

***The Days of Augusta.* By Jean E. Speare (ed.). (Vancouver: Douglas and McIntyre, 1992. 80 p., ISBN 1-55054-003-3.)**

Elizabeth Furniss

Volume 19, Number 1, 1997

URI: <https://id.erudit.org/iderudit/1087653ar>

DOI: <https://doi.org/10.7202/1087653ar>

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Publisher(s)

Association Canadienne d'Ethnologie et de Folklore

ISSN

1481-5974 (print)

1708-0401 (digital)

[Explore this journal](#)

Cite this review

Furniss, E. (1997). Review of [*The Days of Augusta.* By Jean E. Speare (ed.). (Vancouver: Douglas and McIntyre, 1992. 80 p., ISBN 1-55054-003-3.)]. *Ethnologies*, 19(1), 147–148. <https://doi.org/10.7202/1087653ar>

BOOK REVIEWS / COMPTES RENDU

The Days of Augusta. By Jean E. Speare (ed.). (Vancouver: Douglas and McIntyre, 1992. 80 p., ISBN 1-55054-003-3.)

The Days of Augusta presents the reminiscences of Augusta (Tappage) Evans, a Shuswap woman from the Cariboo region of central British Columbia. Born in 1888 at the small Shuswap village of Soda Creek, Augusta was in her eighties when she collaborated with Jean Speare to produce this book recounting her childhood experiences in residential school and her adult years as a mother, midwife, doctor, provider and storyteller. First appearing in 1973 and republished in 1992, *The Days of Augusta* continues to be a classic source on Shuswap oral history and narrative traditions that will be of interest to both scholars and readers among the general public.

A short preface provides a sketch of Augusta's life. In the 1860s, the first gold miners, settlers, missionaries and colonial administrators arrived in the Cariboo, and by 1890 non-native farms and ranches had transformed the region into a thriving cattle frontier. The Shuswaps' efforts to retain control over their traditional lands had by now been suppressed by the creation of small Indian reserves and the imposition of government legislation enforced by Indian agents, game wardens, and Roman Catholic missionaries. It was into this setting that Augusta was born. Reflecting back on her life's experiences, the themes of cultural continuity and change, and of accommodation and resistance to the European presence, stand out clearly in her narratives.

Augusta's genealogy is characteristic of the broad kinship networks of the Shuswap. Her mother's parents were from Soda Creek, her father's father a Red River Metis, and her father's mother a northern native. At the age of fifteen she married George Evans, a Shuswap man from the nearby Sugar Cane reserve. George's father was Welsh, and through her marriage to a non-status Indian, Augusta, too, lost her Indian status. She and her husband preempted 160 acres of land several miles from Soda Creek. There they established a small farm and raised a family, supplementing their income through hunting, fishing and occasional wage work on area ranches. Augusta was a devoted mother, teaching her children to read and write English and to speak the Shuswap language, and taking in other children who needed temporary shelter and loving care. Augusta died in 1978 at age ninety, and left many relatives throughout the Cariboo region.

The book consists of thirty-seven stories, some presented as short poems and others as longer narratives. They include stories told to her by her elders: of the woman who was stolen by a bear, of the smallpox epidemic of 1862, of a stagecoach robbery during the height of the Cariboo Gold Rush. Other stories relate her own experiences living through the deaths of children,

of fishing for sturgeon in the Fraser River, of the proper way to construct fish nets and baby baskets. There is no editorial separation between mythic and historical time, between stories told to her and stories of her own personal experience. Rather, all are presented as personal narratives that combine to form the fabric of Augusta's world view. Her stories are conveyed in a simple, direct and poetic language empowered by the truth of her experience. Her stories are rich and evocative, leaving the reader with vivid, lingering images.

Missing in *The Days of Augusta* is an account of the context in which this book came into being, and the performative setting in which Augusta relayed her life's experiences to Speare. In some ways, Augusta and Speare were unlikely friends. Speare is a member of a long-time Cariboo pioneer family. With her husband, a hospital administrator and provincial politician representing the Cariboo in W. A. C. Bennett's Social Credit government, she was firmly embedded in the social elite of white Cariboo society when she and Augusta met in the late 1960s. At this time, Cariboo society was firmly organized on the principles of racial prejudice and segregation of the native and non-native populations. The two met over a native crafts booth at the Williams Lake Stampede rodeo. Speare was drawn to Augusta's knowledge of Shuswap culture and customs, while Augusta was eager for an audience for her stories. The two struck up a friendship that lasted for the rest of Augusta's life. Speare describes Augusta as a proud woman who ultimately took much satisfaction in the publication of her book and in the royalties which the two shared. As a writer and visual artist, Speare displayed a strong aesthetic appreciation for the cadence of Augusta's narratives as verbal art, a quality that Speare successfully preserved in the written texts.

With its republication, *The Days of Augusta* will continue to stand as an important reference for Shuswap history and a testament to the poetics of aboriginal oral narratives.

ELIZABETH FURNISS
University of British Columbia
Vancouver, British Columbia
