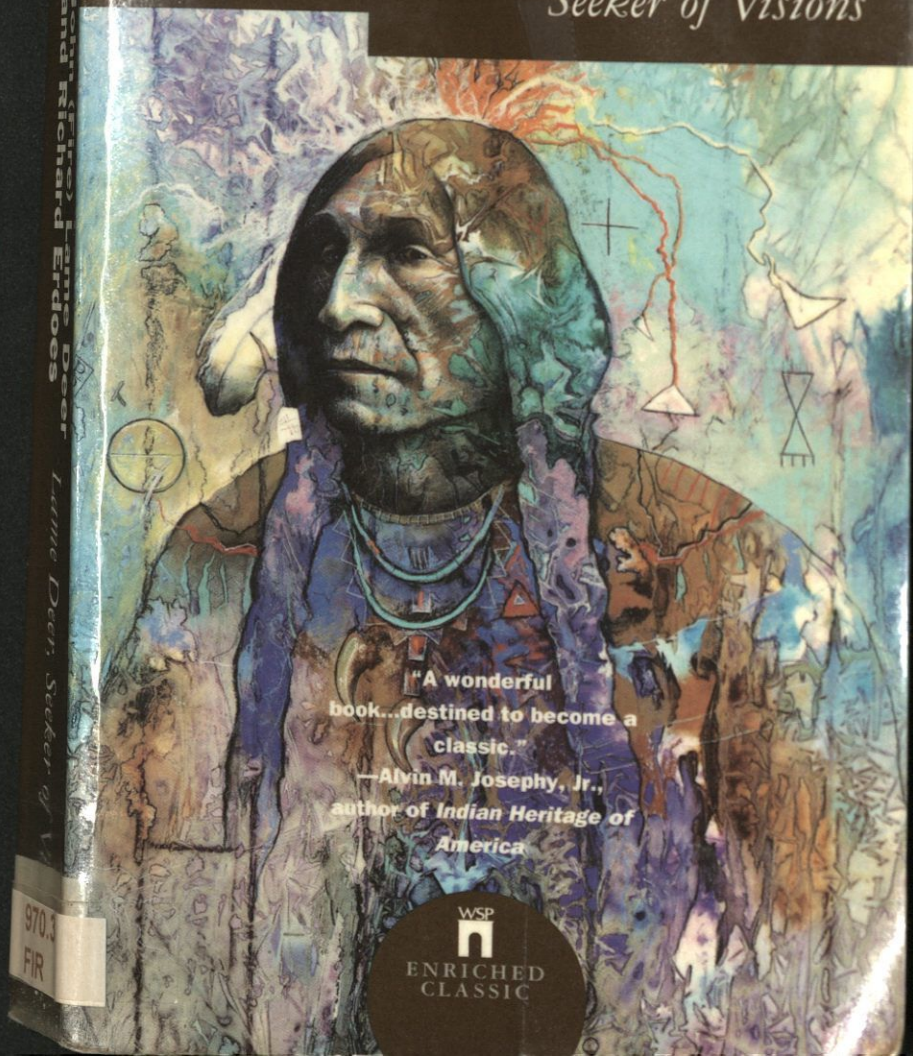


John (Fire) Lane Deer and Richard Erdoes

*Lame Deer
Seeker of Visions*



"A wonderful
book...destined to become a
classic."

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author of *Indian Heritage of
America*

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faced. He works backward openly. He says "god" when he means "dog" and "dog" when he means "god." You know what is in his mind. He doesn't say, "If I get elected to be a congressman, I will do this or that." He makes no promises. He has the power. He has the honor. He has the shame. He pays for all of it.

I think clowns are holy to all Indians, not only to us Sioux. I have heard about the "Mudhead" clowns in Zuni, way down in New Mexico. I was told they ran around with a big wooden male part and had some grotesque dummy of a woman and all the clowns pretended to have intercourse with her. Only not one of them made it; none of them knew how to. And the whole village looked on and smiled, the old ladies and the young children, because this too was holy, part of a sacred dance for the renewal of all green things, a prayer for rain. It is very different from us Sioux, yet it is the same. Different but the same—that is real *heyoka* business. I think when it comes right down to it, all the Indian religions somehow are part of the same belief, the same mystery. Our unity, it's in there.

