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 SHAMANISM, THE ABILITIES, ETC.,
 OF A SHAMAN NAMED CRANE

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GEORGE FIRST RIDER

George First Rider of the Blood Reserve was born in 1904. He had no formal schooling but became an accomplished horseman and worked for a time on the rodeo circuit. After working as a farmer he ended up in jail as a result of alcoholism and theft. He attributes his reform to his conversion to Christianity.

He prides himself on his ability as a storyteller and on his knowledge of Blood culture, particularly the holy societies, many of which he joined as a young man.

HIGHLIGHTS:

- Story of a boy given supernatural powers by the bears and of his subsequent success as a healer of his own wounds and those of other people or animals.

- Account of a foal that got help for its dam.

George First Rider: Okay, I am going to tell a story again. This is the Queen Moon, the 11th day. I am glad that I have a story to tell. Now the people that tell stories about. I really concentrate on the stories that I tell. Now I am talking about the ones that cure themselves, the ones that have supernatural powers.

There is a man; he is aggressive. He has no father. He tried hard and helped himself to live. He was still a very young boy when he decided to have supernatural powers; so he walked on

and on. He slept at the shore of a bay but nothing stirred. He went on his way again and he slept on a hill and again nothing stirred. As he went home - he hasn't eaten yet - he went to a berry bush. He found a big hollow in the ground. It was a bear's cave; the bear curls in there.

The boy thought, "I will curl up in the cave." The camps are farther yet. Before he slept he took his robe and he stood on top of the hill, as there was always a danger of enemy attacks. He doesn't eat nor drink. He actually went out to sleep in the wilderness to get a vision. He stood on top of the hill above the berry bush and he started to weep. It's not mourning, it's crying for mercy. I (First Rider) did that too, that is why I know it.

He was there crying for mercy and after he had wept he went down the hill and curled up inside the cave and covered himself with his robe. He was praying while he laid there; he was praying so that someone might pity him. So he laid there. After he had laid for a while he heard someone approaching him. He said, "A bear is coming and I got no weapons." When the bear got real close to him he jumped up; he was going to run. How is he going to flee? The camps are not so close, he is on foot, and he has no weapons.

He jumped up for nothing. There was no one around, so he laid down again and after a while he felt someone approaching him again. Then he took courage. As he laid there the bear got the scent of the human and the bear coupled as it got ready to charge. The man just laid there. He did not load[?] up this time; he pulled his robe over his head.

He knew when the bear jumped beside him and the bear got on top of him. It was said that it could be him or his soul. He was thrown down to the bottom of the hill. The bear threw him down and the bear got on top of him. He never jumped up. The bear pulled him up to a sitting position. The bear told him, "My son, I made this cave and since you are not scared of me I

will give you something to live by. Nobody will kill you. All the various kinds of animals will not kill you. The ones that run on earth are all my children. No one will kill you."

The bear told him, "Here is my right arm." The bear gave his arm away from below his elbow. The bear told him, "Skin my arm. You will need it in the future. Here is my drum I also give you. Draw me on my drum. You will draw just the head and chest of a bear. This is my song that you will be singing." The bear gave him a song.

(There are no words in the Bear Song.)

The bear told him, "Sing this song, even if you are severely wounded in the future, sing this song and nothing will happen to you. You will perform on a wounded person and he will survive. Here is my ochre, I give it to you (it was a real paint). There is one taboo that you will observe. Us bears,

we have no taboos of any kind. One taboo. Don't let nobody tickle your feet while you're sleeping. If somebody tickles your feet you will turn into a bear and you will kill the one that tickled your feet." That is what the bear told him. After the bear had transferred the sacred items to him, he woke up. He was still sleeping in the cave and it was morning. He was almost running as he went home. The camps were at a distance. He came home in the afternoon. He did not tell nobody about his adventures.

