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MOURNING RITES  
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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:

- Self-mutilation as sign of mourning.
- Punishments for adultery.
- Death customs.
- What happens to pipes and bundles when their owners die.
- Loss of old mourning rituals and customs.

Okay, strange stories are told; old stories are told. These lives that are illustrated don't exist any more. Now the people, the Indian people, are all the same. The people that live in a row that speak Blackfoot - the South Peigans, the Bloods and the Blackfoot - they all live the same way, they speak the same language. These three tribes all have the same language. There is another tribe who is called Our Tipi Liner, the North Peigans, the fourth tribe. They speak the same language.

Now the way they are related, the way they miss each other - along the Belly River, there is a coulee called Greasy Buffalo Pound. The Greasy Bull Horn Coulee on the Blood Buffalo Pound connects with the Belly River. On the west side from where reserve is called Greasy Buffalo, the Greasy Buffalo Pound and the Belly River connect, a man lived. His name in Blackfoot is Striped Wolf. He had a child who was ill and the old people were doctoring the child. The child was a big boy. Right now he is older than me. I (First Rider) know him. He started to get sick and he was having treatments. Striped Wolf kept giving away his good properties. He was paying the shamans.

He (Striped Wolf) hears of Suns\* and he hires them but the boy kept on getting worse. He had another son which is older. The child was at the verge of death in the evening of this day. Striped Wolf told the people, "I have you all these things. I really gave them to your people but try hard so that my son will last up to until morning. May I stay with my son for one more day." They stayed up all night for him and he was doctored all night. The child died when the morning star rose in the east.

Striped Wolf was not mourning at all; he was just adoring his son. His wife was mourning and the others, their relatives, and Striped Wolf's mother was mourning. I (First Rider) was there. I saw him (Striped Wolf) when he took a knife, a big knife; the knife was heavy. I saw him put the knife in his left sleeve. The child was not laid in box yet, he was just already wrapped. Coffins were bought just lately. The dead were put in homemade coffins; the coffins are made of boards.

He (Striped Wolf) went out when he took the knife and I (First Rider) ran out after him. There was a wood pile about fifty paces away and there was a log by the wood pile which is used for chopping wood on. When he got to the log he looked at me. He told me to go away. I refused to go away; again he told me to go. He knew then that the people will come out. He took

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\*People with supernatural powers are called Suns in Blackfoot. the knife, he held the knife on the first top joint of his little finger on his left hand and he folded his other three fingers. His little finger was the only one that was stretched out. He held the knife on his finger; his finger was underneath the sharp edge of the knife. He banged his finger with the knife on the log and I saw his finger drop away and I screamed. I picked up the finger.

My father Dog Child came running. They took a sinew and they tied the finger of Striped Wolf with it and they put some medicine on it. They said, "Don't tell anyone because he'll be jailed for that." The finger of Striped Wolf was put in the coffin beside the child; the child was buried with it. That's how they mourn. Striped Wolf had his hand in a sling. He doesn't wear moccasins, he just wears a loin cloth. He has no shirt, he unbraided his hair, he doesn't paint his face. He just wears his robe. He'll walk even where the ground is thorny while he is walking around crying. He wants to be in

pain. He doesn't eat when he is fed because he pitied his child. It was the same with his wife; she got very poor the way she lived because their child was dead.

It was said Striped Wolf said, "I will not go to a gathering of people in four years because my son is not going to be around." So that is how the people of the past love each other. The reason why the people of the past are like that - a woman will have a baby, she will wrap it up, she will raise it with her breasts. That is why the people of the past really love each other; that is why families don't scatter. And relatives, they live together in clans. I (First Rider) did that too. Me and my father never parted until he died. That is what Real People\* life is.

