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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:

- Description of the construction and ceremonies of various sweat lodges.

George First Rider: Okay, now I will talk about the sweat lodge. There are many different sweat lodges. The artifacts that are transferable all have different sweat lodges. The sweat lodge has many variations. The songs are all different. The pouring of the water is also different in a sweat lodge. I don't know all the different forms for the sweat lodge and yet, on the other hand, I would say that I know more than anyone does. What I know outnumbers what I do not know.

Sweat lodges sound as if they are very easy and easy to build or easy to perform. They are very hard. Only a person who has

real people (Indian) knowledge, will be able to perform one. That is to be the shaman for the sweat lodge. The person who is doing the sweat lodge (m.c.) will not be able to do all sweat lodges because he is allowed to do only the ones that he has lived. Now the person who is going to tell a story (describe, or show) about a sweat lodge, he will only talk about the one that he knows through experience. I doubt if you will hear him say that he also knows of another sweat lodge. A person who officiates in a transferal ceremony is allowed to do only the one that he knows. He cannot officiate in every transferal ceremony because he has not owned all the transferable artifacts.

The officiator of the transferal ceremony has to know the bundle that he is going to transfer thoroughly. He has to be able to tell the origin myth, the story that goes with the bundle. He has to know the songs really well before he is able to transfer. He cannot transfer a bundle if he only knows the story. Only old men are able to transfer because the recipient has to receive a name and the old men are the ones who have accumulated a lot of powers whereas the younger man has not. If a recipient does not know his bundle well, due to the officiator's improper transferal, he will not be able to do anything. He will never be able to transfer his bundle. This is one reason why everything has stopped; the people don't know.

There are many reasons for a sweat lodge. First I will explain about the water sweat lodge. I will do my best to give a good description. There is the water sweat lodge, the water sacrifice sweat lodge, the water mourning (grieving) sweat lodge, where the pipe is washed -- purified.

The water sacrifice sweat lodge, the willow is used for the structure, because the willow is the beaver's food. The dirt is scraped away. They always make it big, then they put water grass on the ground for a mat. Sacrifice sweat lodges use sage for the mat but the water sacrifice sweat lodge use the water grass for a mat. The rocks are not very big and not too many.

The hole is round. It is said that the hole symbolizes the hole that the beaver makes when he chews the wood. The man who sits at the head has a place in front of which he has cleared or scraped away, where he is going to burn incense. The man sitting on the north side has a cleared spot in front of him too, where he will burn incense. The one sitting on the southeast side has a spot in front of him too, where he will burn incense and the man sitting on the south side has a spot in front of him too, where he will burn incense.

The rocks for the water sacrifice sweat lodge are not handed in, they are rolled in. The first rock rolled in was rolled to the man sitting on the southeast side and it is placed on the spot for his incense. Another rock was rolled in and placed on the man sitting on the south side's spot for his incense. Another one was rolled in and placed on the man sitting on the northwest side's spot for his incense. Another rock was rolled

and placed on the man sitting on the northeast side's spot for his incense. The last rock was rolled and rolled to the head and rolled into the hole. The man sitting at the head burned sweetgrass and all the men burned incense. They burned incense on the rocks. Then they all prayed. After all the prayers were said, they pushed the rocks into the hole and then the rest of the rocks were rolled in. The one that they were going to pour the water for was the "white ousi". Willow was used to tie it with and that was the container for the water.

Everyone is wearing their blankets and covered their heads with their blankets, while the officiator washed the rocks. When this was done, the men uncovered their heads and handed out their clothes. Then the officiator will ask the man, "Okay, which one are you having the sweat bath for?" The owner of the Water Bundle will be able to pick from any animal skin in his bundle such as the fisher, ksis-ksta-gi, Mah-tsi-isaibi, and the muskrat. The hardest sweat lodge is the fisher, because the fisher drinks in big amounts so the man will put four big dipperfuls of water on the rocks. We will use the fisher. There are seven songs. If we had the muskrat sweat lodge, the sweat lodge would not be very hot because he does not drink much water as he is a water animal. He lives in the water. The loon, isaibi, will not have a very hot sweat lodge. The skis-ksta-gi will not have a hot sweat lodge. Only the fisher has a very hot sweat lodge. The water sacrifice songs are sung. The pipe is handed into the sweat lodge, the water sacrifice sweat lodge. I cannot sing the songs because I don't know the songs. I know some songs but I don't know the order they are in.

