

American Indian Law Review

Volume 8 | Number 1

1-1-1980

Book Review: Words From the Earth by Julie Gibson

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Recommended Citation

Jeanne L. Crabtree, *Book Review: Words From the Earth by Julie Gibson*, 8 AM. INDIAN L. REV. 197 (1980), <https://digitalcommons.law.ou.edu/air/vol8/iss1/12>

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BOOK REVIEW

Words From the Earth, by A-Se-Gi, Cherokee-Creek (Julie Gibson), with a Foreword by Ross O. Swimmer. Self-published, © 1981, all rights reserved. May be ordered directly from Julie Gibson, P.O. Box 741, Norman, Oklahoma 73070. Pp. 47. \$7.00.

First read this:

For a Cherokee

Fire in your Eyes
Like a wounded Deer
You cannot Run
You cannot Stop
A hint of Destiny
And agony there
Existence Named
In mental flight
I take you high
Upon the Mountain Top
Among the Shadows
of the Cedar Trees
And beneath
the Grandmother Sun
Where the flowers
of Yellow Gold
and the Warmth
of the Wind exists
I give you strength

and then read:

Protection

GRANDFATHER,
You wrapped
The Smoke
Around Me,
who is there
that can
harm me—

With such sensitive expressions of her tribal upbringing as the two examples above, Cherokee poetess Julie Gibson charms and beguiles the readers of her poetry. Employing her life experiences, which are steeped in the traditions of her extended

family, and always respectful of the old ones, Gibson has recorded a poetic collection of memories, observations about the influence of white society on the tribe and tribal individuals, and perceptive comments, many very brief, that reveal the Indian mind and emotions.

In "Sweat Lodge" A-Se-Gi whispers "To all my relations" as she enters the lodge for the ceremony with her sisters, and as the experience is related we can come to understand that the poetess is speaking of *all* of nature in a sense that non-Indians are—sadly—unlikely ever to know.

Ross O. Swimmer, Principal Chief of the Cherokees, says in his foreword: "The *Words* hold a special meaning for all Indian Youth, and [for] many others who have searched for Beauty, Understanding, and Knowledge through the American Indian experience." Thus, he knows that we are all the same in our search to satisfy these universal needs.

There are forty-seven poems in this collection of "Words From the Earth," poems of light and shadow, sadness and joy, poems of the Indian experience that give hope to the young tribal members and poems that pay homage to the old ones and the old ways. As with many meaningful experiences—reading great literature, looking at a great painting, listening to great music—there are poems here that give the perceptive reader a "chills along the back of the neck" feeling in their stunning honesty.

The book would be a valuable addition to elementary and secondary social studies materials, and without question it should become a part of American Indian studies. It would assist in educating young Americans of all races to respect the culture that is still viable in the Native American life ways.

A-Se-Gi is quite young to be able to express herself so intensely and so perceptively, and this bodes well for us. Surely we can expect more of her fine poetry.

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