Canadian Journal of Family and Youth, 16 (1), 2024, pp. 127-131
ISSN 1718-9748© University of Alberta
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Robertson, A. David. (2020). Black Water: Family, Legacy, and Blood Memory. Toronto: HarperCollins Publishers Ltd.

Reviewed by: Stephanie Turrecha, MacEwan University

David Alexander Robertson's memoir, “Black Water: Family, Legacy, and Blood Memory,” examines the complexity of Indigenous identity, generational trauma, and the lasting effects of the Canadian residential school system. Through visual art and narrative, Robertson provides an in-depth exploration of Indigenous issues, creating a narrative that captivates readers and conveys his voice in a way that resonates with Indigenous readers. "Black Water" begins with Robertson sitting in a café with his father, Don, one of many locations Robertson speaks about in this memoir. Don wishes to return to his trapline one last time, where he has not been for almost seven decades (Prologue). Don, born in 1935, lacked official Indigenous status despite his heritage. For nine months each year, he and his family resided in a camp on their trapline in Canada. However, their way of life transformed with the enactment of the Family Allowances Act in 1945. This legislation offered financial assistance to children with a fixed residence, forcing Don's family to relinquish their trapline, except for short seasonal visits in the spring (Chapter 6).

Robertson accepts his father's request, beginning the documentation of Robertson's journey to a more profound knowledge of family and identity, a quest for self-discovery and mending between father and son. Within "Black Water," Robertson skillfully interconnects three themes: Family, Legacy, and Blood Memory. As Robertson recalls stories from his youth and his efforts

to reconnect with his father, he frequently mentions "blood memory," describing it as “the feeling of familiarity” (Chapter 2). He remembers the first time he entered Norway House and felt an immediate sense of belonging; he learns from an Elder that this is blood memory (Chapter 2). Blood memory is an integral part of the Indigenous spirit, consistently ingrained within the people; the sense of belonging extends beyond the physical environment; it is linked to emotions and the heart, symbolizing one's connection to the culture and community.

As the son of a Cree father and a White mother, Robertson considers how his family has influenced him and what it means to be Cree. Robertson reflects on how his parents’ separation not only deprived him of his father's guidance but also created a cultural disconnect in his life. The presence of his mother and siblings, along with the absence of his father, had a profound impact on his understanding of himself and the aspects of his identity that remained unknown to him (Chapter 1). Following a decade of separation, his parents eventually reunite, and Robertson characterizes the circumstances of their reunion as swift and smooth (Chapter 11). Despite the effort and time it took to reach this point, Robertson expresses that hearing this news was the best day of his life (Chapter 11), especially considering the anxiety and uncertainty he experienced during his childhood (Chapter 1).

Nonetheless, Don and his wife intentionally decided not to reveal their children's Indigenous heritage, fearing that acknowledging their Cree roots would create a social burden. This choice left Robertson feeling incomplete as if a crucial part of his identity were missing. During his teenage years, living in a primarily white neighborhood, Robertson denied his heritage, even going as far as to participate in racist jokes and describes his high school life as:

> In high school, my favourite accessory was a Cleveland Indians hat. I was hiding behind the Indians' grinning mascot, Chief Wahoo. If I was making fun of myself, my classmates wouldn't make fun of me, right? I'd beat them to it. If there were jokes about Indians—and there were— I'd laugh along. If questions arose about my heritage, I lied. Why would I want anybody to know that I was an Indian? My friends watched the same movies I did: non-Indigenous actors with the right skin tone (or the right bronzing agent), wearing headbands to keep black wigs in place, acted like savages needing to be tamed (Chapter 1).

Due to the negative portrayals of Indigenous heritage in school seen by Robertson (Chapter 1), he struggled to differentiate between who the Indigenous people were as actual people and the stereotypes that were prevalent at that time. Robertson conveys that the absence of colonial history in the classroom, ignorance, and the reinforcement of prejudices in popular culture all impacted his education, which led to a constrained and skewed understanding of history (Chapter 1).

As he shares his father's life story and its connection to his own, Robertson understands the importance of exploring the past. He realizes the need to thoroughly grasp this history to gain a deeper understanding of his father and, in the end, of himself. A portion of this information can be obtained from the documents he has found and the studies he has done. It also comes from the stories handed down through the years (Chapter 4). Robertson openly acknowledges the presence of Canada's Residential School system and its long-lasting, generational effects on Indigenous communities. He emphasizes that history is lost as survivors unable to share their truths pass away (Chapter 4). Although he did come across a few family-related records, he speaks most about the oral narratives handed down through his grandmother, Nana, and his father, Don. Robertson elaborates and states: "When I stand in the place where the residential school used to be, I'm sure that I can feel Nana there, walking the halls, sleeping in the dorm, attending classes" (Chapter 4).

Every residential school implemented a strict ban on Indigenous children speaking their native languages, effectively erasing a crucial element of their cultural identity by punishing the use of any language other than English (Chapter 8). Robertson characterizes this as an act of cultural genocide. Don started to lose his Swampy Cree language but gradually reclaimed it as he recognized the significance of what had been taken from him (Chapter 8). While understanding the impact of residential schools is vital, Don conveys to Robertson that these schools are just one part of their history, and their lives and stories encompass much more (Chapter 4).

As he dives deep into the core of critical issues, Robertson writes with care and tenderness. He recognizes that his own experience is not representative of all Indigenous people, acknowledging the vast diversity in the affairs of Indigenous individuals. This is evident in his approach when discussing religion, for instance:

> If the indoctrination wasn't happening at church-run schools, it was taking place in what could be viewed as church-run communities, where structures built to praise a Christian God enveloped people on reserve like baptismal water. I visit Indigenous communities, and in many of them, churches appear on the roadsides with the frequency of rez dogs. And like a rez dog, the church ban be – the church has been – both feral and friendly.
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> While for Dad Christianity was, and continues to be, a positive experience, the church, in Indigenous communities for Indigenous People, has also been viciously damaging. In Dad's case, his faith in Jesus Christ did not come at the expense of his identity as a Cree man (Chapter 7).

Although Robertson emphasizes that his personal story does not represent the experiences of every Indigenous individual, stating so clearly that "Identity is fluid and personal. … This is my

story. This is my identity. It is nobody else's. My truth's are my own (Chapter 10)", Indigenous readers may still find aspects of their journeys reflected in "Black Water." This work is suggested for individuals interested in exploring family history and Indigenous identity. Additionally, it is a valuable resource for various academic disciplines, including psychology, anthropology, social studies, and education.

"Black Water" offers a window into the challenges encountered by Indigenous communities in the wake of various historical events. Robertson's work serves a dual purpose: it is a form of artistic expression and a means of shedding light on the painful past while also playing a role in the ongoing process of healing and reconciliation in the present. It is a heartfelt story that tugs at the heartstrings without diving too deeply into the extreme aspects of racism or trauma. While the occasional flashbacks might challenge readers, Robertson's relaxed writing style ensures that his story remains easy to follow. Through his narrative, readers can readily engage with his journey of self-discovery, loss, and deep affection for his father.