



Good Seeds: A Menominee Indian Food Memoir

Thomas Pecore Weso

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In this food memoir, named for the *manoomin* or wild rice that also gives the Menominee tribe its name, tribal member Thomas Pecore Weso takes readers on a cook's journey through Wisconsin's northern woods. He connects each food—beaver, trout, blackberry, wild rice, maple sugar, partridge—with colorful individuals who taught him Indigenous values. Cooks will learn from his authentic recipes. Amateur and professional historians will appreciate firsthand stories about reservation life during the mid-twentieth century, when many elders, fluent in the Algonquian language, practiced the old ways.

Weso's grandfather Moon was considered a medicine man, and his morning prayers were the foundation for all the day's meals. Weso's grandmother Jennie "made fire" each morning in a wood-burning stove, and oversaw huge breakfasts of wild game, fish, and fruit pies. As Weso grew up, his uncles taught him to hunt bear, deer, squirrels, raccoons, and even skunks for the daily larder. He remembers foods served at the Menominee fair and the excitement of "sugar bush," maple sugar gatherings that included dances as well as hard work.

Weso uses humor to tell his own story as a boy learning to thrive in a land of icy winters and summer swamps. With his rare perspective as a Native anthropologist and artist, he tells a poignant personal story in this unique book.

Good Seeds: A Menominee Indian Food Memoir Details

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From Reader Review Good Seeds: A Menominee Indian Food Memoir for online ebook

John says

Review to come.

Laura says

Interesting insight into local native American culture. Mainly a memoir describing a subset of the different foods the author grew up with, interspersed with tantalizing small insights into his upbringing and the intersection of white and native culture.

Gina says

This book attracted my attention on a couple of levels.

As someone of Oneida lineage who lives quite near the area in which the book takes place, of course I have a deep vested interest in indigenous traditions. Secondly, it is important to all indigenous people to share traditional knowledge and pass down these traditions to the younger generations. One of the prime lessons we are taught is to always take care of the next 7 generations. Weso is doing this by penning this book.

The book is small in size, but big in sharing this important knowledge. Weso remembers the days when Natives lived completely off the land, grew everything they needed, fed whomever was at the door (many times two dozen or more people would gather for food), and practiced the spiritual ways of their ancestors. The book also includes a few recipes from his elders.

The indigenous people were here long before the Europeans came. Their traditions were nearly eradicated (as were they), but there are people such as Weso who are reminding us of our traditional life, our spiritual beliefs, and, most importantly, to always keep the next 7 generations in mind. What we do now will have long-lasting effects.

Kate Cronin says

A fascinating first person account of what it was like to grow up on the Menominee Indian Reservation. Each chapter covers a different food (beaver, venison, berries, wild rice) with details on how it was obtained (hunted, gathered, grown) and how it was prepared and eaten. Interspersed with family and cultural history, a truly engaging read.

Randal White says

Pleasant, homey, feel good memoir

The author recounts his 1950-1960's childhood on the Menominee Reservation in Wisconsin. Pleasant, homey, feel good stories. With some Native American history and lore. And lots of recipes from his family. Very nice.

Jan says

A family history, a Wisconsin tribal history of the Menominee, a limited personal history, a food history, this book is all of these things and more. The recipes are gleaned from family, tribal, and other cookbooks. There are recipes with wild rice, berries, wild game, fishes, corn, maple syrup, greens, garden meals, and preserving foods. It is comfortably written and well researched, with several recipes included in each chapter. I loved it, but my sister liberated it when visiting from Columbia county for my birthday! Thank you, Wisconsin State Historical Society Press and LibraryThing Member Giveaways!

S. Daisy says

This book is a personal memoir of a Menominee Indian youth growing up in a quickly changing world, and it is about the foods eaten or made by his family, and the changes that the white man made on their traditional diet. It is also about the hunting, gathering, and preparing of these different foods.

The parts of the book about their way of life "on the rez" are quite interesting, and the parts that talk about their food are very good as well. There are many recipes in the book (44 to be exact), some of which look quite tasty. I have learned much by reading this book, and I think that it was well worth the read.

Lexi says

A curiously fascinating book giving a unique, personal, insight into the Menominee Indian tribe.

Although about food, this is definitely not a cook book unless you are looking for a recipe for fried squirrel, roast porcupine or baked beaver.

There are some light-hearted food related anecdotes like bears drunk on fermented apples, but most of the focus is on the harsher reality of finding and preparing food for the family.

Hunting (for survival, not sport) includes sections on a variety of wildlife from partridges to beavers.

Although the diet is largely meat based, other food sources are included, for example the "good seeds" in the title is wild rice and corn. These are all supported by interesting discussions on traditions, ethics, seasonality, techniques and uses.

