



# Marcie Rendon

“

*woman  
you are strength  
you have given birth  
to daytime visions  
and nighttime dreams  
you are the keeper  
of a nation  
yet to be born*

— Dreaming Into Being

”

## Quick Facts

- \* Born in 1952
- \* Native American poet, novelist, children’s book author, and playwright

## Biography

Marcie Rendon is a writer, performance artist and consultant. Her works include poetry, screenplays and scripts, short stories, children’s books, educational materials, newspaper articles, theater reviews, and magazine articles. She has served as a writing mentor and coach, and a classroom instructor and speaker for various colleges and high schools, as well as for communities and community organizations. She is also a mother and a grandmother.

Marcie Rendon, born in 1952, is a member of the White Earth Anishinaabe Nation. Rendon spent her early years in northern Minnesota. She began writing at an early age, creating little books while she was in first and second grade. When she was twelve years old she submitted a poem to *Seventeen* (the magazine), but it was rejected.

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## Biography continued

In an interview with Voices From the Gaps, Rendon explains that she lived a desperate life that required writing, her creative outlet, as a means of survival. She started writing to save her sanity. She wasn't writing to be read; she just had to "get stuff out" and didn't particularly care what it sounded like to others.

From 1971 to 1975 she attended Moorhead State University in Moorhead, Minnesota, and graduated with two Bachelor of Arts degrees, one in Criminal Justice and one in American Indian Studies. From 1985 to 1991, Rendon attended St. Mary's of Winona in Minneapolis during which she completed her Master's of Arts in Human Development. She was told by a creative writing teacher at Moorhead that she had no talent, but that didn't stop her from writing. At St. Mary's she designed her own program so that she could write her way to a degree instead of taking classes. At that time she didn't know she would become a writer; she thought she was going to become a therapist.

Juanita Espinosa at the Native Arts Circle newsletter has always encouraged Rendon to write. It was Espinosa who encouraged her to write her first script, and it was Espinosa who encouraged Rendon to apply for the Loft Inroads program, which gives emerging writers from various communities the opportunity to work with local authors who share their ethnic or cultural identity. This program was hosted by the Loft, a literary center in Minneapolis, MN. During her participation in the Loft program Rendon met Jim Northrup, who became her friend and mentor. He encouraged Rendon to read her poetry to others and to keep writing. Rendon remarks that it was amazing to be in a group of Native people who related to what she was writing about.

This program helped Rendon to kick off her writing career, with a sense of who and what she was writing for and about. In the Voices interview she asserts, "I am a Native woman and I write for a Native audience because that is what I know. If I can make another Indian laugh or cry then I feel like I have done my job as a writer."



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## Biography continued

Rendon lived in the Phillips Neighborhood in Minneapolis for many years. This neighborhood is home to the Minneapolis Native American community. In a statement she made as a member of the Native American Journalist Association, Rendon explains that she likes to write stories about Native people and women that the mainstream press doesn't even hear about or consider covering. She writes to represent an Indian perspective, or as she puts it, at least her Indian perspective. One of her main endeavors as a writer is to create "mirrors" for her audience so that they can see current reflections of themselves. She explains mirrors in the following passage:

We were kept in their mindset as "vanished peoples." Or as workers, not creators. And what does this erasing of individual identity do to us? Can you believe you exist if you look in a mirror and see no reflection? And what happens when one group controls the mirror market? As Native people, we have known that in order to survive we had to create, re-create, produce, re-produce. The effect of the denial of our existence is that many of us have become invisible. The systematic disruption of our families by the removal of our children was effective for silencing our voices. However, not everyone can still that desire, that up-welling inside that says sing, write, draw, move, be. We can sing our hearts out, tell our stories, paint our visions. We are in a position to create a more human reality. In order to live we have to make our own mirrors. (Nitaawichige 5)

Several themes thread throughout Rendon's work. She writes to create mirrors for American Indians and others so that they can see new reflections of themselves. She writes about home, family, women, and relationships. She writes about the spiritual and the physical existing on the same plane.

