

## **Pictures of an Expedition**

**by Sheri Boggs**

First things first. Author Claire Rudolf Murphy has it on good authority that "Sacajawea" is pronounced the way we've always done it here in the Inland Northwest. Soft "j" sound, accents on the first and fourth syllables. Of course now, historians and the National Park Service are trying to tell us it's Sacagawea (hard "g," accents on the second and fourth syllables) but Murphy – who met with several of Sacajawea's descendents last summer – says it's just not so.

"Emma and Rozina George came to speak at EWU — they would be her great-great-great-grandnieces — and they told us that her name is pronounced the way we're used to saying it here in the West," says Murphy.

Which is nice because reading Murphy's new book – *I Am Sacajawea, I Am York* – aloud just sounds so much better the traditional way. The story, illustrated in glowing panoramic view by Tennessee artist Higgins Bond, is one of the first for children that has ever focused so heavily on the expedition's only black man, Clark's slave York.

Murphy says that she and her friend Bryan Harnetiaux came to tell their York stories independently — and in fact didn't even know each other until last year — but that they had one basic thing in common.

"Neither one of us is interested in 'the white guys'," she laughs. "I was first really interested in Sacajawea for being the only woman on this expedition and then as I started looking more at York I realized these two really were both slaves. She was there because she was Charbonneau's wife. York was there because he belonged to Clark."

Murphy's book tells the story from the perspective of the two "oddities" on the Corps of Discovery — a black man whose skin excited curiosity in nearly every village they encountered and an Indian woman with a baby on her back whose mere presence likely saved the white men from being decimated by hostile tribes.

"There was a certain awe that both of them projected," says Murphy. "Some tribes were afraid of York, and it's in the journals in a few places that Clark wanted him to act scary (which York really didn't want to do). And then Sacajawea just had so much courage. Here was this young woman with an infant, traveling with all these men. I don't think many could have done what she did. Both York and Sacajawea showed an amazing amount of adaptability."

Murphy – who is the author of numerous excellent books for kids including *Gold Rush Women*, *Children of the Gold Rush* and *Caribou Girl* – is currently working on a project involving women's suffrage. Her fascination with the vote – and how long it took for women to get it – is especially ironic in the context of *I Am Sacajawea, I Am York*.

"Sacajawea's vote [in helping decide where to build Fort Clatsop] is the first record of

a woman getting to vote on anything in the United States," she explains. "It's not so surprising then when you look at history and realize that women got to vote in the West first. First in Wyoming, then Colorado, then Utah – Utah! – and then in California, Washington, Oregon and Idaho."

The expedition was pioneering then in more than the Manifest Destiny sense. York was treated for the most part as a valued equal among the men — and this 60 years before the Emancipation. Sacajawea made crucial decisions along the way, helped save the men from starvation with her knowledge of wild plants and was allowed to vote right along with the guys. Still, the story has its bittersweet elements.

"York was treated as an equal on the journey but things went right back to normal once he and Clark were back home. Clark didn't give him his freedom until he was almost useless to him," she explains. "And for the tribes along the trail, it's a very bittersweet time. Bryan and I are both being careful to call this a commemoration rather than a celebration. It was an amazing adventure, but it didn't result in a happy ending for everybody."

Publication date: 05/05/05 and 6/23/05