

Neither Wolf nor Dog: On Forgotten Roads with an Indian Elder Study Guide

Neither Wolf nor Dog: On Forgotten Roads with an Indian Elder by Kent Nerburn

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Plot Summary

This novel, published in 1994 and updated in 2002, takes place in current time and presents a non-fictional presentation of Lakota Indian themes, lifestyle and conflicts experienced by an eighty-some-year-old elder together with his family and friends. This is an enjoyable and light-hearted read despite its potentially heavy subject matter, which deals with racial prejudice, genocide and inability of this respected and aging elder to forgive and forget the pains of his early life and that of his tribe. The author of "Neither Wolf nor Dog, On Forgotten Roads with an Indian Elder" is Kent Nerburn. He is an educator with a doctorate in Religion and Art, focused on Native American issues and education. Nerburn is famous in northern Minnesota to people of the Red Lake Ojibwe Reservation. His award-winning work produced two books titled, "To Walk the Red Road" and "We Choose to Remember", with the memories of tribal elders, plus several other works.

Kent Nerburn traveled by motorcycle on a hot August day to a North Dakota historical market with a rock shaped like a buffalo within a fenced site that he saw as a metaphor for the plight of the Lakota Indian people. He vowed then to bridge the gap between his people and the Lakota by writing this book, which is the fulfillment of that obligation. He wrote "Neither Wolf nor Dog, On Forgotten Roads with an Indian Elder" to spread the faith in ourselves, others and the common humanity we share despite our differences.

The author is fully involved in the life and time of this Lakota elder named Dan. Dan is an elder who is the subject and at the center of the author Nerburn's absorbing work with Lakota Indians. Nerburn is a white man and trusted friend to Dan, the Lakota elder, and Grover is an Indian and also his trusted friend. Dan is able to understand both white man and Indian points of view. The elder Dan takes pride in seeing with the two eyes of a white man and an Indian. This is a tightly-knit family of Lakota people by whom Nerburn is invited in as an inside-outsider until he learns a family secret and becomes Kent, the person who bridges the gap from Dan to Danelle. Dan has not forgiven himself for the half-breed son he sired with the white lady from the East that he presented to Nerburn as his dead grandson. Only as Kent can Nerburn offer a white man's acceptance of Dan's half-breed grandson Myron.

This 334 page book titled "Neither Wolf nor Dog; On Forgotten Roads with an Indian Elder" is comprised of a foreword, introduction, and twenty-six numbered and titled chapters, plus back matter about the author. Chapters range from six to twenty-two pages and have descriptive titles. For example, the first chapter is titled "An Old Man's Request" and sets the theme for the book, while the fifteenth chapter titled "Shiny Soup" describes the fare in a local diner. Twenty-six chapters plus the introduction are organized for this summary in ten sections, grouped consecutively by subject matter. Chapter titles offer descriptive data about chapter subjects. The language of the book is simply written and understood with few unclear concepts. Dialogue between characters is used liberally for an earthy approach to various subjects the characters discuss. Humor is ever-present to keep interest and momentum. For example, Jumbo, a

mechanic, is described in terms like huge and four hundred pounds that fit his name and the dog Fatback has a fat belly that is low-hanging.



Introduction and Chapter 1

Introduction and Chapter 1 Summary and Analysis

The introduction and chapter one cover the author's introduction of himself and the reasons for his initial meeting with the old man he later calls Dan.

Introduction describes this novel, published in 1994 and updated in 2002, as taking place in current time and presents a non-fictional presentation of Lakota Indian themes, lifestyle and conflicts experienced by an eighty-some-year-old elder together with his family and friends. This is an enjoyable and light-hearted read despite its potentially heavy subject matter dealing with racial prejudice, genocide and inability of this respected and aging elder to forgive and forget the pains of his early life and that of his tribe. Kent Nerburn conceived this book idea on a hot August day's motorcycle ride across North Dakota. He came to a three-sided historical marker that enclosed a large boulder with a plaque on it. The rock reminded him of Lakota Indian people and their traditions. It looked like a buffalo and the fenced in site was a metaphor of the Lakota's plight. An earlier passerby placed broken tobacco cigarettes in homage to the buffalo and Creator "Wakan Tanka". Nerburn vowed to bridge the gap between his people and the Lakota he grew to know and love. This book is the result of his fulfilled obligation. Nerburn tells about Dan, a rough-hewn, elemental man of earth and possessed of deep spirituality for those who can see it.

Chapter 1 An Old Man's Request describes Nerburn's telephone call from a woman with an Indian accent who said her grandfather wants to talk to him. She got his name from "Red Road" books he wrote about Indian history years earlier. Her grandfather dislikes talking by phone, so the author agrees to come "soon" to the reservation. Nerburn wanted to help the Red Lake people "retain the goodness" in their world. Many months later, he drove to the reservation and was told by a local store clerk that the grandfather lives three miles west. He followed her map to a clearing with a clapboard house with two cars outside, one on blocks, and an old dog that barked when he opened his truck door. He told the figure at the door he was Nerburn and an old voice told him to come in. The old man told the still-barking dog named Fatback to get away and poured a cup of coffee for him. Nerburn brought him Prince Albert tobacco from the store. The old man asked why folks at Red Lake let him write "To Walk the Red Road", then answered that he didn't try to be Indian. The old man pointed to a picture of his grandson that "got killed" after he graduated from Haskell, the Indian junior college in Kansas. He told Nerburn he wants to write a book. Nerburn asked if he meant memories, and the seventy-eight-year-old man said what he learned from watching Indians and white people. He got some writings for Nerburn to read and he saw the old man had "a level of insight that was as deep and clear as a mountain lake." He wanted help so he wouldn't sound like an old Indian. Nerburn unintentionally offended him by saying he was an old Indian. The old man went to bed. Nerburn took some pages to his motel where he wrote till 4:30 in the morning. He returned at 7:30 and met the old man's

granddaughter Wenonah, who read what Nerburn wrote aloud. The old man said he made it "sound like I graduated from Haskell".



Chapters 2 and 3

Chapters 2 and 3 Summary and Analysis

Chapters two and three discuss where Nerburn and the old man Dan begin to establish their working relationship to write Dan's book.

Chapter 2 *Burnt Offerings* describes events several months later when Nerburn drove back to the reservation with the papers, notes and clippings the old man sent home with him. The author reviewed and reorganized the papers into themes and a few chapters. Fatback barked his arrival and the old man waved Nerburn in where three of his friends played cards. One of them asked who he was, but the old man did not introduce him or offer a chair. Another asked if "Wasichu", meaning the "white man", played cards, but Nerburn had never learned, so they continued to play, smoke and ignore him. The old man told Nerburn to read one titled *Black Kettle*. One card-player asked Dan if he wrote it, another asked if he was writing a book and the third said he thought it was good. When the card-players left, the old man told Nerburn to read it again and return tomorrow with tobacco.

Nerburn woke up irritated about his long, expensive trip without a thank you from the old man. Nerburn recalled an old tribal leader who told him Indian time means when he's good and ready. He arrived as the old man waited for him and another car arrived with the three card-players. The old man looked at Nerburn's tobacco and told the others that Nerburn had something for them. Nerburn said he would like their help writing a book and offered a card-player named Grover some Prince Albert. The old man told Nerburn that Grover thinks the way he wrote it was too white. Ironically, they were the old man's words, but Grover said it sounds like "movie Indians". They laughed about a lady who had come to see how they talk but had decided "real" Indians were boring and that she wanted to hear "storybook Indians". The old man told Nerburn his name and he said Dan wanted it to sound like he graduated from Haskell. Grover told Nerburn to write like he'd describe Fatback. Dan agreed he should do it the Indian way and tell a story. Nerburn drove up in the morning to find Dan chanting and burning sweet grass with notes and papers he wrote over the years. Dan said now he'll talk and that Nerburn could watch, listen and write it down.

Chapter 3 *Talking for the Grandfathers* begins when Dan offered Nerburn a peace pipe to smoke with him that made him feel his own inner life's emptiness. Dan told Nerburn he was not a good liar with his angry silence at Grover's criticism. Dan firmed Nerburn's promise he would not lie again and explained tobacco makes things "wakan", or sacred, and serves as a promise made directly to the Great Spirit, or "Wakan Tanka". Dan explained how Indians got in trouble with the white man by making sacred promises as the white man made deals. A promise, Dan said, meant keeping his word to his grandfathers in the spirit world and not breaking it because it would disgrace them.



