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Telling a Good One: The Process of a Native American Collaborative Biography. Theodore Rios and Kathleen Mullen Sands. Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 2000. 365 pages. $60.00 cloth; $29.95 paper.

Telling a Good One is simultaneously a biography and an autobiography of the Rios-Sands project. It is a collaborative biography of Tohono O'Odham (Papago) Theodore Rios as told to Kathleen Mullen Sands in 1974. The book is also an autobiographical account of Sands's intellectual development over the past quarter century and examines her delay in publication and what she learned in the interim. Both tellings are arranged and/or told by Sands. The result is a book on the difficulties, promises, and processes of writing what she calls "Indian collaborative biography." She states that *Telling a Good One* is "an experiment in the dialogue between collector and editor, between editor and transcribed narrative, between editor and life-story conventions, and between narrator and editor and audience" (p. 110). What emerges is a revealing, cautionary, and methodologically interesting work.

The book is revealing of a scholar's mistakes, hopes, and ultimate learning. It is a story of naïveté giving way to maturity, inexperience to experience and balance: a classic coming-of-age narrative strategy. *Telling a Good One* begins with Kathleen Mullen Sands's description of her romantic notions as a graduate student, her fieldwork preparation, the circumstances for gathering Theodore Rios's life history, her agreement and work with Rios, and the twenty-plus-year process of thinking and agonizing about and finally writing the book under review. It is at times painfully honest as her intellectual coming-of-age reminds one of one's own opportunities lost, of fieldwork screwups, of imperfections. It is something to which all researchers of Native communities can surely attest. Sands claims early and often that she failed Theodore Rios in their original agreed-upon goals, and that the goals themselves were ill conceived and deeply flawed. Sands reveals a great deal about the challenging process that leads to "telling a good one." And while she is concerned with showing how Rios accomplished this, we may also evaluate whether Sands has accomplished this mission as well.

The terms *life history, autobiography, ethnobiography,* and *collaborative biography* denote attempts (usually) by non-Native scholars to bring the personal stories of select Native Americans to a wider awareness and audience. It is an oral-to-written texting process weighed down by a range of conceptual, practical, and methodological problems related to the political, ethical, interpretive, and literary location that such texts occupy in the academy. Sands competently reviews these matters (such as colonialism, resistance, translatability, and chronology) and compares the Rios-Sands project to them. What results is a caution that is well taken and now rather well understood regarding crosscultural life history. Such cautions have recently resulted in the gimmicky "experiments" of some postmodernists such as Ruth Behar (1996) and Barbara Tedlock (1992) that ironically exhaust and close off, rather than open up, the possibility of improving the crosscultural. What should or must lie at the center of collaborative biography, in my way of thinking, is what is remembered, said, told, and recorded—in other words, what the telling has to offer the

world, to teach us about the human condition. And while telling and recording is not without problems, the emphasis has made for a curious, deflected, and inward-looking perspective that takes one away from the very person who the telling is ostensibly about. If Native collaborative biography is to survive, to be worthy of reading and thinking seriously about, it will do so not because of one or another theoretical flourish or flash. It will survive because the words of the lives of others will speak to us in a way that helps our understanding of ourselves and of others. Because the life history genre is politically charged, does that mean that we must shy away from it? Should the possibility of understanding be sacrificed for political expediency?

Telling a Good One is a work of methodology that could be profitably read by anyone contemplating conducting fieldwork in a Native American community. Her examples of Theodore Rios's tellings of his work experiences in Hollywood filmmaking (pp. 171–177), as a cowboy (pp. 166–169), in the regional copper mines (pp. 182–187), and the stories of the Egg and the spirit cowboys (pp. 192–196) demonstrate a successful recording and interpretation of his oral texting. Sands's contribution comes to this: she assists us in learning that Rios defines his life through a nostalgia for his past, his youth, and his work history. He does not emphasize his family and does not recount tribal history and myth. He constructs a good past and a not-so-good present that dwells on a definition of his personhood. It is a nostalgia that I have heard other O'Odham men articulate.

