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 construction of a Holy Lodge.
- Describes a self-mutilation ritual.

George First Rider: The pole of the Motoki is one of the digging stick is tied to the pole. The tipi poles are supported by this centre pole. The Motoki went to cut their poles the same way as the ones that cut the poles for the Holy Sundance lodge. They'll go to the mountains to cut their poles. They didn't take poplar, spruce and red pine; they took tamarack trees. The spruce trees are small to the top and big at the bottom. The red pine are nice and straight but they break easy. We'll say we have a broken travois. That's it. There is nothing wrong with the tamarack. They'll look for a tamarack and they'll cut it and they will look for some more
and they'll cut it too. They'll cut so many rails and they lay their poles on these rails. They'll weight them down to keep them straight and the poles are peeled. When they are half dry they'll have a yellow color when they are peeled. If a woman get too proud she will look for a buffalo horn, a bull horn. She'd insert the big ends of the poles into the horns to make skids. They'll cut a bull buffalo hide into strips to tie their travois. The cross section of the travois are dried birch; they are not peeled. The flooring of this cross section, I lost the name of those. I don't know what they are called but that is what I called them, the flooring. Nobody knows the name of them. My grandmother Making Noise From Underneath was the last one to use a travois and after that travois were never used again for transport. The reason why they put horns at the end of the travois, if the horse backs the poles will not go into the ground; it will slide. The name for a sleigh in Blackfoot came from the word slippery travois. The floorings of the loading section are fancy carved and they tied them with spinal cords. These spinal cords that they tie with are just like the white man's glue, those that are called tape. They'll never come off. All they do, they just wrapped them around and they'll stick. The Motoki will cut their centre pole and their travois. At this point the women that are out to cut poles for their travois will make a vow. They will say, "I will loan my travois to the Motoki for their lodge so that nothing will go wrong with my travois." If the poles are peeled while they are green, they crack when they get dry. When the Motoki Society are going to look for a tipi to dislodge which they will use to cover their lodge a woman would step forward and she'll say, "I have a travois which I construction. Use it to frame your lodge." Women took their travois to the Motoki Society. The travois are erected for a wall in a circle. They used the tipi poles that they displace as rafters for their lodge. The birch wood is the crane's nose. That is the stick that was used to dig the huge turnip. Now when the centre pole of the Motoki is erected the digging stick is tied near to the top angleways; the tipi poles are rested on that. The travois that are erected upright in a circle are supported by the tipi poles that are tied at the cross sections of the poles of the travois. The roof is covered with the two tipis that the Motoki took. The ones that donated their travois will have their faces painted for their travois and the one that donates the centre tipi poles will also have her face painted. A Water Bundle owner that will loan his rattles to the Motoki will also have his face painted and if someone supplies lunch he or she will also have her or his face painted. Some will make vows to have their face painted by the Motoki; they will have their faces painted. Everything is not at hand for the Motoki. They're supplied with travois and with tipis and with the poles. A person will make a vow to make backrests, to cut a stake for the scabby bull buffalo's headdress. This person will make one backrest. After the Motoki have erected their lodge this person will take the stake that he cut for the scabby buffalo to hang her headdress on. The stake is fancy carved and he'll have his face painted for the stake that he cut. A person will have his
face painted with real paint for what he donated to the Motoki and the centre pole of the Motoki will be painted in purple paint from the forehead and down the nose and also on the wrists of the person but not on their teeth. The facial painting is the payment for the backrest that was donated. The Water Bundle owner will also have his face painted for loaning his hide drum to the Motoki Society and his children will also be painted for loaning the Motoki his drum and rattles.