Well, it's late, time to go to bed. Don't dream about the thunder-beings now, Richard. The way your mind works, the stories you tell, if you had to act out your dreams in public, it could be very embarrassing.

Blood Turned into Stone

An old tale among our people, passed on from grandparent to grandchild over a span of many generations, tells of an immense flood which at one time engulfed the prairies like an ocean. Some of the people who inhabited this land ages ago tried to save themselves by taking refuge on top of a high hill; but the flood rose and washed over them, overturning the earth and crushing all living beings underneath its weight. The flesh and bones of the people were turned into a large pool of blood. The blood jelled, grew solid and, after a time, turned into red pipestone. It is still there, in the southwest corner of Minnesota, the only place on earth where you can find this sacred, blood-red rock.

One young, beautiful woman survived the flood. As the waters swirled around her a huge eagle swooped down from the clouds and carried her to a high mountain where she was safe from the raging flood. There she gave birth to twins who grew up to be the ancestors of the Sioux nation. This the old people told us.

This pool of blood figures in a few other tales which are so old that there is nobody left now who can remember them in their entirety. My grandfather told me the tale of the rabbit boy. Once upon a time the rabbit came across a pool of blood. The rabbit made it congeal by rolling it around, giving it the shape of a human being, resembling a dwarf. It was still raw blood, not flesh. The rabbit kicked it around until it formed a little gut. He kept moving this around until it grew bones. Still the rabbit kept playing with it until it became a human—a boy. The rabbit dressed this

new human being beautifully—in red-painted buckskin decorated with porcupine quills. And he called him Rabbit Boy.

Rabbit Boy started walking until he came to a village of other human beings where he saw many boys like himself. They asked him where he came from. He said, "I come from another village," but there was no such village. The village he had come to was the only village on the whole earth. Rabbit Boy added, "That place is so beautiful, I couldn't take you there. Your clothes are not good enough."

There was a young virgin in the village. The people thought it would be a good thing to marry her to the Rabbit Boy, because he seemed to have strange powers and it would benefit them to make him their relative. But Iktome, the spider-man, a trickster and schemer who is always waiting to turn somebody's misfortune to his own advantage, wanted this woman for himself. He worked on the minds of the people, turning them against the Rabbit Boy, making them jealous of his fine clothes. One village boy said, "I have a power to work on that Rabbit Boy. I'm going to throw a hoop over him." They also robbed him of his beautiful red-painted robes. When the Rabbit Boy resisted they tied him up. The two-faced spider egged them on: "Let's cut him up with a butchering knife." The Rabbit Boy was still standing, tied with rawhide. He said, "If you are about to kill me, I will sing my death song.

Friend, friend,
I have fought the sun.
He tried to burn me up,
But he couldn't.
Even in battle
With the sun,
I was not killed."

They cut up the Rabbit Boy into a pile of meat chunks for soup. But that Rabbit Boy was hard to kill.

A great storm arose, floods, rain, hail. A cloud came down, making everything disappear. When that cloud was gone, those chunks of meat were gone, too. But there were some who had seen that the chunks of meat had joined together again, forming themselves up into the Rabbit Boy once more. He had come to life again, but gone up with the cloud.

Again there were voices: "The Rabbit Boy is *wakan*—sacred—full of power. Let us marry him to this girl." The tricky spider said, "Let's forget about him. I am just as powerful. Tie me up. Cut me up." Iktome remembered the words the Rabbit Boy had sung. He thought the power was in those words. Iktome sang:

Friend, friend,
I have fought the sun.
He tried to burn me up,
But he could not do it.
Even battling the sun,
I was not killed.

They cut Iktome up, but he never came to life again. All that was left of him was some chunks of meat.

In very much the same way as the Rabbit Boy, known as *Weota-wicasa* or *Much-Blood-Man*, other beings were made, such as the elk and the buffalo whom we hold sacred, because they offered themselves up as food for our people. I will not tell the whole story here, because in order to tell it, or even listen to it, a person ought to have fasted for two days and purified himself in the sweat lodge. But this much can be told.

