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## MARGARET CRAVEN

Who studied when women didn't go  
to university...

Compiled by  
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**M**argaret Craven, daughter of judge Arthur John and Clara Emily Craven was born on 13 March 1901 in Helena, Montana, but spent most of her early life in Puget Sound, Washington. She studied at Stanford University at a time when women did not go to university and graduated with 'great distinction'. She entered the field of journalism and for six years wrote an editorial column for the front page of the **San Jose Mercury**. She subsequently gave this up to devote her



time to writing fiction. Her short stories have appeared regularly in many American magazines such as **Ladies' Home Journal** and **Colliers** and newspapers such as the **Saturday Evening Post**. A large number have been reprinted in England.

**I heard the owl call my name** was Margaret Craven's first full-length novel, and she waited until her sixties to write it. She was always afraid that she would be unable to sustain the thrust of a long story, or that she would become overwhelmed by a large cast of characters. But she was wrong: **I heard the owl call my name** became a bestseller in the United States and elsewhere, and was also made into a successful television film starring the British actor Tom Courtenay. It is a triumph for a mature and sensitive writer.

Margaret Craven first heard of the existence of the Kwakiutl Indians from the captain of the hospital ship that operates along the coast of British Columbia. The captain had long enjoyed Miss

Craven's stories, and felt that she might be interested in the story of the people whose customs and traditions are forever under threat.

So in 1963, dutifully wearing a skirt because she'd been told that Canadians can't stand American women in trousers, Margaret Craven journeyed north by boat into the Queen Charlotte Straits of British Columbia in search of material. Then a sprightly 63-year-old, she concluded the difficult trip at Kingcome inlet, in a village of the Kwakiutl Indians. Kingcome is a place of icy water, deep, tree-lined inlets, teeming salmon, overwhelming beauty and, for the once proud Kwakiutl Indians, deep sadness, for they were all aware of the fact that the old tribal ways are dying. Margaret Craven stayed for weeks at Kingcome, listening, interviewing, and taking notes. She was amazed at the simplicity and richness of spirit of these people so tragically threatened by modern civilisation. She resolved to put it all on paper before it was gone forever, and the result was **I heard the owl call my name**, a marvellous blend of fact and imagination. This best-selling novel was made into a movie for television in 1973.

**Walk gently this good earth**, Craven's second novel, also shows people responding to a changing world as it follows the Wescott family through the social upheavels of the Great Depression and World War II. Elizabeth Schmidt, writing in the **Christian Science Monitor**, found the book 'comfortable and honest,' saying also that 'the characters are like old pieces of pewter, showing a faint stubborn lustre.' On the other hand, a **Kirkus Reviews** critic observed, 'this brood... is noble and pure hearted beyond belief. Also cloying and a bit unreal.'

Craven's autobiography, **Again calls the owl**, is largely devoted to the research and travel that provided the foundation for much of her writing.

(Source: **Reader's Digest**.)