I am talking about the tipi poles. The buffalo chase is on at this point but it has no concern to the tipi poles; I just mention it. The Motoki will do like the Horn Society. The Horn Society will have intercourse with the women, so is the Motoki. The Motoki will also have intercourse with the men members. If the Horns and the Motoki don't have intercourse they will never have their dance. When they have a chance to have intercourse then they'll have their dance. That is what the Motoki Society is. That is why the centre pole is there; the Motoki pray to this centre pole. I spoke about tipi poles, I spoke about the Holy Lodge poles, I spoke about the Motoki pole. These are the three poles I spoke about. The big offering to the Great Spirit came from the pole and from the Holy Lodge centre pole. Every offering came from the Holy Lodge. The offerings are transferable. If an offering is transferred to a person he will have the qualification to make an offering to the Great Spirit or to the sun. The ones that cut a portion of their flesh at the Holy Lodge, their fleshes are put on the top of the centre pole. A strip of flesh is cut from their thighs. Some are cut in the arm where the muscle is and some are cut below the elbow. Some are pierced with sticks. Willows are sharpened and heated. When they are heated they are very sharp. These pins are used to pierce the skin and then the flesh is cut with a knife. The knife is sharpened roughly so that it will not cut the flesh too fast.

I don't know anything of this kind. It's just my Indian happy life. I didn't eat one morning. I filled a red catlinite pipe with tobacco. I just had moccasins and my breechcloth and my robe. I took a straight razor and a needle and my offering. I went up on a hill. I was standing on the hill praying and crying. The sun came up over the horizon. I was still crying and my offering was there. I sat down. There was a black ochre and a cloth with it. My little fingers were pierced with a needle and a little piece of my fingers was cut off. Then the lower part of my ear was pierced with the needle and a portion of my ear was also cut off and a portion of my other ear was cut off too. The pieces that were cut off were put on the black ochre; when they are put down they cramp up. I stuck my tongue out and the needle was stuck in at the tip of my tongue. It was painful when my tongue was pierced. I was throwing in my tongue but I tried hard to stick my tongue out. Every time the knife is moved my tongue almost pops in. The tip of my tongue was cut off. I don't know anything so painful as the pain of my tongue. The portion that was cut off from my tongue looked like a half-ripened strawberry. All the pieces of my flesh and the portion of my tongue were mixed with the
black ochre and I tied them onto the pipe. I took my offering and climbed high. The sun was high by now. I started praying; I hardly talked because of the pain from my tongue. I didn't care about my fingers that were cut and I didn't care about my ears that were cut too but my tongue was the only thing that was very painful. I put down the pipe that I used to offer a smoke to the heavens and my offering, the offering that was painted hide with feathers attached to it. I just laid them down on the ground. I walked away and got some rocks to weight them down. The pipe was all red catlinite; it was full with tobacco. I went down and went home. I couldn't eat nor drink for one week because of my tongue. Sometimes my tongue moves just by my thoughts. After it started to better the only thing I could drink and eat is the juice from a tree. I think I couldn't eat for good 10 days. The juice was the thing that kept me alive. That is why I was at the Holy Lodge. So that is how I operated. I never thought of going and calling for help from the Creator (God) in all my life. I was just thinking to live up to a hundred years. I heard that when a Medicine Pipe owner dies he turns into an owl and I also wished to be an owl. I never thought of getting saved for the everlasting life in the hereafter. So today I realized everything. I had myself in agony just to be alive. I never got wise. I was just living a bad life. So that is all the story I can tell. Now I close my story. So that is how I know about life and that is how I ruined myself about life. That is all.

I haven't finished the story of the subject but now I am going to finish telling the story. I just spoke about the poles of the Holy Lodge. I am not speaking of the significance of the Holy Lodge; I spoke about the poles. Now it's not altogether...

It's not like just a labor. I illustrated a subject. If misfortune befalls a person, maybe his child is sick in any ways, he will pray. He will say, "I will cut the two-pronged pole for the one that is going to put up the Holy Lodge and I will deliver it." As the people of the past have no wagons they use travois. And now a person -- the centre pole is not cut down yet. The ceremony is in proceed at the Holy Woman's tipi and other people bring tongues to the centre to have the children's faces painted. A person that brings tongue to the centre will have his face painted. The person that cut the two-pronged post will take it to the centre and he will lay it down. "I brought you this pole. I gave you this for a post." This person will have his face painted for that. So he lays it down. The other person might cut two posts; he will also lay them down. After he sets them down he will go to the one that is putting up the Holy Lodge. Singing has started at this point for the Holy Woman. They have started the holy ceremony. He tells the Holy Woman, "I have some posts for you, two-pronged posts." They may be two or one. The Holy Woman tells him, "Sit here," and his face is painted the Holy Lodge facial paint; that is how the people operated. The next man might cut one crossbeam. He also goes and have his face painted for the crossbeam. Then he cut -- he might cut about
two -- so he goes and have his face painted. The other one will also make a vow and he will also cut a long pole for the Holy Woman, the long poles that go on top of the centre pole. He might cut one, just what he can manage. Recently wagons came which are used for hauling. The people of the past have a difficult way of hauling. The men that did the cutting will have their faces painted for the poles. The people of the past make vows to these.