The boy was not married yet. His mother was keeping home for him. When he slept the bear approached him again. The bear told him, "Cut your hair short at the front. Have your hair just like ours, and ochre your hair with red paint but don't paint your face. Just daub your eyes with real paint. Do that every morning."

He told his mother, "Mother, give me a big bag of real paint." So his mother gave him a big bag of real paint and he daubs the front of his hair with real paint. One morning he drew a line with ochre from his eyebrow down to his cheek bone and he did the same to his other eye. In the bear facial painting black ochre is used but he used real paint. He went to a crowd of people. They said, "That young man's got war paint." The people of the past will not tease anybody. The boy was just seen with his war paint. He got married later on.

All the women went to pick berries. Suddenly they all ran out from the bush. "There is a bear," they said, and the men went to their aid. The bear charged and it was shot in the eye and the bear was killed. The bear didn't get anybody, he was just killed. The young married man didn't hesitate. He ran and he

cut the bear's right arm at the elbow. He skinned it leaving the claws still attached to the paw.

The young married man picked some perfumed plants (pine apple weed) and stuffed the bear's arm and then he sewed together where he cut the skin and he hang it up to dry. When it got dry it was tanned and it was made clean and beaver castor glands were put in it and it had a fragrant smell. The bear's paw was tied at the wrist with a thong and it is worn at the back of the neck. The bear's arm is ochred with real paint. The bear's arm is kept in a bag and his drum is completed. It was painted with real paint leaving an unpainted space in the middle and a bear is sketched and painted with real paint on the drum. The drum is covered like the shields are covered and it is hung outside. Nobody knew about his adventures yet. His wife never have a child; it was because of his supernatural powers. He has been a married man for a long time and his wife didn't have a child at all.

The same thing happened. The enemy came to the camps and the people charged the enemy. He was out away from the camps when the people charged at the enemy, then he noticed that something had happened and he ran home and he jumped on his horse with

his rifle. Rifles were introduced at that time and he charged. The enemy posted themselves in the bushes and he approached the enemy. He jumped off from his horse. The men told him, "There, they are shooting out from the bushes."

They were looking in the direction where the enemy were shooting from. They didn't know that some of the Crees had crept up to them from the side. When he saw the enemy and as he aimed his rifle, as he lifted his arm, as he aimed to shoot, as he lifted his right arm, he lifted his rifle high so that he can take a good shot at the enemy because they were lower from their positions.

The Crees that crept up to them saw him. They said, "Someone is going to shoot." The Crees shot him. Two musket balls were put in the gun barrel. His arm was broken in two places below the elbow and his arm was also broken where his muscle is and the bullets went into his armpit. He moaned and he went down. In the next volley of shot he jumped up and ran. He ran back with blood coming out from his mouth. He had his facial war paint; he painted his eyes with real paint.

He was loaded on his horse and he was taken home; he was at the verge of death. The same thing happened. There was a woman; it was his wife's mother. She said, "He would not be so tough

like that for nothing. Did he gave you some sort of instructions what to do to him if anything should happen to him?" The girl said, "I forgot he told me what I should do if he got wounded."

A backrest was set up for him. Now seven men were needed again. Seven good singers were invited again and seven women that haven't got any children yet. His bag and his drum were put down, water and real paint were mixed in a wooden bowl. The girl prepared everything. The husband's arm was broken in four places. The bear arm was tied at the back of his neck and real paint was sprinkled on his forehead and his eyes were painted. He was made to hold his drum with his left hand and he was made to hold the drum stick with his right hand though his arm was broken in four places by the shots and his hand was laid on the drum. The woman started to perform. The woman did not do any drumming. The seven good singers had all their own drums. They sat on the north side and the women that were going to help in singing sat on the south side.

The door was spread wide open. There was the altar and there was the ochre brew. The bear's arm was tied at the back of his neck. His arm that was broken in two places was all ochred with real paint. The real paint was soaked with water and his arm was painted with it. The stick that he was going to drum with was done the same way. He was forced to sit up and the bullets were inside his armpit. There were two wounds in his armpit. The musket balls separated and they were inside of him and he was not very conscious.