That relationship between the spiritual and the physical is important to her work and to her life. Rendon comments, "The majority of my poems, and possibly my plays, are spiritually informed, whatever that means. They aren't necessarily mine, but come through me." Just about anything she writes starts out as a poem, and either it stays a poem or it gets expanded into a story, script, or song. She explains that there isn't one writer that she has tried to be like. Rendon likes the challenge of doing different things. She says that she'll write anything for the chance to be writing instead of really working. Although Rendon does not consider herself a storyteller, a title she reserves for people like Jim Northrup, Louise Erdrich, and Sherman Alexie, when asked how she would characterize herself, she responded, "Me? Maybe I sing dreams (poems), paint word visions (scripts)."



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## Biography continued

### Poetry

Rendon's poetry has appeared in many different anthologies, as well as her own self-published *Dreaming Into Being*, and in *Nitaawichige: Selected Poetry and Prose of Four Anishinaabe Writers*. She says that almost all of her poetry has been "right there—a line comes and then boom, there's the poem." "On the inside front cover page to *Dreaming into Being* she writes, "In my dreams my grandmothers share gifts of knowledge. Many of these poems are their words, not mine."

she danced  
across the artic sky  
danced darkness  
into  
light  
lightness  
into  
dark  
the midnight sun  
called her name  
she danced. . . ("lightness into dark," *Dreaming Into Being*)

### Children's Books

Rendon is author of two children's books, *Powwow Summer: A Family Celebrates the Circle of Life*, and *Farmer's Market: Families Work Together*. Rendon remarks that as a child growing up, there was an absence of native images that were current. In writing to children, Rendon wants to give them current images of themselves.



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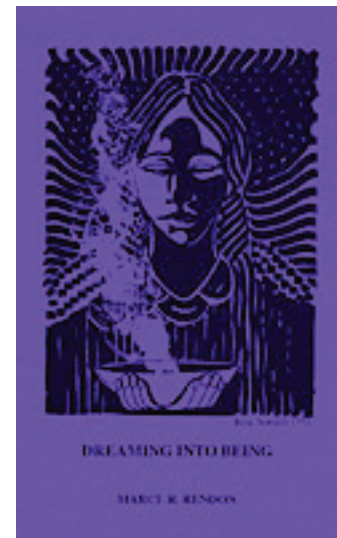
## Biography continued

*Powwow Summer* follows a modern-day Anishinaabe family called the Downwind family during a summer as they travel to weekend Powwows. The Downwind family, in addition to caring for five children, also cares for five more children through foster care, and to these children the heritage of participation in the Powwow festivals is passed on. This story celebrates the circle of life by mourning the death of a loved one and by taking part in the larger community. This book is written for ages 7 to 11.

*Powwow Summer* was nominated Notable Children's Trade Book in the Field of Social Sciences from the National Council for Social Studies at the Children's Book Council in 1997.

*Farmer's Market* follows the story of two immigrant families: the Thaos of Hmong descent, who came to Minnesota in the mid-1970s, and the Kornders, of Polish-German descent whose relatives came to Minnesota in the 1890s. These families participate in the St. Paul, Minnesota farmer's market each year. This book describes the different phases of the growing season, techniques for growing and equipment used. It emphasizes the cooperation within each family to keep a farm going. This book is written for children ages 7-11. Of *Farmer's Market*, Rendon comments that all people, except natives, are immigrants here: "They all share a common heritage despite their perceived differences."

*Farmer's Market* is the winner of 2002 Ohio Farm Bureau Federation Award and has received the 2002 WLA Children's Book Award.





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## Biography continued

### Plays and Screenplays

After seeing theater performances for the first time in 1985 and then in 1991, Rendon remarks that it was a “total shock that this was something Indian people did and could do.” In 1992 she began writing her own scripts. She describes her first script as a “disaster script.” She had to keep trying until, she says, she got it somewhat right. The scripts, for Rendon, are ways to tell stories. Someone once told her that a script is good only if it can’t be told any other way.

Rendon has written and participated in the production of numerous plays and screenplays (see below) since she began writing them. These pieces have served as a main vehicle for Rendon to communicate an Indian voice and create mirrors.

