

BITTERROOT

A Salish Memoir of Transracial Adoption

SUSAN DEVAN HARNESS

2019 High Plains Book Award Winner for the Creative Nonfiction and Indigenous Writer categories

"*Bitterroot* is an inspiration—one woman's quest to find herself among the racial, cultural, economic, and historical fault lines of the American West. A compelling, important memoir, as tenaciously beautiful as the flower for which it's named."—Harrison Candelaria Fletcher, author of *Presentimiento: A Life in Dreams*

"One Salish-Kootenai woman's journey, this memoir is a heart-wrenching story of finding family and herself, and of a particularly horrific time in Native history. It is a strong and well-told narrative of adoption, survival, resilience, and is truthfully revealed."—Luana Ross (*Bitterroot Salish*), codirector of Native Voices Documentary Film at the University of Washington and author of *Inventing the Savage*

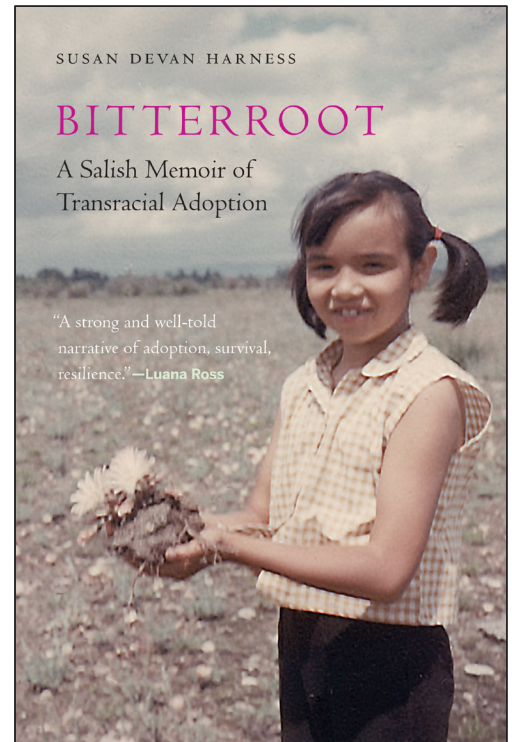
"A page-turner of a memoir that illuminates a great historical injustice. With wit and a sturdy heart, Susan Harness plumbs her own and the American West's uneasy past to shed the burden of living 'in between' and find wholeness. A compelling and moving story."—John Calderazzo, author of *Rising Fire: Volcanoes and Our Inner Lives*

In *Bitterroot* Susan Devan Harness traces her journey to understand the complexities and struggles of being an American Indian child adopted by a white couple and living in the rural American West. When Harness was fifteen years old, she questioned her adoptive father about her "real" parents. He replied that they had died in a car accident not long after she was born—except they hadn't, as Harness would learn in a conversation with a social worker a few years later.

Harness's search for answers revolved around her need to ascertain why she was the target of racist remarks and why she seemed always to be on the outside looking in. New questions followed her through college and into her twenties when she started her own family. Meeting her biological family in her early thirties generated even more questions. In her forties Harness decided to get serious about finding answers when, conducting oral histories, she talked with other transracial adoptees. In her fifties she realized that the concept of "home" she had attributed to the reservation existed only in her imagination.

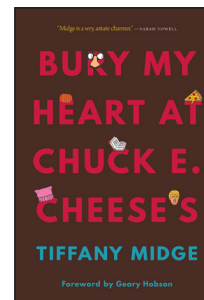
Making sense of her family, the American Indian history of assimilation, and the very real—but culturally constructed—concept of race helped Harness answer the often puzzling questions of stereotypes, a sense of nonbelonging, the meaning of family, and the importance of forgiveness and self-acceptance. In the process *Bitterroot* also provides a deep and rich context in which to experience life.

Susan Devan Harness (Confederated Salish Kootenai Tribes) is a writer, lecturer, and oral historian and has been a research associate for the Tri-Ethnic Center for Prevention Research at Colorado State University. She is the author of *Mixing Cultural Identities Through Transracial Adoption: Outcomes of the Indian Adoption Project (1958–1967)*.



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