



Noel Bennett, John Running
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Noel Bennett, John Running : Halo of the Sun: Stories Told and Retold before purchasing it in order to gauge whether or not it would be worth my time, and all praised Halo of the Sun: Stories Told and Retold:

0 of 0 people found the following review helpful. Five StarsBy John Runninggreat stories lead to an understanding of Navajo Culture. Also awesome photographs0 of 0 people found the following review helpful. Stories to read and re-readBy LynneEnjoy the stories told in this book.10 of 10 people found the following review helpful. An introduction to the "Beautyway" of weavingBy Theodore A. RushtonThis book offers an especially sensitive and sympathetic introduction to rug weaving, a major element of Navajo culture, and is typical of the quality books published by Northland Press. Noel Bennett accomplished something which few outsiders even try on the Navajo Nation. Based on her background and experience, she set out to understand and learn one of the traditional crafts -- weaving a rug from raw wool to finished product. It looks easy. After all, lots of Anglos weave. Some even spin yarn. The whole process, from raw wool to a finished rug that is work of art, sounds simple in the telling; but, reality is different. Let me give you an example. Fry bread is a traditional Navajo food, which almost every woman can make without thinking. It's as natural as walking. Maybe one of the simplest of traditional Navajo skills. I've tried to learn one element of it, taking a small ball of dough and patting and kneading it out to a circle about a foot in diameter that is then dropped into hot oil to be cooked to a golden brown. It was a lot of fun. The Navajos got a lot of amusement out of watching me try and mostly fail, day after day. I had fun trying. My "teacher" was kind, helpful, patient and amused; she'd show me again and again, but I inevitably ended up with a lumpy disc of dough that she'd patiently pat into a proper circle before laying it in the frying pan. In other words, it ain't as easy as it looks. Bennett undertook a similar but far more complicated learning experience in the 1960s. Unlike me, she stayed with it and became skilled. One result is this

book, a sensitive semi-insider's look at a traditional craft that exemplifies one of the few genuine American art forms. Her desire to learn was appreciated by her Navajo friends; one reward is she becomes a target of their good natured humor, a friend of the family. Many outsiders "study" and patronize Native American cultures; Bennett became part of it. There is a genuine "Us vs. Them" attitude among the Navajo, with very good reason based on the constant Bordertown (Gallup, Winslow, Holbrook, Flagstaff, Farmington, etc.) prejudice and exploitation. The Navajos came to regard Bennett as one of "the People," so when it came to entering a rug in an off-reservation exhibition her Navajo friends helped her evade some pretentious Anglo rules. It's always fun to poke fun at the bilagaana (Anglos). Their pretensions are too good not to laugh at. Americans like to think, "Underneath, everyone is basically the same." Bennett appreciates there are fundamental differences between Navajo and Anglo cultures. She touches on it, such as the importance of "four" in Navajo culture. Anglo culture is based on "three," such as the Trinity in religion and three examples if you want to prove something; Navajo culture has "four" as typified by the four cardinal directions, four sacred mountains, four basic colors, four precious materials for jewelry. Bennett cites these examples, but she never really delves into the meaning of these cultural differences. For example, Anglos live in a confrontational culture of guilt or innocence; Navajos live in a consensus culture in which K'e, the spirit of harmony, is more important. But, she lived in the western Navajo Nation where the more traditional people live; the eastern side, where I lived, is more accustomed to pushy Anglos. She feigns shock at some Anglo ways; my experience is that most Navajos fully understand the aggressive Anglo world and its rude contrast with their patience. She is more of a nizhoni (beautiful) person; I'm more of the Ma'ii tso (which has far more meanings than simply "fox"). In general, though, she offers a sympathetic, intelligent insight into rug weaving -- one of the integral elements of Navajo culture. Her book is the epitome of Anglo culture -- an "insider's" view of a different culture, one that most people will never see and even fewer will ever have a chance to begin to understand. It's well worth buying, reading, keeping and sharing with friends.

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