



## Conversations with Louise Erdrich and Michael Dorris

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One would expect after reading twenty-three interviews with the same pair of writers to part from the text with a modicum of ennui borne of interviewers' tendencies to repeat themselves in the manner of *deja vu* all over again. It is especially delightful to report this simply isn't so following CONVERSATIONS WITH LOUISE ERDRICH AND MICHAEL DORRIS. Despite the fact that the interviewers often pose similar questions, Erdrich and Dorris respond to each query with thoughtful honesty punctuated by wry humor. Indeed, the author of *THE BEET QUEEN* and *TRACKS* and *THE BINGO PALACE*, among others, and the writer of *A YELLOW RAFT IN BLUE WATER* and *THE BROKEN CORD* and *WORKING MEN*, respectively, reveal themselves as writers refreshingly modest and intensely committed to the common good. Instead of concentrating on becoming characters or instead of promoting the characters they create, Erdrich and Dorris emerge as writers of excellent character.

What's a conundrum to so many interviewers is how Erdrich and Dorris can collaborate so closely that they either coauthor such books as *THE CROWN OF COLUMBUS*, or they literally agree on every word published under their individual names.

But as Erdrich comments in a 1993 interview with the editors, "The heart of our collaboration is a commitment to one another's separateness....An imagination is composed of all the signs and wonders of childhood, as well as the range of trivialities and possibilities that come with age. In a collaboration such as *THE CROWN OF COLUMBUS* we shared in one book the creations of our own selves, but the source itself, that is a well closed except to the free wondering of an individual mind."

Both Erdrich and Dorris discuss their mixed Native American and Caucasian heritages and their desire to write what is true concerning their own Native American experiences without ghettoizing themselves or their work.

They also speak of Abel (called Adam in *THE BROKEN CORD*), the first child Dorris adopted prior to his marriage to Erdrich, a boy who suffered from fetal alcohol syndrome and who recently died as a result of being hit by a car, and they talk of Abel's two adopted siblings and of the three children Erdrich and Dorris have raised together.

Erdrich says to the Chavkins, "If you're really living, life encompasses extremes." According to these passionate, poignant dialogues, Erdrich and Dorris are not only really living, but truly writing.

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