



VG Interview: Marcie Rendon

The following is the transcript of an interview conducted via email.

Carolyn Steeves (CS): What is your date of birth?

Marcie Rendon (MR): 1952

CS: Where did you grow up?

MR: The question really is: Have I? Northern Minnesota is where I spent my early life.

CS: When did you begin writing?

MR: I actually wrote little books in first and second grade. Bored, bored, bored with school. . . then in fourth grade they, the teachers, discovered I didn't know ANY math, so "real" school began. I submitted a poem to seventeen when I was 12. It was rejected. (Smiles.) I had forgotten about that until recently.

CS: Was there anything in your childhood that sparked your creativity?

MR: a desperate life that required writing, creativity, as a means to survival. And I honestly have to say that the majority of my poetry, and possibly my plays, are spiritually informed—whatever that means. They aren't necessarily mine but come through me.

CS: Did you attend college? If so, when, where?

MR: Moorhead State University, Moorhead, MN. From 1971-75, I think. I graduated with a BA in Criminal Justice, BA in American Indian Studies. Then there was St. Mary's of Winona, in Minneapolis from 1985 to 1991, I think. Graduated with an MA in Human Development.

Interview by:
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CS: What kind of impact, if any, did your schooling have on your writing?

MR: I was told by _____ (famous MN poet who was a teacher at Moorhead in creative writing) that I basically had no talent. That didn't stop me. In my program at St. Mary's I "wrote" my program. The college was, and maybe still is, set-up for individuals to design their own programs. I designed mine so I could write my way to a degree instead of take classes. It was scholarly to semi-scholarly writing, but it kept me writing. Although at that time I didn't know I would become a writer. I thought I was going to become a therapist.

CS: Did you or do you have any mentors or role models?

MR: Jim Northrup was my mentor in the Loft Inroads Writer's of Color program. He really encouraged me to "read" my poetry and to keep writing. It was amazing to be in a group of native people and have them 'get' what I was writing about. Also Juanita Espinosa at the Native Arts Circle has always encouraged me. She encouraged me to apply to the Inroads program. She encouraged me to write my first script, which was a disaster, seriously . . . but she has always, always encouraged my writing.

CS: Who or what influenced your writing?

MR: I can't honestly say that anyone has influenced my writing. I started writing to save my sanity, so from early on it was "my" writing, my thoughts, my "style". I just had to get stuff out and didn't particularly care what it sounded like, and I sure wasn't writing to "be read". I will say though that I am a compulsive reader, but there is not one writer who I have tried to "be like".

CS: How does the relationship between you and your communities of membership impact or inform your writing?

MR: I am a Native woman and I write for a Native audience because that is what I know. If I can make another Indian laugh or cry then I feel like I have done my job as a writer.

CS: What has brought you to so many different venues?

MR: I like to write, and I like the challenge of doing different things.



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CS: Do you have a favorite?

MR: Just about anything I write starts out as a poem, and either it stays a poem or gets expanded into a story, script, song, etc.

CS: How long have you been writing scripts and screenplays?

MR: Maybe since 92 or 93. I never even saw a “play” on stage until about 1985 or 1986 when a friend took me to see my first play at Penumbra Theater. I was like “wow”! Then i saw Margo Cane or Ker-rigan (as you can tell i am terrible at names) from canada do a performance piece at Intermedia Arts, I think in 1991. It was again a total shock. . . that this was something Indian people did and could do. Again, just wow. So my first “script” was the “disaster” script Juanita Encouraged me to write for a radio thing Gary Farmer was trying to do. It was so bad, so then i had to keep trying until i got it somewhat right.

CS: What is the context out of which you began writing poetry?

MR: Almost all the poetry I write has been “right there”—a line comes and then boom, there’s the poem. More recently I have been asked to write poems for a specific “thing”—a painting, a photo exhibit, a media/performance thing. . . and I have to “think” about the theme and the direction the other artist is wanting. That is an interesting challenge. I like the challenge, the work. I am currently working on an Indian opera with Indian composer Brent Michael Davids. So we have this theme, and he and I brainstorm ideas and then I have to write these “poems” that he can either set to music or turn into songs. That type of thing is more work than the usual “work” that happens with my poetry. And it’s wonderful “work”. . . challenging, stimulating, encouraging. . . it’s life.

CS: What is it about the vehicles of script writing and poetry that draws you to each?

MR: Poetry is what I’ve always done. It just “happens.” It’s what keeps me sorta sane, my own cheap therapy maybe. The scripts are ways to tell stories. Someone told me once that a script is only good if it is a story that can’t be told any other way, so that is the challenge there. It’s also really cool to see words “come to life” literally.



