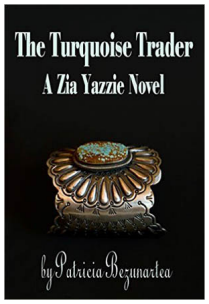
Written by By Lealia Nelson  Sun Correspondent
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“The Turquoise Trader” is a New Mexico based novel that takes place in Gallup.

The main character is Zia Yazzie, the illegitimate son of a Navajo woman, and Ben Monroe, a Navajo Jewelry trader. Zia is a college student with big dreams of helping the Navajo people after his graduation from UNM.

Those dreams are interrupted by Ben’s sudden appearance after a 21 year absence. Zia wishes Ben would return to his “real” white family, while Zia’s mother remains silent. Throughout the novel she appears as a background decoration, much like the Navajo Jewelry that Ben trades and sells. Ben insists that Zia work for him in his Gallup shop.

For inexplicable reasons, this must happen immediately and can’t wait for Zia to graduate in one month. Zia laments the loss of his life, friends, and dreams in Albuquerque. But, Zia believes that Ben will abandon the idea within the year and follows along.

The novel begins on December 29, 1973. In American history, the most popular show on television is All in the Family. It’s not clear if this was deliberate on the part of the author, but Ben and Archie Bunker share similar qualities. They’re both selfish, exploitive of their families, and bigoted against anyone who’s not heterosexual.

The novel tackles complex themes and ideas, such as cultural appropriation, dual ethnicities, cultural family taboos (i.e. incest), racism, and homophobia. Whether the novel successfully

challenges these themes is another issue. The novel attempts to break down negative cultural stereotypes and exploitation, but develops several new ones and reinforces the same ideas it was trying to confront.

One area where the novel succeeds with authentic emotion is when Zia discusses the Navajo Way’s views on homosexuality: “The Nadleeh, as you’re called in the Navajo way, have always been an essential part of our Navajo Life. The Two-Spirit people exist in our ancient traditions, our creation stories, our ceremonies and songs.” This draws out the tension between Zia’s two worlds: the Navajo Way and his white Christian father.

The Turquoise Trader is a typical Southwestern novel and emphasizes the sights, smells, and foods of the local area. It was published by BezCo publishers and has a self-published feel. It lacks the seamless quality provided by larger publishing companies.

But, for die-hard Nuevo Mexico fans this may be the book for you, as long as, you don’t mind reading about an incestuous budding romance or cultural misappropriation.

*The Turquoise Trader: A Zia Yazzie Novel* was published Aug. 9 by BezCo Publishers. The *Gall up Sun*
had made numerous attempts to reach author prior to writing review.

***By Lealia Nelson***

***Sun Correspondent***