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SASKATCHEWAN
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SASKATCHEWAN
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HIGHLIGHTS:

- Mr. Lonesinger was born on the Red Pheasant Reserve in 1888. After school he worked at farming and then moved to the Sweet Grass Reserve. He is a good singer and storyteller. (For biography see IH-052, p.11).
- Story of the acquisition of the Sioux Dance (or Grass Dance) from the bone grass spirits.
- Account of the killing of Cree women by Blackfoot raiders.
- Account of an attack on Cree women by a Sarcee raiding party.

Ka yas. Long ago, the Sioux lived way down south in the state of Wyoming. They were a peaceful people and got along fine with their neighbours till strange people came and made war. The Sioux were driven north till they arrived in South Dakota. Some of the Sioux would go no further and stayed in South Dakota, while the remainder kept going north till they arrived in North Dakota. There they agreed to stay, and they stayed for many summers, camping by a creek named Poplar Creek.

A woman in camp became sick. She was a very beautiful woman, and was respected by all members of the band. As time

went on she became sicker and grew very thin. In vain, her husband brought in medicine men, who could do nothing to help her. When the leaves were beginning to appear on trees, and new grass starting to show, she died. The husband of the dead woman was beside himself with grief, for he dearly loved his wife. As a sign of mourning he wore no clothes; only moccasins on his feet, and covered himself with a blanket. Several days after the death of his wife he left camp and went south. No mention was made as to where he was going or when he would be back. He had taken no food with him, and carried only a knife. After he had been gone for many days, his relatives began to watch for his return.

One day he did return. He was very skinny, and also very weak. In his absence, the people had looked after his lodge. When he arrived people brought food and tobacco to his lodge for him to eat and smoke. People invited him to their lodges for meals and very soon he was as strong as ever and gained weight. But with his wife gone, life was not the same, and one day he again left the camp. After a long time, he again began to get thin and weak. He made up his mind to return to his lodge and die there. Again his people were glad to see him, and brought him their best food. Naturally he was soon strong and well again. Then one day, for the third time, he left camp and went south again.

One day, after he had been gone for many days, he sat down on the prairie, and was weeping over the loss of his wife, when he fell asleep. Not far from where he fell asleep grew many bone grass. Later, as he slept, he saw a bunch of men coming towards him. One was walking ahead of the rest and carried a large bundle. As they came nearer, he noticed the men were naked. Also, he could hear bells the men were wearing. Their bodies were painted yellow. When they got to where he was sitting, the man carrying the bundle told the rest of the men to sit down. After the men were seated, the leader drove four

stakes into the ground, onto which he hung a big drum. Then he called on four boys to sing. The four boys began to sing and the rest of them began to dance. The widower had never heard such good singing and good dancing. He sat spellbound as he listened to the singers and watched the dancers. The leader came to him and told him to watch the dancers very carefully and listen to the singing. And so he sat there and listened and watched as the boys sang and danced. Later when the dancing and singing stopped, the leader came up to him again, and said, "We are here to give you what you just saw. It is the Grass Dance ritual, and is not to be used for entertainment. You see those four women sitting beside the singers. These women are past motherhood and are clean. Therefore they are allowed to help with the singing. You will use this ritual only for making sick people well. As time goes on, this ritual will be performed by other people who will abuse it. We give it to you because you feel so bad over the loss of your wife. Those people you see in the distance are your people. The boy standing apart from the crowd is sick.

Medicine men cannot help him. When you return to your people, you will make him well with this ritual you see here. Now my boys will sing and dance some more so that you may watch and learn the songs and the dances."

The widower sat and looked on as the boys continued to dance and sing. Then he woke up. He opened his eyes just in time to see the dancers and singers throw themselves down in the tall bone grass. Then a puff of blue smoke rose from where they had thrown themselves down, and nothing more.

The widower then got up and started for home. It was now late in the season. The leaves of the trees were turning color, and there was a definite chill in the air. Once again his people were happy to see him, and the old men of the camp asked him not to leave any more. "Yes," he told them. "My trips to the south are finished, and from now on I will stay in camp. But I have a job to do. I know there is a very sick boy in camp, and I want some young boys to come to my lodge, as I have something to teach them." The boys were sent to his lodge and he taught them the songs and the dances he had learned in his dream.

Some time later an old man came to his lodge with an offering of tobacco and asked the widower if he could help his son who was very sick and not expected to recover. The widower called a Grass Dance ritual, and the sick boy was carried into the lodge to watch. The boy soon got well and lived to be an old man. The widower made many sick people well with the Grass

Dance ritual. That is the story of the Grass Dance ritual, as it was told to me by an old Sioux Indian, a long time ago.

Nolin Baptiste and I once went to a dance at Duck Lake. A very large crowd was present, and as usual there were many speakers. They called this dance a powwow. Also, they called a group of people the powwow committee. The place the dance was held was the powwow grounds. This I did not like one bit. A Grass Dance was what they were having and apparently a lot of them did not know it. Later I was called upon to say a few words to the crowd. I am no speaker, but was glad to have a chance to tell the people this was not a powwow, but a Grass Dance. I mentioned to them that when I was a young lad and going to school, I learned that when dogs barked they said, "Powwow." Therefore it would not be appropriate to call our Grass Dance a Pow-wow. After I had spoken, some old-timers came and shook my hand and congratulated me on what I had said. They agreed it was right.

