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JIM KANIPITETEW
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HIGHLIGHTS:

- Description of traditional Indian ceremonies and the changes which have taken place in them. Mr. Kanipitetew is concerned that people are no longer following the strict rituals of the past.

POWWOW WORKSHOP 4

JIM KANIPITETEW:

I am very sorry to say I couldn't get here yesterday when you started. I will start as far back as I can remember and tell what I have seen at these dances. My father started me at this dance and taught me all he knew about it. I was involved for a few years before being selected to be a server. It was my father who taught me how to go about doing the things at that dance. My father always had a drum and this he taught me too on how to go about its peace pipe and drum at a Grass dance. My father always told me to take it easy. He used to tell me, "This is life, this Grass dance. Have great respect for it." And not too long ago I started to notice that great change taking place at these dances. There's no more of this pipe ceremony as was done before each dance was to start. And long ago the old men were scared to let women come to the Grass dances, especially if they were not well. And if they did come they used to sit very quiet, where these dances used to be held.

After I quit being a server my older brother took my place and this is about the time my father chose me to go with him to where they used to choose these Musko-kana. (These were people

selected to do the "Kettle Dance" and they were used for servers when a person has promised to make a dance.) And whenever these people dance the women were never allowed near there. And this is where I finally got to. My older brother took my place as server. And this is what I remember about these Grass dances. And as for the singers they used to own everything needed to be a singer. These people were to be always first before any dance was to start. And when they got in the servers who had songs of their own and also the owner of the drum used to sing. They also used to have a doorman; they always had a doorman long ago. And as time went on my father took sick and before he died he gave me his drum and told me, "Son, always take great care of this drum, don't just throw it away when you want to part with it. And if you ever want to give it to someone else show him what I taught you." So while I was keeping this drum hanging up, every so often it used to get pounded when hanging there. When this used to happen I used to put on a feast and invite all the old people to come and say prayers and have a pipe ceremony. These people knew about things like that (like the drum at times would get pounded four times while hanging on the wall). And after some time my younger brother Charlie Chief asked me if I can start keeping the drum. He said it was his turn to keep our father's drum. So I told him, it was up to him. I told him to take it easy, "Always keep it," is what our father told us. And he took it home and kept it.

Some time after that while he was keeping the drum a bunch of drunks went to his place. They took the drum off the wall as a drunken person will do anything, but before they even hit the drum it split in half. So he came to my place and told me about it and asked me what we should do. First I told him he didn't use the drum the right way. That drum was not for drunks. We put this drum away in a clean place and said prayers. This was the drum that our father left us, and that's what happened that time.

And then lately I'm surprised at our leader for the way he conducts these Grass dances. I see it done different. My father used to say that before any dance was to start everything has to be prayed for including the earth. This is so we won't put a curse on our loved ones - our children, our grandchildren, our relatives. But now this leader that took over my position as leader for Grass dancing won't do this. He took my place as leader when the band had a meeting and the reason was that I couldn't read or write while this Morris he can do both (read and write). So they said he will run everything from now on, and that's the time I was let go by my band. And this is when I noticed that the dance is not the same anymore. There's too much fooling around and people are forgetting, this is a big thing. Pipe ceremonies are not held and prayers are not said before they start. And this is what our dance leader is supposed to do. He never gives an old man some spiritual cloth to say prayers. There's nothing like this goes on now. They just start. And now I see things go a little farther. I start to see women dancing. This is what our elders used to be afraid of in the old days and even the

last couple of years I see women singing at these dances. This was not done long ago. The women were not even allowed to be on the dance floor and this is what I have seen and been taught by my elders. A lot of you people here know how this Grass dance was like a while back. And the same way with the Round dance. A person putting up these dances did it on purpose, this is life. "He might have promised on account of sickness in the family or something of this nature." The elders used to say prayers and have pipe ceremony before each start of a dance. There are songs especially for these too, same way as in Grass dances. The songs are all there; same thing for the servers. Also the owner of the drum, they all have their own songs. And the singers in the old days never just dropped the drum when the dance was over. There was a song they used to sing before they put the drum down. All that now is gone today. We never see it being done this way anymore. And this is why I always say prayers for my children and grandchildren the ones that are dancing the Grass dances.