This is the case, for example, in *Song Catcher*. *Song Catcher* is a play about Frances Densmore, a famous ethnomusicologist, who in the 1940s sought to record and capture over 3500 Native American songs as a way of preserving the culture of a so-called “vanishing people.” American historians hold Densmore in high acclaim for her actions and life work; however, there are other perspectives about her work and her life. Rendon wrote a script telling another version of the story of Frances Densmore. In *Song Catcher*, Rendon shows that it was not Densmore who preserved Native American songs, but the elders. Songs have been passed-on verbally from generation to generation. In an article about her play, Rendon comments, “In this age of multiculturalism, a much larger question being asked by this play is: From whose perspective is history told? Whose stories get accorded academic credibility? Who determines whose version of history is accurate?” How does a history, told from a mono-culturistic point of view shape people’s perceptions, not only of historical times and events, but also people’s perceptions of themselves?” *Song Catcher* takes a perspective and a voice that had not yet been told.

*Looks Into the Night*, a film focusing on American Indian women’s contemporary issues, is another example of a story previously untold. Rendon collaborated with Valerie Red Horse in writing the screenplay. *Looks Into the Night* is a true story about a woman who was adopted out of her family after her parents die in an auto accident. She goes on a journey of self-discovery and reunites with her Chumash family and culture years later. This film has received several awards.



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## Biography continued

In Fall 2002, Rendon collaborated on an Indian opera with Mohican composer Brent Michael Davids, called *The Trial of Standing Bear*. *The Trial of Standing Bear* is a work that Rendon describes in the Voices interview as wonderful, challenging and encouraging. Rendon explains that she and Davids start with a theme, then they brainstorm ideas. Rendon then writes poems that Davids either sets to music or turns into songs. The Indian opera is designed to cross cultures, leading with Native Culture. Rendon comments, “Making this opera is a statement that we can do anything . . . Indians don’t have to be locked into stereotypes of what ‘Indian’ is.”

## Selected Bibliography

### Works by the author

#### Books

*Farmer's Market: Families Working Together.*

*Powwow Summer: A Family Celebrates the Circle of Life.*

*Dreaming into Being.*

*Beyond Survival: Applying for Grants/Awards/Fellowships.*

*Native Models for Business Success* (Minnesota Junior Achievement Project).

#### Short Stories

“The Waiting” in *Stories Migrating Home*, ed. Kimberly Blaeser (Loonfeather Press).

“Hannah-the Midwife” in *Dream and Visions: New Frontiers in Christian Fiction* (Skysong Press, 1990).

“A Native American Birth Story” in *Birth Stories: The Experience Remembered* (Crossing Press).



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## Selected Bibliography continued

### Works by the author continued

#### Plays, Screenplays

*Neurotica* (2004).

*Predator/Prey* (2004).

*Sacajawea* (2003).

*Trial of Standing Bear* (2002).

*Raving Natives* (1999-2002).

*Rough Face Girl* (2001).

*Urban Rez* (2000).

*Free Frybread Telethon* (1999-2000).

*1837 Mille Lacs Treaty* (1999).

*SongCatcher* (1998-1999).

*Outside In, Inside Out* (1997).

*Inner City Opera* (1996).

*Bring the Children Home* (1996).

*Looks Into the Night*, with Valerie RedHorse (1995).

#### Poetry in Anthologies

*Spring Wind Dances at the River: Minnesota, Saint Croix, Mississippi* (work commissioned by Mingling of Waters Ceremony of the Grand Excursion celebration, 2004)

*Without Reservation: Indigenous Erotica*

*Nitaawichige: Selected Poetry and Prose of Four Anishanabe Writers* (Poetry Harbor Publications, 2002).

*Sister Nations*, ed. Heid Erdrich and Laura Tohe (Minnesota Historical Press, 2002).

*Rampike - Aboriginal Perspectives*, ed. Kateri Damm (Kegedonce Press, 2000).

*Drum Voices Revue, A Confluence of Literary, Cultural & Vision Arts* (2000).

*Rising Dawn*, Archdiocese of St. Paul, MN

Recreating the Enemies Language (Arizona Press).

*The Colour of Resistance* (Sister Vision Press).

*Four Directions Magazine* (Snowbird Press).

*Women Between Two Worlds* (Vantage Press)

Fireweed/A Feminist Quarterly, Fireweed Press





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## Selected Bibliography continued

### Works about the author continued

#### Poetry in Anthologies continued

*A Gathering of Spirit* (Firebrand Books).

*The Second Seasonal Palate* (Sanguinaria Publication).

*Speaking in Tongues* (The Loft).

*Every Woman Has A Story* (Haymarket Press).