

An Indian Among Los Indígenas: A Native Travel Memoir

Ursula Pike

Heyday (Apr 8, 2025)

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Ursula Pike's travel memoir *An Indian Among Los Indígenas* covers her two transformative, eye-opening years as a Peace Corps volunteer in Bolivia, which fulfilled her desire to "see the world, learn some skills, and help people" and helped her stand in the power of her Indigenous heritage.

Pike landed in the landlocked Andean country exhausted, unprepared, and feeling the aftereffects of four rum and cokes and an altitude-induced headache. Along with her backpack, she brought a desire to make a difference in the lives of Bolivia's Indigenous people. She also carried a deep need to be "seen," to belong, to be respected, and to be needed. Bolivia, the country with the largest percentage of Indigenous people in Latin America, seemed a good fit. But Pike's desire to be seen by Bolivians as being just like them was not to be realized, and her own concepts of what it meant to be Indigenous were tried, tested, and transformed.

While not having come from wealth, Pike admits that she was privileged when compared to Bolivians and expresses concern that efforts to "help" might diminish what makes Indigenous people kin, no matter their tribe: their shared customs around community, food, generosity, and gratitude. And while exploring issues around the generational effects of colonialism and exploitation and why attempts at "helping" often result in harm, the book also highlights humorous moments, such as when a quick pivot prevented a faux pas. Surprised at a host family's eagerness to show her their new outhouse, Pike admired the sit-down installation's clean, white seat and relative freshness. Embarrassed at their invitation to sit down and give it a try, she declined, suggesting a later time.

An Indian Among Los Indígenas is an engaging memoir about travel and volunteerism from an Indigenous perspective.

KRISTINE MORRIS (March / April 2025)

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