A young man who is my grandson went to a lot of powwows dancing. One time he told me he was going to quit dancing as he thought that Grass dancing was going more crazy. He told me, "Grandad, I'm quitting this dancing before I put a curse on my brothers and sisters who are growing well right now. I might harm them some way if I make a mistake." So I told him it was up to him, this is what I've been trying to say all the time. So this is what I've seen happening to this Grass dance.

And another thing about these various other dances and traditions, what these elders kept most respected and most sacred was the Sundance. When a person was making a Sundance he had to go at it very easy and not rush through it. My father always told me to take it easy. "Don't overdo anything and don't be short of doing what should be done. If you overdo something you won't see where you put a curse on yourself, your children, your grandchildren, and your relatives. The one that depends on you will be hurt, hurt in some way." My father told me this will happen if I overdo something and he told me to never let a drunken person to enter the Sundance tent, never give the pipe to a drunk, as it is no use to give a drunk the pipe. A drunken person's prayer is never answered, his word is no good. But take it easy (slow) never leave your Sundance tent. When it's made for you, don't leave it till it's all over. And never eat while you're making this dance till you are finished. My father used to tell me that these things will die out gradually in the future as money is going to take the place of everything. I see that now today. I see lots of these people nowadays making these Sundances. After they have danced one day, they go home at 6 o'clock to go and eat. And to my way of thinking this is no way to ask our Maker for life. If I'm making a Sundance I stay till its over. I don't go to eat. I won't starve to death if I don't eat for 2 days. Long ago the old men didn't eat for 4 days while making a Sundance as they were asking for life for every creature on the face of the earth. As soon as they moved to the site of the Sundance, they didn't eat till it was over four days later. But today it's

altogether different and this is true. Even today some of these Sundances let white men into the tent to take pictures. I saw this done at Big White Fish Lake - a white man asked if it was all right to take picture and the maker of the dance agreed and this is what the elders were afraid of. This is overdoing the dance. I was not very happy myself of what I see there. But I guess he was depending on himself, I thought. (These people that make these Sundances or Rain dances they can do just so much and it is believed that if they overdo these things, they put a curse on themselves or one of their family).

Last summer I went to Frog Lake to a Sundance as I go all over for these dances, wherever I think I can help my fellow

Indians. When I got to Frog Lake they were already started making the Sundance tent, they were ready to raise the main pole. (This pole stands right in the middle of the tent and its called the King Pole - Okemow-atik.)

My nephew came to my tent to get me, he never even offered me a spiritual cloth. This was one thing the elders used to do and it is supposed to be done when you want someone to say prayers for you. But this man just came and got me, he gave me the pipe and told me to say prayers for them while they raised the pole. I took the pipe anyway and said prayers while they raised the pole. And again after I got to my tent, one of the servers came and told me I was wanted at the Sundance tent. Again he never gave me anything. (These people making the Sundance, it was a custom to give a spiritual cloth to these old men they depended on to say prayers for them.)

And again I was given the pipe to say prayers for when we make the little hole in the ground. (This hole was made inside the Sundance tent and no one else was supposed to go near there except for the server. This hole was used for burning sweetgrass.)

And when this hole was finished the elders never let anyone put his hand in the hole. The only one allowed there was the server and when he had to clean out the hole he had to use a feather. This was very respected by the elders. When we were finished doing this we moved to the side and sat down. After a while I saw a server coming with a bunch of crocuses and this Sundance maker was standing there and he told this server to spread these crocuses over the hole we just made and this is what the server did. After the server had finished spreading the crocuses the leader stepped into the hole with his hands up in the air and he was saying prayers. I can't explain the feelings I had after I seen this man do that as this is what the elders were scared of. This was overdoing. This was supposed to be respected and not overdone.

