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SASKATCHEWAN
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SASKATCHEWAN
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HIGHLIGHTS:

- Antoine Lonesinger, born 1888 on the Red Pheasant Reserve, later went to live at Sweet Grass. He attended school on the reserve and later farmed. He is a good singer and storyteller. (For biography see IH-052, p. 11).
- Story of escape from the Blackfoot by appealing to the spirits.
- Story of an abortive raid by Blackfoot Indians.
- Two stories of the use of evil powers.
- Place names in the Biggar/Kerrobert area of Saskatchewan.

In 1915, my grandfather told me this story. It is about a Cree raiding party in which he took part when he was young. He was here at Sweet Grass for a long time in 1915. This is my grandfather's story.

When I was young and not yet married, I was very poor. I did not have a horse. Then I heard about the house people getting ready to leave on a raiding party. House people are the people who live at Snake Plain. My brother, older than I,

was joining the raid. He was an outspoken man. When I said to him that I would like to go along, he laughed and said, "We are not going to a dinner party. This is a war party." "But I am destitute and have need for horses," I said. "Where did you leave the horses you are going for?" he said. Everyone present had a good laugh at my expense. I said nothing. But my mind was made up, I was going with them.

My mother made me several pairs of shoes and got me ready to go on the long trip. In time all was ready and the Cree raiders left the camp, going west to a place called Weh-qway-tinow (winter), then headed south and a little to the west. After much travelling we came to a river. Along the river was a large camp of Saulteaux Indians. We all sat on the crest of a hill. When the people in camp saw us, they came and invited us to their camp. In that camp was a man named Ah-yoh-to-way. He was a relative of mine. He was glad to see me and said he would join us as we headed for Blackfoot country. Then others in camp offered to join us. We were nine house people when we arrived; now we would be many. It was agreed we would leave the next day at noon. My brother then got me alone and said, "I am ashamed that you profess to be related to Ah-yoh-to-way. He is a famous man and you are very poor." I told him that I and Ah-yoh-to-way had, sometime before, entered the lodge of a spirit helper and have since been related to one another. "I have some knowledge; you do not know anything," I told my brother.

At the time, among the house people was a very handsome boy. He was in the party with us, and also his other brother. The next day we left the Saulteaux camp at midday. We had not gone far when we sat down on a ridge to smoke the pipe. After we had smoked, one man said, "As for myself, I am going straight south." "We will go with you," replied several others. Then one by one others offered to go with them, until only a few of us were left. Ah-yoh-to-way stayed with us. The handsome boy of the house people had gone with those who went straight south but his brother stayed with us. This man was

worried about his brother and asked me to run after them and ask his brother to come back and rejoin us. This I did, but the handsome boy refused to come. When I arrived back and told the brother he was very sad. As we sat there, we were startled to hear gun shots to the south of us. "Our friends are being attacked," someone said, which proved to be true. Our friends had walked into a Blackfoot trap and were all killed. However, they were not scalped. Our little party then agreed to go on with the original plan and we headed for Blackfoot country. We walked and walked and after much walking we decided we should abandon our plan for raiding the Blackfoot and go home. We then turned back. And after walking all day long, we sat down at the foot of a hill to smoke.

While we were smoking we were surprised to hear dogs barking some distance away. We snuck up to the camp and found there were less than twenty lodges and very many horses. We waited

until the camp was sound asleep and then stole all their horses. With horses we travelled much faster and we fled in a northeasterly direction. We knew they would not give chase. They had nothing to chase us with. At daybreak we came upon a large cluster of hills. Here we decided to rest ourselves and our horses. Our horses were hungry and so were we. We filled the peace pipe and had a smoke.

