

BOOK REVIEW

THE BROKEN CORD

BY MICHAEL DORRIS

William Collins Sons & Co Ltd, Glasgow, 1990

300 pages

This is a true story spanning 20 years and tells of the relationship between Michael Dorris, a lecturer in anthropology, and his adopted son Adam. Michael was the first unmarried male in America to adopt a young child and raise him for many years alone.

Michael loved the affectionate child of Sioux Indian stock, whose background he knew little about except that his biological mother had died of alcohol poisoning.

Michael was determined to make a success of fathering and to do all that was possible to develop his son to his full potential. Michael was convinced that the small, thin child only needed the best of care and stimulation to catch up in his growth and development. It wasn't long before Michael saw signs of things not being OK. Adam was epileptic and displayed many behavioural characteristics of a mentally handicapped child. He was hyperactive and had multiple health and learning problems which made him very difficult to handle at times.

It wasn't until Adam was in his teens that the cause of all his problems was diagnosed. Adam had Foetal Alcohol Syndrome for which there was no cure.

Michael, in the course of finding as much as he could about Adam's Indian background, discovered the cultural tragedy of the native Indians and their destruction by alcohol. He learnt about the Foetal Alcohol Syndrome and how this affects people in the Indian communities with the accompanying lack of responsibility, lack of judgement, and lack of motivation it brings. Adam displayed all of these characteristics.

The Broken Cord is the first book for the general reader, which describes the tragedy and lifelong affliction of the Foetal Alcohol Syndrome.

It is absorbing reading for both the lay person and the professional.

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