Dan told Nerburn he wanted to take a ride, so they got in his truck and Nerburn drove to the top of a ridge. Dan spread tobacco to all four directions, chanted, and then told Nerburn how Indians lost the land. He said land came from the Creator to hunt and bury ancestors. Initially, white men explored and then brought horses and wagons and shot buffalo to eat. They brought guns to hunt with but then shot animals and left them where they died. Strangers offered money to Indians for land. White men from Washington put up flags to make the land their own, which the Indians didn't understand. The Indians' religion was from the land—it was alive and their mother. The white men turned sacred land into pieces of paper as their property and made it into a stage on which to build and make things happen.



Chapters 4 through 6

Chapters 4 through 6 Summary and Analysis

Chapters four through six describe the section in which Dan tells Nerburn some history and they visit Grover's house.

Chapter 4 One Wily Old Indian comments on Dan's eloquent explanation of Indian history that confirmed Nerburn would learn more following Dan than reading notes. Dan and Fatback share the lifestyle of coming and going when they want or from inner urges. Nerburn confirmed that Dan didn't mind being called Indian rather than Native American or some other term. He said he didn't like "Indian" for sports teams and other things that dishonored them. Dan didn't mind a "false" name, like Indian, since they're not from the Indies, as long as white men didn't ask if they prefer one false name to another. Dan had a National Geographic map of the Bering Straits to demonstrate his ancestors come from where they are now, not over a land bridge. Dan complained that white people moved to Indian land they called their own or claim that they are part Indian to get treaty payments from government. Europeans exterminated Indians with guns, laws, regulations and censuses or mixed them with white men to confuse them.

Chapter 5 A Land of Dreams and Phantasms describes Nerburn's fascination with land and the sky. He and Dan visited a favorite hilltop, often not speaking for hours, but rather listening to the wind. Dan told Nerburn he appreciated silence that let him see first with a still heart and mind to learn more. Dan said Nerburn's people reward those who talk most in school and meetings at work where they interrupt each other. Dan recalls being a little boy in school when teachers would get upset if he took time to think when she wanted an answer. While Dan is quiet on the hilltop, he listens to the voices of birds, trees, animals and the insects. He pointed out prairie dogs that make grass green by digging up the ground to make roots go deep and brings big animals to eat. Similarly he hears bones of ancestors' underground, which is why he listens. Dan shows Nerburn by calling Fatback to him without a sound. Nerburn said that dog has good hearing.

Chapter 6 Junk Cars and Buffalo Carcasses notes Dan and Nerburn's visit to Grover for a baloney sandwich on the way back from the hill. Grover lived where houses set back from the road a half mile apart but had no sense of order or cleanliness. Old, trashed cars, tools, furniture and equipment were strewn around, left where it dropped. Laundry lines flapped white sheets drying in the wind. Dan saw Nerburn react like it bothered him. Nerburn said it looked like lack of concern for land they claim to revere. Dan said white men's cities with empty parking lots and buildings are trashy to Indians. For example, Dan's old car is Fatback's doghouse and not trash to throw away. Dan claims the white man's way is to own and know what's yours and mine and always to want more, where everything is economic. The Indians' old way shared everything as a gift, and generosity was most important until Indians took on white man's ways. For example, there are rich Indians who keep buying things like white people who need large houses to store their things in. Nerburn teased Dan about buffalo carcasses and



junk cars. Dan said they used things that returned to earth like wooden or clay bowls but soda cans and cars don't return to earth and can't be destroyed. Grover had a rutted path to his trailer on a treeless hill with an organized woodpile on the left in his yard. Two lawn chairs were evenly spaced with Grover's Buick parked neatly nearby. Dan noted with a teasing twinkle in his eye that Grover was a reservation Indian who lost his culture.



Chapters 7 through 9

Chapters 7 through 9 Summary and Analysis

Chapters seven through nine describe Nerburn, Dan and Grover watching television together and how Nerburn's Nissan breaks down.

Chapter 7 Rooting for the Cowboys notes that Dan asked Grover why he didn't have any junk cars. Grover joked he didn't have a dog. Grover said it was lunchtime and told Nerburn to have a seat. Dan brought bread and other lunch supplies from the refrigerator to the table for sandwiches. Grover was watching a cowboy and Indian television show and turned up the volume when a favorite part came on. Grover and Dan talked about the show. Nerburn was surprised cowboys chasing Indians didn't bother them. They said it was a game and didn't have anything to do with real life. They said these movies came from "Buffalo Bill's Wild West Show". The movie idea portrayed Indians as "war-paint Indians" and bloodthirsty killers. They discussed the movie images of Indians and white men where a white man was hero even when wisdom came from an Indian. Dan warned him not to write a book like that, telling him "You got to pee on the earth, Nerburn".

Chapter 8 Taking Maize from Squanto describes how Nerburn felt unsettled, like an outside observer, that night after his lunch with Dan and Grover. He was concerned the "natives" felt required to perform for him. Nerburn began to have second thoughts about this project with Dan, especially with Grover watching over him. Nerburn missed his family and was sick of living in a motel room. He wondered if Dan mocked him with the tales of junk cars and buffalo carcasses. He struggled at writing Dan a note but decided to confront Dan the next morning about the project. He decided it was his book and it was up to him to get it done right. He packed to leave the motel after meeting Dan and would go home to have his truck serviced and rethink the project. At the door, Wenonah told him Dan went on a little trip. She told Nerburn it is a privilege when an elder shares with someone. Nerburn told Wenonah what he thought about Dan's trip, but she walked away in the house. Nerburn complained he wanted respect for helping Dan. Wenonah brought some pictures that showed Dan being abused as a child by white men. She said "He doesn't do what white men want anymore, Nerburn". He drove away in his truck.

Chapter 9 Jumbo notes that by the time Nerburn got to the main road, his truck was steaming a haze through the air conditioner vents and the engine popped while smoke filled the cab. White vapor rose up when he opened the hood and he diagnosed head gasket trouble. The truck wouldn't go more than five miles an hour while he searched for a gas station or auto repair. A kid on a bike motioned him to follow him to a run-down concrete building with a garage door sign that said, "Broke Car's and Stuffixed. 'Not running 'ok' Jumbo". A huge man weighing over four hundred pounds came out with a dirty white T-shirt hanging over his belly that hung over his belt buckle. He looked at it and when Nerburn asked if could fix it, asked what it was and walked back to the door.



The garage door opened and Jumbo directed them to push the truck over the grease pit. He looked it up and said he could fix it. Nerburn asked how long and Jumbo said he didn't know. Jumbo sat down to eat lunch and Nerburn said he would check back. Ironically, Dan appeared and told Nerburn he saw smoke from the truck, an old Indian symbol of distress. Dan said the truck could be a nice dog house, and that Jumbo's good fixing stuff. Jumbo says, "Shoulda got a Chevy".



Chapters 10 and 11

Chapters 10 and 11 Summary and Analysis

In chapters ten and eleven, Dan and Grover take Nerburn on their trip to learn about Indian culture.

Chapter 10 Ponytails and Jewelry notes that Nerburn sat in Grover's Buick next to Fatback as they drove away from the truck he left in Jumbo's dark and greasy garage. He despaired at ever seeing his truck run again and asked Grover if Jumbo could fix it. Dan and Grover laughed when they agreed Jumbo could fix it or kill it. Nerburn wanted to go to the motel to sleep until this was over. Dan and Grover took him along on the trip, since there was little he could do anyway. Grover drove forty-five miles an hour on a major highway with cars and trucks racing by horns blaring. Grover and Dan spoke Lakota and Nerburn slept. He woke at dusk when they pulled into a truck stop for supper. Grover and Nerburn sat in a booth and Dan joined after watering Fatback. He passed a family Dan called "wannabes", who trying to be Indians. That bothered him because they'll want to talk to him. Grover wasn't bothered since he is a "burr Indian" from his crew cut. Dan wears a ponytail from the old Indian custom of long hair to show pride. "Hippies" saw their long hair and thought they were hippies too, just wearing Indian clothes, jewelry and practicing hippie habits. When the hippies left the truck stop without talking to Dan, he was relieved and got a twinkle back in his eyes. He also didn't like rich people called "yuppies" who bought Indian things like dream-catchers and jewelry. Dan compared picture-taking requests from them like being an animal in a zoo. He asked Nerburn how he would like to put on his "most white clothes" for a photo as a white man. In schools they want "rent-a-Indians" to give talks about Indian culture that they already know but want "real" Indians to provide. Finishing up their meal, Dan and Grover agreed you can't buy culture with a nickel or by growing a ponytail.