That pool of blood comes up a third time in our tales. Howard Red Bear, a man from Allen who lived to be almost a hundred years old, used to relate a story his own grandfather had told him. According to this there once was a young man, many lifetimes ago, one of the first to pray with the sacred pipe on behalf of the

tribe. At this time there was only this one pipe which the holy White Buffalo Woman had brought us. The young man went to a lone, towering rock; the rest of the people stayed behind, waiting for him to finish his prayers. They waited in vain, because he never returned.

After four days they went to look for him, and at the foot of the distant rock, where they had last seen him, they found a pool of blood and the calf pipe. They camped there for four more days, mourning him. One man prayed for him, leaning his head against the rock, and he heard a voice from deep within the earth answering him: "This is my blood which you are going to use." And again the blood turned into red pipe-stone.

It is good that these ancient legends, passed along from generation to generation, all tell us that it is our blood, the blood of the Sioux nation, which turned into the stone from which the sacred pipe is made. Because this pipe is us. The stem is our backbone, the bowl our head. The stone is our blood, red as our skin. The opening in the bowl is our mouth and the smoke rising from it is our breath, the visible breath of our people.

As we stand on grandmother earth, raising our sacred pipe in prayer, its stem forms a bridge from earth through man through our own bodies, to the sky, to Wakan Tanka, the grandfather spirit. As the pipe is filled with our sacred red willow bark tobacco, each tiny grain represents one of the living things on this earth. All of the Great Spirit's creations, the whole universe, is in that pipe. All of us is in that pipe at the moment of prayer. Often we are so overwhelmed by this that we cry and burst into tears as we raise the pipe toward the clouds.

Our sacred pipe—I have left speaking about it to the very last, for two reasons. This pipe is our most sacred possession. All our religion flows from it. The sacred pipe is at the heart of all our ceremonies, no

matter how different they are from each other. Crying for a vision, suffering at the sun dance, in the darkness of a *yuwipi* night, in the sweat lodge, the pipe is always there, right at the core. It is as sacred to us as the holy bundle of arrows is to the Cheyennes. Even more sacred, because the arrow bundle is for the Cheyennes only, while we hold the pipe on behalf of all the tribes of this turtle continent, on behalf of all living things upon this earth.

It is because of this sacredness that one should speak about the pipe at the very end, after everything else has been said. But there is still another reason why I have waited so long to talk about the pipe. It scares me. If an Indian tries to talk about it, he is easily lost. Our minds are not good enough to understand all of it. It is so sacred that it makes me want not to tell all I know about it. No matter how old I am, how long I have thought about it, how much I have learned, I never feel quite ready to talk about the pipe. Sometimes I dream of our writing a book about nothing but the pipe, because all Indian wisdom can be known through the pipe. But, as I say, it scares me and overwhelms me with its greatness.

Our grandfathers told us how the sacred pipe was brought to our tribes. One summer, untold lifetimes ago, our different bands gathered for their yearly get-together. The earth was beautiful, covered with high grass and flowers, but the people were hungry. This happened long before we had either guns or horses, and the life of a hunter was hard and uncertain. Among the Sioux, the Itazipcho—the "Without Bows" tribe—had not had any meat for days. They decided to send out two hunters to scout for buffalo.

The two men searched a long time for game without finding any. At last they came to the top of a hill from which they had a good view, and they saw something moving toward them. At first they thought that it was a buffalo, but as it came nearer it turned out to be a beautiful young woman, the most beautiful they had

ever seen. She wore a finely made dress of white buckskin so wonderfully decorated that no human hands could have made it. She wore her hair loose, except for a part of it on the left side which was tied together with buffalo hair. She wore a bundle on her back and carried a fan of sage leaves in her hand.

