Christine Quintasket came into this world, and left it, in her self-imposed role as a diplomat.

The Colville woman, who published two books under the pen name “Mourning Dove,” was born in a canoe crossing the Kootenai River from North Idaho into Washington in 1888, according to family lore.

“I really like the symbolism that she was navigating the plateau right from the moment she was born,” says Laurie Arnold, director of Native American Studies at Gonzaga University, who recently published an article on the Colville woman’s influence.

For much of her life, Quintasket traveled throughout the Columbia Plateau, collecting stories of Colville and Okanogan people that she would eventually compile into a book. As the first Native American woman to publish a novel, Quintasket felt it was her role to preserve Native culture for younger generations, as well as inform those (typically white people) unfamiliar with it.

As a bridge between two cultures, the story goes, Quintasket’s life came to an end in 1936. She was staying in a canoe crossing the Kootenai River from North Idaho into Washington in 1888, according to family lore.

“I am going to the mountains again in August,” she wrote in the spring of 1930. “When flowers of mystery are in full bloom, and then I shall ‘do my stuff.’ Our book is going to be a success. [My] Indian beliefs will prove it.”

Arnold uses this quote to show Quintasket’s zest for living Quintasket’s life story carries some personal significance for Arnold, who strives to fill a similar role.

“I view this article, and others that I’ll do on her and other leaders, as creating a consciousness of the Native peoples of the Columbia Plateau, because there really isn’t one,” Arnold says. “Not among scholars, and not among people who live here.”

Arnold is working on a book about four influential Native leaders: Lucy Covington, Paschal Sherman, Joe Garry and, of course, Quintasket.

“Let us hope that this new form of government will not be imposing on our old people, that you younger men and women will have a voice in the government of the U.S. Let us try a new deal.”

The Colvilles ultimately rejected the law — a vote which remains a point of contention among members.

Quintasket was also instrumental in creating the first “dictionary” for her first language — Salish. She did this as she worked on her second novel, Coyote Stories, to help McWhorter, her editor, understand the text. No known copies of the dictionary exist today, Arnold says.

Quintasket also served on the Colville Tribal Council (the predecessor to today’s Colville Business Council), and founded the Colville Indian Association.

In addition to all of this, she constantly traveled throughout the Northwest, collecting stories, and getting work where and when she could as a farmhand and housekeeper for non-Native folks.

“After working for ten hours in the blazing sun and cooking my meals, I know I shall not have the time to look over very much …” she wrote to McWhorter one summer while revising Coyote Stories. “But fire them on, and between sand, grease, campfire and real apple dirt, I hope I can do the work.”

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