Chapter 11 The Selling of the Sacred describes their trip west at sunset with Fatback's licking that interrupted the silence of the high-plains. Nerburn recalled an old farmer who said he never went east because the trees made him nervous. The three adults riding quietly in a car with no radio or tape were interrupted by Dan and Grover singing a plaintive Lakota song together. The sound of their singing had a deep emotional effect on Nerburn, like the sacred sounds of Bach's Mass in B Minor. They all seemed to share that deep emotion until Dan turned sideways to tell Nerburn he wanted him to listen to his talk about culture. He disliked giving this talk about his own people who sell sacred Indian culture to white people. They agree to hold ceremonies like sweats, pipe, naming or peyote and other sacred experiences for white people to buy for money. They take money to make other people feel like Indians so they become in effect "white Indians" who can then say they are spiritual. The sacred can't be sold without losing its sacred nature, and if you can get it with money, it's not sacred. All that's left to Indians is what's sacred in their hearts and ceremonies. Land was sold by false Indians to become chiefs and sacred objects were taken by anthropologists for museums. Without holding ritual ceremonies, the heart is all that's left, and it will no longer speak without them.



Chapters 12 through 14

Chapters 12 through 14 Summary and Analysis

Chapters twelve through fourteen describe a powwow and Nerburn learns about Indian history from Dan.

Chapter 12 Welcome to Our Land describes their trip. Nerburn fell asleep, but when he awoke, they had parked on a rise in the hills with rock out-cropping all around. Everyone else was up before dawn and out of the car. Grover gave Nerburn a cup of coffee. They were on an overlook above a grassy field with cars and people mingling in bright-colored feathery costumes. Tents, teepees and conversion vans were parked about with campfires. A large ring was marked off in the center for the festivities of a powwow. Nerburn asked Grover if this was their destination. Dan asked Nerburn how long it takes water to flow across land. When he answered that it depends, Dan said that's how long they will be gone. He said he didn't know if he was right for the job but Dan said it wasn't his to decide. Dan said Nerburn should stop worrying about things that don't matter and do what the Creator wants him to do. Grover set up a ceremonial drum he and Dan used with a beaded stick to drum and sing five minutes before putting it away. Dan called Nerburn "little brother" to explain why he told him things. The Creator gave Dan a gift to see with white man's eyes and he knew Nerburn would help from his other book. Indians were careful with white men who could use their words against them or will not listen. There is a reason white men took their land that only the Creator knows. Dan can only do what he thinks is best, which is talking to Nerburn and welcoming him. Dan reached out to grasp and hold Nerburn's hand to show his understanding and said, "Welcome to our land".

Chapter 13 Tatanka notes Grover drove across saw grass on shortcuts that made the Buick bump and jolt through hills and hollows. They stopped for a break to teeming, buzzing and chirping sounds of the land. Nerburn said they need a horse to travel this country. Grover laughed and said white men name cars "ponies and colts and mustangs", but Nerburn didn't appreciate that his Buick was named "Shunka kan", which means horse in Lakota. Nerburn looked for Dan, who hadn't returned. When he saw him, Dan motioned him "down" and pointed to an unseen buffalo far off that blended in. Dan walked cautiously to the car like a blind man and Nerburn asked how he saw the buffalo. Dan said "He showed himself to me".

Chapter 14 Seeing with Both Eyes describes "shortcuts" to a gravel road where Grover said "Annie" and Dan nodded. Grover and Dan recalled when they were both "a kid" and were taught honor and respect that white people don't understand. Freedom is most important for white people, but honor is most important for Indians. White men's churches, schools, businesses and governments have someone with power at the top to own them, with rights to say if they're good or bad. The white man's world was made of "cages" to define it. White men were free inside cages, unlike Indians, who didn't need cages to have honor. White men made cages by taking Indian land that they



"gave" back with the "freedom" to have their own farms and ranches. Indians that accepted the white man's land lost honor by trading a cage for their land that was free. Dan asked whether Nerburn read contracts in another language or trusted someone to tell him what they said, which was how treaties got signed by Indians. Dan said white men claimed victory when they won a battle but called it a massacre if Indians won. White men formed armies but Indians "went on the warpath" and called Indians savages, so they became savage. Dan learned to see with an Indian eye and a white eye, meaning that he saw both points of view.



Chapters 15 through 19

Chapters 15 through 19 Summary and Analysis

Chapters fifteen through nineteen cover their stops at a café and shrines.

Chapter 15 Shiny Soup describes the "white" or "homestead" town where Nerburn could make a phone call and they could get something to eat. The town was orderly and different from the disorderly reservation towns. Grover passed a sign that said "Business District" and they stopped at a café. The waitress brought coffee and soup that looked barely edible to those gathered at the table. A drunken Indian couple with no money for coffee gave a table of white men an excuse to criticize Indians. Dan and Grover commented on alcohol use, but Dan got agitated about these and other cultural differences. Grover calmed him from causing a scene. Dan said the author Henry David Thoreau was a hero for living like an Indian but would have been criticized by social workers if he were an Indian. Dan said white people can't decide whether they want to live in big houses or camps like Indians.

Chapter 16 The Stranger notes they stopped at a convenience store for Nerburn to call his wife because he wanted more privacy than available at the café. They rode silently for an hour, when Dan told Grover to enter Sitting Bull Burial Site Monument area. Dan said Sitting Bull was great because he refused to sign meaningless treaties. An Indian walked along the road, and Dan said they should pick him up. The Indian got in the back seat and offered Lucky Strikes cigarettes. Conversation stopped when Nerburn asked if he was going to the gravesite. He said he would get out here and Dan berated Nerburn about Sitting Bull and Indians that are not warriors or white farmers, but "neither wolf nor dog". Dan said he may have family related to Fort Yates Indian police that shot Sitting Bull they won't talk about.

Chapter 17 Leaders and Rulers notes the Sitting Bull monument is four-sided overlooking the Missouri River Valley and carved bust. Dan walked off but returned to explain the monument was put there to bury him in his own land and free his spirit. Dan and Grover placed tobacco from cigarettes on the monument. Dan told Nerburn Sitting Bull was a chief who led his people. The Indian system worked until white men set up elections and laws to make rulers but not leaders. The Indians followed leaders for leading not for getting votes. Sitting Bull was a great ruler by leading, not by ruling.

Chapter 18 Drunk on Jesus describes Grover's drive to Mobridge for cigarettes on the east side of the Missouri River over a bridge where signs and billboards advertised goods and services. Dan was irritated by a sign for "Mobridge Indian Bible College". Nerburn commented on Christianity, and Dan said he liked Jesus when he learned about him as a little boy. He said Sitting Bull left Fort Yates to find out if the Messiah was coming again to help them from white men who starved and killed them. At first the government killed Indians because they wouldn't believe in Jesus, but then the whites killed Indians because they did believe. They had hope of his coming through the Ghost



Dance that white men called frenzy. Indians called Jesus their leader. At the store in Mobridge, Dan sat in the car while Grover went inside.

Chapter 19 Pushing describes the route west when Nerburn asked Dan what white men did to his people. Dan said white men keep coming with guns and diseases, alcohol and tobacco, money for land and minerals and forests on the land, then a place to bury waste and chemicals. White men keep pushing since that is part of their culture like listening to the land which is part of the Indian culture. Grover stopped the car for Dan to chant in Lakota and wander off "Talking to the Ancient Ones".



Chapters 20 and 21

Chapters 20 and 21 Summary and Analysis

Chapters twenty and twenty-one cover Dan's story as revealed by Delvin, Danelle and his grandson Myron.