Littlepoplar: You are now going to tell about the women who were slaughtered by the Blackfeet at Killsquaw Lake. The lake is not far from the town of Unity, is it?

Lonesinger: The lake is not far from the town of Unity. The lake itself had water not fit to drink. It is alkali water, but beside the lake are many little hills and in the hills is a

very good spring of fresh water. It was at this spring that the Cree women were attacked and killed by the Blackfoot war party. I have been told that the Cree camp at the time was right in the town of Unity. There is a hospital now where the Indian camp was at the time of the slaughter.

A group of Indian women had left the camp to go to the spring for water. In camp was a Stoney Indian who had a girl friend in camp. His name was Fat Faced Sioux. His girl friend was going with the bunch for water and asked her boy friend to come along.

The women were at the spring, bailing out water, when a band of Blackfeet appeared on a hill a short distance away. The Cree women ran for camp, wailing and howling as they went, with the Blackfeet at their heels. The young Stoney boy, being unarmed, could be of no help. He stayed behind the women, trying in vain to ward off the attackers. His girl friend, being a very fast runner, made it back to camp and reported what had happened. The braves at the Cree camp at once caught their ponies and gave chase. They chased the Blackfeet all the way up to a place the white people now call Winter, and on to the

placed called Macklin. Here they lost the Blackfoot and they returned home without having caught the Blackfoot. Many women were killed and are buried there.

What happened there, it has been said, was the Blackfeet killed the Cree women for revenge. It seems a band of Cree were surprised on the prairie by Blackfoot hunters whom they massacred. A Blackfoot halfbreed named Jim Jack escaped and returned with more Blackfeet. The Cree ran and knew the Blackfeet were on their trail. In the Cree band was Four Sky Thunder's father; his name was Lynx Tail. Also Ni-pay-hat's father, whose name was Iron Eagle.

The Cree ran east from the place where the massacre took place. That place was called Snake Nose Hill. This place has many small sloughs that were full of snakes. These snakes were black in colour and very large. That place is south of the town of Kerrobert.

The little Cree band of raiders ran fast toward the sunrise. All afternoon they ran, and at dusk came over the top of a large hill to find a large lake in front of them with the Blackfoot right behind them. Beside the lake they threw up earthworks and kept the enemy off till it got dark. Later that night someone lit a pipe for Lynx Tail, who smoked the pipe and said a prayer, asking the spirits for help in their time of need. After praying and smoking Lynx Tail announced, "The lake is not very wide and it is not deep. We will cross it. In this way we will fool the enemy who are waiting for daylight to attack us." So the Cree stripped and, carrying their clothes on their heads, crossed the lake. Once across the lake, they headed east to a place called Where It Went Dark. Later they came to a place called Stepping Lake; the

people now call this place Tramping Lake. Then they turned north and came to the place about where the town of Wilkie is now. From there they kept going north. At this place the Blackfeet gave up the chase and headed west on their way home coming upon the women at KILLSQUAW LAKE.

An old woman by the name of Pay-tas-timo-wis (She Comes With The Wind) was present when the women were massacred at KILLSQUAW LAKE. She was a young girl at the time and wanted to go with the rest for water. But her mother, whose name was Oh-chee-chees (Hand), had refused to let her go. It was this old woman, She Comes With The Wind, who told me the story of the massacre at KILLSQUAW LAKE. The Cree Indians still call the place Where the Women Were Killed.

Pay-tas-timo-wis lived to be a very old woman. Perhaps you knew her.

Littlepoplar: Yes, I knew She Comes With The Wind. She died a very old woman when I was very young.

Lonesinger: Do you know there was a similar incident at a place near Saskatoon called Mah-nee-ah-mah-nah-nihk? It is a place that is hilly and has much bush. It was an ideal place to winter, and the Cree used to spend some of their winters there.

This one winter, two bands of Cree wintered there. One band was small, only a few lodges, and the other band was large and had many lodges. One warm morning in March, a group of women from the small camp went some distance away to gather firewood. Some of them carried small axes. While cutting wood they were attacked by Sarcee Indians. The Sarcee came at them, shouting war cries and fiercely shooting their guns in the air. The Sarcee had made a mistake; they had seen only the small camp and thought they could kill the women, then take the camp. They had not seen the large camp below the hill. When they fired their guns in the air the women ran to the large camp. When the Sarcee raiders saw the large camp they turned and ran, but too late. They had given themselves away when they had fired their guns in the air, and the Cree were ready for them. It so happened the Cree were getting ready to go on a hunt and had just finished cleaning their guns. They gave chase and after the fighting, one Sarcee was alive. He was allowed to live so he could bring news of what happened to his people. All the others were dead.

My mother told me this story. It was told to her by a woman who was present when the Sarcee first attacked the women. The place where this happened is called Mah-nee-ah-mah-nah-nihk. But some old people still call it Where Many Sarcee Were Slain.

Littlepoplar: I don't think we have enough tape left to tell another story. Perhaps you could sing a few songs that the

young people have never heard.

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