After I went home and was just finished eating, one other old man from Hobbema came to my tent and asked me what I thought of what we just witnessed. He asked me what I thought about this man making the Sundance. I told him, "I saw him the same way as you did," and he said, "That's why I came to see you about

and ask you." "The way I see this man sure gives me heavy thinking. I am really thinking hard as this is what our elders used to tell us. Don't overdo anything." "Yes," he said, "This is very true. When that little hole in the Sundance tent was finished it was very respected by our elders. The only person that can work around there was the server when the hole gets dirty he used a feather to clean it out. And this man that was making this Sundance stood right inside the hole. This is overdoing what was taught us. I wonder if this man can help

himself. Maybe he figures he is strong enough to defend himself if he puts the curse on himself." And this is what we both thought and so we said good night and he went home. I got up early next morning. I was starting my morning fire; I saw this big cloud starting up from the west. I woke up my family and told them a storm was coming up. And this Sundance maker had picked four men from Hobbema to be headmen at the dance. And the main leader (Headman) was blind. And a person who is blind cannot do just what should be done at these dances. As everything has to be just so. And a blind man can't do it because he cannot see. Also at a pipe ceremony he won't be able to do the right thing. I was watching this old man untying some tobacco and he dropped it. This was the headman, but what can he do when he couldn't see nothing. And this was what our elders were afraid of. Always to get the elders with the most knowledge about these things. And about this time the storm was coming, hit us and it was pretty bad with lots of thunder and lightning. And then the headmen started to run out of the Sundance tent and head for their homes. So after a while I went down to the Sundance tent. Three servers were there - Pete Waskakat, George Fox from Sweet Grass and my son. So I told the server to light a pipe and give it to the Sundance maker. Why did these headmen all run home when the storm started? When they were depended on by the Sundance maker to say prayers so that everthing would be all right. So give the pipe to the Sundance maker. I was surprised at these servers for staying at the Sundance tent all through the storm and when the server handed the pipe to the Sundance maker, he took it and got up from where he was sitting and came over to where I was. And he gave me this pipe and said, "My uncle, I can't do nothing as I didn't do right at the start." I said, "I thought your grandfather taught you these things." Also I told him I couldn't do anything. "How can I do anything when you are young, your wishes are strong and you are afraid to do it. But I'll smoke the pipe with you." So after we smoked I called the servers to sing with me. I said prayers that time to the sun in. my song. And the storm died down and the day started to be nice So I went to my tent again and as I was eating I see these headmen starting to head back to the Sundance tent. They were just going back now the day was nice again. So this Sundance maker overdid what was supposed to have been done and this blind man I talked about dropping the tobacco - he went back to his own reserve and he made a Sundance. After the dance was over his daughter suddenly took sick and died. And this was the curse; this was what the elders always said to be very careful doing these things. Don't overdo anything at a Sundance. And another one at Frog Lake lost his wife after he overdid

something when making a Sundance. The elders always said, "Just do so much and no more." And this is what the elders

used to tell these younger people, to be very careful because a man can't defend himself. Never laugh at a man making a pipe ceremony no matter how poor he is. When he's saying his prayers help him through your mind. And this is what we were told ourselves by our elders. This is very deeply loved. And about the "Smoking Tent" (This dance was put on four times by a person who is going to make a Sundance). At these dances I was always tending pipes. A server can't get up while this ceremony is going on till its over. A server just sits there and looks after pipes. Last summer I went to one of these ceremonies up north. I didn't see this being done as the server was all over the place and the pipes weren't being attended properly. And this is not the way the elders taught (took it). The server was supposed to sing when it was his turn. To tell of what was told to him. Today there is nothing. I see this myself. That money is taking the place of everything. Today we do everything in a hurry just so it gets done.