He held the drum and he was braced up from behind with his feet towards to the centre. His head drooped and his hand was laid on the drum. The woman's robe was a real robe*. It wasn't mentioned that it was a bear robe, it was just mentioned that it was a real robe. The woman started the song and then the men sang.

The woman was a good performer. She was pushing him with her head as the man's head was drooped down to his chest. She wanted him to look up. The drummers were beating the drums fast.

(SONG: There are no words in the song.)

Finally the woman succeeded to make her husband to look up. She chewed some of the ochre. When he managed to look up she

*A real robe is a hide robe. It could be an elk robe, a buffalo robe or a bear robe.

blew the ochre on his face. The woman moved backwards and as she moved forward again to him the man lifted his head trying to dodge the ochre that was going to be blown on his face. The woman started to move backwards again and then the tipi was shaken and the singers kept on singing.

(SONG: There are no words in the song.)

As she blew on his face again, on the fourth time, the man moved his arm. Suddenly the man started to beat the drum slowly. His arm was broken in four places. He started to follow the drum beat of the seven men that were drumming. His arm was broken in four places and the tipi was shaken again. When the tipi was shaken he started to have more life in him.

The woman blew some more ochre on his face and the men kept on singing. When the spectators saw the man starting to move they all sang.

(SONG: There are no words in the song.)

His face was blown with ochre again. On the fourth song he suddenly started to beat the drum, he gradually started to lift the drum. His arm was broken in four places by gun shots. Finally he started performing. He was braced up with a backrest. Suddenly he bended his leg and he got up on his knees and he started beating the drum and singing as the song was his song.

Now there are eight drums. There were seven drums making eight with his drum and the spectators all sang. He was moving around. He was just like a bear crying and then he waved at the drummers. The woman went to the brew. The man was put back into a sitting position and the same song was sung again.

(SONG: There are no words in the song.)

His drum was put down upside down. The woman was moving up to him with the ochre brew and she held it in front of him. The bowl was marked in four places with black ochre on the rim. She held the bowl to his mouth on the first black mark and he drank and swallowed it. The bowl was turned around to the next black mark and he drank again and he swallowed it again. The bowl was turned around to the next black mark and he drank. He turned the bowl around again and he drank. When he drank the brew the bowl was then put away.

His arm was broken in four places. Suddenly he bent his arm and held his hand against his ribs; he was coughing. The singers didn't sing too fast.

(SONG: There are no words in the shaman's song.)

He held himself on his ribs moving his chest around and coughing. Suddenly he spit out something and the musket balls rattled into the drum that was laid upside down. The two musket balls came out from inside of his chest, then he sat down and the two musket balls were passed around. People looked at them. When they were returned back to him the bear's arm was then untied, and the singing started again. They sang the same song.

(SONG: No words in the song.)

The bear arm was sprayed with ochre. He took it with his left hand; he slapped it on his wounds. He was moving around crying like a bear, moving the bear's arm down his arm. He had a mouthful of ochre and he licks the bear's paw and holds it against his wounds. He did this four times then he laid down the bear arm. When they looked at the wounds they were healed with just red marks on his skin, but his arm was bent.

He survived. At that point his arm healed up together again. He healed his wounds with the bear's arm; the wounds disappeared. He said, "That is all there is. Nothing wrong with me any more." It was said that he tied the musket balls on a rawhide and he put them in his bag with the bear arm and they were put away.

Time passed on. Now the same thing happened in the camps. The people noticed that an enemy was close by so they charged and the enemy fled down a hill. They were Crees. There were riders and some were on foot. The Crees came to a rocky place and they piled up big rocks for ramparts and they all got behind the ramparts. It was not mentioned what tribe* the enemy were.

