

An Interview

with

Louis Clark III (Two Shoes)



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Wisconsin Historical Society Press Why and how did you decide to write *How to Be an Indian in the 21st Century*? Did it start as one poem with the idea of more or did you gather essays together?

I started writing poetry in the sixth grade, and I got beat up a lot. So I wrote just for myself. I did have writing dreams as I aged, but life got in the way. I kept writing. Sometimes people thought that I was crazy. I kept writing. In 2011, I received some good advice, and I started sharing my poetry and my stories. It felt like I was continuing the oral tradition of my people, the Oneida

Tribe of Indians of Wisconsin. I told stories of my life and my understanding of life, and people seemed to enjoy the stories and the poetry. I was honored to do a talk at the Wisconsin Federation of Poets annual conference where a member came up to me and said, “Your stories should be in a book.” So, I put my poems and stories together in a book and then the wonderful people at the Wisconsin Historical Society Press said that they could hear my voice while reading my words. The curse that a little reservation boy endured is now being shown for what it really is—a gift from the Creator. I’ve been blessed.

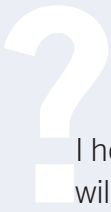


WHS Press Why did you title the book *How to Be an Indian in the 21st Century*? What are you trying to convey with the title?

A group of high school students from Berlin, Wisconsin, were going out west to work on a reservation. I was invited to give a talk about what it is like to be an Indian so that they would have some understanding about what they were getting into. The title was born

there in one of the most electrifying moments of my life. The kids I spoke with were so wonderful! I gave my speech, about forty-five minutes, and the kids asked questions that kept me there for 2½ hours. I just wanted to share that we are not different, we are all human beings. We have ups and downs and perhaps only when we become color blind will we all really be able to see each other as brothers and sisters.





WHS Press How can this book serve as a guide to American Indian and Oneida history?

I hope that by reading my words people will look deeper into our history, mankind's history, and our country's history. We have to learn from the past to make the future better

for all of us. I once found a book in the ditch along the highway. This book was filled with history lessons that I hadn't encountered in my learning. It was a gift from above, I believe, and it opened my mind to different avenues, it made me more understanding, and I hope I shared that understanding in my book.



WHS Press This book is much like a memoir, written in prose and verse. What do you hope readers learn about being an American Indian, about becoming a man, a husband, a father, and a Green Bay Packer fan?

Being who I was, where I was born, where I was raised, I was always attempting to fit in. My parents were good people coping the best that they could with the times and troubles of their lives. But they were human

beings afflicted with the weaknesses of being human. I cried myself to sleep way too many times because I never felt that I could fit in or count on anyone. The only thing that I could count on was Vince Lombardi and the Green Bay Packers, and the sun coming up every morning. So as each day started anew, I resolved to do the best that I could. I fell, I cried, I bled, but I rose each time that I fell. And I believed that you only fail if you fail to try.



WHS Press How can this book increase our understanding of who Oneida people are, who American Indians are?

I hope that I show, through stories, poems, and sometimes silly verses, that we aren't different. Black, white, red, yellow and a combination of colors of human beings, we have so much to share with each other. We should share in peace.





WHS Press As anyone can imagine, writing a poem and a book are deeply personal experiences. How has writing *How to Be an Indian in the 21st Century* been a personal experience for you?

Writing poetry, telling stories, is part of my life. It wasn't until I was willing to reach deep

inside and expose the truth, the hurt, the pain, the good times and the bad, that I was really able to see others. We each have painful stories inside of us, demons if you will, but you have to be willing to open up your soul, like Pandora's box and let those demons loose because only then will hope emerge. Hope will carry us on to a better tomorrow.



WHS Press Why do you think that your poetry can reach a wider audience of readers than mainstream poetry of our time?

I don't know if my poetry, my stories, are unique enough to capture a wider audience of readers. I do know that my writing is true, it is pure, and

it comes from my heart. What I've written I've written for myself. At one time I dreamed of being a great writer. I dreamed many dreams, but I've come to realize that you have to be true to yourself before you can be true to those you love and to the world. I've been true to myself and only good things have come from that.



WHS Press What have you learned from this whole experience?

I've learned that the most important thing is to be yourself. I'm humbled by the whole process, and I hope that my words bring a better understanding to those of us who share this planet.

