
Linda LeGarde Grover. *Onigamiising: Seasons of an Ojibwe Year*. University of Minnesota Press, 2017. 201 pp. ISBN: 9781517903442.

<https://www.upress.umn.edu/book-division/books/onigamiising>

This book is a very nice read. Personally, I found the book to be very moving. One does not have to be Anishinaabe to appreciate the familial warmth that rises from the pages. The reader can bask in that comfort as one might have done with grandma's old wood stove. However, the book touches on some of the hard truths of Ojibwe history as well. Those hard truths recall those solemn moments of pain contemplated in silence and finished with a deep sigh in thinking about one's own family's history as an Anishinaabe.

The book is a collection of newspaper columns the author wrote for the *Duluth Budgeteer* and is organized around the seasons of the year, starting with spring. As the title indicates, the geographic focus is on the city of Duluth, MN, known in the Anishinaabe language as *Onigamiising*, the place of the small portage. The focus and the title are appropriate in that the author and her family have been in Duluth for a number of generations. The author is Anishinaabe. The Anishinaabe people are also known as Ojibwe and Chippewa. All three appellations are used in the book.

The book covers many aspects of the author's life, from childhood memories to her current status as an elder in the tribe and professor at the University of Minnesota Duluth. The author will often start a column making an observation about some details of her family life, such as a family gathering. She will then use that observation to let her memory wander to her own childhood experiences or to make some larger point about life for the Ojibwe people. Invariably, in good rhetorical fashion for the Anishinaabeg, she'll bring her discussion back to the original starting point, thus completing the circle of her thoughts. Given this stylistic method, a reader can approach and appreciate this work on at least two levels—the touching scenes of Ojibwe family life on the one hand and the history and culture of the Ojibwe people on the other. I will discuss history and culture first in order to lead up to the discussion of family life. No doubt, there are other ways of reading the book. But for the purposes of this review, that is how I will organize my thoughts and presentation. I will be speaking based on my status as a member of the Minnesota Chippewa Tribe enrolled on the White Earth reservation.

History weighs heavy on the Ojibwe people, and the author is not afraid to discuss the difficult times we had to endure. The issue that comes up the most is the boarding school experience. As Grover points out in a number of chapters, during the boarding school era, Ojibwe children were removed from their homes and sent to boarding schools, often far from their home communities. Without going into the details, the boarding schools were quite brutal, and the children suffered badly. That trauma continues to echo down through the ages and so the Ojibwe, along with other tribes, still suffer from historical trauma related to the boarding schools, as Grover rightly points out.

The history of the Ojibwe is not all negative, though. The author also discusses the many ways in which the Ojibwe of yore worked hard to maintain the culture. For example, one chapter is dedicated to an extensive discussion of treaties and the sovereign status of Native people in general and the Ojibwe in particular. The manner in which the Ojibwe leaders reserved land for

their people as well as the right to hunt, gather, and harvest wild rice in the ceded territories is explained in detail. The chapter on treaty rights is not the only place in the book the author discusses issues related to sovereignty and treaty rights. However, throughout the book, the reader can get the sense that the Ojibwe were not just passive victims of the U.S. government and the forces of colonialism. Instead, the Ojibwe worked hard to maintain their culture, language, and way of life to as great a degree as possible given the realities with which they were faced.

The culture of the Ojibwe is presented in at least two basic ways: the material culture and cultural practices. One good example of material culture is dreamcatchers. It is well known among the Ojibwe people that dreamcatchers were originally created by the Ojibwe. The author devotes a chapter to the history of dreamcatchers, including the origin story. In short, a spider wove a web in front of a baby to soothe it as the poor child was fussing and fidgeting. Grover points out that the spider did not have to take time out of its busy life to tend to the baby, and so expresses thanks to the spider for doing so. This is a good example because it includes an aspect of Ojibwe material culture, its origin story, and perhaps most important of all, the behavioral attitude of having gratitude. So, the example of the dreamcatcher captures well the depth of Ojibwe material culture.