I also saw the people of the past; she was my grandmother. She is an old woman. The man's name is Bull Horn, his wife's Under Making Noise. The old man died; the old woman had nobody to look after her so she went away to mourn. I (First Rider) went after the old woman. As I got to my grandmother I couldn't go near my grandmother. She stuck a stick into her muscle near her shoulder. The stick must be about one foot long. There was another one below. She did the same to her other arm. She stuck a stick in her shoulder and she stuck another stick into her muscle. They stick out from the other side. And she stuck two sticks into each of her calves. Where she didn't skewer herself, she broke some rocks and they are sharp. She started to slash her body with them. I couldn't get near to my grandmother on account of the way I saw her. There were blood clots where she sat. I didn't think that my grandmother will be still alive. As I looked at my grandmother she was hitting

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\*Native people are called Real People in Blackfoot. her left little finger with a broken stone which was sharp; she chopped off her finger. The slashes in her body were all swollen. As I helped my grandmother up she couldn't walk so I ran home. Mother and the others ran to her. My mother took the sticks that she skewered herself with. They went home. They hitched up a team; she was laid in a wagon and she was taken home and I believe that she never ate for thirty days after she laid down. She just lived on broth; she just drinks broth; she lived on that. She determined to kill herself. She is one of the women that put up Holy Sun Lodges, those first women that put up Holy Sun Lodges. If she puts up a Holy Sun Lodge by her first husband and if he dies she will never get married again; that is why they lived that way. The woman is one of those love living people; she is my grandmother. Now when her body got all healed up she got different. If somebody scares her she start talking nonsense but she doesn't say any obscene words. She will say miserable things. She will say "tumor head." These are her words. Some women will use obscene words. I will tell you why they are obscene words. The father is always getting after his daughter, telling her what to do. His daughter will not have her own way. The girl will get married and her husband will not be so strict on her the way her parents will be watching her so that she will not do wrong. The father is trying to get his daughter to sponsor a Holy Sun

Lodge. When she sponsors a Holy Sun Lodge her father will put up all the payments because he raised her good.

Now in new life a white man will want to have his child to be educated to go up to grade twelve. The Indians lived this kind of life. They live to sponsor Holy Sun Lodges. If the girl gets dishonest and if her husband catches her in the act she reaches death. Her husband will kill her. If her husband doesn't kill her, her brothers will kill because they'll be ashamed of her. If her brothers doesn't kill her, her husband will cut off her nose, he will make her eat her own excrement, and he will make her drink her urine. As her nose is already cut off then they are push out of the lodge. That's the punishment for women that are dishonest to their husbands.

Other women are told by their husbands to behave and if they don't listen the woman's ear will be cut off. She has a crazy life, that is the reason why her ear was cut off. When they get to be like that, when an ear is cut off and if they live, we just clap our hands at them and they get scared and they say obscene words because their noses were cut off on account of obscenity and they use obscene words. Other people laugh at them for using obscene words. A woman that severed her body on account of her deceased relative will use obscene words when she gets scared. That is the difference in life.

It's very confusing the way they carried on with the Indian life. If a man gets into the same offense, he'll be caught at a tipi. He will pull out the tipi pegs at the side where the woman has her bed. He will try to crawl in and lay beside the sleeping woman and he will be caught. He will be tied to poles with his hand and legs tied apart. He is stripped naked; there is nothing on him. His face will be painted with excrement the way the Medicine Pipe owners paint their faces. A whistle will be tied to his mouth with the string that is tied to the whistle. It will be in close to the throat so that he will not break it with his teeth.

His hands and feet are tied and he is braced up and the men will put some ashes in their rectums and they hold them there. Then they will sing their war songs and they dance up to the offender. The man's head is also tied and when he wants to talk the whistle will blow. The men will fart on his face and the ashes will spray on his face. None of his relatives will go up to him because his relatives are ashamed of him. When they are turned loose they go away. Some never come back; they die out in the wilderness because they were embarrassed. That is how the first people operate.

This occurred; it's the same thing. This woman's nose was cut off with a broken stone and whenever she sees a broken stone she will say, "That stone is dangerous. Throw it away." She is scared of broken stones because her nose was cut off with a broken stone.

Now it occurs a woman's lover. She is a married woman and she is after another man. The people were moving camps to the Sun

Dance and it was raining. The husband told his wife, "Go and get some wood." Finally the man told her, "I will go with you to get some wood." So they went and the man told his wife, "Let's get the wood from that Holy Sun Lodge." The woman told him, "There are a lot of wood around. We'll pick those." Finally the woman agreed to get the wood of the Holy Sun Lodge. The woman told her husband, "Go around that way." The woman remembered where she stood to watch the performance inside the Holy Sun Lodge. Her lover stood behind her and they were crowded against one of the posts and her lover's face was pressed against the post and his facial paint stained the post and it was still there on the post.

