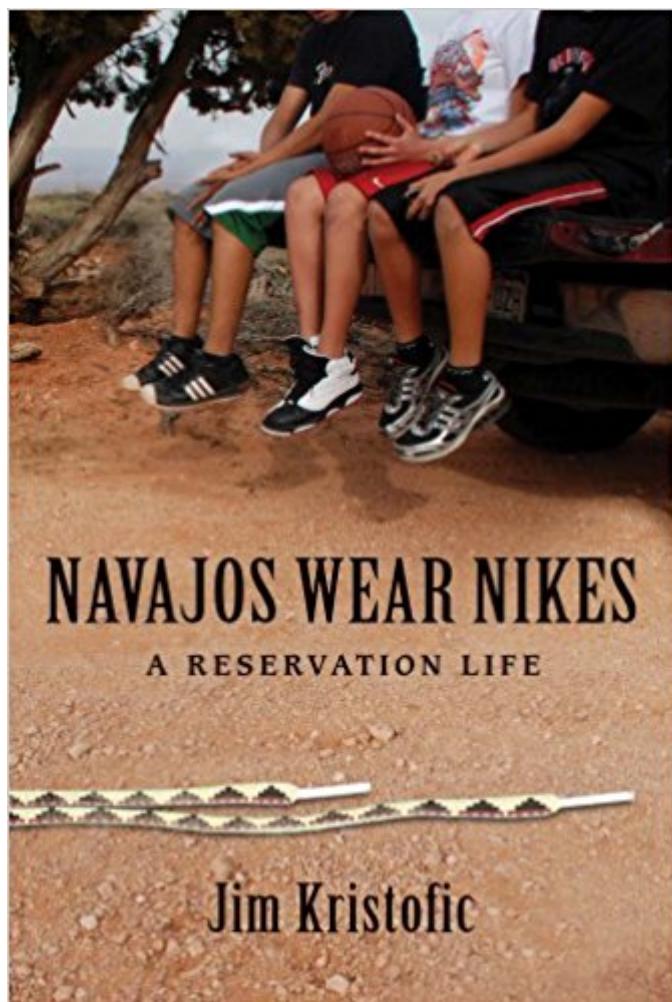


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# Navajos Wear Nikes: A Reservation Life



## **Synopsis**

Just before starting second grade, Jim Kristofic moved from Pittsburgh across the country to Ganado, Arizona, when his mother took a job at a hospital on the Navajo Reservation. Navajos Wear Nikes reveals the complexity of modern life on the Navajo Reservation, a world where Anglo and Navajo coexisted in a tenuous truce. After the births of his Navajo half-siblings, Jim and his family moved off the Reservation to an Arizona border town where they struggled to readapt to an Anglo world that no longer felt like home. With tales of gangs and skinwalkers, an Indian Boy Scout troop, a fanatical Sunday school teacher, and the author's own experience of sincere friendships that lead to ho?zho? (beautiful harmony), Kristofic's memoir is an honest portrait of growing up on and growing to love the Reservation.

## **Book Information**

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## **Customer Reviews**

Kristofic, now a high-school teacher in Pennsylvania, shares his story of being transported at age seven from Pittsburgh to Ganado, Arizona, on the Navajo Indian Reservation by his mother, a nurse who had long nurtured her "Indian Dream." Jimmy is the only bilagaana, or white person, in his class, and he struggles with racial teasing from day one. By the third grade, he's learning to escape the daily taunting by helping his "Navajo enemies" with their schoolwork. Jimmy's new world is one of contrasts the violence and domestic abuse so common on the Rez occurring amidst its natural wonders, the prejudice he experiences before forming life-long friendships, the poverty-stricken homes in which food is always shared with a stranger. His mother marries a Navajo artist, and when

Jim is a sophomore, the blended family moves to a small Utah town, where once again he feels like the "rootless transplant, the outsider," this time in a predominantly Anglo world. Today he teaches tolerance, reminding his students that Navajos don't usually wear moccasins, but, rather, Nikes like their own. --Deborah Donovan --This text refers to the Hardcover edition.

Few regionally tied autobiographies have shown as much wit and keen observation as Navajos Wear Nikes by Jim Kristofic. --Arizona Daily Sun --This text refers to the Hardcover edition.

