogues concerning reconciliation today.

The 2015 publication of this memoir coincided with the release of the final report of the Truth and Reconciliation Commission (TRC) on Indian Residential Schools. Merasty's narrative is composed, in part, of correspondence with lawyers who worked on the classaction lawsuit that ignited the official TRC process. While working toward his memoir, and writing his own legal testimony, Merasty also served as a grassroots documentarian, recording the stories of his community:

All those sisters and cousins, uncles and many other unrelated people from other villages told me what has happened. . . . A lot of their stories I already wrote and submitted to our lawyers . . . representing the survivors of residential schools.

While the foreground of *The Education of Augie Merasty* is a character-driven catalogue of the routine and devastating violence of residential school life, these accounts are punctuated by conversations with other survivors about collective experiences of brutality and resilience. Such moments of narrative interruption are an important reminder that the TRC process was made possible by the bravery, conviction, and grassroots activism of survivors willing to share their experiences and collectivize their struggle.

Perhaps the brilliance of Merasty's story is his ability to weave his personal experiences of incarceration with a

broader political critique of colonial domination manifest in the Indian Residential Schools system. Throughout the book's nine short chapters, Merasty makes a point of identifying the colonial paranoia of his "keepers" in the school. Describing two of the most vicious nuns, Merasty writes: "I think they were paranoid in the position they had, being masters of a lower race of creatures, Indians, as we were called." In this lucid analysis of a fragile colonial supremacy that must always be protected by violence, Merasty names the structural nature of the colonial domination he experienced. In the most compelling passages of the memoir, Merasty draws ethical and historical parallels between Fascist Germany and the "little regime" of residential schools. While comparisons to Nazi Germany often miss the mark, Merasty's assessment signals the importance of historical, structural critique to both popular and academic discourses of reconciliation. Reflecting on the religious hypocrisy of the residential schools' perpetrators, Merasty writes: "[T]hey never really practiced what they preached, period." In our current era of TRC calls to action and reconciliation, this book is a mustread if we are to avoid that same charge.

DETTAGLI

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