It was very near sunrise when we saw a man on a white horse. He was on top of a hill, not so far from us. When he saw us, he rode his horse back and forth on the hill. Very soon he was joined by others. Before long there were very many, and we knew we would be attacked. We would not have a chance. We were nine and they were many. Ah-yoh-to-way passed me the pipe and said, "See what you can do. We are at the mercy of the enemy." I took the pipe, and after a few puffs prayed to my spirit helpers for help. I reminded my spirit helper, Misi-na-na-tayo, of his promise to send me help if I was ever in danger. I was in danger and asked him to send a fog to hide us. Also, I prayed to my other spirit helper, the porcupine, for help. I asked him to make us appear we were as many of us as quills on his back. We sat there and waited. The Blackfoot did not move but stayed on the hill. Then we caught our horses and rode off. They stared at us but did not bother us. Our prayers had been answered. In my prayers I had also included a request for food, as we were hungry. We kept going north and later in the day we shot a beef. We roasted meat and had a big meal. There was not a sign of the enemy when we headed for home. When we arrived we found the camp had not moved. We told of some of our party being surprised and killed by the Blackfoot. We told the relatives the enemy did not have time to scalp them, and that we had given them a decent burial. It

was not too long after this that the treaty was signed and peace came to the people. The Cree and the Blackfoot became friends.

Misto-wah-sis (Big Child), and Ah-to-ka-kuhp (Star Blanket) were two chiefs for whom the Blackfoot had much respect. Some time later when the Blackfoot chief visited Big Child's camp, he asked about this particular party of Cree, and wanted to speak to the leader. Chief Big Child sent word the Blackfoot chief wished to speak to me. When I arrived at the lodge the Blackfoot chief shook my hand and wanted to know how many hundred of us were in that party. Through his interpreter, I told him there were nine of us. The interpreter was a Blackfoot halfbreed named Jim Jack. The chief insisted there were hundreds of Cree in that party, and had warned his braves not to give chase, there were too many of us. I told him there were only nine of us and that I still had some of the horses brought from that raid. That is my grandfather's story. His name was Bad Owl.

This one is a Blackfoot story.

A long time ago a Blackfoot chief who was very brave came to Cree country to raid the Crees. He had with him thirty-one of his bravest and best fighting men. They came riding horses. Now and then the chief would stick a post in the ground and hang some clothes on it. He would then ride his horse back a ways, then come charging at the post which his horse would hit and knock over. This, he would say, was what he was going to do to the Cree. After much travelling they arrived in Cree country and soon came upon a fresh trail. This they followed and soon came upon a camp of Cree at the foot of a hill. The Cree were preparing to move. And without being seen, the Blackfoot watched as the Cree moved away. The chief noticed, as the Cree moved off, that some of the braves walked away from the main group, apparently scouting as the band moved. "My pony is trained to run down people on foot," the chief told his boys. "We will go after these scouts first and I will run them down with my pony." The Blackfoot chief took two of his braves and went looking for the Cree scouts. As the two Cree scouts were walking, they turned their heads when they heard a noise behind them. They saw coming at them at full gallop a Blackfoot warrior. There was no sense in running so the boys stood still and waited. One of the Cree was armed with a knife and the other had a gun. The Blackfoot brave was

coming right at them, and he was not going to stop. He had no gun. When he was almost upon them, one of the Cree threw his blanket at the horse's face. The horse stopped short but the Blackfoot kept on going and landed with a thud some distance away, where the Cree with the gun finished him off while the other caught the horse and held him. The Blackfoot brave had on very beautiful clothes and the Cree boys knew he was a chief. Then they stripped the body of all the clothes and walked off, leading the horse. Before going over a hill they looked back in time to see Blackfoot boys carrying away the naked body of their chief. Very soon after this incident, treaty was signed and peace came to the people of the prairie. A small band of the Cree visited the Blackfoot by invitation. In the Cree band were the two Cree boys who had killed the chief. They still had the clothes and the horse taken from the chief. These the Blackfoot people recognized, and they were received warmly by the chief, who congratulated them. "You are brave men, your hearts are strong," the chief told them.

Littlepoplar: These two stories you just told happened not too long ago. They happened just a short time before the treaty was made and people stopped fighting.

Lonesinger: No, no, these happened not too long ago. I guess soon after they happened the treaty was made.