I wish now to draw attention to two matters—language and ethnography—regarding the Rios-Sands project. First, it was recorded entirely in English. The lack of a first-language telling is a drawback shared with the majority of published Native life histories. Crosscultural texting in an English-only dialogue is problematic. In fact, much of Sands's criticism of the life history, narrative ethnography genre can be traced to this point (this limitation plagues Barbara Tedlock's *The Beautiful and the Dangerous*). An obvious resolution resides in the necessity for non-Native collaborators to possess a working knowledge of the Native, in this case O'Odham, language. Sands agrees with this necessity (p. 120). See the Frank Lewis and Donald Bahr collaboration for a good example of a Native language-English collaborative approach to life history that shares the nostalgic mode of Rios (Frank Lewis and Donald Bahr, "Wither T-himdag," *Wicazo Sa Review* [1992]).

Allow me to make a comparison between the Rios-Sands project and my work with David Lopez (1999). Early in our work together, and without my prompting him, David Lopez drew upon his Native O'Odham language for a word, phrase, or concept that would help him and me understand the texting process we were inventing in our collaboration. He settled on the phrase *so'ospolk ñ-ñeok,* literally "little, my-speeches." What is interesting to me is Lopez's translation of *ñeok* as "speeches." "Talk" or "talks," in fact, is a more precise translation but he selected "speeches" because he conceived of his communications with me as a quasi-traditional verbal mode. He was careful, however, not to imply that he was making "speeches" in the sacred sense of that word (see Ruth Underhill et al., *Rainhouse and Ocean: Speeches for the Papago Year* [Flagstaff: Museum of Northern Arizona Press, 1979]). Thus, Lopez tran-

scended the O'Odham language's lack of a specific communication mode (question-and-answer interrogation) by modifying and stretching a traditional mode (speech making) in a novel way. Our moving back and forth between English and O'Odham allowed for a wider range of experimentation than an English-only approach could hope to offer. I suspect that there may be and most likely are Native oral strategies in other languages to be drawn on in the process of collaborative biography, just as Lopez did using the O'Odham language. Thus, like ethnology, life histories are best served when the appropriate linguistic practices of the participants are taken into account.

An ethnographic matter I will briefly mention is Sands's use of the word *tradition.* Never defined explicitly, there are several references where its use is problematic. For example, she claims that the devils-give-power story (pp. 194–196) does not follow a traditional narrative strategy but instead echoes European fairy-tale motifs. Sands is correct in pointing out the European influence but she underestimates the indigenous influences. This story, in fact, is a classic example of an O'Odham shamanistic-power-acquisition narrative though with the admittedly contemporary referents of cowboys, horses, treasure, and the like. This criticism does not undermine the quality of this book, however. I am happy to have read *Telling a Good One,* as that is exactly what it does.

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Visit Teepee Town: Native Writings after the Detours. Edited by Diane Glancy and Mark Nowak. Minneapolis: Coffee House Press, 1999. 372 pages. $17.95 paper.

Diane Glancy and Mark Nowak's *Visit Teepee Town: Native Writings After the Detours* includes work by Native and non-Native artists and reflects a diverse array of talent and genres. Included in this collection is poetry that registers an exchange between aboriginal languages and English (James Thomas Stevens and Allison Adele Hedge Coke); work that combines poetry and prose and plays with their intersections (Rosmarie Waldrop); vignettes (Marie Annharte Baker); expository prose (Gerald Vizenor); stories (Gerald Vizenor and Peter Blue Cloud); photographs (James Luna); concrete or found poetry (tj snow); narrative poetry (Linda Hogan, Wendy Rose, Maurice Kenny); textual imagery (Hachivi Edgar Heap of Birds); translations of traditional stories (Nora Marks Dauenhauer and Richard Dauenhauer); photographs of mixed media (Phil Young); bilingual (aboriginal and English) work (Larry Evers and Felipe Molina); and orally inflected writing that resists classification (Lise McCloud and Diane Glancy). This text, which takes its name from a Phil Young drawing (reproduced on page 254), does not divide or group material into different genres (as I have done) or historical periods. Rather, it attempts to portray and expose the manifestations of oral traditions in written or inscripted mediums: "[U]nder the writing, the old sound moves," the editors write in their introduction (p. iii).