



## ★ **Becoming Little Shell: A Landless Indian's Journey Home**

**Chris La Tray**

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Métis storyteller Chris La Tray's expansive memoir *Becoming Little Shell* began as a compassionate inquiry into his father's rejection of the family's Native American heritage. Haunted by questions of identity after his father's death, La Tray took small steps to learn about his Métis and Little Shell ancestors. He interviewed the living, studied the work of scholars, and interrogated primary sources. Joining the Little Shell Tribe of Chippewa Indians and their tenacious campaign for federal recognition, he came to an understanding of how his father's communities had been tormented by people, policies, and governments bent on his culture's annihilation.

Conversational and recursive, the book's emotional tone ranges from sorrow for La Tray's relatives' suffering to anger at the US government's greed and duplicity. La Tray expresses the thrill of discovering an ancestor's rejection of a one-sided treaty and the glow of pride in his father's survival. His family and people covered, uncovered, and recovered a past that is both traumatic and triumphant.

La Tray takes careful steps over and around linear time too. The book's singular achievement is in the throughlines drawn between past and present diverse communities who suffered under extractive policies. Connections are made, for example, between three separate events: the eighteenth-century Métis moving camp when the people were forced from their settlements; the Little Shell people being unenrolled from the Chippewa and made landless after La Tray's ancestor didn't sign onto a revised treaty; and the unhomed people setting up camps in contemporary Missoula.

Heartbreaking, infuriating, and remarkable, *Becoming Little Shell* is a memoir that's packed with historical details, transcending and amplifying a personal quest to understand a family's past.

MICHELE SHARPE (September / October 2024)

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