Water sweat lodge. This one is also different but the same animals are used for the sweat lodges. The water mourning (in grief sweat lodge) is also different. I don't know all the sweat lodges, I only know a few, so I cannot follow it exactly

as it is ordained to be. I heard my father talk about them. My father owned two pipe bundles. I own two bobcat tails (cougar tails?). I also cut tobacco. I had a sweat lodge for these two things. My father had sweat lodges for the water sacrifice sweat lodge. I helped my father organize it. I also took part in the mourning sweat lodge. I also took part in the water sweat lodge, but I never could do it right. The Horn sweat lodge has a heart-shaped hole. The ordinary, for happy occasions, sweat lodges, I also saw it. The wood used was birch, because it is a strong wood and does not break easily. The ends can even be tied together. The willow is not a very strong wood. It breaks easily and has to be tied. It is not good to use material or rope to tie a sweat lodge for the Horns. It is also a taboo. This type of sweat lodge, Horn sweat lodge, is also transferable. The sweat lodge usually takes place after the Sundance or after everyone has left the spot where the transferal took place. The sweat lodge takes place because the bundle has not been kept very quiet. It has been danced with and handled quite a bit. I was transferred this. It is just a sweat lodge (ordinary sweat lodge), because the bundle is going to be put away for next year's event.

I had a partner who was an older man. His name was Bee; he died years ago. I was still very young. That was the very first time I joined the Horns. I was Bee's partner and we owned the rattle. He had two wives. One we shared; she was our wife. I was ready to have a sweat lodge. I had already taken a horse over to where the sweat lodge was to take place. My friend, Bee, stayed behind. When I got there, the horse team was ready. We got on the wagon and went into the woods to pick the wood for the sweat lodge. I was with my Horn wife, Bee's other wife. I cut fourteen willows for the sweat lodge. I also picked some rocks, wood for burning, and something to sharpen the willows on. We took these home. Bee had already chosen the site for the sweat lodge. Our grandfather was Eagle Black. My friend told him that he was to transfer the sweat lodge to me. I was told to put the peg into the ground which I did, and I took a piece of rope and tied it to the stake in the ground and I also tied another peg to the other end of the rope. Then I paced out four feet from the stake in radius, then I drew a circle around the stake. Then I took a brand new axe that I had just bought and held it over the incense. Then I made motions of trying to cut into the ground with the hammer four times and on the fourth time I cut into the earth. Then I took a shovel and set about making the hole which was heartshaped. There was a blanket beside the hole I was making. This blanket was for the dirt that I was taking from the ground. I had to put the dirt on the blanket. I didn't make a deep hole nor did I make a shallow one. When I finished making

the hole, I took the dirt and took it right behind where the lodge was to be. I emptied the dirt on the ground in a small mound. Then I pointed to the west side of the circle where the west door was to be and to the east where the entrance door was to be. The west is the head and the east is the entrance. Then I scraped the inside part of the circle. Then I took some white dirt and scattered it on the part I had just scraped away. This meant that I had just whitened (cleaned) it. Then I took another peg and the rock that I was to use to hammer it into the ground and held them over the incense. Then I had to make motions of pounding the rock into the ground four times again and on the fourth time, I hammered it into the ground. I had just made the hole to ready the making of the sweat lodge.

I built the west side first where the sun sets. Then I made the east side. I put seven on one side and seven on the other side. I had to do the four time thing with each willow. I held one branch and tried to trip it with my leg three times and on the fourth time I bent it with my leg, my friend on the other side was doing the same thing and when we had bent the branch we tied them together. We finished the sweat lodge and a friend remarked that we had made a beautiful dome shaped sweat lodge, that it looked like the Queen's crown. When we finished, I brought in the sage and put it inside the lodge on the ground for a carpet. The rocks were hot already. They were not the kind that cracked when heated. My friend Elk Bear sat under a canopy smoking. The other wife was in the house cooking the

meal we were to eat after the sweat lodge. I had given one horse, two blankets, two materials, and a gun for the transferal.

