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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:

- Tells of the origin of the Fly Society.
- Gives some of his personal background.

Okay, we'll sit here tonight about the origin of the Fly Society dance. The people of the past travel. Before they travel, when they grow to a certain age, about the age of fifteen (15) years -- they are called young men at that age -- they go out to sleep in the wilderness and they get visions about war. There are some people that cure their wounds. That's what it is.

A war party scattered and fled. One of them travelled alone. He disposed of his clothing. He had no robe, no extra pair of moccasins, his awl and his sinew, he had dropped all these. He took his knife and his bow and arrows and then he was walking

along. He was on foot; he swims across rivers.

As he walked along he saw, as he looked to the west it looked enormous. This is called... if there are a lot of clouds, if it's a dark cloud... these scabby clans must abuse their wives a lot. It is called... it's just like a black eye from a hit by a scabby. That's what it is called if it is going to rain, if a rain cloud comes up. So that's how it is; the rain cloud looked like night.

What is going to keep him warm? He was trying to dodge the oncoming rain. He has come out from the river; there are no trees. Where is he going to take refuge? He was walking down a coulee. People used to say, "Raindrops are starting to fall." It's starting to rain a little. He saw a dead buffalo. They say when a buffalo dies it doesn't lie on its side. The buffalo died in a crouching position. When he got there the skin was not damaged. It was eaten from the rear end; the manure was all inside and the bones were dry.

The rain was now coming down fast. The dead buffalo was facing west. He started to clean out the manure with worms in it. The worms were all dried up; they were not fresh any more. So he had it hollow. He took all its insides out; they were dry. He covered his head with his robe and he crawled into it. He curled up inside of the buffalo and the rain came and thunder was roaring. He was just hearing the raindrops falling on the hide and night came and it rained during the night.

It must have been towards dawn. The people of the past say when the birds sing means it's going to be morning. So that's how it was; when the birds sang the rain stopped. He was warm inside so he went to sleep. He saw people. They told him, "We're going to have a dance. You will watch us so you will imitate us, how we dance." As he looked at them they looked like as if they were wrapped in diapers. They were all white, black backs. They were worms.

They told him, "If we have no place to stay our mothers will bind leafs and that's where we are born and we don't have anything to eat. We have to be made to dance to have something to eat. So we'll give you that." So he saw them when they sang.

He crawled out when the sun came up, when it got to be a nice day, and he went home. He got home happily and safely. As he got home, when he slept, he saw them in his dream. They told him, "We will show you our dance, the first gift that we gave you. You will make us dance. For people to know that we like dances, you will show that to the people. Now the dance that we are going to have we will tell you when the people see how we are made to dance." He started to get his friends together in morning and they all went to a berry bush, a saskatoon berry bush. They saw some worms. They bind some branches just like the bees' rope, spider web. When they saw the worms he told his friends, "We will make these worms dance. They will dance;

you will see them." The people, all the boys, some grown ups too, they all stood around them. The ones that all stood there all clap their hands and a song was sung for them. "KO-MO-YO-KS-TSI\* KO-MO-YO-KS-TSI KO-MO-YO-KS-TSI KO-MO-YO-KS-TSI." The worms started to dance, then the people knew. "Yes, they are made to dance." When the people dispersed they went looking for these worms and when they got to them they make them dance and the same song is sung. "KO-MO-YO-KS-TSI KO-MO-YO-KS-TSI KO-MO-YO-KS-TSI." And the worms all dance. Eventually I saw it myself. When I heard the story I thought, "I'll go and make them dance." When I saw them they were all in a cocoon and I made them dance; I clapped my hands too. I drummed on my hands and I sang a song for them too. "KO-MO-YO-KS-TSI KO-MO-YO-KS-TSI." And they all start to nod their heads and then I knew it is true.

When the man went away again he slept out in the wilderness. He told them, "Ah, you worms and flies, you told me that you would give me something that I would live by." The worms just made him to be a shaman. A person, let's say a person will catch a bad disease, insects will be eating him. The boy was given the power to cure people that have a bad disease like that and he/she will survive.

I (First Rider) also saw a diseased old man. His name is Moon Calf; that man treats bad diseases. He just brushes his nose

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\*The words in the Blackfoot song cannot be translated because they have no meaning in English.

with his smoke and worms will all come crawling out. He cures with those. All there show that they are true. When he went to sleep he saw the flies. They were worms before and now they have turned into flies and then they all transformed into humans. These flies introduced their headpieces. You see the flies have a growth above each eye just like a whisker; those are their headpieces. The headpieces of the Flies are the main feathers of an eagle. They put them crossways and they tie them at the back of their heads. Later on they wore medicine hats. They dance in weasel tail suits. In the first place they put their headpieces in rectangular parfleches, and there are buffalo hoofs that they rattle.