Finally, the book becomes slightly sadder, more reflective and strangely spooky.

Margaret Sankey says

Warm and folksy food memoir (with recipes) of the author's childhood in northern Wisconsin as a member of a large, multi-generational Menominee household in the 1950s and 60s, as his grandmother and aunts adapted the hunting, fishing, maple sugaring and gathering done as a family to modern preservation techniques. Weso, who now lives in Kansas, is particularly thoughtful about the ways in which infrastructure projects and land management decisions (including the removal of wolves) have altered the ability of people living on the reservation to maintain self-sufficiency from the land, and how water systems have altered the traditional cultivation of wild rice.

Roberta Moeschter says

An interesting view of Menominee life and the author's family.

Bexa says

I really liked this, it was short, but full of life. Weso talks about growing up with his grandparents on the Menominee reservation in Wisconsin. Each chapter is dedicated to a type of food, how that food influenced his life, and finishes with recipes for those dishes. It provides enough information to be heartfelt, but not enough to truly share intimate portions of his life so you stay focused on the food. There's so much more I want to know about his life and growing up, and without trying to romanticized reservation life and the horrors of American government in regards to Indians, I'm jealous of the childhood he described. It was hard work and struggle for food and warmth and basic needs, but the knowledge he gained and connection to the world is fascinating. This could have done worth another review from an editor, but there is such sincerity in his voice that I don't mind the grammatical errors. Wonderful read.

Shirleynature says

Thank you, Tom Weso, for these resonate-poignant, character-filled family stories and generous savory recipes!

This book is an award-winning, intimate and nostalgic bridge into Menominee cultural-place connections shared with heart & humor.

Lisa says

This is an American story, told through food.

Gathering wild rice in Minnesota is one of my most treasured memories of my years there; the choice to put an image of a canoe in a wild rice bed on the cover sealed my decision to purchase this book. This is an anthropological work about Menominee food traditions, done by a member of the culture in question; the author's view from inside adds a critically important perspective.

Weso captures a moment in time and cycles through the seasons with stories and recipes. As someone who has spent time in the wild rice country further north of the Menominee region he describes, I recognize in his stories that he is very familiar with some ancient food traditions, and less so with others. I enjoyed especially reading about the maple sugar bush traditions. His comment, "Grandpa always said that one of the few good things that white people brought to us was a frying pan," has already been absorbed into my own family's lore.

Having lived my adult life in more sparsely populated, hungrier lands further north, I was blown away by his description of growing up at the intersection of three traditional food regions: Big game of the western prairies, farming of the east, and fish and wild rice of the northern waterways. He noted, "Menominee people used all these foods, and all combine well with wild rice--meat fish, and berries." (p. 49)

There's plenty of straightforward information here, and some wisdom as well, as his book progresses and he talks about the complexity of his uncle, a WWII veteran whose methods for making blackberry wine were not about just the alcohol, but had everything to do with getting the youth outdoors, immersed in traditions from their own culture, and hearing stories from their elders. "That summer we learned chemistry and horticulture. We learned traditional medicine as well as the tribal lore Buddy taught . . . He was trying to establish a new culture. Sometimes that coincided with being a good citizen and sometimes it did not. So there is an element of rebelliousness in that." (p. 84/85).

Reading works by indigenous Americans means grappling with a history that is devastating and this book is no exception. In understated manner, he describes a few places where dams flooded wild rice beds and forever changed the community's patterns of food harvesting. He quickly goes on to describe as well the community's resilience and ongoing interactions as neighbors with the immigrants. Weso's story of food in his family as integration of tradition with the changes of colonization, reflects the heart of American experience in the 21st century.

Carla says

Short and sweet. It was like sitting down and listening to Thomas telling stories. Included of course are some recipes. All simple, but you can see the love that grandmother, or mother put into them. I wrote one down on cornbread, because, who doesn't love a new cornbread recipe?! Life in simpler times.

Jim Potter says

Good Seeds a Five-Star Spirited Story

Good Seeds is a rare book, superbly done. Like a wise medicine man, Thomas Pecore Weso shapes stories that must be told for the greater good. The anthropologist author takes the reader on a colorful cultural journey into the lives and food of his Menominee Indians.

In Weso's world he uses food as an appetizer before the main course. The reader is reminded that wild food can't be rushed or manufactured, that every food has its season, and that each family member has a skill—often providing game—so that the household can eat, survive, and prosper. Only then is there time for storytelling and magic.

This book, a food memoir, is so much more than a collection of recipes; it's a book of important, intimate stories of individuals and culture. Use the recipes to tell a story, or use a story to tell the recipes.

Jim Potter, author of *Taking Back the Bullet: Trajectories of Self-Discovery*