Chapter 20 Revelations describes driving to a point where Grover turned off to follow two ruts, bouncing up and down over the hillside. They reached a rise where Grover stopped the car and said they made it. There was a structure one half mile away where a figure appeared in the yard and sounds of barking dogs filled the air. Grover let Fatback out to run with the dogs and drove downhill to an old woman in the yard. Grover said the woman was Annie as she walked back to the house that was not much bigger than a chicken coop with an outhouse against a clump of trees. Nerburn heard Dan's voice laughing with a man in Lakota from the back room. The woman motioned him in, asked if he wanted to eat, and pointed to a chair where he sat and ate the stew she gave him. Annie told him to sleep on the bed in the yard. The sun was rising when Annie showed him a picture of fifty boys and girls with a priest, Dan and herself. A white pickup drove up with four people in the front seat and a teenage boy in back. A man and woman got out with two children. Delvin and Nerburn introduced themselves to each other and a woman, Danelle shook his hand. Delvin asked if he was writing a book and said Dan is her grandfather. His son went to Haskell College and was her dad and Wenonah was her sister. Dan married "some white-churchy social worker" and had a kid, but the woman left to go back East since she couldn't take the prairie. Dan's son Bobbie had a hard time as a half-breed, meaning a white mother and Indian father. He married Annie's daughter Katherine and Danelle's mother. The reservation police said they were both killed in an auto accident but they had bullet holes in their bodies that were never explained. Danelle asked why he was there with Grover and Dan. He replied with a story of Wenonah's call and said he's writing for an Indian. She told Nerburn, "don't blow it mister wasichu". Danelle said her dead father tried to reach out build a bridge for his mom to come back on. Bobbie went to Haskell College and was going to write a book to bridge the gap between his parents.

Chapter 21 Half-Breed describes the family gathering where Nerburn prepared for their departure after noon. Children came to see what the wasichu was doing to the Buick. Three children of Danelle were named Eugene, Myron and April, and Nerburn told them his name was Kent. A little blond boy asked if he was a white man and said so was his daddy. It was hot when the travelers got back in the Buick and drove away. Dan said Nerburn talked to the little blond kid who was different than the others. Dan irritated Nerburn when he called Myron a half-breed and said the others were more Indian. He recalled how kids were divided in groups and photographed forty years ago. Dan said they were all Indians to the Indians but not all white to white people, who treat them differently. Calling them "half-breed" won't make them white or Indian, because as Dan said, "Race is the biggest thing to white people". He said it was all part of the lie white people live. White people left blacks alone if they had some black in them but Indians



were divided in degrees like half- and quarter-breed. Dan claimed it was a matter of conquering with the white man in control over a black or Indian woman. If the man was Indian or black, the white woman must have something wrong with her or the man has something bad about him since she must be a captive or renegade. He wondered why else would a "decent white woman ever want to be with an Indian man?"



Chapter 22 and 23

Chapter 22 and 23 Summary and Analysis

Chapter twenty-two and twenty-three cover their conversation about Jesus and the arrival of a storm.

Chapter 22 The Song of History notes the darkened sky, except for visible roadway signs Grover that read aloud as they drove. Dan's anger lessened, but he smoked cigarettes continuously. Far ahead, a whitewashed cross stood out against the gray sky when Dan asked Nerburn what he thought of Jesus. Dan asked whether Nerburn thought his spirit was alive when he didn't reply. Nerburn began an academic reply, but Dan said he wanted to know about the rancher that put up the cross while Grover broke in about Mount Rushmore, Jesus and Abraham Lincoln. Grover said missionaries tell people to believe in Jesus and that he'll be alive in one's heart, but they never talk about Abraham Lincoln being alive in people's hearts. Dan replied Lincoln is white man history and Jesus was a different kind of history. Dan said Lincoln history was not good for Indian people since it's all about when things happened that white people remembered. They wrote down things for false Indian chiefs to sign that they couldn't read. Those things eliminated all the Indian history before then that wasn't written down. Sacred Indian history was just legend to white men. Similarly with Jesus, nobody asked when it happened, just that it happened "when Jesus was alive". For example, on the day Jesus died, an earthquake happened. Dan claimed that wasichu are in trouble since they eliminated power from the earth, sky and things that live there when they became simple facts and nothing was wakan or sacred anymore.

Chapter 23 Storm describes their supper of rib bones that Grover wrapped into a napkin for Fatback. The storm caught up with them and lightning flashed in the horizon. Grover drove west to make up time while Nerburn watched the storming drama in the night sky as raindrops hit the windshield. Fatback got nervous and whined, while Dan chanted in Lakota. Suddenly the rain and movement stopped and Grover pulled over just before a surge of wind hammered and blasted the car like a thunderous war. Fatback whimpered, Dan rocked back and forth and Grover smoked harder as Nerburn imagined a high plains tornado tearing them apart across Dakota. Nerburn didn't pay attention to the direction from which the wind blew and Dan angrily said it's important to pay attention. Dan determined it was wind from the north that he called "Waziya", which meant a message. He got out of the car with Fatback and walked across the grass onto a short rise. Grover agreed with Nerburn that Dan's behavior worried him too, and said the wind was from the west. When Dan returned, they spoke Lakota, and Grover drove back on the highway. Nerburn felt like he was waking from a nightmare. They rode in silence to the Badlands, where Sitting Bull's people escaped from the soldiers after he was killed by Indian police. They arrived in December, when wind and snow will freeze toes and fingers in minutes. Dan's heart was heavy and he was silent. Grover encouraged him to talk about his son, who was buried in a conquered land. Dan noted the suffering and pain of his people by white men and a Catholic church that wanted to

kill them and take their sacred things. Dan saw the bones as museum artifacts that were his grandmother's skull in a display case. He was saddened because he did not know why it happened that way.



Chapters 24 through 26

Chapters 24 through 26 Summary and Analysis

Chapters twenty-four through twenty-six describe their visit to Wounded Knee and Nerburn's Nissan returns.

Chapter 24 Paha Sapa describes their ride together in silence, thousands of miles apart in thought departing the badlands. The moonlight gave the landscaped night a silvery glow. Hills, scattered with abandoned cars, rose on the left side of the road to meet ridges that became the Black Hills off in the distance. These mountains were a presence of spiritual forces called Paha Sapa that was the Lakota center of the universe. They huddled here in blankets to escape and pray to their god who failed them as the army killed them. Black Hills was the spiritual center the Lakota gave up everything for, that the white men stole from them when they found gold. Nerburn was filled with shame and contrition at the realization white men, his ancestors, lied, stole, killed old people and children and now tried to recapture the spiritual truths they destroyed. He shared Dan's sadness, rage and inability to understand why it happened that way.

Chapter 25 Wounded Knee describes the stop where Dan told Grover to let him out. Dan got out and told Nerburn to get out too. Dan ordered Grover to open the trunk, took out a bag and told Nerburn to take out his pack. Grover got back in the car and drove off. Dan started walking up the hill and Nerburn followed silently a few paces behind. Two brick pillars painted white stood at the hilltop with an alcove in front of each and a small white cross on the connecting arch. They passed under the arch to a nine foot tall obelisk with plastic flowers strewn around and graves marked within the fenced area. Dan circled the area to perform rites with tobacco and cloth bundles while chanting. He opened a gate to the monument and motioned Nerburn inside. The monument was in memory of the Chief Big Foot Massacre December 29, 1890, where many innocent women and children died. Dan lit a pipe, smoked, and passed it to Nerburn, noting that this was the Wounded Knee grave. Two hundred murdered bodies of Lakota people are buried here, including "Little boys like your boy, Nerburn". Dan told Nerburn to pray to the four directions and sky, Wakan Tanka and the earth. He told Nerburn to tell him what is in his heart, and began chanting. Nerburn felt sorrow and sadness. Dan said they are brothers. Nerburn dreamed he stood in a valley with a majestic multi-colored bird and rose in the morning as if from a trance. Dan walked down the hill and Nerburn followed to meet Grover driving up with coffee.

Chapter 26 The Promise describes the trip back that took two days and one stop at a public campground to wash. On the second morning, near home, Dan said he thought he saw a buffalo up ahead, but it was moving too fast for one. Nerburn looked and said it was his truck, but he was irritated that someone else was driving it. The truck disappeared off the ridge and Dan suggested they have lunch of "poodle noodle". They drove up to a café with a "Closed" sign and walked in. Nerburn saw the mechanic eating



and he said that the truck was fixed. The price was twenty bucks for a hose that he had fixed before supper. Nerburn looked at Dan, Grover and Jumbo, who avoided his look, and concluded they had tricked him. Dan said you always blame the Indians. Nerburn checked out the truck and was happy to pay Jumbo twenty bucks when the Buick came driving up. Dan got out and gave Nerburn a carving. He reached out to shake his hand. Nerburn told Dan he'd do a good job and to send drafts. They drove away.