The people of the past make vows for everything. They don't go just by the plans as for them to say, "Next summer it will be like this and it will be like this." The ones that are going to work will do this; this is how they work. The ones that made a vow to supply poles for the Holy Woman, these men will have their faces painted for cutting the poles. Their faces are painted with real paint and with black ochre around their faces. A person that is wearing a Sundance necklace, black ochre will be painted around the face of this man at two fingers wide and down to the tip of his nose and their hands are also painted with black ochre. A person that has a Sundance necklace, black ochre will be painted around his face at the width of one finger. These are the ones that cut poles for the Holy Woman; that is how the poles and posts are supplied. The centre pole is not the only one that is cut for the Holy Woman. People make vows to cut the poles and the post. A person that is going to cut the centre pole will look for a tree; he'll cut down a good tree. He will pray and the one that is putting up the Holy Lodge will also pray. "Now, O Sun, this is a fort for you." A corral is a fort; that is what it means. So the materials for the Holy Lodge are complete.

A person knows his young comrades. The young society members know each other. They will also make a vow. "I am going to join the ones that are going to cut the willows for the sweat lodge so that I may have a better life." These are the men that will go and cut the willows to build a sweat lodge, the Sundance sweat lodge. The willows are one hundred and they are the same ones that will take some rocks, one hundred rocks. A different man will find a buffalo skull. This is a precious skull. He'd save the upper part of the bone where the front teeth are still on. If he find a skull in that good shape he will take it, he will pray with it, and he will give it to the Holy Woman and his face will also be painted for that. The Holy Woman didn't collect all these. She will give a facial painting for the things that she receives; that's how she pays for them.

These are the others. I am talking about the Holy Lodge. These are the others. They are going on a hunt and it's the same. A sick person, his child or a relative, he will make a vow. "I will cut out a tongue for the Holy Woman so that my child may recover." A person doesn't have to be pure. So he kills his game. He might kill a buffalo. He cuts out the tongue very neat and puts it away. So he takes his meat home. He tells his wife, "There is a tongue in there. We will take the child to the Holy Woman and have the child's face painted
for the tongue." If the child is not walking, even if it's a baby, it will be lifted and will be carried to the Holy Woman's tipi with the tongue. The tongue is taken into the tipi. The parent will tell the Holy Woman, "Here is a tongue which is cut for you." So the child's face is painted for the tongue. If a man wishes to get an easy prey he will say, "I will donate the tongue to the Holy Lodge so that I may get my game." So the man will get his game easy and he will donate the tongue to the Holy Lodge and he gets his face painted for the tongue. That is why there are a lot of tongues for the Holy Woman. The men's faces are painted before they go out to cut the willows for the sweat lodge. Then how many men would there be they're all on horseback and their singing is very charming. They ride with the rocks and the willows for the sweat lodge and they chant as they ride along. Their chanting brings back the memories of the past.

A different man will look after the sweat lodge. He is called the orderly. I (First Rider) had that job; I worked with a friend of mine. His name is George Good Dagger. Our elder comrade's name is Many Swans (Crow Spreading His Wings). His wife puts up the Holy Lodge; her name is Indigent Woman. Crow Spreading His Wings had two wives. Indigent Woman -- yes, yes, he had two wives. One of his wives, Indigent Woman, puts up the Holy Lodge and he (Crow Spreading His Wings) joins the Horn Society with his other wife; her name is Nicely Going In. He (Crow Spreading His Wings) looks after the Holy Lodge for the one that puts up the Holy Lodge (Indigent Woman) and he goes to the Horn Society with his other wife; that is why he had two wives. We built the sweat lodge. After he brought the materials for the sweat lodge our elderly comrade said, "Iron Necklace." This Iron Necklace is George Good Dagger. I wasn't called by my name, First Rider. I was called by the name Miserable Boy. "These two men will stay here. They will look after the Holy Lodge." This is after we brought the materials for the sweat lodge. When the celebration in the Holy Lodge was in full swing I was told, "You have to go through a transferal." That is where we had crow feather headpieces. They were transferred to us today. I am remembering the song of the crow feather headpiece; I was given a headpiece. To join in I paid a brown horse for the headpiece, a race horse, but he was made to quit running because he was not a fast runner; he was just a saddle horse. Then I was painted for the crow feather headpiece.