They didn't drum on a drum, they drummed on hard rawhide. They didn't dance like an ordinary dance, they are the kind that attack. That is why they are fed to their fill. There are two kinds that are fed to their fill, the eagles and the flies. The Flies are two kinds, the Big Flies and the Little Flies, and now I (First Rider) am talking about the Big Flies.

Later on they wore weasel tail suits and they have medicine hats and they don't wear them, they tie them on their backs. But they wear their headpieces and they paint their eyes black and they use white earth on their noses. They must look terrible as flies have big eyes, then they paint their eyes

black. They dance the same way as the Prairie Chickens Society. The Prairie Chickens have rattles, the Flies have sing feathers; they are like four. The claws that they use for scratching, they scratch a person with those. They take the properties from the one that they scratched. They are offered a lot of food when they attack. Flies will lid on meat and they'll lay eggs on them and they spoil them. They'll grab all the meats when they attack. A fire is already burning in their lodge and they cook them there. They don't feed the people, only themselves. They get something to eat from their dance.

The Little Flies are mixed. Some are girls and some are boys; they are the same ones. They have headpieces too but they didn't dress up for their dance. Their songs didn't sound like songs. The songs that the Big Flies sing are called sharp walk songs. They drum on the hard rawhide that they drum on. They don't drum on the hide just temporarily. It is folded when they get through drumming on it and they put it together with the rectangular parfleche. The leader of the society keeps them.

They dance only once in the summer, the Flies and the Big Flies. It's the same with the worms. We'll only make them dance in the summer. How can they be made to dance again when they grow? They are made to dance only once. Cunning also

came from the Big Flies and they handed down the perforated tipi. The people of the past didn't obtain this perforated tipi too often as holes are cut all over and when the wind blows it gets drafty and it will be cold in the winter and when it rains water will run in. But after that it was just the kind of a tipi to be erected inside the camp circle. When the tipi ceased to exist then they used old tipis.

The Fly Society was a joyous society to the people of the past. When a sweat lodge is built for the Holy Lodge the Flies will sit there. The Flies are the ones that go and cut the material and they build the sweat lodge. The Flies will go into the Holy Lodge and they all make it merry. Later on when the Pigeon Society was transferred the Pigeons then formed and the Horns also formed. The Flies are the first society and they tell about their war exploits in the Holy Lodge. As flies are into everything, they perform their dance in a confusing manner, they all run scattering into the camps. The worms are the same ones. They are used in a lot of useful ways, the dancing of the worms. All we know about the worms is that they are that kind. When the white man came they knew what a worm is. Us Indians we don't know what they are.

Now a man, the man is a holy man. His wives always take their children out. When the man invites people he will sit inside alone with the ones that he is telling stories with. One of his wives will stay in; she'll be the one that will be doing the chores. The other women will tke the children out. Now he is on a hunt. He went with one of his wives. They took pack horses and their mounts and a horse to chase his game. They

travelled light and away they went. They found the buffaloes; they slept by the buffalo herd.

Very early, at dawn -- old people say the buffaloes feel cold at dawn and they can't run faster and that's when the old people give chase. They tell legends about it. So he gave chase very early at dawn. He didn't kill them needlessly, he just killed enough to pack on his horses. They were just the two of them, him and his wife. They butchered and packed the meats. The sun hasn't even gone low. Gone low means after noon. The people of the past call it midday. Us we'll say it's midday, then they will say the sun has laid still.

Now the sun is crawling low and they are starting for home. On the way, he was thinking of which people he is going to feast with. When they got home they unloaded and himself he tended the horses and then he announced invitations. A rain cloud came up. He told his other wives, "Go and get some wood. It's going to rain." He told the others, "Cook, so the ones that I invite will eat." So the women started cooking and the others went for wood.

The men started coming and they were fed. So he told a story of how he killed the buffalo. He told the men, "We will smoke just twice. It's going to rain so we can weigh down our lodges." The women brought home the wood. The women didn't go inside. They started breaking the wood to certain lengths and they took them in so that they will not get wet. The women that went far went in and ate. After they ate he told his wives, "Okay, that I am very tired. Go out now. Take the children out so I'll sleep and when you think that I am going to be awake then come in." The women all took their children out. The woman that accompanied her husband on his hunting trip went out to the newly brought wood and she built a fire. She built a big fire and she also went out.

The man laid inside alone. His bed was made close to the fireplace and he laid down with his back to the fireplace to warm his back. He went to sleep. He wasn't asleep. He heard a man sang. When he heard him plainly he lifted his head and look around; there was nobody. He laid down again and after he laid there for a while he heard him sing again. The man worded his song, "My pipe is holy." He looked up again. There must be someone singing. The man laid down again. On the third time he thought that he'd learn the song, so he learned the song. When the man sang, "My pipe is holy," he looked up again and there was nothing. He laid down again. The built up fire really burned at this moment. When those burn out they will be mounted and then the wood will burn out completely. He laid down again. He heard him again as he laid down again. The man got really worried. This is the fourth time that he heard him sing. When he got really worried, he was almost crying. He was singing, "My pipe is holy." I (First Rider) know these songs as I am sitting here. They will be sung some of these days and whoever is going to listen will know the songs.