Characters

Dan

Dan is the old Indian elder who represents communal knowledge, history and understanding of the Lakota Indians. He is the subject of this book and narrates his story, thoughts, ideas and feelings to Kent Nerburn. Dan is a rough-hewn, elemental man who is earthy, but who has a deep spirituality for those who can see it. He got Nerburn's name from "Red Road" books that the author wrote about Indian history years earlier. He is presented by his granddaughter Wenonah as the grandfather who didn't like to talk on the phone. Nerburn drove to the reservation to meet him. Dan had initial confidence in Nerburn because "he didn't try to be an Indian". Dan determined Nerburn liked Indian people from his books but asked whether he liked white people too. Dan entrusted Nerburn with a box of papers, writings and clippings he had collected over years for the author to read and edit for the book he wanted help to write. Nerburn read some pages and wrote Dan had "a level of insight that was as deep and clear as a mountain lake". Dan wanted Nerburn to write for him so he didn't sound like an old Indian talking but to "make it sound like I graduated from Haskell".

Dan showed Nerburn a photograph he said was his grandson Bobbie who "got killed" after he graduated from the Indian college in Kansas named Haskell. Nerburn asked Dan if he wants to write his memories, but the seventy-eight-year-old man replied what he has in his mind from watching Indian and white people. As the story unfolds, it is shown that Dan was married to a white social worker from the East with whom he had a son named Bobbie. She left Dan and Bobbie, who was devastated by her remarried family's rejection of him as "half-breed" on his visit. Bobbie's goal was to bridge the gap between his father Dan and white mother by writing a book. Dan does not reveal any of this background to Nerburn as memories of his life. Ironically and symbolically, Dan wants to write more about Indian and white people than just an old Indian talking. Paradoxically, Dan calls Nerburn cowardly for not expressing his feelings honestly.

For example, Dan told Nerburn that Fatback started out by just hanging around, but Danelle, his granddaughter, told Nerburn she was Bobbie's dog and that her now deceased father had trained her. Dan was eloquent in his explanation of Indian history that confirmed his friend Grover's opinion that Nerburn would learn more listening to Dan than reading his notes. Dan and Fatback would come and go as they wanted, and Nerburn got used to Dan randomly falling asleep. Nerburn confirmed Dan didn't mind being called Indian rather than Native American but didn't like "Indian" for sports and other things that did them no honor. Dan used a National Geographic map to demonstrate how his ancestors came from where they are now rather than from over a land bridge. Dan complained white people moved to Indian land that they claimed their own or claimed to be part Indian to get treaty payments. Dan wore a ponytail from the custom of long hair to show pride. Dan compared picture requests by rich white people he called "yuppies" to being an animal in a zoo.



Kent Nerburn

Kent Nerburn is the name of the author and narrator of this book. Nerburn wrote other books under the name "Red Road" about Indian history years earlier. He agreed to come "soon" to the reservation but had misgivings about driving that far to meet a stranger who just wanted to talk. Nerburn had a wife and family and the trip took a lot of time, and it was expensive to stay in motel rooms. Nerburn agreed, however, because he wanted to help the people of Red Lake "retain the goodness" in their world. Nerburn read, reviewed and edited some of the papers, notes and clippings Dan sent home with him. When Nerburn returned months later, the old man told Nerburn to read one called Black Kettle. Dan had Nerburn read it again and then come back the next day with tobacco. On a return visit, Nerburn saw Dan burning all the notes he read for this book. Dan's friend Grover agreed Nerburn would learn more by listening to Dan than reading his old notes.

Nerburn protested that he didn't know if he was the right person for the job, but Dan said it wasn't for him to decide and that he needed Nerburn to help him. Nerburn felt guilty about the suffering thousands of Indians endured and asked for Dan's forgiveness. Dan told Nerburn to stop worrying about things that don't matter and do what the Creator wants him to do. Dan called Nerburn "little brother" to tell him why he told him things. The Creator gave Dan a gift to see with white man's eyes, and that told him Nerburn would help when reading his other book. Indians know to be careful talking to white men who use their words against them and will not listen to them. Dan told Nerburn to listen and said that there is a reason white men took their land that only the Creator knows. Dan can only do what he thinks is best. Talking to Nerburn is what he thinks is best and is why he welcomes him. Dan reached out to grasp and hold Nerburn's hand with his understanding to say "Welcome to our land". Nerburn promised to do a good job and to send Dan drafts.

Grover

Grover is the name of an Indian, a generation younger than Dan, who watches over his aging friend. Grover flirted by telling Wenonah she could cook his bacon anytime while she cooked Dan's breakfast. Grover offered to help with the book if Dan wanted it. He and Dan went outside to talk, and Dan told Nerburn Grover thought the way he wrote it was too white. Grover told Nerburn it sounded like "movie Indians" not "real" Indians. Grover told Nerburn to put it all in and just write like he would to describe Fatback. Grover's house trailer was placed on a rutted path on a treeless hill with an organized woodpile on the left in his yard. Two lawn chairs were evenly spaced next to his Buick that was parked nearby. Dan called him a reservation Indian who lost his culture. Grover called himself a "burr Indian" from his crew cut. Grover called Dan "Tunkashila", which meant highest respect for the old ones. Grover drove the Buick he called "Shunka Lan" on the trip across country and highway to towns, Indian shrines and Annie's.



Wenonah

Wenonah is the name of Dan's granddaughter and the sister of Danelle. She stayed home to help Dan with his cooking, housekeeping and other needs. She made the first call to Nerburn and was the woman with an Indian accent who told him her grandfather wants to talk with him. Wenonah offered to fix Nerburn breakfast when they first met. Later, Wenonah met him at the door and told him Dan went on a little trip. She told Nerburn it is a privilege when an elder shares with someone. Nerburn tried to tell Wenonah what he thought, but she walked away. She showed Nerburn some pictures of Dan being abused as a child by white men and said "He doesn't do what white men want anymore, Nerburn".

Jumbo

Jumbo is the name of the four hundred pound garage mechanic who fixed Nerburn's Nissan truck. His shop was in a run-down concrete building with a garage door sign that said, "Broke Car's and Stuff'fixed. 'Not running 'ok' Jumbo". Nerburn's truck had stopped and would not run anymore. Jumbo came out wearing a dirty white T-shirt hanging over his belly that hung over his belt buckle. He looked at Nerburn's truck, and when Nerburn asked if he could fix it, asked him what it was. Most of the vehicles he saw around were Fords, Chevys and beat-up pickup trucks. The garage door opened up and Jumbo had the truck pushed over the grease pit. He said he could fix it. Nerburn asked how long, but Jumbo said he didn't know. When Nerburn returned from the trip with Dan and Grover, the truck was done and Jumbo charged him twenty bucks.

Annie

Annie is the name of Dan's sister who was the old woman standing in the yard as they drove down the hill. She seemed as old as Dan and was a hospitable woman who stood there smiling with white-hair and heavy-breasted. Grover introduced her as Annie as she walked back to the house that was not much bigger than a chicken coop with an outhouse near a clump of trees. Annie motioned Nerburn in and asked in English if he wanted to eat. She fed him meatball stew and told him to sleep on the bed in the yard. In the morning, Annie gave him a cup of drinkable water and prayed with a rosary, which surprised Nerburn that she was Catholic. She showed him a picture of fifty boys and girls with a priest and pointed out Dan and herself. Annie's husband was confined to a wheelchair and called Grandpa by Danelle's children. He laughed and spoke Lakota with Dan in the back room.

Delvin

Delvin is the name of Danelle's husband, who was in his late thirties and wore jeans, a white T-shirt and cowboy boots. He drove up with her and their three kids. Delvin and Nerburn introduced themselves to each other. Delvin asked Nerburn if he was writing a



book and began to tell him about the family history. Delvin said Dan was Danelle's grandfather. He continued to reveal the rest of the story to Nerburn until he heard Danelle's voice shout okay when he changed the subject, whistled and tried to act nonchalant. She asked if he got it all, meaning the water and how long it would last, but Delvin misinterpreted her comment to mean the story about her family.

