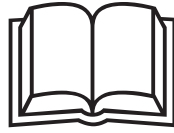


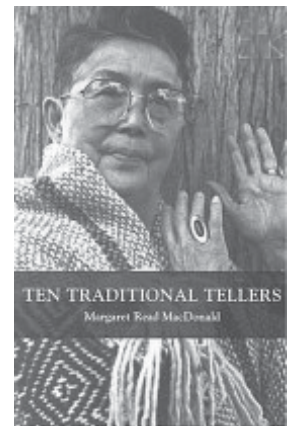
Ten Traditional Tellers
by **Margaret Read MacDonald**
a book review by Jill Johnson



This book, published by University of Illinois Press, is quite unlike many of MRM's other storytelling books. Years in the making, it was published only after constant pressure from the author - who is dedicated to bringing the stories of traditional tellers from all over the world to light.

It begins with a cover photo – the most beautiful photo of our own Vi Hilbert that I have ever seen - and one which perfectly captures what this book is all about. Inside are carefully drawn portraits and stories of ten tellers from Alaska, Tibet, Brazil, Thailand, Liberia, Hawaii, New Caledonia, Ghana, and our own Chehalis and Skagit cultures.

The format is a major strength of the book. Each article begins with a photo and a quote – a nice touch which pushes the reader to approach what's coming in a reflective way. Then, there is background material on the culture – short and sweet, but very necessary – followed by background material on the teller, an interview, and then – the stories. By the time we get to the stories themselves, we have such a rich background of information that it deepens our enjoyment fourfold. Throughout the book, the care and precision evident in the writing are perfect demonstrations of the way a skilled folklorist goes about recording and presenting material.



Following the articles on the ten tellers, there is a chapter devoted to teller motivation; a discussion of WHY each of these performers continues to do this work. I was startled at the variety of responses: for example, some began telling quite by accident; others were carefully trained in a “classic” tradition. The final chapter is an intriguing discussion of what makes a “traditional” teller with descriptions of several (sometimes conflicting) points of view.

Any serious student of traditional storytelling or cultural history or anthropology will find much to delight in on these pages. For this is no dry, academic tome. MRM has had too many years of writing lively, colorful material for her readers to sink into that hole; this book is FUN to read!