I enjoyed this tender, well-written memoir very much. Mr. Kristofic's coming-of-age tale relates a world so many Anglos know too little about. Amazingly, the author manages to walk the line between being effusive in his appreciation for his adopted life and any potential criticism of the Navajo. Rather, he presents a clear-eyed portrait of a people and an environment he came to love. I was charmed by the episodes Kristofic chose to recount. From the opening pages, I liked the second-grade boy who is transplanted to the desert against his will. The boy, and the man he becomes, is keenly observant, self-effacing, and accepting. While there is nothing unique here (transferring into a new school, enduring the agonies of football as an undersized kid, figuring out who you are and wanting to be accepted at the same time), the author freshly presents these rites of passage. That they are set against a southwestern backdrop and peppered with fascinating historical facts about the Navajo only added to my enjoyment. Mr. Kristofic's prose is crisp and sparse. Not a word is wasted. His ear for dialogue is spot on, whether it is capturing the verbal volley of a bully and his victim or teenagers out on a night of aggressive play or an exchange between Anglos and Navajo. The author effectively represented the beauty of both the place in which he found himself, as well as its people. I was privileged to inhabit his world for the days I spent reading Navajos Wear Nikes. Even after having read so much of his life, I longed to know more, to know this person better. I also wanted to know more about the Navajo. This is an interesting and touching memoir.

I thought this was a great book. It was honest but not condescending or patronizing to Navajo people. The writer also didn't presume himself to be Navajo by virtue of living with them and knowing their culture - he freely acknowledged his white privilege. I found that very refreshing. A good read!

Jim Kristofic's childhood may not have been easy, but it was an adventure very few children get to

experience. I found myself eager to sit down and read, so I could find out what happened to the young 'bilagaana bilasaana' next. Sometimes, I wanted to give this brave young misfit a hug. At other times, his descriptions of characters he encountered and some of the incredulous situations he faced had me laughing out loud. I felt transported back to being a kid again, only a kid with a childhood far more colorful than the one I knew. I was glad I could be a part of his. Jim Kristofic takes you on a journey of transformation--from the Anglo 2nd grader who doesn't have a clue how to fit in on the Rez to the young man who has adapted so well, he's invited to participate in a friend's "Blessing Way Ceremony" as if he were family. Every misstep along the way brings a new lesson in life on the Rez. And when his awkward piece finally fits the puzzle, you want to cheer for this brave kid who kept on keeping on. When he leaves the Reservation for college, he has to adjust again, but gives us a rare glimpse of how our values look through Navajo eyes. I also enjoyed learning about Navajo culture and customs, it was an educational experience as well as a fun read. I'd definitely recommend this one.

Coming from the other side of the world it was not easy for me to try to understand something about a reality so complex like an Indian reservation in the south west of the United States. This book written from the perspective of a white kid from the east coast became an adult among the Navajos helped me a lot. So when finally I crossed the San Juan river and I found myself in this amazing world of beautiful landscapes and silent people I was ready to learn and to respect. Mario

I read this book in three days while on vacation, having saved it for that occasion, and it called me back quickly every time I had to put it down. Having had some previous knowledge of Navajo culture from other books I've read, I was really looking forward to Mr. Kristofic's life growing up on the Rez. I felt like I had been invited into the heart of someone very special, and allowed to experience his growing up years in a very intimate way. His love and respect for The People shine through every passage, and he illuminates a lot of the Navajo beliefs and customs that I had just touched on before. All the terms and explanations in the back of the book, along with historical references, helped my understanding, also. I thoroughly enjoyed this book, and maybe 'enjoy' may not be the right word, because this very touching book will always stay with you - you will not forget the lessons that Jim learned with his many friends and relatives. The hawk, the football teams, the Rez dogs, his new brother and sister, Nolan, the Sacred Mountains, and Jim, himself, will find a place in your heart. I highly recommend this book, and hope that someday Jim might write another book about the Dine' and their proud and resiliant spirit. Thank you, Jim.

This book was suggested to me by my sister-in-law who actually knew the author and attended the same school on the Navajo Reservation. Since I also attended the same high school, I was interested in what this book had to offer. To my surprise and several good laughs, I have to admit this was a good book about a non-Native American who is the minority. His trial and tribulation of trying to be accepted into a culture that treated him as a nuisance had its share of humor. After learning the culture and language, the author was accepted, but also learned a valuable lesson about how it feels to view the world after he left the reservation to attend college.

Easy to read and very realistic. Enjoyed very much!

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