Danelle

Danelle is the name of Delvin's wife, who is Wenonah's sister and the granddaughter of Dan. Danelle formally shook Nerburn's hand. Nerburn knew nothing of Dan's history and Danelle until Delvin told him the story. With new information about her parents and Dan, Nerburn saw Danelle from a different point of view. She asked him why he was there with Grover and Dan, and was uncomfortable with his new knowledge about her that Dan had not revealed to him. He told her the story of Wenonah's call and Dan's shoebox full of notes. She asked why didn't he ask an Indian, and Nerburn told Danelle defensively that he's writing for an Indian not about Indians. She abruptly said to Nerburn, "don't blow it mister wasichu".

Nerburn reached out to her by asking for her help. Danelle pleaded tearfully that Nerburn not take advantage of her Grandpa Dan. Danelle patted Fatback, her dad's old dog, and had her do tricks. She told Nerburn that her dad trained Fatback just before he died. Danelle told him about her dead father, who had tried to reach out to his wasichu mother. Dan and his white wife didn't get along well and she went back East when Danelle's dad, Bobbie, was twelve. He blamed his father Dan and said he would build a bridge for his mom to come back on. She was remarried to a white man when he visited her. Their children were mean to him and called him Tonto. Danelle told Nerburn that Dan saved Bobbie's letters from college. She asked him to ignore Dan and Grover's negative comments about women.

Bobbie and Katherine

Bobbie and Katherine are the names of Danelle's mom and dad. Bobbie was Dan's son with "some white-churchy social worker", who left to go back East because she couldn't take the prairie. Bobbie had a hard time as a half-breed, meaning he had a white mother and Indian father. Katherine was Annie's daughter, presumably with Grandpa. Bobbie married Annie's daughter, Katherine, who was Danelle's mother, with Bobbie being her dad. Bobbie went to Haskell College and was going to write a book that would become a bridge between his parents, Grandpa Dan, and Dan's white ex-wife. Presumably, Bobbie's letters from Haskell College that Dan saved were in the shoebox Dan was going to use when he asked Nerburn to help him write a book. The reservation police said they were killed in an auto accident but there were unexplained bullet holes in their bodies.

Eugene, Myron and April

Eugene, Myron and April were the names of Danelle's three children. They met Nerburn, who told them his name was Kent. Ironically, one of them was a little blond boy named Myron. He asked if Kent was a white man and said so was his daddy. Little blond Myron was the half-breed Danelle, an Indian woman, had perhaps unwittingly given birth to with a white man to make up for the "hard time" her father Bobbie had or become the bridge he wanted to his wasichu mother.



Objects/Places

Buffalo rock

Buffalo rock historical marker in North Dakota is a three-sided historical marker that enclosed a large boulder with a plaque on it. The huge rock reminded the author of Lakota Indian people and their traditions. Nerburn claims he conceived this book idea on a hot August day's motorcycle ride across North Dakota when he saw this historical marker. The rock was shaped like a buffalo and the fenced-in site was a metaphor for the plight of the Lakota. The rock represented a living spiritual presence that stimulated Nerburn's vow to bridge the gap between white people and the Lakota Indians that he grew to know and love

Red Lake people

Red Lake people are the people that Nerburn spent time with when he wrote his Red Road book series. The Red Road books suggested to Dan its author Nerburn would be a good writer for his book.

Lakota Indian

Lakota Indian is the name of the tribe of Indians that Dan and his friends and family belong to and that Nerburn wrote this book about.

Wakan

Wakan is the Lakota term used to refer to the English term "sacred".

Wakan Tanka

Wakan Tanka is the Lakota term used to mean the English term for Creator.

Missouri River

Missouri River is the name of the river with an east-west bridge that Grover drove over on their trip to Mobridge. The bridge symbolizes the bridge, that Bobbie, before his death, and Dan, in his memory, think can close the gap created by the marital conflict between Dan and Bobbie's wasichu mother. More broadly, the bridge symbolizes efforts of Indians and white people to interact. Additionally, the Missouri River divides a mountainous prairie west and agricultural east side, reflecting the split between Dan and his wife, who left the prairie to go back East.



Fatback

Fatback is the name of the old, low-bellied dog that Dan said showed up at his house one day. Dan's daughter Danelle said Fatback belonged to and was trained by her father, Dan's son Bobbie, who was killed.

Haskell Junior College

Haskell Junior College is the name of the Indian junior college that Dan's son Bobbie graduated from. Dan initially wanted Nerburn to make his writing sound like he graduated from there too, perhaps in memory of his son Bobbie.

Wasichu

Wasichu is the Lakota term used to mean the white man.

Buffalo Bill's Wild West Show

Buffalo Bill's Wild West Show is the name of a show that Dan and Grover claim originated the "movie Indian" idea. The idea portrayed Indians as "war-paint Indians" and bloodthirsty killers from movies. They continued to present the image of Indians and white people like in the movies where the white man was always hero even when the wisdom he expressed came from an Indian.

Nissan truck

Nerburn's vehicle was a Nissan truck that was fixed by Jumbo when it apparently needed minor repairs. The truck's needed repairs were a literary device for Grover and Dan to take Nerburn on an indefinite extended cultural trip cross-country over Indian land, shrines and Annie's house.

Buick

Grover's car is a Buick that is able to drive cross-country over grassland prairies typically undrivable for a passenger vehicle. Nerburn complained they need a horse to travel this country. Grover replied white men call their cars "ponies and colts and mustangs", so he named his "Shunka kan", which means horse in Lakota. The irony is that white men use trucks to travel overland and drive cars with "horse" names on the highway. Nerburn's truck is laid up, so Grover's Buick auto that he named "horse" is used for the trip.



Annie's house

Annie's house was one of the destinations Grover drove to on their trip. The house was not much bigger than a chicken coop with an outhouse against a clump of trees. The yard had a chicken-wire fenced in small garden, woodpile, and a pump near the front door. The small house was divided in two rooms with a red and green striped blanket separating them and had four pieces of furniture, cook stove and table. Annie told Nerburn to sleep on the bed in the yard, which he did in his sleeping bag. The pump water was undrinkable.

Tobacco

Tobacco is the ceremonial commodity used for ritual ceremonies that also is the major ingredient in cigarettes.

Sitting Bull

Sitting Bull is an actual historical figure that has taken on mythological and iconic significance as an Indian hero who led the Indians and was later killed by reservation Indians.

Wounded Knee

Wounded Knee is where they visited on which a monument was placed in memory of the Chief Big Foot Massacre December 29, 1890. Many innocent women and children died there. Dan lit a pipe, smoked and passed it to Nerburn, stating that this location was the Wounded Knee grave where two hundred murdered Lakota people are buried, including, "Little boys like your boy, Nerburn".

Reservation

Reservations are made by white men for the Indian areas in reserve that were authorized by the Dawes Act of 1887. The Act created 160-acre parcels allocated to individual Indians to take up farming within reservations.

White or homestead town

White, or homestead town is the name of a town typically located in the middle of a reservation. White settlers acquired land in reservations by various means on which they developed towns. These towns were orderly, with a gradual increase in human habitation. Grover drives to a homestead town where they plan to get something to eat and Nerburn can make a phone call to his wife and family.



Reservation town

Reservation town is the name of a town located on a reservation and inhabited by reservation Indians that was typically comprised of a disorderly mix distinctly different from the order found in white or homestead towns.

Powwow

Powwow is the name of a term used to describe the gathering that Grover drove to show Nerburn. They parked on a ridge overlooking a grassy field with cars and people mixed in bright-colored feathery costumes. Tents, teepees and conversion vans were parked about with campfires and a large ring marked off in the center for festivities of a powwow, typically a showy display of Indians held for tourists.

Alcohol

Alcohol is the term used to describe an intoxicating substance that Dan and Grover commented on in the café where the drunken couple tried to buy coffee with no money. Dan said alcohol use challenges Indians to be strong, but many let it make them victims. Dan got agitated about these and other cultural differences until Grover calmed him from causing a scene as bad as the drunken couple

Treaty

Treaties are agreements made between an Indian leader and a white man. Typically, the treaty was written in language the Indian could not understand and signed by an Indian who was called a leader by the white men but did not understand what he signed except to receive something of benefit for doing so. Dan claims the Indian people made promises that they intended to keep but the white men simply made deals that they called treaties.