Another little story was told to me by an old man a long

time ago. It shows how people here fought one another with medicine. This is the old man's story, as he told it to me many years ago.

To the east of Snake Plain is a place called Pile of Horns. We were camped there when my brother said to me that I should move away and do some hunting. So I and my wife moved two camps north to do some hunting. I hunted for days and days without any luck. We began to get hungry and I pulled some long hairs from the tail of one of the horses and my wife set out snares to catch rabbits. But no luck. She caught nothing. Then I hunted ducks and prairie chickens but I could kill nothing.

This was unusual, and I suspected someone with bad medicine was sending bad luck to us. We would starve if this kept on, so I thought I should retaliate. I sharpened my axe; then asked my wife if she had any cloth offering. She produced

a white cloth, which I took with me. I went to a clump of large poplar trees growing beside a creek. I cut down a large tree and with my axe, I whittled a lion. Then I tied the cloth offering around its neck and prayed to the spirit helpers to find who was sending us this bad luck. Then I went home and went to sleep. Early next morning I went to see my lion. The cloth around its neck was soaked in blood. A man and a woman living not far away had been killed. They were the ones who were sending us bad luck. I felt very bad about it. But our luck changed at once for the better. I killed much game after the lion went to work. We moved back to Pile of Horns with very much meat. And I never told my brother about what happened while we were away hunting. He would have scolded me.

This same old man told me another story. This is about the time he drowned a very bad old man. This is the way he told me the story.

A long time ago there was a little trading post on the banks of a river. We arrived at this store one day and were told a very bad man was in camp nearby. This man was old and ugly. He had curly hair and was married to two very beautiful girls. They said he was a bully. At that time I had a very nice white coat with a red belt. I was told to hide the coat. If the bad old man saw it he would take it from me, whether I liked it or not. I told them I was not worried. I would not hide my coat, and I would not let anyone take it from me. Later, when we put our things on the boat to cross the river, a very ugly man came on board and picked up my coat. I told him it was my coat and he should put it back. "No," he said. "It is now my coat and I am going to keep it." I took the coat from him and held him by the throat. He scrambled to shore as soon as I let him go.

We continued on our way after crossing the river. After travelling for several days our band came upon a large lake. The people living there offered to take us across on boats. We

accepted their offer, not wanting to walk around the big lake. Halfway across the lake, I knew the old man had put some bad medicine to work against me. Soon after, someone shouted a warning. Looking back I saw a small ball of fire coming straight at me. It was almost upon me when I grabbed it and threw it in the water. It was a small axe, and it was red-hot. But it did not burn my hand when I caught it.

We finally crossed the lake, and were again on our way. We returned some time later, and again crossed the lake, this time without incident. Finally, we again crossed the river,

where the old man was camped. When we arrived on his side of the river he came on board and helped himself to my clothes, which I took from him. He was very angry, and I threw him in the lake. Then I jumped in after him. I grabbed him and held him under water for a short time. Then I dragged him to the shore and told him to go home. I noticed he staggered when he walked. We did not stay around but moved on toward home at once. We camped that night some distance from the little trading post. Next morning at sunrise I woke up and went outside. Then I knew the bad old man had died. I told the people I was with that the bad old man was dead and that I had drowned him.

Another time I and my wife went on a trapping expedition. This time our luck was good. We caught many fur-bearing animals. One morning I told my wife that we had plenty of fur for the time being, and that we should go home. We got ready and in a short time were on our way home. We walked and walked and finally came to some pine trees. As I walked among the pines, I noticed someone take cover behind a huge tree. I pretended not to see him. My wife was a ways behind me. I said nothing to her about what I had seen. I had a gun and a small axe with me. As I came closer to the tree the man was hiding behind, I dropped my gun and made a dash for the tree. The man hiding behind it ran and I gave chase. But the man knew his way in the bush and outran me. I could not catch him. My wife was very surprised and asked what was going on. I told her I did not know. I never did find out who the man was or what he was up to.