And the Chicken dance (If a person promised a dance such as this, it was usually done in the spring of the year or in the fall. These people didn't want to hold these dances inside of houses as they were not clean enough. They usually had them on clean ground.) I was at these kind of ceremonies four times. I was afraid as I went to these ceremonies but I seen my grandchildren got up from there. I tried to do just what I was told - not to do too much and not to do too little. And this is what I try to do. One time we had this ceremony for a man who's here now and it seems we helped him of what he asked for. This is what a person gets out of it if he does it right at the various ceremonies. The Round dance and all the other ceremonies I've worked at. All of these I've been a server all of these ceremonies for the past 42 years. I gave my son my place as server and I thought I'd take it easy. Then this Sundance was given to me by some higher power and this I will do in the near future. So I'm not taking it easy as this is a real big doing. Really big. A man making a Sundance prays for the whole world. Our children and grandchildren, he's not supposed to let anybody or anything get him mad. Or he's not supposed to use alcohol. He's supposed to try and do everything that's right while preparing for this dance. He's not supposed to listen to something that's no good. He's supposed to use only kindness towards his fellow men. And this is what I see today. I am going to put on a Sundance at my reserve this coming summer. I'm very busy right now as people come and get me for a feast or food offering and they want me there.

Like right now I haven't been home since I left here. As one young man came and got me to go to Sweet Grass for a food

offering, feast. But I'm not sorry, going all over like this. I like to think that I'm helping someone by going when they

come and get me by saying prayers with them. And whenever people depend on me I try to do what they want. Sometimes I can't do anything at home for myself by being away too much. Only yesterday I had to buy a load of wood for my wife. They cost me \$10.00 but my wife had to go home so I don't mind as long as I'm helping some people out. I like to help these workers here at the Centre. I know what heavy job they have on their shoulders and this is why I'm here too. If there's anything I can say that will help people that I would try and help all I can. And so I'm very sorry that I wasn't with you when you started yesterday. The prayers you said when you started this workshop I'm with them. And if we all pray together and ask for the good things we need, something good for our children, grandchildren. Where we can teach our children, our grandchildren, the good things in life. What we call Indian teaching. And we have to go together, have respect for one another. If we started gossiping against one another our prayers won't be answered. But if we think right and use our minds right we will get what we ask for. This is what our forefathers used to say, "If you are gossiping against your fellow man or if you think too much of yourself, this is where whatever you ask for will end. But what is good is when you get up in the morning and you go outside. You feel and know that the Great Spirit is everywhere."

The elders used to say there will come a time in the future when a young man will hold a book in his hand and teach you and will tell you all what's in that book. And as soon as he puts the book down, right away he'll forget about God. And I used to wonder where these old people get to know these things. Today we see that now. I'm getting old now so I see the change. When I go outside and look around right away I think about the Great Spirit and say a prayer, this is the Indian prayer book, this great earth. An Indian doesn't need a book to pray by, the prayer comes right from the heart. The elders said this. This all along what their teachings were; this is what I fall back on what the elders used to say; this is the only thing. We have to do what they did in order to have things like they did, to be able to run things the right way. And these we should never forget.

The last time I was here I told two of the workers here if they would be willing to help this big feast that was held at our reserves. And I never got no answer from them. I thought about this all the way to North Battleford, about these people not giving me a definite answer. I asked for \$25.00. So finally

I thought I'll do it myself. I took meat and whatever was needed and asked my wife to cook the stuff. Then I took this stuff over to where they were having the feast and gave a spiritual cloth and pipe to one of the elders to say a prayer for these workers in Saskatoon. This I did because I know the job these people are doing is trying to help the Indian people. Because I know what these people here are working at, I don't want to let them down. Whenever they want me here I try my best to get here. Even if I have something to do at home I

leave that behind for a while. Just like I told you, my wife didn't have any wood but I still left. I bought her a load of wood and that's why you see me here now. There will be something else I'll want to talk about later on. For now I'll just say a greeting to each of you.

(End of Interview)

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