Ghost Dance

Ghost Dance is the name of a term used to describe an Indian belief in the Messiah's return that he celebrated in the Ghost Dance that white men called frenzy and disregarded as myth.

Mobridge

Mobridge is the name of a town where Grover drove east across the Missouri River to get cigarettes and matches. The drive into Mobridge with its highway signs and billboards creates an effective contrast between prairie life of the west and urban life of the East.

Paha Sapa

Paha Sapa is the name of a sacred site where hills alongside the road rise to meet ridges and become Black Hills in the distance. These mountains were a presence of spiritual forces called Paha Sapa that was the Lakota center of the universe. The people huddled here in blankets to escape and pray to their god who failed them as the army killed them. Black Hills was the spiritual center the Lakota gave up everything for that the white men stole from them when they found gold.



Themes

White men and Indians face the land

There was a significant difference between the way white men and Indians dealt with the land. Native Americans, also called Indians, were born in an environment where land was plentiful and abounded everywhere. To the Indians, the land was sacred and given by the Creator. Land was considered as the mother, and everything on the land as the brothers and sisters. Indian religion was landed, alive, and their mother. Everything on land, including bears, buffalo, trees and plants were the Indians' brothers and sisters to be treated right so mother earth would not be angry and withhold food or send storms and plagues. Indian spirit was rooted and grounded in the land where they live. Land was there for them if they honored and treated her and their "brothers and sisters" well. The Indians' old way shared everything as a gift and generosity was most important until they took on white man's ways.

Unlike the Indians, white men carried their religion with them. For example, the freedom to worship was one of the reasons white men left the European continent and traveled to the New World. European land was a scarce commodity, so white men left Europe to acquire land in America. According to Nerburn, the Indians didn't understand this because land was always there for them compared to white men who left Europe to get land they wanted. The white man's spiritual life was secondary to their acquisition of new land. Initially, white men explored and then brought horses and wagons and shot buffalo to eat, but later shot animals and left them where they died. Strangers offered money to Indians for land. White men from Washington authorized settlers to put up flags and claim land as their own, which Indians didn't understand. For example, white men traded sacred Indian land into pieces of paper for bags of flour and blankets. The stronger white man took land as theirs to make a stage on which to build things. White men know what's yours is mine and always want more where everything is economic.

Nerburn was offended by the squalor he saw in reservation towns like Grover's that looked like a lack of concern for the land they claim to revere. He saw old, trashed cars, tools, furniture and equipment strewn around and left to lie where it dropped, with clothes lines flapping white sheets to dry in the wind. Dan defended his Indian culture by pointing out Fatback's doghouse was an old car that stopped running, but was far from trash compared to the empty buildings and parking lots he saw in white man's cities. The Indian culture used things that returned to earth like wooden or clay bowls, except that soda cans and cars don't return to earth and can't be destroyed, so they recycled them into modern use like a doghouse. Even lands reserved for the Indians under the Dawes Act of 1887 were acquired within reservations by white settlers with various means to acquire and build homestead towns with a gradual increase in human habitation evident as they got closer, but distinctly different from the disorderly mix found in reservation towns.



Cowboys and Indians

"Buffalo Bill's Wild West Show" was the underlying basis on which the idea was developed to portray Indians as "war-paint Indians" and bloodthirsty killers that the movies perpetuated. They continued the image of Indians and white people in the movies where the white man was always the hero even when the wisdom he expressed came from an Indian. One of Grover's favorite activities was watching a cowboy and Indian television show that was on when Nerburn and Dan visited. Grover turned up the volume when a favorite part came on and he and Dan talked about the show. Nerburn was surprised that they enjoyed a show with the theme of cowboys chasing Indians that didn't bother them. They said it was a game and didn't have anything to do with real life. However, Dan emphasized that Nerburn should not write a book like that and said "You got to pee on the earth, Nerburn".

Grover thought Nerburn's original writing for Dan was "too white" but he didn't know, ironically, they were the old man's words. Grover said they sounded like "movie Indians". They recalled the story about a lady who wanted to see how real Indians talked but she got bored and preferred "storybook Indians" like she saw in movies about cowboys and Indians. English words can be used to create drama in movies and books and make a specific impression. For example, white men win battles, but Indians who win are said to massacre white men. White men band together, but Indians "went on the warpath". Cowboys called Indians savages, so they became savage. Dan initially wanted his book to sound like he graduated from Haskell, but agreed with Grover he should write it the Indian way and tell a story. The example provided by "movie Indians" enhanced contacts with them.

For example, Dan wore a ponytail because he liked it and chose to follow an old Indian custom of wearing long hair to show his pride. When "hippies" saw his long hair, they thought he was a hippie too and tried to talk to him. Dan disliked rich people called "yuppies" who bought Indian things like dream-catchers and jewelry and wanted to take pictures of a "real Indian". He thought picture-taking requests were like being an animal in a zoo. He asked Nerburn how he would like to put on his "most white clothes" for a photo as a white man. The schools want "real Indians" to present Indian culture so they rent Indians to give talks. Dan was offended by white people that wanted to take Indian pictures or buy Indian things that make them look like they came from a "cowboys and Indians" movie. He did not like white men to think they know Indian culture from pretend Indians dressed up in bright-colored feathery costumes at Indian powwow festivities for tourists.

The Half-breed Cycle

There is a paradox associated with the term "half-breed" and its related levels of mix, i.e., quarter, etc. Individuals of other races and ethnic mixes are not identified by a degree of blood mix. For example, a German with one French parent is not half bred, nor is a child born of an Afro-American and a Caucasian union. Dan said it best perhaps



in his claim no matter how slight the blood mix, they were all Indians to the Indians but not all white to white people, who treated them differently. Dan claimed the term "half-breed" wouldn't let them be white or Indian. To Dan, "Race is the biggest thing to white people". Do his comments belie a deeper reality in his life? For example, why else would a "decent white woman ever want to be with an Indian man?" He also claims further, "If the man was an Indian or black man, the white woman must have something wrong with her or the man has something bad about him since she must be a captive or renegade".

Dan is Indian and lived around Indians, also called Native-Americans, with presumably society's current understanding of "half-breed". The underlying curiosity is why he had a child with a white wife, and why did he call that deceased child his "grandson" when first presented to Nerburn. In his words, the white woman must have something wrong with her or the Indian man has something bad about him and she is a captive or renegade. His wife has no name, but merely "some white-churchy social worker" who left because she couldn't take the prairie. Dan and friends made consistently negative comments about social workers, white people and women, so it is clear to them there's something wrong with her. Whether she was a captive or renegade is secondary to his perception that she must not have been a "decent" white woman since she was with Dan, an Indian man.

The continuing conundrum in this case is why Danelle, who knew about her half-breed father's hard time, would have Myron with a California white man, and bear a half-breed son of her own. Danelle talked about her dead father who had tried to reach out to his wasichu mother and said he was going to write a book to build a bridge between his parents. One of Danelle's three children was a little blond boy named Myron who told Kent his daddy was a white man. It was hot when the travelers got back into the Buick and drove away. Dan commented that Nerburn liked the little blond kid and talked to him different than the others. He made a point of calling him a half-breed. Dan claimed the other children were more Indian and reflected on how kids were divided into groups and photographed forty years ago. He said it was all part of the lie white people live that divided them into degrees like half-breed and quarter-breed. Dan claimed it was a matter of conquering with the white man being in control over a black or Indian woman. The irony in this situation is that Nerburn, the white man, never called the little child Myron a "half-breed", like his own Indian grandfather Dan did.

Style

Perspective

The author of "Neither Wolf nor Dog, On Forgotten Roads with an Indian Elder" is Kent Nerburn. He is an educator with a doctorate in Religion and Art, specializing in Native American issues and education. Nerburn conducted an oral history project in northern Minnesota on the Red Lake Ojibwe Reservation. That award-winning project resulted in two books titled "To Walk the Red Road" and "We Choose to Remember", that captured the memories of tribal elders. Nerburn wrote six other acclaimed books and edited three periodicals including "Native American Wisdom". He traveled by motorcycle on a hot August day to a North Dakota historical market with a rock shaped like a buffalo within a fenced site that he saw as a metaphor for the plight of the Lakota Indian people. Nerburn vowed then to bridge the gap between his people and the Lakota by writing this book to fulfill that obligation. He wrote this book "Neither Wolf nor Dog" to spread the faith in ourselves, others and the common humanity we share despite our differences.

