
MÉTIS: Mixed Blood Stories

by Lynn Ponton. Sunstone Press, Santa Fe, NM, 2010, 179 pages, \$19.95 (paper).

MÉTIS is the first work of fiction by Dr Lynn Ponton, a child psychiatrist and psychoanalyst. Following the path of her numerous earlier articles and two books about adolescents and their struggles, she reminds the reader about the goodness of the individual and the interplay of genetics, culture, environment, and life circumstances that together form an individual's personality and character. Adolescent experiences of 4 generations from 1868 through 1989 of a Métis family are elegantly depicted. The captivating narrative begins and ends with the experiences of Annie, the great-great-granddaughter in the family. Annie is the daughter of a psychiatrist who has devoted her work to caring for American Indian and other children. Mixed-blood descendants of French and Scottish men and native Canadian Assiniboine and Cree women, the Métis people, we learn, have a unique culture and experiences. The reader derives dynamic insight into the shaping of individual Native American adolescent lives when they are 16 years of age. Their development is depicted across several generations and formed by forces of discrimination, experienced trauma of being raised in a reservation school or in a home with a non-mixed-blood parent, drug and alcohol abuse, and concerns about fitting into the environment in which they reside. The playing of each character's positive features against his or her environment inspires the reader to seek understanding about the interaction leading to the outcomes of the characters' lives as they struggle, survive, and thrive.

The story begins in a Prologue with the family's matriarch, Angeline, going to the train station in rural Illinois to pick up her grandson, Gilles, who is coming from Chicago to live with her and her non-mixed American Indian blood husband. Angeline's son and Gilles' father, Joe, is an alcoholic and unable to care for Gilles, whose unwelcome choice is to live with this elderly couple in order to avoid returning to a reservation school. Joe's troubled life is revealed only later in the book through the son's recalled perceptions of his father. The blessedly short 4-page Prologue is dark and almost a disincentive to go further into the story. However, it does set the stage and engages the reader in comprehending the multiple family tribulations over 5 generations. The blessings and curses of being different from others are starkly illustrated. The book also provides the added attribute of exposing the reader to the Métis people, about whom most readers have very likely had no awareness.

Witnessing the interplay between the expected struggles of middle- to late-adolescent outsiders to the dominant culture within a generally poorly nurturing environment should serve as a treat for psychiatrists and other mental health professionals. The character portraits depicted by Dr Ponton, a masterful storyteller,

allow trainees and medical students the opportunity to observe the unfolding of material for a biopsychosocial formulation rich in cultural, familial, and possibly genetic issues.

MÉTIS provides us with the uniquely fine-grained perspective of the psychoanalyst and assists readers to place in context the substantiated and overwhelming risk of Native American youth to fall into the abyss of psychiatric illness and substance abuse. Though the characters are not in situations that traditionally represent danger, their ties to the Métis culture, family history, and special attributes do shape their responses to extant situations. For those of us in practice and trainees in the helping professions, the interplay of genetics, family, culture, and the environment is elegantly depicted in the personality formation of each character. The brief

“Cast of Characters” at the front of the book and “Author Notes” to end the book add helpful dimensions to *MÉTIS*’ enjoyment for the reader. This short, succinctly written, and easy-to-digest book is worth reading and sharing with others.

Theodore A. Petti, MD, MPH
pettita@umdnj.edu

Author affiliation: Department of Psychiatry, Robert Wood Johnson Medical School-UMDNJ, Piscataway, New Jersey.

Potential conflicts of interest: None reported.

doi:10.4088/JCP.12bk07753

© Copyright 2012 Physicians Postgraduate Press, Inc.