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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:

- Detailed description of plant remedies.
- Story of Striped Walker who killed a Cree.
- The difference between medicines that are discovered and those that are revealed in dreams.

George First Rider: Okay, I am going to tell a story again. I am going to tell a story of - as we don't have a doctor, a white doctor - the medicines that the Indians use, the medicines that we use. I am going to illustrate those, the kind that are used. It's just the discovery of the people. No one had a vision, they just instructed each other how to use them.

Here is how some grass are used. But they are different and they have a sweet scent. Those are called Fragrant Smell. They have a little red color on the base; they are recognized by that. They grow among swamp grass. They are not in

bunches; they are here and there. We pick them up and they are tied at the bottom where they are plucked. They are held at the base and they are tied with a string. The people of the past tied them with rawhide thongs and they braced them and they also tied them at the other end of the braid. A lazy person will just tie the braid into a knot at one end. They are dried and they are cut at the bottom because they have dirt on them. That is thrown away and just the grass is kept and dried. It is used in this way. We'll say if a person died, if he dies suddenly, we burn the incense with it and we'll put our hand over the smudge. We'll put our hand on his mouth and we'll be blowing on it at the same time and finally the person will start breathing. Fragrant Smell is brewed for a person that has hemorrhage. Anything that has a bitter taste is not brewed for a person that has hemorrhage. Something that is tender will be brewed for him to drink. The Fragrant Smell are brewed and the person will drink that. That's the person that is spitting blood; he is the one that has hemorrhage.

Okay, here's something that is also different. They also grow among the grass. They are called Pine Stem (Yarrow). The Pine Stems have the same kind of stems as the pines. The Pine Stems are also plucked. Those grow in bunches and they are plucked out and these are also brewed for medicine. A person will have stomach trouble, he might have an aching liver; the herbs that are called pine stem will be brewed for him. It's not a vision, but these are just discoveries.

Okay, it's the same with a person that is coughing - a plant that grew on the ground, but this one is under the ground. They are called Takes Women By Force. The plant, its growth, is dark brownish color and the berries are sharp. (This plant that is called Takes Women By Force in Blackfoot have reddish stalks with prickly burrs on them and the root has a bitter taste.) Where the root is, that gristle wood is what we take. They are also dried. A hole is punched through them and they are strung with sinew in bunches and they are dried. This

root will be brewed for a person that is coughing a lot. That will relieve him from his cough and the phlegm will break.

There are also other plants. They also grow on the ground; they are called sage. They are also brewed for coughs. They taste bitter. There are other plants. They also grow on the ground, they are called sage. There are a lot of uses for the sage. The sage is not one: one is called Man Sage and the other is called Big Sage. So these are the three kinds that grow on the Blood Indian Reservation. These Big Sage grow at the Belly Buttes; that's where they grow. The Man Sage has long leaves and the Woman Sage have little balls of seeds on them. The Big Sage and the Man Sage are the same. Nobody had a vision of them. They are good for coughs. If they are brewed they will kill the cough; the throat will not be itchy any more. The root that is called Takes A Woman By Force will break the phlegm; the sage will not make the throat itchy anymore. Okay, the same sage, the Man Sage, it's used in holy

ceremonies. The inside of a sweat lodge will be covered with sage. The person that is going to have a sweat bath will take some of the sage and he'll chew it and his chest will be cool. The sweat lodge will be hot so he'll take some of the sage and he'll chew them and his chest will be cool. The other use for it - the cross section(?) of an offering. The sharp end of it, the legs of a hide will be tied to these. I give offerings. I tie a shirt to the frame and I tie the sages at the end of the sleeves of the shirt. It's the Man Sage. The Man Sage are put on the altar where the ground is scraped. The Man Sage are also used to wipe the rectum. They have a strong scent and our rectum will not smell like excrement; that is why we use them. The Women Sage are mostly used for wiping the rectum. The Big Sage are scarce; they are just taken for medicine.

There are plants that grow among the grass by a lake. They are almost like buckbrush but they are grass. They have yellow stalks; the stalks are like the stalks of flax. They are called Red Color Liquid. If a person has an ailing chest he will brew some of the Red Color Liquid for himself. It's also not a vision, it's just a discovery. They are everybody's medicine. They are also brewed for tea. Everybody uses them. They didn't come through a vision. The others are the same. The stems are stiff; the stems are also brown colored and they have soft leafs. They are called Kootenay Tea; tea is made with those. They are good for a person that has stomach trouble, that has diarrhea. Those will be brewed for him.