The woman missed her lover and she was with her husband and she had children but she missed her lover the most. She climbed up to the centre pole, she tied a rawhide rope around her neck and she tied the rope onto the pole and she sang at the top of the centre pole. And I (First Rider) know the song. Her lover's name is Wolf Shoe. The man was on the other side. Suddenly he

heard his wife sing. He told his wife, "Pity me. Pity our children. He is killed and we will know about it just the two of us. He is your lover. Pity me. Don't kill yourself." When her husband was about to climb up, she jumped and she was suspended in midair with the rope. Her throat was cut with the rope so she killed herself. The man climbed up and he cut the rope but she was dead.

It's the same thing when we missed someone. A woman jumped off over a cliff because she missed her lover. There is a woman. She is still alive; she is an old woman now. Her name is Blond Woman (Mrs. Wadsworth). Her mother died. She took care of her mother while she was sick. People were doctoring her but she never got well and finally she died. The woman's husband took care of the old woman; she was taken to a burial place. When she (Blond Woman) went out to mourn she did the same thing. She broke a stone on another stone and she started to slash her arms and her calves with the sharp edge of the broken stone. Her arms and legs were bloody. Nobody went to her. She went to sleep for loss of blood; then the people went to her. They thought that she was dead but she was not dead. They took her home and they treated her wounds and when they tell her, "How do you feel?" She would say, "I feel fine." She rather be in pain because her mother died.

The reason why people don't bury the dead, they are put up on a scaffold, whenever a woman or a man wants to see a dead relative he/she will go to see the dead relative. He will be satisfied even if he just sees the bones. That is the reason why the people of the past don't bury the dead. It is sad thing when a woman's husband dies. Even if she is a young girl her hair will be cut short up to the ears and strips of rawhide will be cut and they will be tied on each of her wrists and on each of her ankles and around her neck. So there are five strips of deer hide. When these five strips of deer hide all break off - sometimes it takes five years before they all break

off - and then she will get married again. She will not get married if her hair is still short; she will get married when her hair grows long. So that is what the first life is. Today girls will cut their hairs real short and the old people see one they'll think that she is a widow.

Okay, imitations and news that we hear are just being told. I saw some of the pipes that went to the burial place and it was taken back; a Horn Society Bundle that went to the burial place and then it was remade. I saw a Beaver Pipe; the owner's name is Bull Back Fat. This man's name is Night Caller. I saw those they were brought back from the burial place. Okay, I

know a Beaver Pipe it is called Hair Lock Pipe. The man that constructed the Hair Lock Pipe gave it away. The wife of the man that he gave the pipe to died and he threw it away. He cut the tails off of the beaver pelts that were in the bundle and he sold them. A different man took the pipe with some small items in the bundle and now that pipe was sold to a white man.

Okay, the Beaver Pipe that I saw it was Bull Back Fat's pipe. Bull Back Fat started to get ill; he was old. When he got to be very sick he told his relatives, "Take my pipe." His son-in-law said, "No, I will not take it. Beaver Bundle owners are poor; they don't have horses. That is the reason why I am not taking the pipe." Nobody took the pipe when Bull Back Fat died and he was buried and a small house was built with boards. All his belongings were put in it and the pipe. And Night Caller took it from there. When he took it he said, "I pity the pipe and now I took it." He built a sweat lodge for it because he took it from where a dead man was laid in the grave.

So he (Night Caller) built a sweat lodge. The attendants were old men. The heavenly songs were just sung in the sweat lodge; the sweat lodge songs were not sung. The heavenly songs were sung; the pipe was purified after the songs were sung. It was not unwrapped, it was just cleansed the way it was and was ochred. It wasn't ochred all over it was just daubed with ochre here and there. It was unwrapped again not long after that. It was unwrapped in a sweat lodge and this time the sweat lodge songs were sung - the Beaver Bundle sweat lodge songs. The sweat lodge offering songs are different. The sweat lodge songs were sung, the pipe was unwrapped and it was repurified and then it was ochred because it went to the burial place with its owner.

