



The Old Way: A Story of the First People

By Elizabeth Marshall Thomas

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Elizabeth Marshall Thomas was nineteen when her father took his family to live among the Bushmen of the Kalahari. Fifty years later, after a life of writing and study, Thomas returns to her experiences with the Bushmen, one of the last hunter-gatherer societies on earth, and discovers among them an essential link to the origins of all human society.

Humans lived for 1,500 centuries as roving clans, adapting daily to changes in environment and food supply, living for the most part like their animal ancestors. Those origins are not so easily abandoned, Thomas suggests, and our modern society has plenty still to learn from the Bushmen.

Through her vivid, empathic account, Thomas reveals a template for the lives and societies of all humankind.

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Editorial Review

From Publishers Weekly

In 1950, Thomas (*The Hidden Life of Dogs*), at 19, joined her civil engineer father, her ballerina mother (who would become a celebrated anthropologist) and her brother on a life-changing expedition into southwest Africa's Kalahari Desert to live among the Ju/wasi Bushmen. Less a rigorous anthropological study than a loving, nostalgic ode to a self-sustaining culture of hunter-gatherers, this book recounts their now extinct way of life. The Ju/wasi used ostrich eggs to hold more than a day's water supply to expand their foraging range, and burned dry grass to encourage the growth of green grass, thus attracting large antelopes and other prey. The Ju/wasi allowed polygamy and divorce, welcomed baby girls as much as baby boys and treated children with unfailing kindness, but practiced infanticide on children born to nursing mothers because, with their low-fat diet, they could produce enough milk for only one child. In recent decades, the Bushmen have been removed from their land and their way of life has been obliterated by modernity, racism, poverty, alcoholism and AIDS. Thomas offers readers a glimpse of how our prehistoric ancestors undoubtedly lived, worked, loved and played. Photos from the Marshall family album freeze the Ju/wasi in the happy 1950s. (*Oct.*)

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Review

"Heartbreaking and gorgeously observed . . . *The Old Way* is not only a timely work, but also a timeless one." ?Alexandra Fuller, *The New York Times Book Review*

"A work of impressive scholarship and, more important, a book that connects the dots linking us to the first stages of the human race. . . . Remarkable." ?*The Washington Post*

"It is fascinating to see how Thomas has honed her observational powers over the years . . . and how her notion of 'culture' has broadened." ?*Los Angeles Times*

"Thomas captures the fascinating customs of a people that had no future as a tribe." ?*The Daily News (New York)*

About the Author

Elizabeth Marshall Thomas is the author of seven books of fiction and nonfiction--among them *The Hidden Life of Dogs*, *The Harmless People*, *Reindeer Moon*, and *The Animal Wife*. She has written for *The New Yorker*, *National Geographic*, and *The Atlantic*. She lives in New Hampshire.

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