Tone

The tone of this book is subjective with an ironic objective twist. The author Kent Nerburn is fully involved in the life and time of this Lakota elder whose "alter ego" he becomes through the omniscient, objective character Nerburn. The elder is Dan, an eighty-year-old Indian. All the other characters are known by first name only as well, except for Nerburn, who becomes "Kent" for a short time with Danelle's three children, and then only with Myron the blond "half-breed" grandson of Dan. This is a tightly-knit family of Lakota people by whom the author Nerburn is invited as an inside-outsider until he learns a family secret and becomes Kent, the person who bridges the gap from Dan to Danelle. In some mystical sense, Dan has not forgiven himself for the half-breed son he had with the white lady from the East that he presented to Nerburn as his dead grandson. Only as Kent can Nerburn prove a white man's acceptance of Dan's half-breed grandson Myron.

Structure

This 334 page book titled "Neither Wolf nor Dog; On Forgotten Roads with an Indian Elder" is comprised of a foreword, Introduction, and twenty-six numbered and titled chapters plus back matter about the author. Chapters range from six to twenty-two pages and have descriptive titles. For example, the first chapter is titled "An Old Man's Request" and sets the theme for the book while the fifteenth Chapter titled "Shiny Soup" describes the fare in a local diner. There is neither index nor glossary but a foreword is written by Kent Nerburn from Bemidji, Minnesota Spring 2002. Twenty-six chapters plus an introduction are organized for this summary in ten sections, grouped consecutively by subject matter. For example, Chapter 20 Revelations and Chapter 21 Half-breed are



grouped in Section 8 because they both deal with a major element of the book. Chapter titles are helpful in this format since they offer descriptive data about chapter subjects. The language of the book is simply written and understood with few unclear concepts. Dialogue between characters is used liberally for a down-to-earth approach to various subjects the characters discuss. Humor is ever-present to keep interest and momentum. For example, Jumbo, a mechanic is described in large terms that fit his name and the dog Fatback has a low-hanging belly. This is an enjoyable and light-hearted read despite its potentially heavy subject matter dealing with racial prejudice and genocide.



Quotes

"I had a human obligation to try to bridge the gap between the world into which I had been born and the world of a people I had grown to know and love."

p. 3

"No. What I have in my mind. I watch people. Indian people and white people. I see things. I want you to help me write it down right."

p. 17

"The tobacco was why. The tobacco is like our church. It goes up to God. When we offer it, we are telling our God that we are speaking the truth. When Grover took the tobacco from you, he was telling the Great Spirit that he would do the best he could."

p. 41

"And then there was a lot of intermarrying between our races, and sometimes there were rapes, so nobody really knows who is an Indian anymore, or even what it means."

p. 59

'Our elders were schooled in the ways of silence, and they passed that along to us. Watch, listen, and then act, they told us. This is the way to live.'

p. 65

"I've been waiting for you to ask. But I guess you figure I got forever.' He gave me a mock blow on the shoulder. 'I'm damn near eighty, Nerburn. You've got to work faster.'"

p. 75

"For the first time I felt like the dreaded anthropologist - an observer who pretended to participate, an outsider for whom the natives felt compelled to perform."

p. 91

"Saw the smoke signals from your truck. Old Indian signal of distress.' he cackled."

p. 107

"Think about it. Suppose Indians came up to you and asked to have their picture taken with you in front of your house? What if they asked you to go inside and put on your most white clothes so you would look more like a white person for the picture?"

p. 119

"His bad eye stayed on mine. It was an unnerving stare, at once empty and intense, like the gaze of a blind man. 'The world is not an accident, Nerburn,' he said. 'Nothing is an accident.'"

p. 133

"I don't know whether you're good or bad. But you're here. And you try. I think you are good. I think maybe you were sent to help. But you need to stop worrying about things



that aren't important and try to see what the Creator wants you to do."
p. 135

"We Indians never thought that way. Everyone was free. We didn't make cages of laws or land. We believed in honor. To us the white man looked like a blind man walking. He knew he was on the wrong path when he bumped into the edge of one of the cages. Our guide was inside, not outside. It was honor. It was more important for us to know what was right than to know what was wrong."
p. 157

"I think that's a lot of where our people went wrong with your people. We didn't see the big idea behind the words you used. We didn't see that you had to name everything to make it exist, and that the name you gave something made it what it was. You named us savages so that made us savages."
p. 165

"Think of that Thoreau fellow. I've read some of his books. He went out and lived in a shack and looked at a pond. Now he's one of your heroes. If I go out and live in a shack and look at a pond, pretty soon I'll have so many damn social workers beating on my door that I won't be able to sleep."
p. 183

"You want to know how to be like Indians? Live close to the earth. Get rid of some of your things. Help each other. Talk to the Creator. Be quiet more. Listen to the earth instead of building things on it all the time."
p. 185

"I want you to understand this, Nerburn. I don't think you've got it figured out. Sitting Bull was a leader. He was a real chief. People followed him because he was great. He never won any election or was appointed by any government official. That's not how you get to be a leader."
p. 199

"You know, this was a lot of the problem with the treaties. Lots of times our real leaders didn't want to sign the treaties. But your government needed to have a piece of paper, so they found an Indian who would sign a piece of paper and they told him he was a leader."
p. 203

"You see, we could always read the signs. We still can today. You may not be coming with guns and diseases, but you are coming. Instead of alcohol and tobacco, you are bringing money. You don't want our land. You want what is under our land and on our land. You want our minerals. You want our forests. You want to bury nuclear waste and chemicals."
p. 219



"I didn't know what to say. In a few sentences I had discovered more about Dan than I had learned in being around him for several months. It made me realize how closed-mouthed he had been."

p. 237

"My dad was a really good man. He really cared about people. He was going to do something good for the Indian people. Then he got killed. Along with Mom."

p. 243

"If you could find some Indian who would work for you, you made him a chief so he could sign papers giving away our land, then you wrote down what he said. If he didn't say anything, you wrote down something for him and had him sign it, then that was the history."

p. 271

"I looked warily from one to the other. I could not divine what was happening. Grover was clearly pushing the old man, and the old man was clearly listening to some inner voices."

p. 291

"But most of all I felt the pain of their confusion that their god had failed."

p. 301

"A shiver came across me as I followed Dan on the path. The earth was alive here, but there was nothing living. From the graves to the alcoves to the ribbons flapping in the dark, this place spoke of life that had fled."

p. 307

"I took his hand in mine. The whiteness of my grip against his mahogany gnarls and knuckles made me seem effete and unformed. He squeezed hard. A promise was being passed."

p. 333



Topics for Discussion

Describe and discuss at least three reasons that Nerburn may have used to decide whether to help the old man with his book. Do you agree or disagree with the reasons he gives? Describe why or why not.

Identify, list and describe the steps according to Dan that was used by the white man to take over Indian lands. Do you agree or disagree with the story Dan told Nerburn? Why or why not?

Explain and discuss the significant differences that Dan complains about between hippies and yuppies regarding their appreciation of Indian culture.

Identify, list and describe at least five signs of habitation that distinguish a "reservation town" from a "homestead town", as described by Nerburn. Comment on the cultural significance that may be represented by the differences.

Describe and discuss how "Buffalo Bill's Wild West Show" was the source for creating the movie idea image of Indians. Whether you agree or not, explain how you have seen that idea represented in at least three movies.

Identify and describe the idea of "cages" that Dan uses to explain the differences between white men and Indians. Whether you agree or disagree, explain why or why not.

Describe and discuss how you would interpret the phrase "neither wolf nor dog" that was used by Dan with regard to Sitting Bull and Indians. Explain how that phrase might make sense in your everyday life.

Describe and discuss at least five elements of Delvin's revelations to Nerburn that are contrary to what he was led to believe previously by Dan and Grover. How do these elements make the story more or less credible? Why?

Identify, list and describe three ways in which Abraham Lincoln and Jesus were different as described by Dan.

Describe and discuss the significance of Paha Sapa and how it affected the Indian way of life.