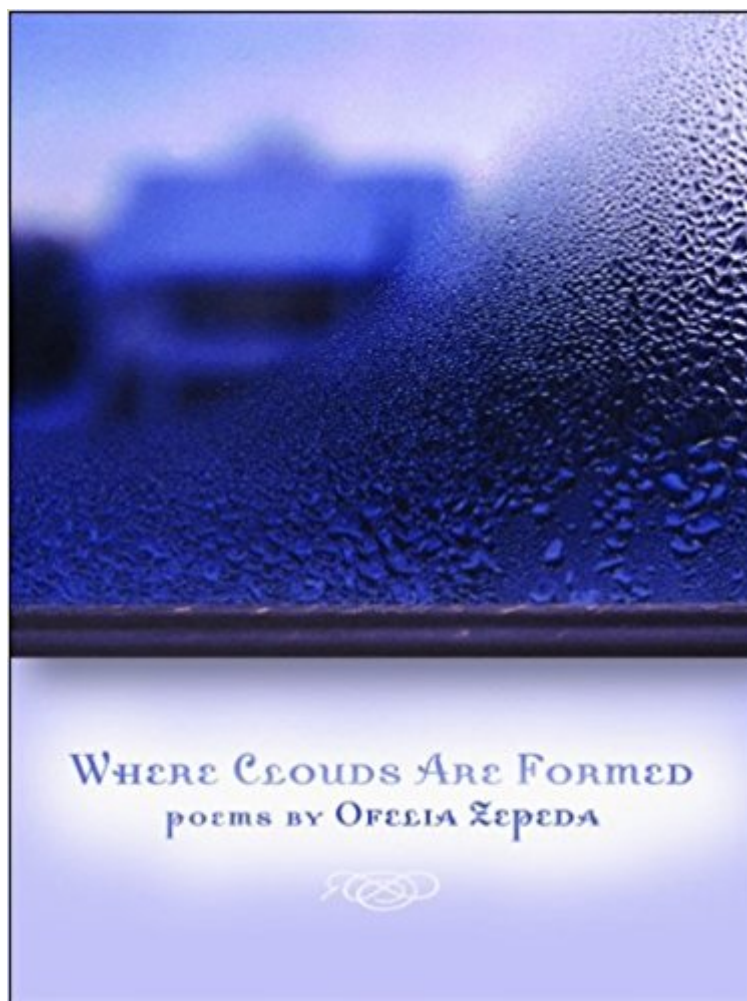


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# Where Clouds Are Formed (Sun Tracks)



## Synopsis

Ofelia Zepeda is a Native American poet who possesses a kind of double vision. She sees the contemporary world through her own highly observant eyes and, at the same time, through the eyes of her Tohono O'odham ancestors. Seeing this way infuses her poetry with a resonance and depth that makes it a delight to read and re-read. Zepeda is as clear-eyed about the past as she is about the present. She recalls waiting for the school bus on a cold morning inside her father's truck, listening to the sounds of the engine, the windshield wipers, and the soft rain on the hood. • She remembers celebrating Mass on the cold dirt floor of the Winter Solstice. • In the present, she sees both the frustration and the humor in a woman she observes trying to eat pancakes with one hand while her other resides in a cast: Watching her, I realize eating pancakes is a two-handed job. • Whatever she sees, she filters through her second set of eyes, which keep the past always present. She tells of traveling to Waw Giwulig, the most sacred mountain of the Tohono O'odham, to ask for blessings and forgiveness. She writes that one should always bring music to the mountains, so they are generous with the summer rains. • And, still, the scent of burning wood / holds the strongest memory. / Mesquite, cedar, piñon, juniper, . . . / we catch the scent of burning wood; / we are brought home. • It is a joy to see the world afresh through her eyes.

## Book Information

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## Customer Reviews

Ofelia Zepeda offers another collection that reveals once again the cultural and creative genius that earned her a MacArthur Award. Unlike many contemporary Native American poets and writers, Zepeda mixes English and her native tongue, Tohono 'O'odham, a Uto-Aztecan language spoken in present day Arizona and Sonora, Mexico. In addition to being the author of a number of books of poetry, Zepeda has also written a fine language learning texts for her native language, one which I personally have used for many years in my courses in linguistics at the University of Nebraska at Kearney. Anyone interested in the Native American experience, the American Southwest, or the art of poetry itself should take the time to read this, her latest work. It can unlock a whole new way of looking at the world we all live in and share.

Zepeda's poems bring serenity. In "Mogollon Rim," she writes: "That light that we shared / left us that day. / I don't know how it left, I just know it did. / I have gone searching for it. / I look around the rim of this edge of the world and wonder. / Did it leave on the wing of a hawk?" And her poems can startle: "Lately, I've been craving dirt. / I long to see how it / lies on freshly turned fields, / clinging to deep-digging equipment." All her poems are connect to the earth, to nature, and natural power. Often an entire poem--like the one I've just quoted from--seems designed around the contradictions of Native American life confronting a modern technological society. While "Doing electrical wiring in our house / we bore holes into adobe walls; / rivers of dry dirt begin to flow." In many of her poems, she has lines from her native Tohono O'odham language--further evidence to me, a Euro-American, that Native people, people indigenous to this land, must work hard to retain every bit of their culture. As other poets have shown--whether Native American, Welsh, or Irish--language is specific. For example, Waw Giwulig is a sacred mountain, and through Zepeda's poetry, I can "see" that mountain. The reader can also feel what the Native person feels: "We stand below the mountain and look upward." But Zepeda is not talking about the modern Anglo-American tourist speeding along I-25 looking up a Pikes Peak, for example, knowing there's a cog railway to the top. Zepeda is writing about sacred space--not a commercial corridor. Through these poems, the reader can experience that the people and their culture bring sacred feelings and thoughts to her homeland. I'm not sure if I bought this book from or from Moby Dickens bookstore in Taos, many years ago; but I had the good luck to hear Ofelia Zepeda read in person at a college in Santa Fe.

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