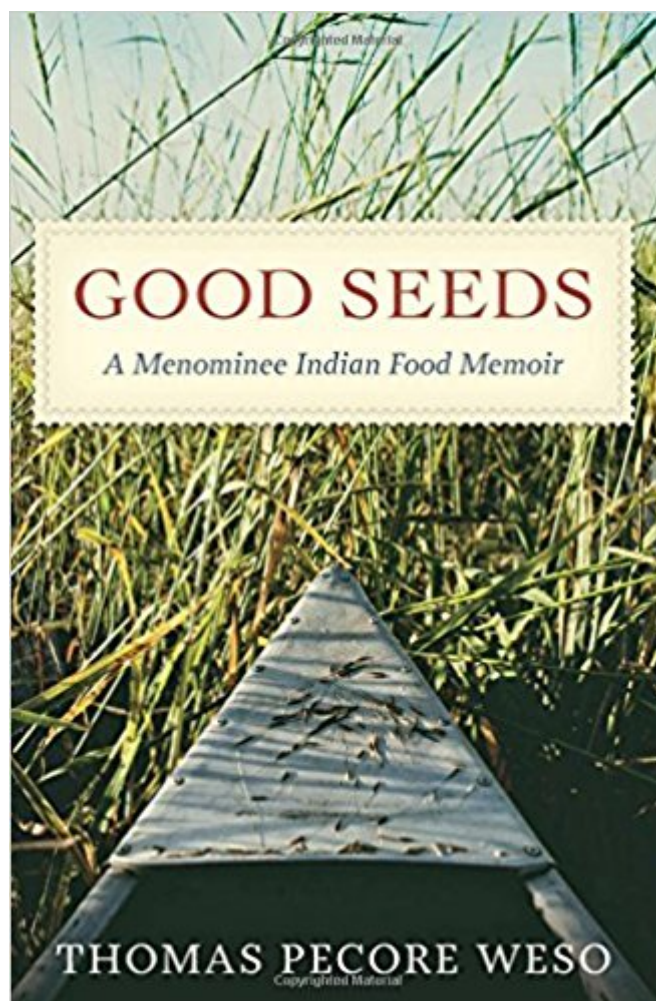


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Good Seeds: A Menominee Indian Food Memoir



Synopsis

In this food memoir, named for the manoomin or wild rice that also gives the Menominee tribe its name, tribal member Thomas Pecore Weso takes readers on a cook's journey through Wisconsin's northern woods. He connects each food—beaver, trout, blackberry, wild rice, maple sugar, partridge—with colorful individuals who taught him Indigenous values. Cooks will learn from his authentic recipes. Amateur and professional historians will appreciate firsthand stories about reservation life during the mid-twentieth century, when many elders, fluent in the Algonquian language, practiced the old ways. Weso's grandfather Moon was considered a medicine man, and his morning prayers were the foundation for all the day's meals. Weso's grandmother Jennie "made fire" each morning in a wood-burning stove, and oversaw huge breakfasts of wild game, fish, and fruit pies. As Weso grew up, his uncles taught him to hunt bear, deer, squirrels, raccoons, and even skunks for the daily larder. He remembers foods served at the Menominee fair and the excitement of "sugar bush," maple sugar gatherings that included dances as well as hard work. Weso uses humor to tell his own story as a boy learning to thrive in a land of icy winters and summer swamps. With his rare perspective as a Native anthropologist and artist, he tells a poignant personal story in this unique book.

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Customer Reviews

"In Tom Weso's youth, a meal for his Menominee family took an entire year to plan. Eating with the seasons, you get wild game, fish, maple, berries, squash, and other delectables. But

you get them only once a year. It is this sustaining way of life that Weso narrates for us in *Good Seeds*. These stories and recipes make us appreciate the past, make us long for the woods and waters today, and make us just plain hungry." (Heid E. Erdrich, author of *Original Local: Indigenous Foods, Stories, and Recipes from the Upper Midwest*) "Weso tells his tale of Menominee history that began with his family in a house that had been an Indian service jail. There is necessary information here- diesel fuel gels at 40 below. Pines burst at 20 below. The whole Wisconsin winter he knew begins to thaw in *Good Seeds*. Weso says his grandmother used to start the fire each morning. I want to say, it is Weso who starts the fire, but the fire he builds is for the written word. It is language that sparks this work to life. (Diane Glancy, poet, playwright, and author of *Pushing the Bear: After the Trail of Tears*) This is how I understand cooking, as part of a family process that includes spirit, the forest environment and fuel for cooking - all before the meal can be prepared. Sentences like this elegantly express the author's multiple perspectives as anthropologist, artist, Menominee Indian, family member, cook. Raised in the big, multigenerational home of his matriarch grandmother and medicine-man grandfather, Tom Weso grew up eating (and hunting, gathering and growing) traditional foods along with modern fare. The book is organized by ingredient - beaver, wild rice, maple syrup, etc. - with chapters and recipes on German beer, Wisconsin diner meals and the concession foods at county and tribal fairs. But Weso's stories are much more than culinary tales or instruction. Plain-spoken and occasionally hilarious, Weso sparks understanding and connection. As a contemporary of Weso who grew up less than an hour away from the Menominee reservation, I learned more about tribal food, culture and family life reading this single slender book than I did in more than two decades as his regional neighbor. *Good Seeds* is a poignant, important book. (Terese Allen, *Isthmus Magazine*, 2016) One grasps at once that *Good Seeds*, rooted in the Midwest, at the same time transcends the region with its strong transnational focus. The book is local, state, regional, and international history. ...*Good Seeds* provides an important study of foodways in the upper Midwest, treatment that others might well extend to Iowa and other parts of the Midwest. Indeed, remarking about his residence in Kansas, Weso trains his eye on foodways of the lower Midwest so that a balanced treatment emerges. Given the centrality of the potato and corn to the diets of the Menominee, one wonders whether similar patterns emerge in Iowa and other parts of the Midwest. In these ways, *Good Seeds* should command the attention of many scholars. (Christopher Cumo, *The Annals of Iowa*, July 2017)