These are bad medicine; they grow flat on the ground. There will be no grass where they grow. They grow single. This single growth has a yellow flower. The yellow flower fades and

something comes like plumes. As the new generation will say they are like wool. They are called Plume Stems. They grow with the grass. Those didn't also come through a vision. They are the women's medicine. If a woman doesn't want to have a baby she'll brew some of the Plume Stems. They taste bitter and they taste bad. If a woman is one month gone in pregnancy, or two months gone, or so many months gone in pregnancy, she'll drink some and she'll just kill her baby with these Plume Stems. The other woman will know I am going to have a baby, she will drink some when the moon is going to appear. At the time when her menstruation stops she will drink some of the brew and she'll have her menstruation again and she'll never be pregnant. So those are also a medicine for that.

The others are also under the ground. The stems are like buckbrush the stems have green leaf. Those are called Crooked Stem. They are the same. If a woman is pregnant she will drink some and she'll kill her baby, but if a woman always drinks them that will injure her liver, that will pus up her womb. When her womb gets pussd up she is called "She Has a Ghost in Her." That's what they are called. Those are the women that drink these Crooked Stems will pus up their wombs. We'll notice a woman that is like that, her vagina will stink. It's because her womb is pussd up. Women die from that. Recently a woman that is like [that] will be operated on her

womb. Okay, it occurs when a woman is like that she will go to a cherry bush and she will cut a new growth of a cherry willow and she will scrape it with the dull side of a knife. She'll scrape off the black bark, then she will scrape the white part underneath and she will put that down and she will go - and there is a plant that is like, we'll say sunflower galls on the stems. The top that are like sunflowers, those are called Bachelors. They have galls on the stems. The top have those that are called Bachelors. We will take the top and we'll combine it with the cherry willow. The woman that has a ghost will brew that for herself. If these are combined they kill the pus. If these work together that will save the woman. They are very good when they work together like that, the Bachelor and the cherry wood.

Okay, there is another medicine. We get that from the Kootenay. They grow in lakes. They are gristle. They are called Fish Backbone (Muskrat root). Those are for coughs. These roots taste bitter. A person that has an ailing liver will chew them. They didn't come through a vision but they are just known how to use them.

Okay, these also grow among the grass. They grow in a sandy place. The stems are round and they are green. They are

stiff. They are not grass. They are called Green Stems. They don't taste bitter. These Green Stems are good for a person that spits blood.

The others, they are also a growth. They have green leave and there is a single growth of a plant among them. They have red flowers. The sticks are under the ground. They are soft. They are roots. They don't grow straight up, they are sideways. They don't have to be dug with an axe or a digging stick; all we have to do is just scratch the ground. Those are called Lies On Its Belly. The Lies On Its Belly will be dug and it will be scraped and dried. It will be grind when it dries. If a child's mouth is all raw, it is called canker sore. The child's tongue will be all raw and its gums. The Lies On Its Belly will be brewed and the child will be made to drink it. If the child is old enough he/she can wash his/her mouth with it. It will not do any harm if the child swallows it or if he/she wants to spit it out. The Lies On Its Belly is good for the canker sore.

The stiff stem of the Lies On Its Belly, they grow in a way - they puff up. Those are called galls. We make necklaces with them; the old people of the past make necklaces out them. I saw an old man who is deceased - his name is Striped Walker. They came from a vision and they are taken along on the warpath. The galls were all dried up and holes were made through them and they are strung with a rawhide thong. Small galls were strung between the large galls. They are as a bandoleer and there is a crow's head attached to it. It's not an ordinary crow's head, it's a raven's head; they are transferable. Now us young men - there is a man his name is

Otter and his brother Many Scouts he is also still alive - we got galls for Striped Walker. A man by the name of Scraping White - Striped Walker is his father - he is the one that killed the raven and he gave it to his father. Us, we picked the galls and they were made into a bandoleer. They are transferable. There is no other song to them than the raven song. The words in the song are as follows, "The crow has supernatural powers." The raven also worded his song that he was an eagle. The other words in the song are, "When I am flying around in the mountains I have supernatural powers."

