

Indigenous adoption focus of Wilson-Bird novel *Probably Ruby*

By Julia Peterson
for Eagle Feather News

Saskatchewan Métis and nêhiyaw author Lisa Bird-Wilson's second novel, *Probably Ruby*, is already leaving a lasting impression on readers.

"Ruby spends her whole life in this identity crisis of not really knowing or understanding who she is, feeling lost and trying to find her way back home," said Bird-Wilson, describing her character who was adopted as an infant and goes in search of her Indigenous identity.

For Bird-Wilson, Ruby's story has been years in the telling.

She began working on the book around 2016, after the publication of her debut poetry collection *The Red Files*.

"I was looking for a new project, and I really, really wanted to get back to writing fiction," she said. "So I started to think about what I would write about and what that might look like. I really didn't know where to go."

"I was thinking, maybe I don't have any more fiction left in me?"

Initially, Bird-Wilson believed she would write a short story collection about being Indigenous and adopted.

"But as I was going along, I realized, 'This is a terrible short story collection, because all of these stories sound like they're about the same person,'" she said. "And then I realized - okay, that's not what I'm writing here. I'm writing a book about one character, and that character is Ruby."

Once Bird-Wilson, who describes her fiction as "very character-driven," had found Ruby, it was a matter of getting to know her and making her become real on the page.

"Ultimately, for me, I 'got' Ruby when I figured out her laugh," said Bird-Wilson. "In the book, she has this great big laugh that she just swings around all over the place and uses in various ways."

The title indicates the tentative nature of Ruby's understanding of herself, Bird-Wilson said.

"So she's 'probably' Ruby, but she even goes through this part in the book where she finds out what her name was when she was born and it wasn't Ruby."

"And that's the Indigenous adoptee experience, right? To go through this unknowing and insecurity about, 'Who am I? Where do I belong?' Something as basic as your name can throw you for a loop."

Probably Ruby was released on August 24th - coincidentally, Ruby's birthday in

the novel. Since then, Bird-Wilson has been "appreciating and enjoying" the positive reception.

Fellow author Warren Cariou described the book as "brilliant," and had high praise for Bird-Wilson's handling of difficult topics.

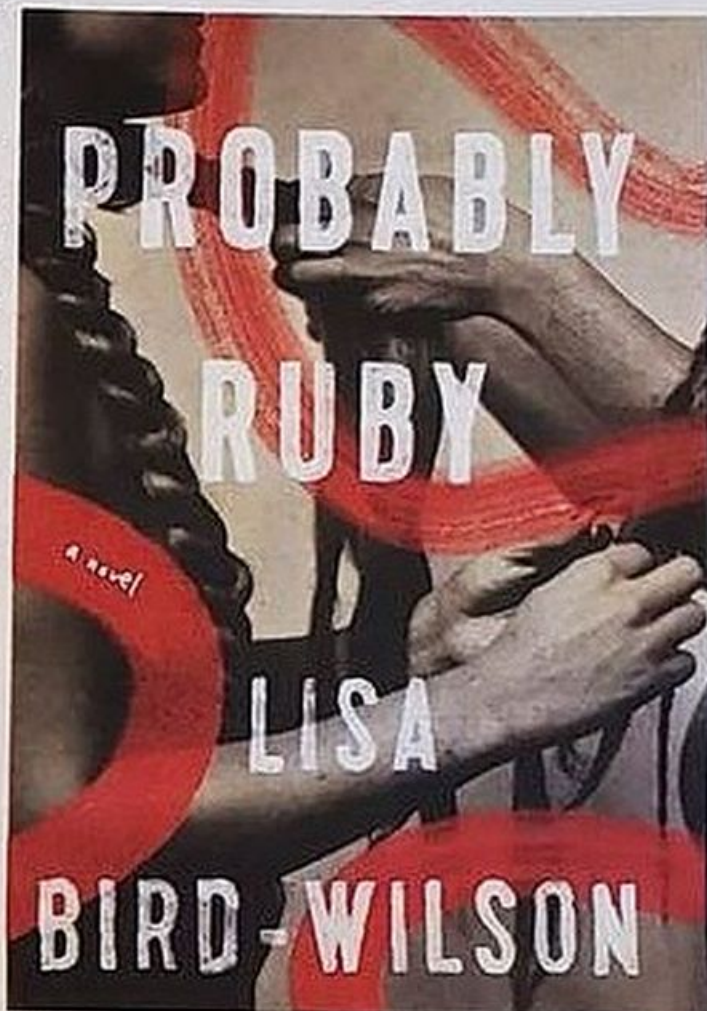
"Lisa is an extraordinary stylist, and this novel explores Indigenous women's lives in a way that is empowering and that doesn't follow the usual tropes of trauma and victimization," he said. "I think of her as a Michif Alice Munro."

Bird-Wilson has also enjoyed hearing from readers about how they feel connected to Ruby even after they have turned the last page.

"I get to hear them talk about her as a character and say that she's stuck with them," Bird-Wilson said. "And I usually say, 'Well, she's stuck with me too.' I still sort of have Ruby in my head and have her on a trajectory that I'm thinking about."

Though Bird-Wilson has been enjoying the acclaim, she has not been resting on her laurels. Since *Probably Ruby* was released, she has signed a book deal for a memoir and been working on a series of essays.

"These essays are talking about my origin story, talking about my background, finding my family and trying to connect with my relatives and my community and my ancestors," she said.



***Probably Ruby* is Lisa Bird-Wilson's second novel. Its success has seen her sign on to write her memoirs and a series of essays.**