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:
- Describes the role of the otter in the Horn Society.
- Comments on the deterioration of traditional Indian culture.

George First Rider: Now there is another story. The stories that I am telling, if I tell them in my own way I will illustrate life in sequence. My boss tells me what story to tell. His question is, "Why did the Horn Society bind their staffs with otter skins?" Now I am going to illustrate why the Horns bind their staffs with otter skins.

The membership of the Horn Society we are still calling for help. A white man will get sick, he will call a doctor. He will tell the doctor, "I am sick. You will help me," but the doctor will have no way to help him. The doctor will prepare
the medicine. Then he will give the medicine to the sick man and he'll tell him, "Use this medicine and you will get better." There are ingredients in a medicine; the Horn Society is just like a medicine. I spoke about some of the Horn Society bundles before. Here is what I said. There are 27 Horn Society bundles; they all have individual histories of how they originated. It is not good for a buffalo that is going to transfer a Horn Society bundle to bind the staff with a buffalo skin; it will be too wooly. That is why the buffalo called the otter for help. When a buffalo calf is born its fur is yellow and late in the summer its fur changes color; it turns black. That is how the group stars* came into existence, because nobody gave them buffalo calf skin bags.

The group stars will disappear in the spring when the buffalo calves are born and they come out again when the fur of the buffalo calves turns black in the summer. Now us humans, we don't know that we changed color. We get suntanned the older we get and our hair turns grey. That is how the buffaloes are and that's why they call on the otter for help. They told the otter, "Your fur will never change color and the bindings of the staffs will never change into the future so we will use your skin for binding the staffs." So the otters agreed to the suggestion of the buffalo. The buffalo knows that he raised all mankind and all the various animals and fowls; he raised them with its meat. When a buffalo calf is born its fur is yellow and after so many months the calf's fur will turn black. It's yellow fur will shed in the summer and its new fur will be black and the older the buffalo gets the color of its fur will fade so that is how the staff will be after a length of time. That is the reason why he told the otter, "We will use your skin to bind the staffs." 

*A group of little boys went up into the heavens and turned themselves into stars so that people will see them all the time because nobody gave them buffalo calf skin bags while they were still on earth as little boys.

The otter lives in the water and it never has a summer; that is why its coat never changed. Every summer the buffalo's fur changes; and us humans, every time we comb our hair we pluck some of the hairs out and the new growth of hair changes its color. They turn grey.

The otter told the buffalo, "I agree to your suggestions but you will feed us." The buffalo answered, "Yes." The otter said, "I will give you my hide." When the otter comes out from the water onto dry land and if they are chased they have such short legs but they slide on the ground. I never saw an otter to slide on the ground, I just hear that they do slide back into the water for safety. The buffalo transformed into a human and he took an otter skin and cut it in a strip and used it to bind his staff. When the Horn Society Bundles were transferred and when the people made the contents of the bundles, they killed otters and the otter skins were used to bind the staffs and
buffalo skin bands were attached to the staffs at certain places. Those buffalo skin bands are called reinforcements. There are four buffalo skin bands to a staff. One buffalo skin band is at the tip of the arch of the staff and another at a certain place and one at the bottom. So there are seven buffalo skin bands to a staff.

There are no beaver skins attached to the staffs; beaver skins are not included. The reason why they are not included, because the beavers will gnaw a tree which is called a red birch down and they eat the bark of this tree and the buffaloes also eat the bark of the red birch. So that is why the beaver skins are not included in the Horn Society Bundles. The little brothers of the beavers (the muskrats) donated their hides which are used as face towels. The marten told the Horn members, "Please let me join in. I will dance on the outside and I will protect all of you. I am a fast runner." That is why the marten doesn't mingle with the other members. It dances all alone on the outside of the circle.

The bundles that are transferred are not all from the buffalo. There are different members. I already explained how the foxes joined in the society. The question that I was told is, "Why were otter skins used to bind the staffs?" So that is how it is the buffalo bought the otter skins. The buffalo's wool changes and if the buffalo skin is used for binding the staff, the Horn Society staff will always change. When a person has gone through the various transfers at individual times then he will join the Horn Society. When he gets old he'll be a member of the Horns for four years and then he will transfer his Horn Society Bundle and then he will retire from all transfers. The Medicine Pipe -- there are few that stole Medicine Pipes; it a rule to steal Medicine Pipes. I heard the

Medicine Pipes are for wealthy people. That is why they give away tobacco free and free lunch too. It is a usual thing to have a feast at all transfers. It is true that all sacred bundles that are transferable cost a fortune; they cost that much. Sometimes we include our wives in our payments for a sacred bundle. But they'll serve free lunch. The beavers eat freely on the red birch. That is why lunch is free in all holy ceremonies and that is why there is always a feast at a transferal ceremony. This is a truce with all animals and fowls.

There are people in the past that mingle with animals and birds. They get their supernatural powers from them and they live by the animals and birds. Other old men live by the animal that gave him the powers to live his life as he is instructed to live. For example, a man by the name of Chief Moon, people called him Bug Eater. He'd put his hand on an ant hill and when there are enough ants on his hand he puts the ants up with his tongue and eats them. Chief Moon (Bug Eater) will pick up a rattlesnake and will eat it alive. He'd also catch a frog and eat it alive too. Chief Moon (Bug Eater) doesn't eat buffalo meat too much. He’d eat any animal or a
bird that he encounters and he ate a lot of fur-bearing animals with their furs. He lived like this because he has supernatural powers. There is a place called Snake Nose. He (Bug Eater) slept and had a vision. A bald eagle gave him his supernatural powers; that is why he eats animals and birds.

