Spirit Quest
by Susan Rocan
paper (teen fiction).

Reviewed by Donna Gamache

*Spirit Quest* by Winnipeg writer Susan Rocan, is her second time-travel adventure featuring Winnipeg teenager Michelle Langly. In the first book, *Withershins*, Michelle tested an old legend by circling a church three times at midnight, and was flung back to the year 1846. There she adjusted to life in Lower Fort Garry, met actual historical people, and began to appreciate the lifestyle of an Aboriginal group that lived around the fort, including an attractive young man named Bear and his grandfather, Owl-Who-Sees-All, the tribe’s medicine man. Owl had apparently intervened to bring her through time to visit them, but Michelle didn’t understand why. Eventually, homesick for the present, she managed to return back through time, where she finally learned a well-kept family secret – that her own great-grandmother was Saulteaux.

In Michelle’s newest adventures, her great-grandmother is dying, but first she urges Michelle not to deny her heritage, which she herself regretted doing. She also left Michelle a short taped memoir and a beaded buckskin dress and moccasins.

Michelle tells her family and friends about her time-travel but most of them are skeptical. For several months she tries to forget her adventures but then, while visiting the Manitoba Archives, she reads a terrible entry stating that Owl-Who-Sees-All had been found guilty of murdering a young woman named Michelle Langly who had disappeared in January 1847 but whose body was never found. Realizing that she had caused this, she resolves to try to prevent the execution by time-travelling back to Lower Fort Garry. Fortunately she arrives in time and then resumes life there in 1847 – first with the white settlers at the fort and then with the natives in their teepees outside the fort. As Owl teaches her about her First Nations heritage, and as she goes on her own “spirit quest,” Michelle deals with hardships and racism, and comes to realize that she and Bear have
developed a strong mutual love. Eventually she will have to decide whether to remain with him in the past or return to the present and lose him.

Teenagers who like historical fiction with a touch of fantasy will enjoy this book. Michelle’s struggle to come to terms with her heritage and then to decide whether to leave behind the one she loves will ring true with young readers. The appearance of actual personages such as Governor Simpson and Duncan MacRae, and the building of the church at St. Andrews add interesting features to the story. The long explanations from Owl about Indian beliefs and philosophy tended to slow down the plot in some spots. I also felt that the change of heart shown by Elizabeth towards Michelle, after the latter pulls her from the river, seemed too abrupt and complete to be realistic.

Although *Spirit Quest* could be read as a stand-alone novel, it is best appreciated if the reader has first read *Withershins*, since the new depends on what happened in the previous book.

Donna Firby Gamache is a writer/retired teacher from MacGregor, Manitoba. Her newest work is *Sarah: A New Beginning*, a novel for children, loosely based on the coming of her great-grandparents to Canada in 1891.

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