The beautiful woman spoke to the two hunters: "Do not be afraid. I have come from the buffalo nation with a message for your people, a good message." As he looked upon her, the older of the two hunters was overcome with a desire to possess her. He stretched out his hand to touch her, but she was *lila wakan*, more than human, and had not come to gratify the lust of a man. It is sometimes said that as soon as the hunter reached out to seize her a cloud descended and enveloped him. After it dissolved, a heap of dry bones was all that was left of this man. This is not the only way the story is related, and it is not quite as the spirits have told me. When the right time comes and I feel able to do it, I shall talk more about this. But one thing is certain—desire killed that man, as desire has killed many before and after him. If this earth should ever be destroyed, it will be by desire, by the lust of pleasure and self-gratification, by greed for the green frog skin, by people who are mindful only of their own self, forgetting about the wants of others.

So there was only one young hunter left, and the White Buffalo Woman told him to go back to his people and tell them to prepare for her coming. She explained what she wanted them to do. They were to set up a large tipi and make an *owanka wakan*, a sacred earth altar, inside it. She also wanted them to place a buffalo skull and a rack made of three sticks inside the tipi.

The young man went back to his people and told them what had happened to him and to his companion. He told them that a sacred woman was coming to see them the next morning with a message from the

buffalo nation. He made known what she wished them to do, and it was done as she had instructed him.

The next day the crier called upon all the people to assemble around the sacred tipi, and, as the sun rose, they saw the White Buffalo Woman coming toward them in a sacred manner. Instead of the sage fan she carried the holy pipe. She was holding the stem with her right hand and the bowl with her left, and that is how we carry the pipe to this day.

The White Buffalo Woman entered the tipi where the old men of the tribe awaited her. They said, "Sister, we are glad that you came. We have had no meat for some time and all we can offer you is water." They dipped some *wacanga*—sweetgrass—into a skin bag of water and gave it to her in this way, and to this day we dip sweetgrass or an eagle feather into water and sprinkle it on those we wish to cure or purify during a ceremony. Most of our rites end with the drinking of water, and all this constantly reminds us of the White Buffalo Woman.

She then instructed and showed the people how to use the pipe. She filled it with red willow bark tobacco. Then she walked sunwise, clockwise, around the altar. This represented the circle without end, the road of man from youth to age, from ignorance to knowledge. It stands for life. So if we have a ceremony now, we also circle around like this before beginning to smoke. The White Buffalo Woman then placed a dry buffalo chip on the fire to light the pipe with it. For many generations this was the only right way to do this, but now we must take matches most of the time.

The White Buffalo Woman then showed the people how to pray with the pipe, lifting it up to the sky, lowering it toward the earth, pointing it in the four directions from which the wind blows. This lifting up of the pipe we call *hupa gluza*. "With this holy pipe you will walk like a living prayer," the White Buffalo Woman told the people, "your feet resting upon the

grandmother, the pipe stem reaching all the way up into the sky to the grandfather, your body linking the Sacred Beneath with the Sacred Above. Wakan Tanka smiles on us, because now we are as one, earth, sky, all living things and the *ikce wicasa*—the human beings. Now we are one big family. This pipe binds us together. It is a peacemaker. There is a pool of blood somewhere, a place you came from. You will find this blood petrified into stone and it is red. It comes from a sacred spot common to all people, where even enemies are turned into friends and relatives." And it is probably from this time onward that the Sioux people started the custom of ending all important ceremonies with the words *mitakuye oyasin*—all my relatives—plants, animals, humans, all one big universal family.

The White Buffalo Woman then addressed the women, telling them that it was the work of their hands and the fruit of their wombs which kept the tribe alive. "You are from mother earth," she told them. "The task which has been given you is as great as the one given to the warrior and hunter." And therefore the sacred pipe is also something which binds men and women in a circle of love. It is the one sacred object in the making of which both men and women take part, the men making the bowl and the stem, the women decorating it with their best quillwork. During an Indian wedding both the man and his bride take hold of the pipe at the same time, and red cloth is wound around their hands, tying them together for life.

The White Buffalo Woman then turned to the children, because they have an understanding beyond their years and, among Indians, the right to be treated with the same respect which is shown to grownups. She told the little children that what the grown men and women did was for them. That the children were the greatest possession of the nation, that they represented the coming generations, the life of the people,

the circle without end. "Remember this and grow up, and then teach your children," she told them.