When the lodge was ready and everything else was ready, I took my blanket and wrapped it around myself and went beside the lodge and faced east and called out to my friends I had invited to the sweat lodge. (1) "Eagle Black, here is your sweat lodge to stop you from walking around. It is bursting apart from the flames. Hurry to the sweat bath." I then called out to (2) Liked Being Hit; (3) Little White Calf; (4) Dog Ribs, in the same fashion. I also called out to Many Bears, my friend, and Iron Collar, another friend, in the same fashion. These were two Horn members. They had helped me with the transferal. The old men walked around the sweat lodge as the sun sets and came in from the east entrance. The old men sat near the east door. I sat with the master of ceremonies.

When we were all seated we covered our heads with the blankets. The flap had not been closed yet when the rocks were washed. When the steam from the rocks which was now dirty had left the lodge we uncovered ourselves and proceeded to undress. We had worn light clothing to enable us to undress fast. A woman stood outside the lodge on the west side (another opening) waiting to take our clothes. Rabbit gave his clothing to the lady first. He was down to a breech cloth. His clothing was

taken over to the dirt mound and placed beside it. I sat on his left hand. I gave my clothes to the woman and she put my clothes on the ground beside the mound. Our clothes were placed in a circle according to our seating positions. Then the flap was closed. The men start to sing after the flap is closed. They start one note and finish. This was the first time I had ever been in a sweat lodge of this kind. It was really dark, and it was getting really hot. There was no breathing space. I had been told not to move and I was on the verge of panicking. One man told me to watch and do what he did. The old man started to sing and stop four times and on the fourth time sang the whole song. He didn't sing loud or fast. He sang soft and slow. He sang three songs (which George sang). The fourth song was a word song, "The man is saying my lodge is holy." At the end of this song you make four short sharp sounds. The other words are: "The above is a mound I have made. It is holy." That was the fourth song. The words were: "The woman's trail is holy." That was the fifth song. The sixth song was another word song. The sounds made at the end of this song were owl sounds. The sixth song was the same as the fourth song. The seventh song was not a word song. The first three were drum songs, one Horn song, the four other songs were fox songs. There is another song which is quite fast. (George sang all these songs). The fast song was a dance song. The Horns did not dance, they just made sounds. After this song the flap was opened. As soon as the eighth song was sung everybody got up to dance and the flap was opened and the lodge opened. At this time the flap was opened and we drank some water. My friend and I drank some chokecherry brew, non-alcoholic.

Okay, we started again. This time I was allowed to protect myself from the heat. I laid my head on the ground and faced the doorway and put my mouth to the ground to breath some air. The flap was opened, then closed, and I still put my mouth to the ground. The old men took turns pouring water on the rocks because we were not used to taking sweat baths, and that we might get too hot and jump outside the sweat lodge. I had been warned beforehand not to make a fast exit from the lodge and was told that if I did, the steam would follow and burn my skin. I did not leave the lodge because I was relying on the prayers from the old men that I had invited. They were very holy men. With great relief I would hear them say, "Okay, open the flap again." There were four openings, not counting the first opening which was a test opening, which made it five. Their seven grandfathers were in the sweat lodge. There were seven songs before the opening and one song when it became chaotic for the opening. This made it eight songs. This is how it was transferred to me.

At the final opening, I was able to leave the lodge. As soon as I started to leave the lodge a blanket was put around me right

away. I crawled out and laid on the ground for a while. I was very dizzy. My friends came out after me, my Horn friends. The old men were the last to leave. There are always four old men and the men who want to participate in the sweat lodge can be any number. There are four old men and the master of ceremonies which make it five men.

After everything was over, I invited the men to the tipi for a meal. We sat in the same position as we sat in the sweat lodge. After everyone was seated, the old man Rabbit asked for incense. One of the women burned incense. The woman was a relative of mine. The woman went to the left side of the old man and held the fork stick on the left side of the fork end. She picked up an ember from the left side and burned the sweetgrass from the left side. She broke the ends of the sweetgrass with the left hand. She said, "Okay, we are burning incense for a long life to bring up our children (for long life), and for old age." The grandfather told us to take one berry from our dish. I picked up a berry with my left hand. I prayed with the berry and then I spoke to the earth which bore the fruit and also asked for help in raising my children well and for the long life of my parents. Then I stuck the berry in the ground. Then we ate and after we had eaten, one man said he was going to have a sweat lodge too.