A young man came racing his steed down the hill. He thought he'd run over the group that were behind their rampart and they took a shot at him and the young man was hit in the stomach. He stooped over on his horse. The horse ran in a semi-circle and ran back to the people that were at the rear of the main

line. While both parties were fighting the man that had his arm broken in four places did not join in the battle.

The young man was taken home. The young man was the only one that was wounded; the enemy was massacred. The musket balls did not go through the body of the young man. They said, "Get Bend Body to treat him." So things were piled up for payment. They told Bend Body, "Okay, you will treat that wounded man."

*The informant mentioned that the enemy were Cree Indians and yet he claims that it was not known what tribe the enemy was from.

He (Bend Body) said, "No, don't give me those, just give me seven miscellaneous items and one woman that hasn't got a child yet. That will make eight items that you will give me."

The boy was the favorite child of the family. He had an elderly sister who was not married. The girl said, "I will marry him." So the seven items and the girl were brought to him. They told him, "Here are seven miscellaneous items and a girl." "Okay, I will go with her to treat the boy."

They said, "Go and get the good singer." There were seven men that were going to drum. So he told his legal wife to sit by the door and his new wife sat with the wounded young man. He told the girl that was given to him for his pay, he told her, "Daughter, watch me, the way I perform, and you will perform the same way as I do. You will join me in my curing performance. You were given away for payment so you will join me in my curing performance." As the good singer knew the song before his (Bend Body) boy was laid down when the bear arm was taken but it raised yellow dust as it was laid down.

The wounded young man laid there in agony. He wasn't moaning. He was shot in the stomach. How can he moan? His stomach couldn't move.

The man told the girl, "You will perform on the other side of him and I will perform on this side. You will wear your robe exactly the way I wore my robe." And the singing started. All the people came forward and the door of the tipi was spread wide open. The tipi was almost rolled up all around for the people to watch. The drum was beat on softly.

(No words in song)

When the drummers got accustomed into singing he (Bend Body) laid his drum down. His legal wife, who sat by the door, wore her robe the way he wore his robe; so there are two women now. He laid his drum down and he waved at the drummers to sing faster and the drummers sang faster.

(SONG: There are no words in the song.)

The wounded young man laid there all curled up; he was pushing him with his head. He opened his fingers in an arch like claws and bubbles were coming out from the corners of his mouth while he was making sounds like a bear. The girl was on the other side performing the same way as the man did. The woman at the door was performing too.

Suddenly the shaman went on top of the wounded man, he grabbed him by the hair and threw him up. It was said that the patient smiled as he was thrown up and he sat up in a stooping position.

When the shaman grabbed him, the girl came forward too and she grabbed him and they both threw him up. As they threw him up they both jumped up and the shaman grabbed him at the back of the neck and the girl also grabbed him and they threw him to the door. The young man was thrown clean over the fireplace and he landed right in front of the woman that sat at the door. The woman grabbed him too and held her mouth on his stomach where the wound was and she spat the ochre in the wound and she blew into it.

After she had blown into the wound she grabbed him. She also threw him back to his bed. The boy was a big stout boy. It is fantastic that the woman who was on her knees to throw the young man back to his bed. The boy landed between the two performers and they both got on top of him. The man (Bend Body) was licking the wound. The wound was completely healed. There was just an ochre mark on it. Then they gave him the ochre brew to drink and the boy drank the ochre brew. When he drank it down he started to move his head and he made a sound like as if he was going to vomit. The drum was held in front of him upside down and he vomited into it and the musket ball dropped into it. The shaman told the boy, "Here is the bullet that you got shot with. Take it and avenge yourself with it in the future." The boy will keep the bullet. The wounded boy will take the musket ball and in the future he will load his musket with it and he shoot a Cree with it. So everyone sat back and the father of the wounded boy offered a smoke and they were smoking and then lunch was brought in. The boy that was wounded in the stomach was served, his sister that he gave away for payment, and the shaman. The woman that sat by the door walked up and they all ate from the same bowl and everybody was fed. So they ate.

