



***Kit's Indian Summer***

Written by: Sharon Brown

Book Review (why is this here, in this spot?)

Publish America

68 pages

Grades 3-8

Isbn# 1-4137-3956-3

**Rating: \*1 – Buffalo Chip**

By Marlette Grant-Jackson

**Overview:**

Eleven-year-old Kit is sent to live with her aunt and uncle in San Francisco after her mother dies in childbirth and her father is off gold mining in the Sacramento Valley. Her aunt and uncle are tolerant of her “uncivilized” ways but her twin cousins Clarissa and Marisa make her year long stay unbearable. So when her father leaves for the gold mines of Northern California, a day after his return, Kit takes drastic measures to ensure she doesn't get left behind again. She cuts her hair and dons pants and work shirt to disguise herself as a boy, then stows away on the ship to Union, California, known now as Arcata. Not having enough money to buy her a ticket back to San Francisco, her father says she can travel with him dressed as a boy to the gold mines along the Klamath River. Traveling with the mule train Kit sees first hand the brutality of some of the miners, and the mistreatment of their animals. Once they reached Clear Creek, Kit makes friends with a young Indian girl, who introduces herself as Yeenipaxzuh and spends most of the summer swimming and hanging out in the village. During late summer Kit is invited to participate in a native religious ceremony known as a Pikyavish. She makes a ceremonial dress in a week and is very excited about dancing in the week long ceremony. Only the people of the village know that Kit is a girl. After the conclusion of the first night of ceremonies the miners burn the village and kill Yeenipaxzuh's father as well as others. Yeenipaxzuh, helps Kit and her wounded father navigate the Klamath River and watches as they set sail back to San Francisco from the shores of Klamath.

**Review:**

Misleading information:

- 1) *The Title:* “Kit's Indian Summer.” The title of this book sends red flags up not only for me but other Native people. I truly hoped the title meant that Kit had an experience during the fall season. The title “Kit's Indian Summer” seems to make the experience of meeting and interacting with another human culture more like a visit to the zoo. I guess what I am trying to say is that the title objectifies a people, making them less than human.
- 2) *Contributing experts:* Susan Smith, and Sue Masten are both given a special thanks for their help of the Karuk Language. Susan Smith Gehr is the Karuk Language Director at the Karuk Tribe and Sue Masten, former Yurok Tribal

Chairwoman, have both stated they **were not** contacted by the author nor were they asked to give assistance on any part of the making of this book concerning language or anything else. Susan Gehr stated that if she were asked she would have assisted in ensuring the proper use and spelling of the Karuk words. Sue Masten stated that she “would not have given assistance on Karuk language, since she is Yurok.” This tells me two things: 1) that the author is trying to prove she did her “homework”, when in actuality she did not and 2) that the author is trying to claim some kind of authenticity by citing known tribal figures in our local communities.

- 3) *Climate:* Kit and Yeenipazuh are swimming in Clear Creek before June. Most of the creeks in our area run cold with snow run off until mid July. Even today, we don't swim until mid July. The hottest part of our year is August and September. Even then Yeenipazuh would not have been swimming every day, she was a functioning member of a communal society dependant on her supplies, crafts, and able body.
- 4) *Inaccuracies in Language:* Karuk Language inaccuracies are one of the main problems with this book: a) **Yeenipaxzuh** the young Indian girl's name meaning “adolescent girl” in Karuk is actually spelled yeeripáxvuh. There is no 'z' in the current Karuk orthography anywhere. b) Yumararik is referred to as the ancestor's home and that the Milky Way is the trail that the Karuk people follow upon death to the ancestors home. Yumararik actually refers to the land of the dead or more specifically Hell, after Christian contact. c) 'pikyávis' was coined by a non-Native who pulled the word out of a sentence "Karukithívthaaneen upikyâavish" meaning he (the priest) is going to fix the world, referring to the World Renewal Ceremony. The word a Karuk would have been more likely to use for the World Renewal Ceremony at the time was 'ir' - World Renewal Ceremony or 'irahiv' World Renewal Ceremony time.
- 5) *Misrepresentation of ceremonies:* This book trivializes a very important ceremony for the Karuk people. A Pikyavish or "Karukithívthaaneen upikyâavish" is a dance/religious ceremony that women/girls do not dance in, therefore the girls would not have needed a ceremonial dress. Even if they did, why would they have allowed Kit (a non Native) to participate without any training? To quote one of my professors, I would have to say “The book is not accurate and misinforms readers about a culture's living religion; it's like writing a book about a Catholic family and having women priests.”
- 6) *Dressmaking:* Kit made a ceremonial dress in a week. Most ceremonial dresses take years to make. You must collect the shells, nuts, grasses, and deer hide during the proper seasons. Then clean the materials, and assemble the dress with the proper attitude and spirit. It is a religious item and a spiritual process. The dress I made for my daughter took over seven years just to put together, not to collect; I started collecting the materials when I was eighteen. The dress was finished when I thirty five, in time for my daughter's coming of age ceremony.

7) *Family responsibilities*: “Yeenipaxzuh” helps Kit and Kit’s wounded father to a canoe and steers them down the Klamath River during the night, after the miners attacked the village. Yeenipaxzuh, a pre-adolescent, sheds few tears and does not want to talk about her family because mentioning their names would keep them from following the trail to the ancestors. The problem here is that Yeenipaxzuh is human, is a pre adolescent, and the village would have been her entire family. So for her to be so emotionally detached to leave her dying father and her burning village (family) with only a few tears to save two white American interlopers is unfathomable. This makes Yeenipaxzuh seem inhuman. It sure seems to say that Kit and her father are more important to Yennipaxzuh than her own family.

I read the book. I set it down for a week. I read the book again. Things just sat wrong with me about the book. The fact that the author allows the main character, a white American, to be accepted by the tribal people and invited to dance in one of our most sacred ceremonies is very ethnocentric. The author is blinded by her own white privilege from which she writes. We, as Native people, have struggled for so long to survive, fought so hard to keep our language, religion, land and culture that to hear non-Natives say “if you feel it in your heart, then you should be considered Indian”, to watch on television people pretending to be Native American Indians like Chief Illini, to know that our religion is not federally protected, to know that most American’s believe that Indians never lived in their part of the United States, why would I or we want to share something as sacred/emotional/cultural as our ceremonies/religion with a stranger?

An Indian Education Director contacted me about the book and wanted my thoughts. I was in the process of contacting Mrs. Masten to verify her connection with the book and I found that the Indian Education Director was contacting Mrs. Gehr. We shared what we found: **neither person had been contacted** by the author.

If the book had been written without the references to the ceremonies, and the special thanks to the two women who were not contacted, it might be something worth reading to a 3<sup>rd</sup> or 4<sup>th</sup> grade class studying the Gold Rush. I think that the book did give a good glimpse into what life might have been like on the Klamath River during the Gold Rush for white Americans and how some white Americans perceived and treated Native peoples. The times were rough, all women were at great risk of being raped and beaten. One thing the author can be credited for is that she wrote from a white perspective about early contact. The author was inaccurate about the ceremonies and she claimed research that she didn’t really do. If by adding those two things the author may have been hoping that this would give her credibility, but by doing so she lost any credibility in my eyes.

This review has been done by Marlette Grant-Jackson (Yurok/Karuk/Shasta/Abenaki) Coordinator of the Indian Teacher & Educational Personnel Program’s (ITEPP) Curriculum Resource Center.