I saw some of the shamans that cure sick people by piercing the skin. They use quartzite to pierce the skin and they'll suck the blood out and I went through that treatment once. My father's name is Dog Child; he does the skin-piercing treatment. And a man by the name of Punk and a woman by the name of Beaver Woman and another woman by the name of Red Otter -- these are two women that I know that use the skin-piercing treatment. Mrs. Jim White Man Left used the spiritual powers of a Water Bundle Pipe for curing. Mrs. Jim White Man Left is still alive and there is another woman, her name is Home Offering (Mrs. Joe Mountain Horse). She used the powers of the Horns for curing. A woman uses the spiritual powers from a Medicine Pipe for curing; her name is Long Time Pipe (Mrs. Shot On Both Sides, deceased) and also she uses the spiritual powers of the Crow Water Bundle for curing. In the future I'll be singing the shaman songs. I know them all. The spiritual powers of the bear belt in the Pigeon Society is also used for curing. A man by the name of Low Horn uses the spiritual powers of the bear belt for curing. Wolf Old Man (Scraping White) also uses the bear belt of the All Braves for curing and Elk White uses the spiritual powers of the Medicine Pipe for curing.

In the past, people have Tea Dances and this Tea Dance was also used for curing. I (First Rider) was cured with the powers from the Tea Dance. A man by the name of Three Bulls cured me with the powers of the Tea Dance. And the All Brave Dog Society was also used for curing by Red Plume and all the sacred bundles that are transferable are used for curing. Transferals are scarce today and the shamans are not reliable any more and today there are a lot of these shamans that have forgotten their curing powers on account of liquor. Calf Shirt uses liquor for curing and it gave him strength and made him to be a fierce man. Nowadays an Indian child is baptized as soon as it is born and shamanism is abolished from them by baptism.

Shamanism is completely extinct on the Blackfoot Reserve, on the Blood Reserve and on the Piegan Reserve. Today very few will use their curing powers. The reason why there are a few shamans today is because transferals have stopped. Shamanism originated from sacred transferals. I learned the songs from sacred transferals and now I don't know many of the songs because I don't go through transferals any more.

I must say that my father did some curing with the powers of bald eagles. My father did his curing with the powers of all the sacred artifacts and he has an experience of all sacred transferals and now I have my father's ways. I learned everything from sacred transferals. I was given the spiritual powers for curing too but I got shy and I quit it and now I am
giving the histories of sacred transfersals.

Today I believe the word of our Father. He is our Creator. He said, "Everything will pass away but my word shall not pass away." Today I am thinking. I'll say 20 years ago horses were used to move camps to the Sundance and horses are used for haying and for plowing. Today everything is gone. Very seldom I'll see a horse and a rider.

Where are the wagons? Where is the Sundance? Today the Indian day celebrations have put a stop to the Sundance. Now we are holding up the Indian days instead of the Sundance. Where are the women that sponsor the Sundance Lodge? Where are the Horn Society? Where are the Medicine Pipe owners?

I saw Wolf Shirt. When he really dances he puts the Medicine Pipe on his head and dances with it and the pipe never falls; nobody will do that today. Life has extinct. There is no more life.

Now here's how it is going to be. The things that preserve our living will vanish and now liquor is poured on us. Before our Father left he said, "I will come back. I will send you back with the one that you live by." One hundred and twenty men* were selected and they went to a place and waited. When they were ten days at their waiting place our Father gave them a holy object. The thing that was given to the men is called the Holy Ghost. As they looked at each other there was a tongue of fire on each one's head; they glowed with the supernatural powers of our Father.

After the men received the Holy Ghost which our Father gave them they spoke strange languages. They knew then how a person is going to lead his life. They will pray for a sick person, they will lay their hands on the head of the sick person, and they will call our Father and the sick person will recover. The blind will see, the crippled will get up, and those who have leprosy, their sores will heal. Now us Indians that show, the Queen made her laws for us and now the new government are governing us and today they have killed our way of living. Our pleasures, the things that we get our food with, the things that give us life and our way of good living -- they have destroyed all these and they gave us the liquor rights. Now today our people are living a miserable life.

Our Father said, "There will be many Christians but a few will go to my home." I feel sorry for this kind of life. If life was still like the stories that we are telling now about the transfersals of sacred bundles then today will be smooth. Now the Indian doctors are operating with their drinking. Now those that conduct the Horn Society are drinking continually. They don't care any more for their society. Now the old way of living has stopped. It is suffering. It is just like a war on this continent. I feel sorry on account of this and that is why I am illustrating the sacred transfersals of the past. The way things were in the past were joyous. When the days came up
to Victoria Day we have sports and people will have a big feast out in the open. Today we are dodging the drunks and especially we are given the rights to handle a gun. All we do now is shoot a person. We are living like dogs. In the past when the Indians first started to drink there were a lot of murders. They were not neighborly any more. Today that kind of life is back again. I believe that the end of time is near for the way things are. And the sacred bundles are not handled in the right way any more. It's on account of liquor. Talking about people, Charcoal was the first one to commit murder. The

*The men that waited for the coming of the Holy Ghost were not number 120. They were the 12 apostles of Jesus Christ without the 12th apostle Judas that betrayed Jesus and hung himself.

people hated him for what he did and he was hung. And today people that are close relatives will kill each other and married couples will also kill each other and nobody will hate them for what they do.

Now we are stealing sacred bundles and sell them just for liquor; life is that lonely now. An Indian is an Indian. He'll never be a white man and now they think to be like the whites but they'll never be like the white. People will never give the right information of the Horn Society. People only want to get something out of life. Night Caller was going to construct a Black Covered Pipe but he constructed it into a Water Bundle Pipe. The pipe was all new. It took Night Caller two years to complete the pipe and the Spear Chief took the pipe. The pipe was transferred to him in the summer and the following summer his wife died. Spear Chief kept the pipe, and Night Caller died and his wife died too.

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