Littlepoplar: Does this little town west of here called Winter have a name?

Lonesinger: Yes, the Cree call it We-qway-tinow (ring of hills). A long time ago it was a favourite wintering place. The Cree used to spend winters there. It is said that many Cree are buried there. Eye Hill (Wainwright) was another place where the Cree used to winter. And another place southwest of

Unity. It is a long way from Unity. The Indians call it Wooded Ravine. I have been told a great number of Indians are buried there. Min-as-qway-yohk is southwest of Biggar. Here also many Indians are buried.

Littlepoplar: Is there a place in that part of the country called Where the Horse Lives?

Lonesinger: That place called Where The Horse Lives is east of the town of Kerrobert - not straight east, it is southeast from Kerrobert. East of Kerrobert some distance is a place the Indians call Where It Went Dark. It is southeast of here, beside a big lake the Cree used to call Where The Horse Lives. Also, there is a big spring there. Still further to the east is a place called Wah-kah-yu-ka-ni-pah-ta-kate (Where Wah-kah-yu Was Murdered).

Littlepoplar: Did somebody murder someone there?

Lonesinger: Yes. A murder was committed there a long time ago. My grandfather used to tell about it. Many years ago Indians used to see a horse at the place Where The Horse Lives. This horse used to make for the lake and run into the water and disappear, my grandfather used to say. The horse could outrun the fastest horse the Indians had. That is why it was called Where The Horse Lives.

Littlepoplar: Buffalo Jump Hill is a name the Indians had for a hill somewhere around Biggar?

Lonesinger: This hill is not far from the town of Biggar. And south of Biggar there are a cluster of hills the Cree used to call The Spring. Further south are more hills. These hills the Indians called The Cooking Hills.

Littlepoplar: Did someone do some cooking there at one time or other?

Lonesinger: No, nobody cooked anything there. As the story goes, some Cree in a party came upon these hills just as it was getting dark and decided to spend the night there. Later on as the night was getting darker, one of the boys noticed a campfire a short distance away. Several of the boys agreed to sneak up to the campfire and find out who was there. They crept close to the campfire and were astonished to see a giant roasting a man over the campfire. The boys crept back to their friends and reported the matter. Their friends found what they had to say hard to believe. The boys went to see for themselves. Close to the campfire they stopped and looked on as a giant turned an ordinary man over and over on his campfire. The boys then became frightened, and all agreed to return to the main camp. "If we go on to Blackfoot country, what we just saw is what is going to happen to us," they said. Back at the main camp, after the boys had told what they had

seen, the people in the camp agreed the hills should be called The Cooking Hills. My grandfather used to say, "Nobody cooked anything there. It was just a warning for the Cree boys to go back and forget about going into enemy country."

Another place the Indians called Mysterious Spring. This spring is close to the river and it came out the side of a hill. When people went near this spring it would flare up, spouting water high into the air. When they left, the spring went back to normal. That is why it was called Mysterious Spring. Many of these places I have not seen for many years. Many of them I would not recognize.

Littlepoplar: Also, I have heard of a place called Bad Hill or Ugly Hill.

Lonesinger: Bad Hill is west of the town of Rosetown. It is a very big hill. There is bush on this hill, and long ago there were wild animals in those bushes. Up a ways on the south side of the hill, a spring ran out of the side of the hill. It runs down the side of the hill and forms a creek. At the bottom, this little creek joins a big creek, formed by another spring further west. Indians never camped at the place because it would rain often. They used to say something was in those springs that would draw the rain. There are maple trees and birch trees there. It must be about 25 miles west of Rosetown. There are sandy spots around the hill. It is a very ugly hill, that is why it is called Bad Hill.

Littlepoplar: What is the Cree name for Fort Pitt?

Lonesinger: Wahs-kah-hi-kan is (Little House). It has been called that for a long time. To the east is a place called Elk Hill, and further up is a very high hill. It is called Frenchman Hill. A small creek runs by Elk Hill. It is called Elk Creek, and it runs into the river. Around Frenchman Butte there are many springs. There is a place nearby called Paradise Hill. What does paradise mean?