This Striped Walker is the one that got first to a Cree. The Cree had stripped himself from his clothing while he was running. It is said that Striped Walker runs as fast as a horse. Striped Walker got first to the Cree. His gun had six barrels.* When Striped Walker was getting closer to the Cree he saw him drop the gun. The Cree was shot in the elbow and he dropped the gun. Striped Walker grabbed the six-barrelled gun while he was still running, then he chased the Cree. The

* A gun with six barrels is a multi-barrelled gun. Cree's breechcloth had fallen off and as he (Striped Walker) looked at him the Cree's buttock was moving in a chewing motion and Striped Walker laughed and he'd flop over from laughter. The attackers behind Striped Walker were mad at him. They told him, "Don't just laugh." And he (Striped Walker) chases him again and when he sees the way his buttock was moving he starts laughing again. As he chased him again on the fourth time, Striped Walker stabbed him (Cree) on the back and he killed him. It's the raven head and the galls; that's how they were used. Okay, the galls, these they are called Elk Food (Puccoon). These are burned for incense for the raven. This raven is connected with black covered pipe, Scraping White's black covered pipe. His son's name is Ball Cactus Face (Harold Chief Moon) - took the black covered pipe. Their family name is Scraping White. Ball Cactus Face name was changed lately to Harold Chief Moon and I (First Rider) heard that he sold the black covered pipe but he didn't sell the raven. This is incensed with Elk Food.

Okay, these medicines that are used are from a vision. The cedar grow only in the mountain forests. A person is scared of the cedar needles. If a smudge is made with the cedar needles and the person that is sick, that has a facial trouble, smells the cedar odor his face will swell up. If a smudge is made with the cedar needles, a person that has a chest trouble, that spits blood, will start coughing repeatedly. Finally he'll start spitting blood again.

The people of the past are scared of ghosts. A person who is haunted by ghosts, the ghosts are going to kill him, a smudge will be made with the cedar needles for him and he'll come to. Okay, on the Medicine Pipe side, the cedar needles are used for the Medicine Pipe owner in all sorts of ways. The inside of his moccasins will be sprayed with chewed cedar needles before he puts them on; and they burn incense with them. That is why a Medicine Pipe Lodge smells like cedar needles. It's also not

a vision; it's just a discovery.

These are called Water Rhubarb (Poison Hemlock). They are similar to rhubarb and there are the white man's rhubarbs. The Water Rhubarbs almost look like the Indian rhubarbs. The Water Rhubarbs are Indian poison. We die from them if we eat some. The plants that are called Will Make Your Neck Cramp, they are different. They are also not from a vision; they are just discoveries. There are other growths. They are called Garter Root (Silver weed), the Rip Roots. A person that has diarrhea will take some of these Rip Roots. We'll find some of these Rip Roots on a sandy place by the river shore. They'll just be ripped off. The roots are long; this is called Rip Root.

This Rip Root will be dried and it will be brewed. Maybe a child or a man or a woman that has diarrhea will drink the brew. This is not from a dream; it's just also a discovery. If a person has diarrhea like that, a Rip Root will be brewed for him and his diarrhea will stop. Another plant grows the same way. It's also almost like a buckbrush. The leaves grow flat on the ground, the stem stands high. That will be taken. Those are called Makes The Nose Bleed Continually (Yellow Umbrella Plant). A person that has a swollen face or has sores on his face, he'll brew the plant and he will wash his face with that. The swelling will go down or the sores will dry up.

There is another one. It's also a growth, the red berry. The tree is sharp; they are called thorns (Hawthorns). The berry of that tree is called Blistered Foot (Hawthorn Berry). A person (we all know this), if he just eats them, they say that they bite us. We get a terrific stomach ache from them. We'll have cramps in the stomach. They are not so sweet. We don't know what causes the stomach ache. When a boy is going to eat some, when he takes the Blistered Foots, he will say to it, "Now, Blistered Foot, don't bite me. I will make an arrow for you." He will not get a stomach ache with the false promise that he will make an arrow for the berry. It's not from a dream; it's just a discovery.

A girl will take some of the Blistered Foots. Before she eats them she'll say, "Now, Blistered Foot, don't bite me and I will make you a pair of moccasins." And the woman will eat it too and she will not have a belly ache. If she doesn't give it a promise, she will have a belly ache. That is called. It's Biting Her. They are not from dreams, they are just discoveries. If a person just eats some without giving them a promise they'll bite him/her.

Okay, a saskatoon berry, the saskatoon - a person that has sore eyes, his eyes will be treated with the saskatoon and he/she will be again. It's not from a dream, it's just also a discovery. Everybody uses them.

Okay, the chokecherry is the same. A child that has canker sores will be made to eat the chokecherry and his/her mouth will be all coated and his/her mouth will heal from underneath. Then the child will wash his/her mouth and the coating will

peel off. Some will chew fat and the coating from the cherry will peel off. When the chokecherry is crushed, it is picked out and it is crushed and it dried. When the crushed chokecherry dries and then it is soaked after and that is a cherry brew. The crushed chokecherry was soaked and it is soft and it is immediately mixed with fat and it is made into a chokecherry pemmican. It's not from a vision, we just all know that it's a cherry brew. When the Beaver Society are going to

sow tobacco they spray what they are going to sow with the cherry brew. That's how they are used. Okay, when the chokecherry is picked and they are dried, and in the winter the man will want to have something fancy to eat, he will say, "Okay, boil some berries for me." And the woman will boil the chokecherries in blood. When they eat it, it will be soft just like it was newly picked. It is just a lunch. The chokecherry that is made into a pemmican, it is dangerous if people don't take care. We get constipated with it. It is also not a dream but we just all know that we get constipated with it.