Me and George Good Dagger looked after the hide to tie the poles of the Holy Lodge. Strips of hides are used to tie the poles of the Holy Lodge. First we painted the hide. We had to go home to get some knives; the knives were new. The knives we used to cut the hide were painted. This the hide of the carcass. A strip was cut from the tip of the nose down to the tail. This is to tie the willows on top of the centre pole. The tail hangs down. Coup counters will say, "I will try to burn out the furs of the tail." A coup counter will put a stick down and he will burn it. Their wives will pack some of the wood on their backs and they are unpacked by the fireplace.
The man will take a stick and he will say, "This stick represents a thing that I stole at such a place. I am burning it now." The worst crooks will almost burn out the Holy Lodge. The cutting of the hide was our job. We tied the tail hanging down from the top so we'll find out who is the chief of all if anybody can burn the furs of the tail. The ones that are successful only twice in battles or raids, their fire will not burn very good.

We did all that work. The cutting of the hide was transferred to us. We didn't eat. When the Holy Lodge was erected the strips of hides that we cut were used for tying and I had a crow feather headpiece. I was told that I'd transfer my crow feather headpiece and, "If you go to a big smoke ceremony you will sing of a crow feather." When the Holy Lodge was about to be erected we brought the tongues in food containers to the centre. Us, we served out the tongues, we distribute the tongues. The woman participants of the Holy Woman are different. They fed the tongues that they took to their relatives. Us distributed the tongues that the Holy Woman gave. That is how I got the crow feather headpiece; we did all the work of the Holy Lodge. When the Holy Lodge was set, when it was erected, we went and looked after the maker of a man effigy*. We built a place inside the Holy Lodge where he will make the man effigy. We looked after him from the time he was made to dance from his tipi to the Holy Lodge. We also went to get some creeping cedars for his bedding. We scraped the ground and spread earth on it for him. By this we got our crow feather headpieces. When the dancing started in the Holy Lodge we (George First Rider and George Good Dagger) were burning the incense for the Holy Lodge dancer. We worked every confusing thing in the place and there was dancing in the Holy Lodge.

Our comrades were called Owned Gray Horses. They participated in the Holy Lodge. We were then the officials of them at this point because we were working in the Holy Lodge. We looked after everything. We served out the food that was fed to all the people. At this point we thought of the ones that cut the forked posts, the ones that cut the crossbeams, and the ones that cut the poles, and the ones that donated tongues. We thought of them all, so they were all made to sit in one place. The Holy Woman prayed for them and she also prayed for us. She views the coup counters at this point. People are making a big confession when counting coups; that is what it is. That is how I recognize it myself. Now this will not exist any more in the future; that is why I am illustrating how I worked in it. Today, the one that still has some poles has only three poles. His three poles are known as this, the reach pole. We don’t know which poles that go at the back or at the door; we'll just take any poles and use them. Now we have no home, the home that was built for our life-giver, the sun. Now we will have our homes on wheels. We are just like boulders. A house will never be moved; a boulder will not be moved.

* A man effigy maker is a Holy Sundancer. He is painted before
he enters the enclosure that is built for him. When he enters the enclosure the drumming will start and he will come up dancing. While he is dancing he will be looking at the centre pole and he will see a vision of a man. Then he will sit down behind the curtain. Then he'll come up dancing again. He'll have his face painted in the facial paintings as the vision of the man he saw on the center pole. He will change his facial painting every time he comes up dancing the way as the vision of a man that he sees on the centre pole.

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