After she had finished speaking, the White Buffalo Woman wrapped the pipe in the bundle she carried on her back and gave it to the old-man chief of the Without Bows for safekeeping. The name of this man is sometimes given as Standing Hollow Horn and sometimes as Buffalo Standing Upward. Together with the pipe the White Buffalo Woman gave the people a round, blood-red stone. On it were the marks of seven circles—the seven campfires of the Lakotas, or the seven ceremonies which go with the pipe. So here again the stone represented the whole universe to those who could read its signs.

After the White Buffalo Woman had done all this she took leave of the people, walking in the same direction from which she had come. She was singing: "*Niya taniya mawani ye*," which has been translated as "With visible breath I am walking." This has a deeper meaning if one thinks about it for a while. First, *niya taniya* means not only breathing and breath, but also being alive and life itself. It means that as long as we honor the pipe we will live, will remain ourselves. And the thought of "visible breath" can be taken as the smoke of the pipe, which is the breath of our people. It also reminds us of the breath of the buffalo as it can be seen on a cold day. It underlines the fact that for us the pipe, man and the buffalo are all one.

As the people watched, the beautiful woman turned into a white buffalo. It kept on walking toward the horizon until it finally disappeared. This too is good to think about, easy to understand. The buffalo was part of us, his flesh and blood being absorbed by us until it became our own flesh and blood. Our clothing, our tipis, everything we needed for life came from the buffalo's body. It was hard to say where the animal ended and the man began. Ever since that time a white buffalo robe has been the rarest and most valued

thing a tribe could own. A tribe would give all its wealth for such a white-haired hide. When the buffalo disappeared, the old, wild Indian disappeared too. There are places set aside for a few surviving buffalo herds in the Dakotas, Wyoming and Montana. There they are watched over by Government rangers and stared at by tourists. If brother buffalo could talk he would say, "They put me on a reservation like the Indians." In life and death we and the buffalo have always shared the same fate.

The pipe the White Buffalo Woman gave to us is still kept by the tribe as its most sacred heirloom. It is called *Ptehincala Huhu Canunpa*—Buffalo Calf Bone Pipe. It is unlike any other pipe. Its stem is made of the lower leg bone of a buffalo calf. It is wrapped into buffalo wool and red flannel cloth. Red eagle feathers, four small scalps and bird skins are tied to it. It is now brittle with old age. It has been kept by the Elk Head family of the Itazipcho tribe of the Sioux nation for fourteen generations. Since we were put on reservations it has always been kept at Green Grass, north of Eagle Butte, on the Cheyenne River reservation. It is said that the old pipe keepers always lived close to a hundred years of age.

Beside the *Ptehincala Huhu Canunpa* this family also kept a second, very sacred tribal pipe, one among the first made from red pipestone in the way the White Buffalo Woman had taught the people. This old pipe served as a model after which all our other pipes are made. It has the feather of a red eagle tied to its handle. This brings to mind the eagle which rescued the only survivor from the flood, who gave birth to twins who, in turn, grew into the Sioux nation. It also reminds us that the eagle is a symbol of wisdom, almost as important to us as the buffalo. Many of our medicine men therefore have an eagle feather tied to their pipes. For a curing ceremony it is fastened way up on the stem. If the pipe is used for straightening out some family trouble, the feather is attached to the

middle of the stem. If one wants to gain knowledge, the feather is placed on the spot where the handle and the bowl touch. The shape of the pipe's head is like this,



the shape of a "T" standing on its head. But this is the pipe of a father, a man who has already founded a family. A bachelor's pipe is just shaped like an "L" with the extra piece at the end missing.



Nothing of importance, good or bad, takes place among us without the pipe. If a man killed a tribal brother, be it through anger or through accident, then the sacred circle was broken and a wound had been inflicted on the whole people. The killer would see his victim's face reflected in the water every time he drank. When there was a shedding of blood only an untying ceremony with the sacred pipe could bring peace to the minds of the people and reconcile the families involved.

