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A Selection from Song of Rita Joe. Autobiography of a Mi'kmaq Poet Rita Joe is celebrated as a poet, educator, and ambassador. Her new book from Ragweed Press, Song of Rita Joe, reveals her as an eloquent and courageous Mi'kmaq woman whose timely message of "gentle persuasion" has enriched the life of a nation. Here is a selection from this new book. From Song of Rita Joe I am an old woman now. When I dance the powwow, I cannot dance it like the young ones do, because I limp on my left side. But I do dance. It's called an old woman dance: dragging your feet around on the ground, just moving.... When I dance in a powwow, I follow my heart. My heart is what has moved me all along. Nothing but your own heart has answers to the questions you ask.... I was born in Whycocomagh, Cape Breton, in the eastern part of Canada, on March 15, 1932. My parents, Joseph (Josie) Gould Bernard and Annie (Googoo) Bernard had seven children. Sonwel, a boy, had died earlier in infancy, and the seventh would die with my mother in 1937, when I was five. I was the sixth, and the youngest surviving child. My three brothers, Charlie (whom we called Soln), Roddy and Matt, were eleven, eight and four years older than me, and my sister Annabel was five years older. From two earlier marriages of my father's there were also Susie, a much older sister, and William, who was thirty-five when I was born. As far back as I can remember, I had a loving family. We were very poor, but I try to remember the positive things. I cannot remember my family being loud or angry. Everybody was soft-spoken and gentle, even though we had such a sad lot. We were poor and the neighbours were poor and everybody did the best they could to help their neighbours. The contact among people was gentle and loving. That's the part I remember. While my children were growing up, I shared many problems and stories with friends in the community. I remember one occasion in 1960, when I became ill with bleeding ulcers. It had never occurred to me that I might be ill, until one day I took my two small sons for their noon nap upstairs and lay beside them singing and talking in a soothing voice until they were asleep. While lying on the bed, I felt nauseous, so I went downstairs and began to vomit blood. I told one of the older children to fetch a neighbour, and the neighbour took me to the hospital. I was there for ten days. The day I came home, an old friend, Mrs. Ma'n Julian, brought me a gallon bottle and set it on the table. "You drink this every day," she said. "What is it?" I asked. "Never you mind what the hell it is!" she said. "Just drink it." So I drank it every day and very soon I was doing handsprings. The gallon bottle was full of a herbal medicine my friend had prepared when she heard I was coming home. I could fill a book with stories like that, about the kindness of friends from day to day.... I like to think of our native life, Curious, free: And look at the stars Sending icy messages. My eyes see the cold face of the moon Cast his net over the bay. It seems We are like the moon • Born, MI Water Parl' OPEN MAY to SEPT. 12 mi. from Sydney on Hillside Rd. 564-1824 Cafe: Delicious Hot Meals 1 Chicken Fingers \* Hamburgers \* Pizza \* Drinks \* Light Groceries \* Camp Supplies LOVELY BEACH & DOCK • KIDS' GAMES ROOM TENTINGn-RAILER SITES •



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