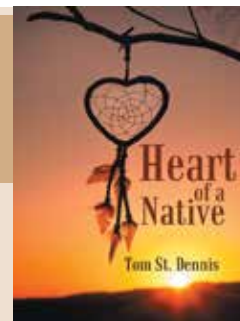


# Heart of a Native

By Tom St. Dennis, published by iUniverse/Star Bluff Publishing (2012), softcover, 142 pages, \$12.95



Reviewed by John R. Runyan Jr.

“You see, the people of my culture have a philosophy, that every act you do should be done with the seven future generations in mind...”

When his sharp-elbowed mentor dies and he is fired from his job with a large northern Michigan developer, Jack Clay's life undergoes a remarkable metamorphosis. He loses his palatial home, his country club memberships, and his sleek SUV, but he regains something else: Jack rediscovers his Native American roots and his culture's egalitarian “seven generations” ethic and values. Well researched and brimming with Native American wisdom, Michigan attorney Tom St. Dennis's first novel is the story of that rediscovery.

Sandwiched between funerals for the two men who had the most influence over his life—his longtime boss and his cancer-stricken Native American grandfather, a fishing guide on the Big Manistee River—Jack's story is exceptionally well told. Sprinkled throughout are quotations from well-known tribal leaders and lesser-known homilies drawn from American Indian lore. St. Dennis skillfully weaves together his modern morality tale and the native wisdom that makes his storytelling unique.<sup>1</sup>

Through his grandfather, Jack is reacquainted with Lisa, an old high school friend with whom he quickly develops a profound spiritual and emotional connection. At the same time his relationship with Lisa is about to take off, Jack's new values are tested by overtures from a group of outside investors

who want to exploit the generous nature of Michigan's water rights and usage laws. Weighing this opportunity against the modest [financial] return likely to flow from taking over his grandfather's guide business, Jack must decide once and for all if he is going to walk the walk as well as talk the talk.

St. Dennis's character development is so compelling that at the story's end, the reader is left wondering about Lisa and Jack and hoping there will be a sequel. Will they take the plunge? What happens to the fishing guide business Jack takes over from his grandfather? What about Lisa's decision to try and steer the investors along a more environmentally friendly path? It is a sign of great storytelling that the reader always wants to know more. Let's hope St. Dennis does not keep us waiting too long to find out. ■

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## FOOTNOTE

1. Among the tidbits of American Indian law discussed in the book is the Supreme Court's 1883 decision in *Ex parte Kan-gi-shun-ca* (otherwise known as *Ex parte Crow Dog*), 109 US 556; 3 S Ct 396; 27 L Ed 1030 (1883). In *Crow Dog*, the Supreme Court ordered the release of a Brule Sioux who had been tried, convicted, and sentenced to death by a Dakota territorial court for murdering another Sioux named Spotted Tail. The Supreme Court reasoned that territorial courts lacked jurisdiction over crimes committed by one Indian against another in Indian country. Congress responded to the *Crow Dog* decision by enacting the Major Crimes Act, 18 USC 1153, extending federal court jurisdiction to major felonies between Indians in Indian country.