The man suddenly sat up and he looked at the fireplace. He saw

a worm emerge from a wood and the fire was burning towards it. The worm was the one that was singing. He knew that it is the one that is singing so he got up and it has started to rain. He took the wood and the worm. He told the worm, "Why are you worried? Nothing will happen to you, you will survive." He picked up the wood and he put the fire out in the new rain water and he went away with it to the river with it and he stuck the wood in a pile of driftwood. He told the worm, "Now stay here. Nothing is going to happen to you." So he left the worm behind and he went home.

When he went home his wives saw him and they all went home. He didn't tell a story to no one. The women started to cook, as the people just lived by eating. He told his women, "Sleep

with each other. Sleep with the woman that I sit by. I am so tired I'll sleep with alone so I'll have rest." He wanted to sleep alone on account of the worm that he took away. He knew that the worm will give him something, because he had heard it sing, "My pipe is holy."

Now we talked about the worms and flies; they are the same. So the man went to sleep. He burned incense before he went to bed. He held his right hand over the incense and then he put his hand on his head. He held his left hand over the incense and then he put his hand on his chest and then he held both of his hands over the incense and held his hand on his ears. Holding his hand over his ears mean for him to hear the truth. So that's what it means, the reason why he held his hands over the incense and over his ears, on his head and on his heart. That's what these are.

He slept. The worm approached him in the form of a man. The man told him, "Son, I am grateful for saving me. I was about to be burned and you saved me. Now you are not the only one that is merciful, and now I pity you myself and now I am going to pay you for saving me." So he saw a white tipi in his dream. There was a pipe at the back. As he was looking at the pipe he thought, "That Medicine Pipe is so small, it's small." The man told him, "This is my pipe. My pipe is the kind that we'll travel with. It will be taken along if we go on the warpath and we can ride on horseback with my pipe."

This pipe is the little Medicine Pipe. It was presented by the worm. The songs to it are just different. The real Medicine Pipe songs are different. You will hear the songs when I (First Rider) sing them. There are not many of them. At this point the man told him, "Now I give you my pipe. I will not just give it to you I will transfer it to you." It's in his sleep. Where did the berry soups come from? Berry soups were ready. The people were all seated in the dream.

This little Medicine Pipe has no topknot, but the fawn skin is there and the wing feather. The real Medicine Pipe have topknots. In the real Medicine Pipe there is a Medicine Pipe rope, a Medicine Pipe quirt and the Medicine Pipe bowl. These

items are not in the little Medicine Pipe. So the pipe was transferred to him in his dream. All the participants have their own songs. There was not just one that sang. All these people were the former owners of the pipe. They told him, "The pipe owner was about to walk into loneliness and now he has survived. Just the way we got sly by the pipe you will survive miraculously that way. Misfortune never comes to the ones that own the pipe.

It's not the kind of a thing for an old man to own it. It's the kind of a thing that agile people own. They go on the warpath with it and they get into combat with it, and now we give it to you." And it was transferred to him. The transferal ceremony differs a little, that is why the people of the past know them all. When he went home, when he went, he invited people. He invited all the inquisitive people. He told them, "Here, I dreamed this." So he constructed it. That pipe was just small, the little Medicine Pipe.

When he constructed it, favorite child's existed and they obtained the pipe. And treaty life came and going on the warpath stopped. Childing were just then obtaining the little Medicine Pipe. It's the same as the other pipes. A vow can be made to supply grub at the opening of the little Medicine Pipe. A person will keep it for four years and he'll sell it. Some people will think, "I'll keep it for another four years," and they keep it for eight years and then they'll give it away. The reason why they own it is to preserve their lives. And finally I (First Rider) saw the little Medicine Pipe and I learned the songs. I never owned it, I was just seeing it and I just know the songs to it.

I (First Rider) traced back the gifts of the flies. The little Medicine Pipe is a gift from the worms; it's the dance of the worms. They are made to dance, the worms are. The flies, there are the flies and the little flies. The liver of the flies are in four ways and transferals are operated by those. The songs are not too many; the real Medicine Pipe songs are many. The little Medicine Pipe songs are not too many. It's not transferred regularly; children obtain it. The worms are flies. A fly will lay eggs on a dead animal. When it lays eggs on it they are worms and they'll grow. When the worms grow and when they start to crawl there will be water in the dead animal. The worms grow by sucking the meat. When they grow they buzz; their wings will buzz.