Later on the pipe was opened again and they had a dance with it. At this point another man asked for the pipe and it was given to him. It was not given to him at this time, it was transferred to him many holy days after. The pipe was not transferred the way it was supposed to be transferred. It was transferred to the man in half a day. He didn't pay very much on it because it was taken from a dead man.

Okay, the other bundles that I heard about, this pipe that is called Shaggy Pipe kept on being taken to burial places. It

came from the ghosts. People that are captured with the Shaggy Pipe will not refuse it, but it occurs people that purchase the Shaggy Pipe don't walk around too long and they die. That is why people don't want to take it. The Shaggy Pipe was taken to a burial place with its owner and another man took it. The ghosts captured him with it. When he was awakened he said, "Why did you wake me up? I was captured with the Shaggy Pipe."

The man went to a bush on the hillside and the ghosts transferred the pipe to him and he took it back but it went to the burial place again. Stories were told me about the other Beaver Bundle Pipes. The same thing happened. It went to the burial place, the owner was laid to rest with it. A man performs miracles with his pipe. Nobody took it when he died; it was placed beside him. It was taken back after he was with it for four days. The same thing was done to it. A sweat lodge was built for it. That has a black facial painting. Not many days after, another sweat lodge was built for the pipe and it was purified and it was rewrapped up.

The relatives sponsored a dance with the pipe in memory of their dead relative. The other man considered it holy. He said, "I will take this pipe. The owner of the pipe is my relative. I will keep it and I will use it." He said, "Capture me with it." The pipe was transferred in the regular way. The transferal lasted for four days. After the transferal, the pipe was wrapped up for the man. Not many days after he opened his pipe again.

The Peigans, the Blood and the Blackfoot - the Beaver Pipes are all the same but they are used in three different ways. The Blackfoot Indians use them for tobacco planting. The Bloods just sponsor dances with the pipe; they didn't use it for tobacco planting. The South Peigans didn't use the pipes for tobacco planting and they didn't sponsor dances with them, they just perform miracles with them. I saw the woman that went into the beavers that held a dance. She performed a miracle with the Beaver Pipe. She is a woman; her name is Last Calf. So that is the difference in the pipes, the Blackfoot use them for tobacco planting; the Bloods sponsor dances with the pipes; the South Peigans perform miracles with them.

Now a pipe - I illustrated this before, how it is and the facial paint. I always see the Beaver Pipes are transferred for four days. The recipient will not do what he wants during the four days. He will be initiated into everything that he is going to do and the woman will also be initiated into what she is going to do. That is what the Beaver Pipes are. There are Medicine Pipes that also went to burial places; some went for good. I also saw a pipe that went to a burial place; it was taken apart. The Black Seizer Pipe also went to the burial place.

I (First Rider) saw Steel, this old man Steel. I saw him when he reconstructed the Black Seizer's Pipe. Steel said, "The Black Seizer Pipe went to the grave with its owner and now it will be reconstructed." So the Black Seizer Pipe was

reconstructed. When it was transferred, after the

reconstructed pipe was finished, a sweat lodge was built for it and it was made holy and it was purified. The Black Seizer Pipe was purified and it was made holy, then it was transferred. The recipient's name is Many Fingers. That is what these transferable artifacts are.

If a person loves his sacred bundle he will be buried with it. Some are taken back and some are reconstructed; that is why there are a lot of pipes that are the same. An item will be transferred to a person from the bundle. It might be a lynx tail or the tripods or the hide drum will be transferred to him. The society will have a dispute or one of them will die and the person will rebuild the item that was transferred to him from the bundle and he will carry on with it.

Some are thrown away; some are taken back. There are Beaver Pipes that are given away free, but the pipe will be transferred to the person later on. They are given away in different ways. A Beaver Pipe will be transferred to a person and when it is transferred to him it's his own. He will do with it what he wants. Some pipes are given away at dances. The person who is given a pipe is the one who will build a sweat lodge. I saw a pipe that was opened at a burial place and the bird skins and the animal skins were taken. There are two pipes, the secondary pipe and the main pipe. Which one will a person take, the secondary pipe or the main pipe?