If a person's word was doubted, he might offer to "bite the knife." If he did this people would know that he had spoken the truth, because misfortune would be his part if his lips touched iron after having said something which was not true. For many years I haven't heard of anybody biting the knife; people don't seem to believe in this anymore. But the pipe is another matter. Nobody would be foolish enough to tell a lie while the pipe was being smoked. That would surely kill him. And this we believe, even now.

And the pipe has to be properly smoked, every person sitting in his right place, in a circle, the pipe being passed back to the dark from the light in a

sacred manner, because it is our altar, while in a white church it is every man for himself, here and there, cafeteria style. My grandfather used to say, "The earth is red, blood is red, the sun is red as it sets and rises, and our bodies are red. And we should be walking the Red Road, the good north-south road, which is the path of life. Thus the Indian and the red pipestone belong to each other."

The pipestone quarry in Minnesota is the only place where this sacred stone can be found. It is now a national monument, but we Indians can still go there and dig out the red rock from which we make our pipe bowls. The quarry is right in the heart of the old Sioux country. Our eastern tribes—the Wahpeton, Sisseton and Wahpekute—held this land until 1851, when they were forced to give it up to the whites. But we got a treaty under which we can still go there to obtain the sacred stone.

In the old days you made a pipe the right way. You purified yourself and made tobacco offerings to the spirits. There are three large, upright boulders there, said to be ancient Indian people turned into stone, and you put tobacco ties there and maybe a feather, too. Right when you dug the stone out, you started with a prayer. The designs carved into a pipe bowl, these were prayers, too. A pipe made like this had the power.

Nowadays pipes are made commercially, with a machine and electric drill. They are easy to make, too easy. There is little power in these pipes. The quarry is all prettied up now, with lawns and lawn sprinklers and a museum. As you come in a loudspeaker tells you about the White Buffalo Woman and other Indian legends, getting it all mixed up, and there is a whirring sound as the slides come on. There are uniformed guides to take you around, explaining the meaning of the peace pipe to the tourists. Only how can they explain something which they don't know themselves? It is all very neat with water coolers and flush

toilets, but I close my eyes and try to think of this place as it was before all the landscaping and prettifying was done to it.

A friend of mine, a young medicine man, went to the quarry and a park ranger there told him that he could take out a pound of stone for a dollar—as a special favor, because he was Indian. My friend got angry. It wasn't the money, you understand, but he told them: "I am a Sioux, this is my land, my pipestone. I will take it out and I *will not pay!*" There was another guy who looked like an Indian himself. He said, "Right on," took my young friend to a place where the vein of pipestone lies in the rock like a long red snake and told him to take as much as he liked, courtesy of the National Park Service. My friend came out with a barrellful of stone. It is small victories like this which have to keep up our morale nowadays.

I found an old book by George Catlin in your library which was printed over a hundred years ago. I like to leaf through this book of yours and look at its faded, yellow and brown speckled pictures. I ran across a part where he describes his visit to the pipestone quarry in the 1830s. I think he must have been the first white man to see it. In a way he was also the first tourist and he had to talk to us through an interpreter. He got a few things wrong; maybe the interpreters weren't up to their jobs either. But Catlin was an artist, and he kept his eyes open, and some things he got at least nearly right and somehow it ties in with what we Indians know. Catlin's details could be all wrong, and when he is not sure of a fact he hides this behind a mass of words, but underneath it all, very faintly, you can see the main idea of the pipe coming through.

He knew, for instance, that the stone was the flesh of the Indians. He had heard about the flood which had turned the blood of the people into pipestone. He was also told that in ancient times buffalo were driven over these cliffs and that their blood, too, turned into

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pipestone. I have never heard this mentioned among our people, but whoever said this to Catlin 140 years ago had a sense that the Indian, the buffalo and the pipe were one.

One Sioux warrior told Catlin that this red stone was part of their flesh and that it would be bad for a white man to take it away; a hole would be made in their flesh and the blood could never be made to stop running.

