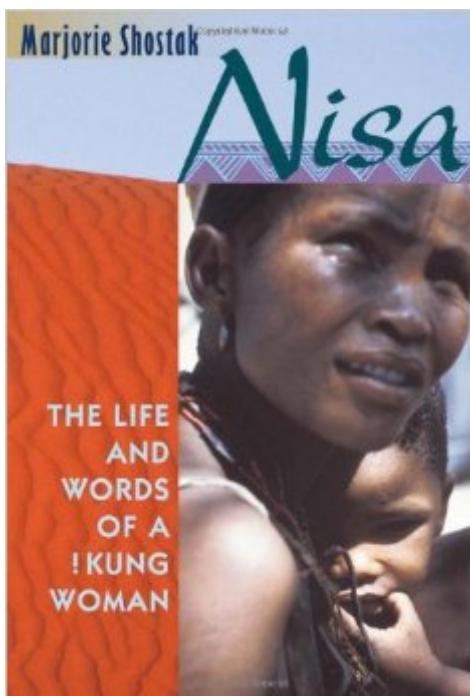


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Nisa: The Life And Words Of A !Kung Woman



Synopsis

This classic paperback is available once again and exclusively from Harvard University Press. This book is the story of the life of Nisa, a member of the !Kung tribe of hunter-gatherers from southern Africa's Kalahari desert. Told in her own words earthy, emotional, vivid to Marjorie Shostak, a Harvard anthropologist who succeeded, with Nisa's collaboration, in breaking through the immense barriers of language and culture, the story is a fascinating view of a remarkable woman.

Book Information

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Customer Reviews

Majorie Shostak's account of her anthropology trip to Africa's Kalahari Desert examining the rituals, lifestyles and existence of the !Kung tribe is not to be read like an expanded version of a National Geographic article. It is written with academic rigor and precise examination of a !Kung woman Nisa. The majority of the book is told through Nisa's words which are translated into English with as much accuracy possible by Shostak. Shostak prefaces each chapter with a more general description of the events of Nisa's life which follow. The !Kung have such a different life style than Westerners, so naturally the story telling methods Nisa uses are a little unfamiliar. There is much more repetition of certain phrases and ideas that some of us might find excessive. If one can get past this they will soon see what an expert Nisa actually is. Also it is a tribute to Shostak that she didn't slice up the narrative to make it more accessible for Westerners. The book begins with an extensive introduction, about 40 pages. Although at first this might feel over detailed and cumbersome, it is a necessity to read it before jumping into Nisa's narrative because some of the

actions taken might seem unfathomable without a better understanding of !Kung life. For instance, when Nisa describes stealing and hoarding food for herself as a child, we might feel she is extremely selfish. But after reading the introduction we understand that in !Kung life there is virtually no private property. Imagine being a young child and having nothing of "your own." I think we all would have stolen to some extent. Also during the time the book was written there was a struggle within the anthropology communities as to whether these "field work" expeditions were even worth taking.

Marjorie Shostak offers readers an interesting and insightful account of her relationship with a member of the !Kung San people of the Kalahari Desert during the early 1970s, a woman known by the pseudonym "Nisa," in her seminal work *Nisa: The Life and Words of a !Kung Woman*. The book is a coupling of both Shostak's ethnographic insight and Nisa's life history told in her own words, along with some very interesting photos taken by the author. Shostak admittedly runs into barriers that she must cross, particularly as to whether or not she can trust Nisa, who the rest of the tribe regards as a liar, but really, much can be seen in the lies that people choose to tell as well as the truths. Either way, Nisa's stories are compelling and give the reader a great window into their hunter-gatherer society and the dynamics that make it work. It reveals techniques of tribal socialization and ethic reasoning, the importance of intimacy, as well as offering a model (however debatable it may be) for the ways in which the status of women is compromised by changing demographics. Nisa's life history account reveals many instances in which can be seen a socialization process that is meant to turn her into a more productive and adaptive person in society. These instances can especially be seen in Nisa's childhood. The !Kung place a high value on sharing in their culture, and Nisa's early tendencies to selfishly covet and hoard food for herself was counterproductive to this ideal. Nisa's mother dealt with her daughter's stealing firmly, often hitting her and screaming such things like, "Nisa, stop stealing! Are you the only one who wants to eat klaru? Now, let me take what's left and cook them for all of us to eat. Did you really think you were the only one who was going to eat them all?"

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