Thomas Weso is an enrolled member of the Menominee Indian Nation of Wisconsin. He is the

author of many articles, personal essays, and a biography of Langston Hughes with coauthor Denise Low. Weso holds a master's degree in Indigenous Studies from the University of Kansas, and has taught at the college level for the last fifteen years. He is a speaker for the Kansas Humanities Council library program, Talk About Literature in Kansas and copublisher of Mammoth Publications. He is an artist with paintings in collections throughout the Kansas City area, and he has had solo and group shows at the Hutchinson Arts Center and other venues.

Tom Weso caught me up right away with this wonderfully written remembrance of his life on the Menominee reservation and his diet (traditional and not-so-traditional) as a member of a most amazing family. As an adopted only child, I only rarely got to hang out in households where aunts, uncles, cousins, and grandparents all came and went as important ingredients in the family stew. *Good Seeds* is so many delightful things: a history book; an education in the seasonal nature of living with the land and what it provides; a primer on what "village" means when people say "it takes a village to raise a child;" and, a beautiful reminder that family is where the heart is. There are recipes (You will want to try many of them.), food storage tips (Did you know that a canoe can make a very efficient rice silo?), ghost stories (You will believe them without any effort.), and a host of human beings you would love to have adopt you. (Even if you've got a real family already.) And beneath all the wonderful storytelling, there is a warm undercurrent of something else. I'm not sure exactly what to call it, but it feels like grace.

Good Seeds is a rare book, superbly done. Like a wise medicine man, Thomas Pecore Weso shapes stories that must be told for the greater good. The anthropologist author takes the reader on a colorful cultural journey into the lives and food of his Menominee Indians.

Weso's world he uses food as an appetizer before the main course. The reader is reminded that wild food can't be rushed or manufactured, that every food has its season, and that each family member has a skill—often providing game—so that the household can eat, survive, and prosper. Only then is there time for storytelling and magic. This book, a food memoir, is so much more than a collection of recipes; it's a book of important, intimate stories of individuals and culture. Use the recipes to tell a story, or use a story to tell the recipes. Jim Potter, author of *Cop in the Classroom: Lessons I've Learned, Stories I've Told*

A wonderful book, combining potent personal reminiscences, traditional stories, and cooking

information. All are presented in a humble and respectful style, straight from the heart. A book to cherish and share.

Wonderful! I got copies for three friends!

menominee-indians-of-wisconsin, recipes, historical-research, history-and-cultureA family history, a Wisconsin tribal history of the Menominee, a limited personal history, a food history, this book is all of these things and more. The recipes are gleaned from family, tribal, and other cookbooks. There are recipes with wild rice, berries, wild game, fishes, corn, maple syrup, greens, garden meals, and preserving foods. It is comfortably written and well researched, with several recipes included in each chapter. I loved it, but my sister liberated it when visiting from Columbia county for my birthday!Thank you, Wisconsin State Historical Society Press and LibraryThing Member Giveaways!

“Good Seeds: A Menominee Indian Food Memoir” is author Thomas Pecore Weso’s journey back to the tastes and memories of his life on the Menominee reservation in Northern Wisconsin. Each of the seventeen chapters tells the story of people he has known through their relationships to the gathering, preparation and consumption of food and concludes with a few recipes. A self-described suburban Indian, Weso introduces readers to his medicine man grandfather, his grandmother, the queen of the house, his alcoholic (which the author explains is a European concept) World War II and Korean War Veteran Uncle Buddy who made Blackberry Wine, and a large extended family that formed his youthful memories. He explains the differences between gathering, hunting and agriculture and the roles that fruit, beaver, fish corn, maple syrup, wild rice, Wisconsin diners and Country Fairs played in his young life. I imagine that “Good Seeds” would bring back memories to those who experienced reservation life. For those of who have not, it is a glimpse into the history and life of another world. There is a science, such as that the Indian practice of harvesting the tallest stalks of wild rice disperses their seeds and gradually increases the height of subsequent generations. There is history, such as that Indians have high military participation rates, and the changes in fauna of the Midwest as recorded in Indian memory. As a frequent visitor to Wisconsin I enjoyed references to cities and fields with which I am familiar and the descriptions of the fish fries I savor. Finally, there are the recipes. Some are exotic, others seem tasty and a few may even be tempting. I am not a cook by any stretch of the imagination, but even I might try one or two. This is a short, interesting, easy to read book. Author Weso has a knack of weaving seemingly independent chapters into a

coherent whole. Pick it up, settle in, enjoy and then, maybe try something new in the kitchen.I received a free copy of this book without an obligation to post a review.

This book is a personal memoir of a Menominee Indian youth growing up in a quickly changing world, and it is about the foods eaten or made by his family, and the changes that the white man made on their traditional diet. It is also about the hunting, gathering, and preparing of these different foods. The parts of the book about their way of life "on the rez" are quite interesting, and the parts that talk about their food are very good as well. There are many recipes in the book (44 to be exact), some of which look quite tasty. I have learned much by reading this book, and I think that it was well worth the read.

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