Another Indian told him, "This red pipe was given to the red men by the Great Spirit; it is part of our flesh and sacred. We know that the whites are like a great cloud that rises in the east and will cover the whole country; we know that they will have our lands; but we want to keep this place." I might have spoken this way if I had lived then.

Catlin also mentions some fabulous birds which at one time were supposed to have been nesting in the quarry, and the way he describes them it sounds as if he meant the *wakinyan*, the thunderbirds. Again, the way I know it, the thunderbirds are not part of the pipe, but it all goes to show that there were many legends about this place in the old buffalo days. Some old people among us are still saying that there are little ghostlike human spirits in the rock, just about a finger long, very fast and hard to see.

The Omaha tribe had a legend about the pipestone quarry. They say that long ago there was an Omaha woman called *Wahegela*. She was married to a Sioux warrior. One day she found herself face to face with a white buffalo. She followed this sacred animal as if in a trance. She watched the buffalo kicking loose large chunks of red stone and knew right away that these were the petrified bodies of her forebears. In this way she discovered the quarry. The Sioux and the Omahas were enemies, but they agreed that they would never fight each other at this sacred place. The land belonged to the Sioux, but the stone belonged to all Indians who honored the pipe.

Blood Turned into Stone

This is different from what we believe but, again, it ties in with our White Buffalo Woman story, because all the main parts are there, even if they are jumbled up: the woman, the white buffalo, the Indians' blood turned into stone, the pipe as a peacemaker. These many stories show that, no matter what the differences are, the pipe is sacred to all tribes.

A year ago I went to a convention of many tribes which was held to work for unity among us Indians. I had my old pipe with me which I have used for more than thirty years. We had a good ceremony during the night, just before daybreak, and fifty-four tribes smoked my pipe. I lit it for them, and 161 people smoked my pipe and it never went out. It kept on glowing all through the ceremony. The medicine men present raised this pipe and prayed to the Great Spirit in their own languages which I could not understand. But, on another level, I understood them well. That pipe gave us a common language and a common mind. Some reporters tried to take pictures, but not one of them came out. Wherever the pipe should have shown up, you could see only a white blur, something like a fog. That old pipe didn't want to be photographed at that time. Many men on our reservations have their own peace pipe. I won't be satisfied until there's one in each family. A Sioux without his pipe is only a half Indian, only half a man.

From the last person named Elk Head the keeping of our two most sacred pipes passed to Stanley Looking Horse and his son Orval, who are a part of the Elk Head clan. Orval is the nineteenth in the line of pipe keepers in that family. Very few people, even among our own tribe, have ever seen these two pipes unwrapped. Only once in a lifetime, if that often, can these two sacred heirlooms be seen. I was one of the few men privileged to hold these two pipes and to pray with them. It really changed my life.

One winter, many years ago, when I was a young man, I went north to Green Grass, where I heard the

Buffalo Calf Pipe was kept. Something within me urged me to do this, voices that told me I had to pray with this holy pipe. It was as if some power had taken hold of me, not bothering to ask me, "Do you want to do this?" I was like a car; someone was in the driver's seat making me go. The going was hard. There was a Cayuse wind, blizzards, an icy cold. The snow was hard and shiny, like glass. I thought that a man would be keeping that pipe but found out that a woman was in charge of it, Mrs. Elk Head, the older sister of Chief Elk Head, who had been the keeper before her. Some people told me, "If you want to see that woman you better hurry up, because she is dying."

I made my way through a snowstorm to her log cabin. I found the old lady sitting on the floor in the middle of the room. She was all skin and bone, so frail that a gust of wind could have blown her away. Her lips had receded and were so dry I had to wet them with a damp cloth. Seeing her like this, I didn't think she could live longer than another day or two.

I saw that her cabin was all prepared for a ceremony—sage on the ground, cedar, sweetgrass and all that. I asked her, "Who is doing a ceremony here?" She said, "You are. I had a vision that a young man from the south would come and cure me. I don't know you. I have never set eyes upon you before, but you are the one. All my grandchildren have turned Christians and no longer practice the old ways. Tomorrow, the snows will stop falling and the sun will come out full blast. There won't be any storm and the whole country, the whole earth, will be sparkling. If that happens tomorrow, you come over here. I will show you the sacred Buffalo Calf Bone Pipe. You will pray with it, and you will cure me. Be here tomorrow as soon as the sun is up."