The saskatoon that was picked and dried, it is called a berry soup is made with it. It is a sweet meal for the people of the past. If a person wants to talk to another person good, real good, he'll say, "I spoke with saskatoons." The saskatoon is the most delicious meal. We also get stomach [ache?] if we eat too much of it. The chokecherry stick is a medicine. The saskatoon willow is a medicine and incense is burned with it and tampa stick are from them. Now I'll end my story here.

I am telling stories about discoveries about growths. Here I am continuing my story and I'll illustrate what I didn't illustrate, the herbs that are used for brew.

These grow on the ground. Those are the Holy Turnip. They are all over the earth. Us Blood Indians, we've a place that is called Turnip Hill. The people of the past all go and dig turnips there. These turnips have gray stems. There are two bulbs on them. They are like galls, but they are leaves and they are called testicles, the testicles of the turnip. A turnip will be recognized by those. They are a little bit deep into the ground. The turnips are dug with a digging stick; they are oblong and big. The bark will be peeled off. The turnip is just like a boiled potato. We'll say a person has a chest trouble, he may be spitting blood, he'll drink the turnip brew. It's not from a dream; it's just discovery. The turnip will be boiled and he'll drink some and that will relieve him. A person will have a broken leg or a broken arm, the turnip will be chewed and will be applied on the broken portion and the person will feel relieved.

The other plant is also dug. They stand alone, they are tall, they grow among swamp grass, they are high. They reach above the knee - that is how high they are. We pull the stalk slowly and we'll pull it out with the - they are called Double Turnip

(Yampa). There are two to one stalk. When children are

playing they'll come to a meadow and they'll find the Double Turnips. The Prairie Parsley is larger, the Double Turnip is smaller. Those are Double Turnips. They are just wiped and they are eaten. Those are also good for coughs. The Double Turnips will be brewed for a person that has liver trouble. They are everybody's medicine and they are just a discovery.

There are others; they are also growths. The stalks are also high. They grow in sandy places; they are called Garters (Silver Weed). They are also used for brewing. A person that has a pain in the chest will brew some of these that are called Garter Root. These Garter Roots are very long and we can tie anything with them. The people of the past used them for garters. They break only when they are dry; that is why they are garters. People all use them.

There are others they are grass. They are called Rattle Weed (Locoweed). Those are also medicine. They will be boiled and applied on a swollen part on a person's body.

There are other growths, they are also grass. They grow among rocks. They are gray and they have round flat leaves. They are called Gopher Ears. They are also called White Stem, (Double Bladder Pod). This White Stem will be chewed and it will be used as a poultice and they burn. They are better to be brewed. It's the same for a person that has hemorrhoids and liver trouble. A swollen part will be treated with this plant and it heats up when it dries up. They are the same as liniment. They are everybody's medicine. They are good for everything. A person that has a toothache will put some of this plant between the teeth and the pain will stop. If a person has a severe cut he'll put some of this Gopher Ear (they are also called White Stem), he put some on the cut. They burn but that will stop the bleeding. They are not from a dream, they are just discovered. A person, let's say he stepped on something sharp, his wound will be treated with this Gopher Ear and it will heal the wound.

Finally decoctions came. People are going to investigate the decoction. A person will know for himself what is used for a decoction. A person may not eat for a while. He will not be eating; he may not eat for one week. The people of the past that go on the warpath, sometimes they will have nothing to eat for twenty days. A person will not just go ahead and eat even if he has plenty to eat, as he didn't eat for twenty days. A person that didn't eat for that length of time, if he eats right away, it is called Hits The Liver From Eating. The Hit Liver From Eating means that the stomach will be just like as if it was hit and the person dies. He died because he didn't eat for a length of time. It's not a dream; it was also

discovered. A person will drink a decoction first. He will not drink too much of it. He will drink some of it, he will

sit for a while and then he'll drink some more of the brew, and again he will sit for a while. First he will take plenty of the decoction then he will eat. If the one that didn't eat for a length of time eats right away he will die. Then we will trace what kind of a herb that is going to be used for a decoction. The things that are going to be decocted are meat or they are dry meat, and today we are still using that decoction. It is the decoction of our grandparents of long ago. I'll say ten generations. The person who never ate and who is going to drink this decoction will not die when he eats. It's a broth that is called soup. And now that soup, the decoction - there is a man, his name is Soup. He must be eight. ten (eighty) years old now; he is old. He was raised with that decoction. And if people who want to trace how meat is used for decoction, the meats have various kinds of name. There is a meat that is called boiling meat. The broth is a decoction. A person that didn't eat for a long time will drink some of that; he'll be relieved with that.