This Moon Calf is a boy. He was looking at the worms. Didn't he smell the stink of the dead animal while he was watching the worms that were crawling around? He was watching them. He laid on his belly while he was looking at them. He got drowsy. They told him. A man approached him. They told him, "Our fathers invited you. They are going to have a dance and they are going to do some curing." There was no design on the tipi of the worms, it's just a white tipi. There were a lot of people inside so Moon Calf walked up to it and when he got to the door they told him, "Come in," and he went in.

His right hand... the Bloods all know Moon Calf. His arm broke just above his wrist and his hand was hung loose. He works with it. And his other shoulder was smashed. That's Moon Calf. He was the one that went in to the people. They told him, "Although you are crippled, you benefit by life." He can't shoot with a bow and arrow and how can he shoot with a gun? He has no chance. They told him, "We invited you purposely so that we will give you something to live by. We will have a dance and you will watch us and those will do some curing and they are the ones that will give you something."

When the worms danced, us we will say they had white cloth robes. Moon Calf said they had old hide robes. The robes are all white and they all painted their entire bodies with white earth and they all wore their robes. They stood in a single file. The drummers drummed on a rawhide. They sang the same song, "Worm, KO-MO-YO-KS-TSI KOMO-YO-KS-TSI." They had whistles. Their whistles were coated with white earth and the thongs were coated with white earth. Plumes are attached to their whistles; the plumes were very fluffy. Those are their whistles. Their moccasins were all coated with white earth.

There were four people that sang and they sang. They daubed their hair with white earth. Four women sat beside them. The women helped in the singing, they didn't do any drumming, and they sang, "KO-MO-YO-KS-TSI KO-MO-YO-KS-TSI." They danced around and they were blowing on their whistles. When the circle was connected together they all hold their white cloth robes at the corners and they shook them up in the air and they blew their whistles. They danced four times and they sat down.

A person was sitting there; he was just skin and bones. Worms were crawling away from where he was sitting. I (First Rider) actually saw Moon Calf. He goes to dead animals and he picks out the dried worms and he puts them in a paint bag and those are his medicine. He takes some of the worms and he chews them, he treats the sick with them. Those are the ones that got a bad sickness. Even if the skin of the one that he treated is peeling off, the skin will heal. He makes a brew with these same worms and the patient will drink it.

Okay, I (First Rider) saw him (Moon Calf). A rock with a hole in it, he tied it around the neck of a person. He is a big man now and this day that man still has that stone with a hole in it. He must be sixty-seven (67) years old. Moon Calf gave it to him when he was a little boy. It's his grandson and he still has it now. Those are the flies that held a dance.

Okay, I'll illustrate it. Now I am First Rider; I am a Blood Indian. My father was on the north side of the town of the Men With Many Wives. My father's Blackfoot name is Dog Child. Dog Child is not his name; Dog Child came from the Blackfoot Reserve. My father's mother is a Blackfoot woman; his father is a white man. In the past women marry white men. His



father's name, he a south white man.\* The name of this father of his is George Howe. That's what my father's name is, George Howe. When his father and his mother died he came over on this side; my father went to his mother's relative. That's her elder brother. His name is Holy Coming Down; he took him as his father.

Before the treaty my father's Blackfoot grandparents said, "My son can't receive the treaty money because he is a white man. We'll give him in Indian name." So he was given the name Dog Child, so he became a treaty Indian at that time. That's when he took the name Dog Child. That's why I did not have the same name as my father. My relatives, the people of the south, called me George Washington. This name is not good for on this side so I was called First Rider, so I took that name. That's why I didn't have the same name as my father.

Now myself I didn't go to the teaching place\*\*, I was raised with Indian life. The reason why I know all about Indian life, my father puts me to the Indian way. Now myself I am going on sixty-five (65) years. I don't know anyone that's of my age that knows more about Indian life the way I know about it. I know a lot about the Indian things that are transferable. I am not saying that I know them all. There are some that I don't know but there are more things that I know. I know a lot of songs.

Myself, the Horns that I (First Rider) join, I am the one that carries on the songs. I give instructions how the Horns to operate. There are various kinds of holy artifacts that I took; that's how I know how they are. Tipis, I had four tipis. They are all yellow designed, they were all transferred to me and I also know how to transfer a tipi. Myself, I am one of the Pigeons. I (First Rider) know all about comrade societies. Now myself I think I am the only one that these headdresses were transferred to. Four headdresses were transferred to me in one day. The ochre is just wiped off my face and my face is repainted again. I took four headdresses in one day. I also owned Horn Society headdresses. I also owned a shield. There

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\*A south white man is a Yankee.

\*\*A schoolhouse is called a teaching place in Blackfoot.

are a lot of transferable artifacts. There are some people that don't know me, they say, "I don't think he tells the truth. He is a white man. How can he know about life?"

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