The person who is having a sweat lodge can invite anyone he wants to invite and he can ask any medicine man to be the master of ceremonies. The sweat lodges can be done by any old man. I had the transferal. I was given the authority to have a sweat lodge or to be the M.C. of one. Okay, I had another right to the Horns. I had already been transferred something else before. The person who transferred the sweat lodge told me that I could be the master of ceremonies for a sweat lodge,

that I had just been transferred the right to do so. I was transferred "the pair." I went to cut the wood for the sweat lodge. I cut fourteen branches. I also picked the rocks. I proceeded to bend the branches. The south side of the sweat lodge had seven and the north side had seven. Okay, this sweat lodge was just an ordinary sweat lodge. The Braid Wrapping, the Bracelet and I had a sweat lodge together. We had the sweat lodge for one old man. The Braid Wrapping, the Bracelet and the Pair were all the same. They are the three who are at the head and they are the same. That is why we had a sweat lodge together. We had the sweat lodge for a man called Moon. Okay, these men helped me build the sweat lodge. We built it the same way as the other was built. It had a heart-shaped hole. "The One With the Rattle" had a trailer headdress to it. That is why it had a heart-shaped hole. The round medicines have round holes. So we had the sweat lodge for the three bundles. They had heart-shaped holes and were going to have the same sweat lodge. Okay, we all helped dig the hole going through the same motions as I did with the other sweat lodge. We dug

the hole and put it on a canvas and when it was full it was taken to a spot behind the sweat lodge and poured it in a small mound. This is done with every sweat lodge, not only with this kind. We scraped the dirt away inside the sweat lodge not only with this kind. We scraped the dirt away inside the sweat lodge and then poured white dirt on the ground which we had cleaned. Then we put sage on the ground for a carpet.

I had my partner with me. Braid Wrapping had his partner. My partner was Black Horse, Bird Running, Wolf Chief. These were all my friends (comrades). There were eight of us. I sat beside the man who sat at the head on the south side. Braid Wrapping and his partner sat on the other side of the man. Bracelet sat beside me on my right. The rocks had already been brought in. We did not have to be painted because it was just an ordinary sweat lodge. We covered our heads again and the rocks were washed again. The man whom we had the sweat lodge for was Moon. We stripped again and after we had undressed and the flap was down, the Horn women sat outside the door. The rocks had already been wet so the lodge was quite hot again. The old man started to sing the same song again. Start, stop, start, stop, start, stop, start and finish the song. (George sang this song again on the tape. It is the same song that he sang earlier on this tape.) It is quite a lengthy song. After each song we gave our yell (which was just a sound something like an owl hoot) (four songs). Okay, the same song was sung again with the words "The man's lodge is holy" and "Has been mine a long time." There is another sound at the end of this song which is sharp and short (fifth). [The sixth and seventh song is another word song but I could not catch the words. (Diane Hellson)] The song had the same sounds at the end. The eighth song... this one was quite fast. The participants in the sweat lodge moved their bodies (upper part of their bodies in time to the song). Then he called for the flap to be opened.

Then we all left the lodge. We left again in the same position

as we had sat. We all went into a big tipi to eat. The same thing was done. The incense was burned. One of the partners burned the incense. He held the tongs with his left hand, he burned the sweetgrass from the north side, his left. He said a prayer as he burned the incense. The berry was prayed with again. The same requests were made, long life for the whole family. The berry was buried again and then the feast began. Okay, I had more sweat lodges after these two that I just spoke about. I had the sweat lodge for the rattle, the pair, ochred stick. Okay, water sweat lodges, head sweat lodges, and the real water pipe sweat lodge. I took part in these sweat lodges, some I was invited to. The sweat lodges are not all the same. Moon, who had the sweat lodge for us said: "All

these wrappings, four are Horn songs, three are fox songs." There are always seven songs and the dance song which makes it eight. The one that is danced with in the opposite direction and the round medicines have three Horn songs and four fox songs. The wrappings have four Horn songs and three fox songs. There are always seven songs to the sweat lodge. The eighth is for the opening.

Okay, this will be all for now.

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