After they had eaten the shaman took the seven miscellaneous items that were given to him (Bend Body). He told the man that has a daughter and son, he told him, "Now you got your son back. Okay, I am through with your daughter and now I give her back to you. I just briefly took her to perform my curing with her and now I give you your daughter as a gift." So that is how he (Bend Body) returned the girl.

So Bend Body got the name Bear's Paw. So these are the occurrences of sleeping out in the wilderness. Okay, Bear's Paw did another curing performance again. The woman led away

her horse with a train and she parked it in a certain place and she went into a forest. She walked on and on; she came to a protruding hill. She went there to dig up some herbs; she left her horse behind.

It is very true when horses are disturbed they will bray. I (First Rider) saw some of those horses. There was a horse with a rope around its neck and it was snowing during the night. It was a wet snow. When the horse steps on the snow, the snow sticks to his hoofs; this is called moulded snow. As it stepped on the rope the snow came off from its hoof and the moulded snow got stuck onto the rope and as the horse was grazing away the moulded snow on the rope got big gradually. Finally it got real high. The moulded snow must have weighed about 30 pounds by this time. The horse couldn't drag the weight of the snow any more. More snow sticks onto the moulded snow as the horse pulls it with force, finally the horse couldn't move.

We didn't know that the horses that were loose went in the eastern direction during the night. The herd were my grandmother's horses; her name is Under Making Noise. The horse that she hitches to a travois was a black mare; she was the one that had a rope around her neck. Her foal was unbroken; the young horse was three years old. The mother was a black mare and the colt was white. The white colt wandered off. It would stop for a while and he'd bray. My father said, "That horse wouldn't be wandering around for nothing. I wonder where's its mother." The colt came to our home and it brayed then it shook its head and it ran off. It ran in the eastern direction and it ran over beyond the ridge. It wasn't long after it came back up on the ridge. The colt would stop and it would bray. The horse came to our home. We looked out and the horse shook its head, then turned around and ran away.

My father followed the colt on foot. When my father had walked farther the white colt came back up on the ridge and stood there. The colt just saw my father approaching him then it turned and ran back to its mother. When my father got to the edge of the hill the black mare brayed at him. When he got there the snow had rolled into a huge snow mould. The horse couldn't pull it any more and she had eaten all the grass where she was grazing. My father started to kick the snow and he broke it all up. He got on the black mare and he rode it back home then he took the rope off and turned her loose. She went away to graze. So that is how horses call for help for each other. That is what the horse with a travois did.

The horse was approached by a bear. The horse was torn in several places by the bear. The travois fell off and left it there. The horse fled for home alone; he was torn up by bites. The old lady fled around the other way; her horse got back home before her. This man, Bear's Paw, also treated this horse, but he did not heal the wounds. He just saved the horse who was bitten by a bear. He (Bear's Paw) cures with the powers of a

bear. So we experienced that the bites of bears will turn white when they heal up. If a bear bites a horse, even if the horse is black, when the wound heals the hair will turn white, and even it's a boy, where it's bitten by a bear it will turn white when it heals up. So that is how these two men were discovered, how they got their visions, the Curlew and Bear's Paw.

The old people at that time are actually like that. Some will go on the warpath at the age of twelve and thirteen years of age. At the age of twenty a person's walking is not so good any more. The people of the past go on the warpath when they are young and they get supernatural powers when they are young. Now the stories that I (First Rider) will be telling, the stories I will tell, there are six recording tapes that were given to me to give information on. I might give information of shamanism on all of those tapes, but I will not use them all on shamanism. My woman will help me. She will give some information on some of the tapes. I (First Rider) am still the same in her.

I (First Rider) am giving information on shamanism. I heard about a lot of people and it is a lucky thing that I know a lot of shaman songs and I have drummed for a lot of these shamans. And also myself, I am a shaman but I quit shamanism. I also make decorations and I will also illustrate how I perform in my curing.

