



Paddling to Where I Stand: Agnes Alfred, Qwiqwasutinuxw Noblewoman

Martine Reid

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The Kwakwaka'wakw people and their culture have been the subject of more anthropological writings than any other ethnic group on the Northwest Coast. Until now, however, no biography had been written by or about a Kwakwaka'wakw woman. *Paddling to Where I Stand* presents the memoirs of Agnes Alfred (c. 1890-1992), a non-literate noble Qwiqwasutinuxw woman of the Kwakwaka'wakw Nation and one of the last great storytellers among her peers in the classic oral tradition.

Agnes Alfred documents through myths, historical accounts, and personal reminiscences the foundations and the enduring pulse of her culture. She shows how a First Nations woman managed to quietly fulfil her role as a noble matriarch in her ever-changing society, thus providing a role model for those who came after her. She also contributes significant light and understanding to several traditional practices including prearranged marriages and traditional potlatches.

Paddling to Where I stand is more than another anthropological interpretation of Kwakwaka'wakw culture. It is the first-hand account, by a woman, of the greatest period of change she and her people experienced since first contact with Europeans, and her memoirs flow from her urgently felt desire to pass on her knowledge to younger generations..

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