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CS: Is there a relationship between the two vehicles?

MR: I don't know. I love to write. Probably each of my scripts has at least one poem somewhere in it. The other thing is that both poetry and scripts are short. As a mother and grandmother they fit in the time-frame of my life. I have three murder mysteries that have now been in "the writing" for at least seven years. They are in various stages of undone because i can't sit here at the computer and just spit them out.

CS: In a preview description of *The Trial of Standing Bear*, Brent Michael Davids comments that you and he both see yourselves as "role models for Indian youth and responsible citizens of the planet". Is writing to children (*Powwow Summer* and *Farmer's Market*) related to this?

MR: Writing for children . . . as a child growing up there was an absence of Native images that were current. The history of Indian people is locked in the past. So with writing to children I want to give them current images of themselves. I have this poem that goes:

my own grandmothers
have no names
their heroic actions
erased from history's page
freedom stories left untold. . . . shared only in the deepest dreams
in lessons to the world
the enemy has recorded our greatest warrior's names
Crazy Horse, Sitting Bull, Geronimo, Cochise
resistance fighters all. . . . and yet. . . . my own grandmothers have no names
their heroic actions
erased from history's page

In their first 400 years on this continent, the "others" attempted to either eliminate us or to subjugate us. When that didn't work, they tried denial – denial of our existence. although we surely continued to be, we were obliterated from their daily presence. To successfully deny our presence; our faces, images, thoughts, creative works had to be censored. We were kept in their mindset as "vanished peoples." Or as workers, not creators. . . . And what does this erasing of individual identity do to us? Can you believe you exist if you look in a mirror and see no reflection? And what happens when one group controls the mirror market? As Native people, we have known that in order to survive we had to create, re-create, produce, re-produce. . .



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MR (continued): The effect of the denial of our existence is that many of us have become invisible... the systematic disruption of our families by the removal of our children was effective for silencing our voices.... however, not (everyone) can still that desire, that up-welling inside that says sing, write, draw, move, be... we can sing our hearts out, tell our stories, paint our visions...we are in a position to create a more human reality...in order to live we have to make our own mirrors.... my own grandmothers.....

©1992 Marcie R. Rendon First published: 'Opening the Door', *Colors* magazine. Jan/Feb '92 issue, editor, Anthony Porter, Mpls. , MN. Also appeared in: *Sweetgrass Grows All Around Her* (literary journal), edited by Beth Brant & Sandra Laronde, Native Women in the Arts, Toronto, Canada, 1996. Excerpt in: *The Colour of Resistance*, edited by Connie Fife, Sister Vision Press, 1993; and *Speaking in Tongues*, anthology of the Loft Inroads Program, Mpls. , MN, 1994.

So the children's books, and a lot of the plays, are "mirrors" for us today. The opera is to do what hasn't been done, and to cross cultures/leading with Native culture. So we are writing an "Indian" opera - not an adaptation/not an opera with an Indian theme or characters or "white-washed" Indian music. It's that idea that we can do anything. We don't have to be locked into stereotypes of what "Indian" is AND we don't have to write an opera with an Indian theme, but a real Indian opera. Ok, so that may not make too much sense and maybe Brent can say it better. Rosy simas does modern dance and she is native, therefore her dance is native dance. Am I going in circles here? (Smiles.)

The Farmer's Market was so that Asian children can see themselves today, and to say, in a subtle way, that all people except native people, are immigrants here . . . and that they all share a common heritage in spite of their perceived differences.

CS: How does your work as a journalist relate to other writing you've done?

MR: Again, the Indian voice, the Indian mirror, the Indian perspective or at least MY Indian perspective. And like i said, i'll write anything for the chance to be writing instead of REALLY working.

CS: Do you see any common themes that thread throughout your work?

MR: The mirror, home, family, women, relationships . . . and then everything is always about the existence of spiritual and physical existing simultaneously, contrary to christian beliefs which seems to be first you are a physical then a spiritual being (if you're good enough). In my reality both spiritual and physical exist simultaneously on the same plane.



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CS: What are your reasons for being so actively engaged in community?

MR: Change, Memory, History. . . and always thinking seven generations ahead. Planting seeds, throwing the pebble into the sea so the ripples go out. Loneliness is a bitch, with community there is always more . . . and the possibility for better is greater than in the singular.

CS: Do you consider yourself a storyteller?

MR: No. Jim Northup is a storyteller. He can tell a story. So can people like Louise Erdrich, Sherman Alexie, and [David] Treuer. Those people are storytellers.

CS: How do you characterize yourself?

MR: Me? Maybe I sing dreams (poems). Paint word visions (scripts).