Strange things happen in the earlier times. How a person gets a vision - some are possessed by their horses and also their dogs and they perform miracles with their rifles and their bows and arrows. They get supernatural powers from all these. Some people are given such powers as not to die from a wound if they are wounded. The people that have supernatural powers get wounded and they cure themselves and they are exposed. We will know that person cured himself. That is why this occurred.

A man sang about his horse. "Buckskin, why is he not eating?" The buckskin horse was shot between the lower shoulder. He just stands around sulkily and the man was shot in the chest. He said, "Where is my horse?" They told him, "He is still standing where he was." The man was taken outside. When he

looked at his horse, his horse was staggering. Its mouth was clogged with blood. That was the horse that he rode and they both got shot and he sang for his horse. "Buckskin, why is he not eating?" Suddenly the buckskin started to snort and it started to eat. Just by his singing his horse survived. That is the reason why these elderly people are so particular about their horses when they are stolen from them.

There are a lot of famous horses. We get names by them such as Yellow Horse, Black Horse, Sorrel Horse and Holy White Horse. All these people got their names by their horses, like this Heavenly Colt and the Duck Horse. There are many useful things done by the supernatural powers of horses towards men of the

past. They all have songs and this Curled Up Black Horse is also a mystic horse. I (First Rider) am talking stories up to these incidents. I will be illustrating them. And now I conclude my story at this point about this Bend Body whose arm was broken in four places and he drummed with it. I told these adjacent stories just to fill out the recording tape. That's all.

(End of Interview)

INDEX

| INDEX TERM | IH NUMBER | DOC NAME | DISC # | PAGE # |
|------------------------------------|-----------|-----------|--------|----------|
| MEDICINE AND CURING PRACTICES | | | | |
| -paints and painting | IH-AA.120 | SHAMANISM | 61 | 5,6,9 |
| MEDICINE AND CURING PRACTICES | | | | |
| -rituals | IH-AA.120 | SHAMANISM | 61 | 5-9 |
| MEDICINE AND CURING PRACTICES | | | | |
| -songs in | IH-AA.120 | SHAMANISM | 61 | 5-8,12 |
| MEDICINE MEN AND WOMEN | | | | |
| -healing by | IH-AA.120 | SHAMANISM | 61 | 8,11,12 |
| MEDICINE MEN AND WOMEN | | | | |
| -payment for | IH-AA.120 | SHAMANISM | 61 | 7,8 |
| MEDICINE MEN AND WOMEN | | | | |
| -powers of | IH-AA.120 | SHAMANISM | 61 | 2-12 |
| NAMES (PERSONAL) | | | | |
| -origins of | IH-AA.120 | SHAMANISM | 61 | 9,12 |
| NAMES (PERSONAL) | | | | |
| -significance of | IH-AA.120 | SHAMANISM | 61 | 9 |
| POWER | | | | |
| -animal sources | IH-AA.120 | SHAMANISM | 61 | 3-8 |
| POWER | | | | |
| -from dreams and visions | IH-AA.120 | SHAMANISM | 61 | 2-12 |
| POWER | | | | |
| -vision quests | IH-AA.120 | SHAMANISM | 61 | 2,3 |
| STORIES AND STORYTELLING (GENERAL) | | | | |
| -animal | IH-AA.120 | SHAMANISM | 61 | 10,11,12 |
| STORIES AND STORYTELLING (GENERAL) | | | | |
| -dreams and visions | IH-AA.120 | SHAMANISM | 61 | 2-12 |
| STORIES AND STORYTELLING (GENERAL) | | | | |
| -medicine men and women | IH-AA.120 | SHAMANISM | 61 | 2-12 |
| WARFARE, INTERTRIBAL | | | | |
| -accounts of | IH-AA.120 | SHAMANISM | 61 | 4,7 |