For their part, cultural practices permeate the book. For example, there is a very nice discussion of the practice of respecting elders. Grover and her husband attend an event where the young people bring elders their respective plates of food. Of course, Grover is served. There is a twist, though, which I will not spoil by revealing it here. But, the twist points to another cultural practice of being polite. However, one aspect of this event I think is very telling. The elders are not just passive recipients of the food. They have a role to play as well, and their job is to be gracious in accepting the gift from the young people and to encourage them with kind words. In other words, the elders work to reinforce the cultural practice by making the young people feel good about following Ojibwe customs. I appreciate how this example demonstrates the holistic nature of cultural practices across the generations.

Of even greater importance, though, is the manner in which the history and culture discussed above manifest themselves in the many scenes of Ojibwe family life Grover paints. It is those scenes of family life that, in my mind, make up the strongest part of the book. The many examples of Ojibwe family life provided by Grover show how in reality the history and cultural practices of the Ojibwe are passed down from generation to generation. The examples are too many to go into here. However, two will suffice to make my point. The discussion of making ribbon skirts early in the book is very nice. The older, more experienced individuals work together to help the next generation learn the tradition of ribbon skirts. There is also a nice discussion of the history and cultural practices involved with ribbon skirts. For example, Grover discusses the ways ribbon skirt fashions have changed over the years. But, the one example I truly appreciate is so simple and yet so powerful—the revival of the language. She talks about how her Uncle Bob hears one of her grandchildren singing a song with Ojibwe words he learned as part of his Ojibwe language instruction at school. Her uncle comments how they were not allowed to speak Ojibwe in the boarding school he attended, but now they are teaching it in schools. The simple and powerful part is her uncle shakes his grand-nephew's hand just as a way of honoring the young boy and encouraging him to keep learning Ojibwe. It is those types of

simple, gentle, and kind ways in which the history and culture continue to be passed on. In that regard, the book provides an intimate look at how the culture really operates.

Before I close, I would like to add a few personal notes. Grover and I are from the same generation. So, when she talks about her childhood memories, and really her life in general, there is so much that I can relate to myself. Some of them are fun, simple things, like using the family's baby buggy as a toy. We had the exact same kind of baby buggy and used it as a toy as well. As kids we also always got so excited when we came back home from swimming or whatever and saw our aunt's camper parked in front of the house for a visit on their way up north in the exact same manner Grover details an impromptu family gathering. I also think about how the history of the boarding schools really did not come out when we were young. It was not until we were older that we heard some of the ways my family suffered in the boarding schools, again in the same way as Grover. The same is true for the Ojibwe language. It is pretty evident Grover did not grow up learning much Ojibwe. Neither did we. But as the years have gone by, both of us have worked to learn the language as best we can. One last example has to do with local knowledge. This was a subtle little thing. But, at one point, Grover mentions old Highway 61 outside of Duluth. I know old Highway 61, just as I know the old Cass Lake Road, old Highway 2, old Highway 71, and the old Red Lake Road around Bemidji. I love how the locals keep referring to roads and highways by their old names long after their names have been changed. Knowing the old roads and highways really marks one as a native to the area. One is part of the in-group if one knows those old names. I had to chuckle to myself when Grover mentioned old Highway 61 and all the memories that were sparked by its name. I really felt a kinship with Grover reading this book. I imagine other Ojibwe people would not have to belong to the same generation as Grover and myself to personally relate to the book. For many Ojibwe, reading this book will be like holding up a mirror to one's life. The reflection will validate Ojibwe culture and make one feel good about oneself. So, in some ways, it is worth reading the book just to feel that sense of validation.

There is much to commend for this book. It provides a lot of food for thought, and certainly if it were used in a classroom setting it would provide a wealth of material for discussion. I only touched on a few examples of the topics covered in the book. There is a lot more to explore in this wonderful collection. I will close by giving one last example, though. She has a whole chapter on making lugalette. So, if you ever want to know how to make lugalette, this is the book for you!

Lawrence Gross, University of Redlands