Littlepoplar: Paradise could mean very beautiful land.

Lonesinger: They name this place...right, the land around there is very beautiful. There were many Frenchmen living there long ago. Also, there were many elk there long ago. Once a man named Ko-min-ah-koos was sick. His condition worsened and he was very thin. He was living at the time not far from Maidstone. One night Ka-min-ah-koos asked his brother to take him very early next morning to Elk Hill. "You are too sick to

travel and Elk Hill is on the other side of the river," his brother said. "How are we to cross the river?" "You take my best horse and put the travois on him and take me to Elk Hill. I know a shallow spot in the river where we can cross," said Ka-min-ah-koos. "If I get there, I know I can get well."

This the brother agreed to do, and very early the next morning

they went on their way. Late in the afternoon they arrived at Elk Hill, where camp was made. It was getting dusk when Ka-min-ah-koos stripped and asked his brother to paint him brown, the colour of elk. After this he smoked a pipe and said some prayers. While he prayed, an elk was heard somewhere in the distance. And then another was heard, until four elk were heard. Then Ka-min-ah-koos left the camp, telling his brother to wait for him. The brother sat up all night long waiting. At daylight Ka-min-ah-koos walked in. He was not sick any more. The elk had made him well.

Littlepoplar: It is a strange story. Has Turtleford a Cree name? Isn't Nay-yohs-qway-yohk the Cree name of Turtleford?

Lonesinger: Nay-yohs-qway-yohk is the Cree name for St. Walburg, not Turtleford.

Littlepoplar: Is there a place around Maidstone called Pouting Hill?

Lonesinger: That place you speak of, Pouting Hill, is southwest of Maidstone. It is a hill the Cree called Pouting Hill.

Littlepoplar: I suppose many of the places with Cree names are lost to us.

Lonesinger: Yes, I agree with you. I knew many places around Biggar with Cree names, but I don't think I could find them now. I would not recognize the places. Kindersley was called Where the Tipi Stands. Also, north of Maidstone, along the river was a place with the same name, Where the Tipi Stands. Did I tell you how Tramping Lake got its name?

Littlepoplar: No, I have never heard how it got its name.

Lonesinger: Long ago, a band of Assiniboin arrived at the lake to attend a Sundance being held there. In the band was a young man whose wife had just died. This young Assiniboin was very lonely and very early next morning, before the sun was up, he climbed a hill beside the lake. He climbed the hill to be alone so he could weep over the loss of his wife. On the crest

of the hill he found a man fast asleep. This man was lying on his stomach, and he was a Blackfoot Indian. The young Assiniboin picked up a large rock, sneaked up to the sleeping enemy and, stepping on the man's shoulders, hit him on the head with the stone, killing him instantly. That is why the lake beside it became known as Stepping Hill. Later, the lake beside it became known as Stepping Lake. But the white men call it Tramping Lake.

In the month of the Frog Moon (April) 1888, Antoine was born on the Red Pheasant reserve, to He Sings Alone and Man Birds. As a boy, Antoine attended school on the reserve for several years.

In the year of 1907, at the age of 19, Antoine married Christina, a daughter of Big Man, and for 10 years they lived on the Red Pheasant reserve where Lonesinger kept a few cows and farmed a small acreage.

In 1917, he visited his mother, who had remarried and lived on Sweet Grass reserve. Lonesinger liked Sweet Grass and the people liked him and a year later he became a member of the band.

Antoine and his wife Christina raised a number of children, including 2 orphaned nephews and a niece.

His wife passed on in July 1957 and Antoine buried her on Red Pheasant.

Now almost 77, Lonesinger lives with his son on Sweet Grass and enjoys good health. He likes telling stories. He is a good storyteller and he likes to talk about old times and days gone by.

In spite of his age, Antoine still likes to sing and often sings songs that were favourites when he was young.

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