

by Brenda Brooks

CARRY THIS (Dec. 6/89)

I wake up  
I make plans  
I go about things  
as usual  
as my mother  
did as my  
sisters have  
always done  
after the final  
worst thing  
happens—  
to deal  
well with these  
kind of facts  
is expected in  
our family,  
a tradition,  
as if the final  
worst thing was  
nothing more  
than a small,  
round basket  
placed in our  
little girl beds  
at birth to  
get used to.  
Carry this—

carry this  
to school through  
the tender snow  
of your girlhood  
falling quietly in  
a magic wood  
carry this  
to places that are  
none of your business  
and sit there  
while the solemn  
liturgy continues  
carry this  
as you enter  
the stairwell,  
as you pause  
in the forest  
keep your eye on it  
as you dream by  
the river

use all  
your strength  
all your concentration—  
the final  
worst thing is  
a deep, round  
basket.

by Terri Jewell

Show You Hear

Among my people  
it is rude  
to listen to another  
without making noises  
of acknowledgement.  
A famous anthropologist  
now deceased  
said the invention  
of the boat  
started race prejudice.  
It is rude  
to listen to this silently.  
The world says  
a "real" woman  
has gratefully accepted  
some man's vision  
of herself.  
It is unsafe  
to listen to this.  
A black woman  
loving other woman  
defies the narrow line  
and draws the spiral  
of her own  
fire dances.  
Make a noise  
of acknowledgement.

She Who Bears the Thorn

her vulva was clean  
rose turgid and pink  
from the focus of her  
she thought of her mothers  
who bore the thorn  
had the bud of their pleasure  
cut out  
their labiae sealed like an oath  
with mud and blood  
ash and gut  
the girls before who lay moaning  
men who clicked by in approval  
while wives rocked and fingered  
their own coarse scars  
nothing like those wormed onto flesh  
naming proud lineage and sense of ground  
nothing like those shouting right to birth  
to strut kick take on the sun  
the knife maimed her  
in the name of Allah  
cleansed all desire  
to make her precious  
in the arms of a god  
who knew not her name  
or delight in girlish touch



r e v i e w s

## Snapshots of Native Struggles with AIDS

by Patii Flather

**WHITEHORSE**—The smell of burning sage slowly wafts from the set out through the audience, as Grace cleanses herself with the sweet-smelling smoke and then comforts her sleeping sister in their home on the reserve.

A few steps away in another part of the theatre set, brother Spike also moves slowly as he dresses in stylish clothes in his city home and puts on cologne—a contrast of smells and lifestyles.

The beginning of *Snapshots*, which toured the Yukon this fall, reflects a wonderful simplicity that runs throughout the play.

When the actors—Evan Adams (also the playwright), Maureen Adams, and Dinah Gaston—discussed the play with a reporter earlier they had said it is a simple story about a simple native family coping with AIDS.

This simplicity, which is also reflected in the haunting music and a sparse set of chairs, makeshift couch, table, and radio, is the essence of this 45-minute play's effectiveness as an educational tool that has touched many audiences since its debut in Vancouver last spring.

The characters include Grace (Maureen Adams), a more traditional native woman who is little aware of the city life her siblings

have experienced.

At first she doesn't believe her brother is gay and is angry at sister Coco for this news. Slowly she accepts her brother's sexuality and then his illness.

Coco (Gaston) is the street-wise sister used to going out on the town, getting high, picking up men. She is an intravenous drug user who doesn't want to admit her own susceptibility to AIDS.

She also has her own wise side—she slyly leaves a copy of a book about loving gay people for Grace to read.

Both women dearly love their brother Spike (Evan Adams), who now lives in Vancouver. Grace laments that her baby brother Spike hasn't written her and misses him.

When Coco learns from Spike's letters to her that he has AIDS, she is hard on herself for being so drunk the last time she ran into him in Vancouver.

At first Spike has no plans to return to his home. Then—as did one native man this year from a northern British Columbia community—he does go back.

There is a remarkable scene in this play, a contrast between Coco's and Spike's sexual experiences, that wrenches apart many of our society's stereotypes about romance and sex.

As Coco bitterly, dejectedly describes her history of abuse by men and unsatisfying sex since she first had intercourse with her stepfather at age 12, Spike describes his first experience at age 18 so tenderly.

Spike calls it what Coco cannot—making love, and recalls nostalgically that his lover told him that if all native people were like

him, the lover could understand why the explorers had stayed.

In another scene, Spike recalls dressing as a child in his sisters' clothes for play.

"I found out I could put high heels on and it wasn't the end of the world," he said. "At the end of the world."

In an interview earlier, the actors had discussed the challenges of presenting a play about natives and written for natives to native audiences. The Yukon shows mark the first time many non-natives are among the viewers.

The actors didn't seem to have any problems reaching the mixed-race audience at a junior high school gym in Whitehorse. When Spike finally comes home to his reserve and his family, again it's so simple and effective.

Each sister welcomes Spike in her own way. Grace cleanses him with sage and then gives him a hug. Spike teasingly sits on Cox sprawled out on the couch, and she laughs. The *Snapshots* tour was co-sponsored by the Yukon government and the Federal Centre for AIDS.

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Playwrite, actor and member of the Coast Salish Nation: Evan Adams