When a sick person can drink some soup he/she will help his/her body with that. That will make things better. That is why the Indian shamans existed. The Indian shaman that went out to sleep in the wilderness also didn't eat for a length of time. He is called seeking for visions. He is not eating while he is seeking for visions and he doesn't drink water at this point. He'll dream of what he is going to use for a poultice and what he is going to use for a decoction.

Let's say his dream he'll boil some gunpowder. How he is going to use his decoction for curing will come true; he puts a bullet in the brew that he is boiling. I (First Rider) saw that done. There is a man, he just died recently, his name is Wolf Child. He make decoction with cartridge pellets for people that have liver trouble. A person that went out to sleep in the wilderness seeking for visions will make a decoction with all different kind of things. He also used ochre. There is another person, her name is Gros Ventre Woman. She made a decoction with white earth for a person that had diarrhea and the diarrhea stopped. Every time they come home the people of their homes will make decoctions for them first, and he'll feel good and then he'll eat. The decoction is a soup. The soup is also used to kill. A person's head was scalded with a boiling broth. The ones that went out to seek for visions also drank some of the meat decoction and it revives them. Then they use what they received in a vision. The ones that make decoctions gather up the herbs and plants that were discovered and they put them together and they make decoctions with them.

Finally it came they'll make a brew before a woman deliver her baby. They'll not give her anything that is bitter to make the baby come out. He'll make a decoction with the finest herbs to make the baby come out. In the past a woman that is going to have a baby will be given a broth to drink and that will break the water bag and she'll deliver her baby. And now when the seeking for visions started the people started to get paid for

their decoctions. There are people that just make decoctions and there are some that just treat wounds and swollen parts on the body and some are just shamans.

There are different kinds of shaman. Some will do a curing with water, some with hot coals, and some do curing with steam and some do curing with a hot rock. And then it occurs that they all do curing with bird and animal pelts; we go by those. The pelts that we go by we make decoctions with them. The pelt that we are going to make a decoction with will come true. A shaman will make a decoction and he will treat a person with a poultice. His treatment is good only to himself. His curing is no good to his children; his wife will not make a use of his curing.

It occurs that a shaman cannot do any curing to his children and to his relatives that are in his home. He said that his power will not work if he is going to do any curing to the people in his home. His power will work only on what he is paid for. His curing is with the decoction so that a person will gain something. And now how to save ourselves with the discovery still exists. Now there are very few people that can still do some curing. The full-blooded Indians are still using the decoction and as I (First Rider) am sitting here I am also using a decoction. I will concentrate on what herbs are going to be used for our sickness and now if I have a headache I will burn a smudge with Fragrant Smell and I'll cover my head over the incense and I'll be inhaling the incense and it will make me feel good. That's what the discoveries are.

They pay for what come through a dream; we don't pay for what is just discovered. It is used freely to everybody for kindness, but we have to pay for what come through a dream. So that is what I know and that is how the shaman operated. Shamans are different. A decoction is not a curing, it's just a decoction. The curing is far different. I am First Rider. My father, Dog Child, does curing, and as I am sitting here I still know all his songs. Now Dog Child is going to do some curing. His drum - that's his own drum - the drum is ochred all around with a bear painted in the centre, just the head and chest of a bear. And when he is going to do some curing he'll be the first one to beat the drum. He'll be praying and he'll

be calling on the one that gave him the power to cure people and he'll sing when he gets through praying. I will know his song and I'll know what he is going to use for curing. I will know if he is going to use the powers of a bear for curing.

I drum for him when he is going to do some curing and the people pay me for drumming. I know my father, how he does the curing, and I know what kind of medicines he has. I know my father very good and, now my father died, I pick the medicines that I know that he uses for decoctions and I use them. I make decoctions with the medicines for myself and I use them on my children, and today I didn't make any further use of his curing. He didn't give me the authority to be a shaman. Just him alone - he dreamed it. If it was just my father's

discovery, if it wasn't his dream, he'd show me how and I'd use them for curing.

It's not a sacred thing to be transferred. Curing bundles are not transferable and that is the reason why I am not a shaman. I could've been a shaman if it was transferable. Curing was given alone to my father and now, myself, I can't do any curing. That's what Indian life is and now I close my story. I will tell the other stories. That's all.

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