The things that were taken out from the bundle are put together again to make a bundle and transferred again and people at group smoking ceremonies will sing of these pipes. I saw a pipe at a burial place. This occurred on the Blackfoot Reserve, west of Cardston. There is a shack. It is called the Ghost House and there is a Black Covered Pipe in there. I saw that too. All these pipes go to burial places and then some are taken back from the burial place. Even if the pipe doesn't belong to the man that took it back from a burial place a sweat lodge will be built and the man's face will be painted for the pipe. So this kind of business doesn't exist anymore. Recently, we considered the sacred artifacts real holy and we started to lose them again. Nobody made a use of them any more and now we are operating with very few bundles.

I heard that the Horn Society headdresses were being transferred and the Horn Society headdresses are then remade. The owners of some of the Horn Society Bundles died and the bundles are of no use any more so they are offered to the sun. Now the transferable artifacts are just used for play; they are used for dancing. This occurred. A man wept around the camp circle with a Medicine Pipe. I (First Rider) saw a Medicine Pipe that was used to offer a smoke to the Horns and I saw

another Medicine Pipe. They danced with it around the camp circle and I (First Rider) participated in the dance. The Medicine Pipe that the man wept around the camp with, went and offered it to the Great Spirit. That is why a lot of the pipes

have disappeared.

The secondary pipe and the main pipe are two pipes. The pipes were transferred separate. The two owners had their pipes in one bundle and they had dispute over something and they took their pipes out from the bundle and each one remade the Medicine Pipe and that made two pipes of the same make. That is why they ride on horseback with the pipes. That is why there are Medicine Pipe owners that ride on horseback with their pipes. That is why that there are people that ride with Medicine Pipes on a horse and travois.

The Medicine Pipe and the Beaver Pipe have the same facial paintings and the pipes all existed. Every transferal goes on by pipes. Even the Pigeon Society offer smokes and the All Brave Dog Society start off with a pipe. The Black Seizers even have a pipe and now Indian life operated with a pipe. A pipe bowl is taken from the ground, a pipe stem is taken from the ground; and they are taken back to the ground. There are Medicine Pipe dogs (Medicine Pipe horses). They are called Medicine Pipe dogs. Nobody will ride that horse. It belongs to the medicine owner alone. There are also Medicine Pipe saddles and they also go to the burial place with the owners. If a Medicine Pipe owner has no saddle he will say, "I will take that dead man's saddle," and he will go to the place and he will take the saddle.

The Medicine Pipe horse's tail bobbed and its mane was cut off. It was the woman's husband's horse. She led the horse around crying. A person that has no pity, who is lively, approaches the woman and he helps her to mourn. He was walking up to the woman who was sitting there with the horse. He cried harder when he got to her. He went to the woman and he kissed her and then he took the rope and walked away with the horse crying. And that's his horse. A man's best horses will all be killed by his grave. His horses will surround him. The other people will take the other horses. That's taking property from the dead and now it is not done anymore.

A dead person's property is kept clean; it will not be mistreated. The house that a person died in will not be evacuated; it will be always nice and clean. In the past a man will die in a house. It will be a log cabin. The mud that it is plastered with will be all knocked in. It's not a house any more. The reason why it is like that it's because the Indian religion still exists. Now we do not fear a house that a man

died in. It's because Indian religion doesn't exist any more. That's what made everything change.

Okay, we don't mourn for each other any more since the Beaver Pipes and the Medicine Pipes don't exist any more. The people of the past will dress poorly for their dead ones. A Medicine Pipe owner's face will be painted in a Medicine Pipe facial paint and a Beaver Pipe owner's face will be painted in a Beaver Pipe facial paint so as his children and his relatives.

There is no singer for a Medicine Pipe. There is no singer for a Beaver Pipe. What is going to be used to cleanse a dead person, there is none.

Now when a person is at the verge of death the relatives will go and buy black material and a lot of liquor to drink. As soon as the dying person's eyes turn over, the relatives will all be wearing black scarfs over their heads and they'll all start drinking. That's a disrespect for the dead. The people of the past will miss each other with the Beaver Pipes, Medicine Pipes and their Horn Society Bundles. People will walk around crying with a Medicine Pipe robe or a Beaver Bundle robe, what is it. They walk around crying with a Medicine Pipe headpiece or a Beaver Bundle headpiece, how many days do mourners lie on the prairie? Today no one lies on the prairie. A person that is laying some place we'll just think he is passed out, he is drunk. So that is what life is. And now I am First Rider. I tell old stories.

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