I went to a house in Green Grass where I knew some people who let me sleep there. They told me, "You are making a fool of yourself. The radio has forecast blizzards to go on without a let-up. This storm will

last a week or more." That wind sure was howling. I went around the house like a spy, testing doors and windows.

I suddenly woke up in the darkness before dawn. I wondered what had roused me. Then I knew that it was the stillness. The storm had died down; everything was quiet. I couldn't hear a sound. I got up, had a drink of water and went outside. Nothing stirred. It was as if the earth had come to a standstill. I noticed that the air had turned warm. The sun came up. It was big and red and glowing so brightly that I had to close my eyes. Even if I looked away from the sun, I still had to squint. The snow turned bright red, reflecting the sun. It sparkled, millions and millions of crystals glistening, a sun in every one of them. When I started walking, the snow made a noise like breaking eggshells. That was the only sound I could hear.

When I arrived at Mrs. Elk Head's log house she was again sitting in the middle of the room, waiting for me. There was a fragrance in the place, smoke from burning sweetgrass and cedar. That house had already been made holy. I sat down at the west side. I noticed a big canvas bundle, about the size of a man, tied up like a *yuwipi*. The old lady asked me to unwrap it. The bundle consisted of seven rawhides, buffalo skin, deer skin, red and blue flannel. I came to the last layer and there was the pipe—*Ptehincala Huhu Canunpa*—the Buffalo Calf Pipe, the most sacred thing in the world for me. There was a second bundle and I unwrapped that, too. It contained the other holy, tribal pipe of red pipestone. This one was very large. The Buffalo Calf Pipe was small.

Mrs. Elk Head instructed me to take both pipes in my hands, the big one at the bottom and the small one on top. "*Takojia*, Grandson," she said, "pray with these. I had a vision that you would come, and you are here. Always pass the pipe to your left. Always take it with the right. Give it from your heart, keep the head close to your heart. Let the spirit come to you." The

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old woman talked to me in Indian, in a secret language only I could understand.

I held the pipes. Their bowls were my flesh. The stem stood for all the generations. I felt my blood going into the pipe, I felt it coming back, I felt it circling in my mind like some spirit. I felt the pipes come alive in my hands, felt them move. I felt a power surging from them into my body, filling all of me. Tears were streaming down my face. And in my mind I got a glimpse of what that pipe meant. That Buffalo Calf Pipe made me know myself, made me know the earth around me. It healed the blindness of my heart and made me see another world beyond the everyday world of the green frog skin. I saw that the pipe was my church, a little piece of stone and wood, but I would need nothing more as long as I had this. I knew that within this pipe were all the powers of nature, that within this pipe was me. I knew that when I smoked the pipe I was at the center of all things, giving myself to the Great Spirit, and that every other Indian praying with his pipe would, at one time or other, feel the same. I knew that releasing the smoke to rise up to the sky, I also released something of myself that wanted to be free and that thereby I gladdened all the plants and animals on earth. All this I could understand only with my heart and blood, I guess in the same way an animal understands things, not with my mind, and I thought about this for many years. Even now, after so much time has passed since that moment, the memory of it keeps me awake at night.

It suddenly came to me that if I mingled my breath with the sacred smoke, I would also mingle it with the breath of every living creature on this earth, and I also realized that the glow in the pipe was the sacred fire of the Great Spirit, the same fire that is in the sun. I knew that in this pipe all small things were fused into one, making an entirety. The thought came to me that if I ever learned to understand all that the pipe meant, understand all the symbols hidden within it, only then

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would I fully know what it meant to be an Indian, what it meant to be me. Well, I still don't know it. I am still learning. Maybe I'll be getting near to it one day. It is hard to find words for the thoughts that came to me then, insight and confusion, sadness and happiness all mixed together. Nor can I describe the power which flowed into me from the pipe, shaking me up. I can't do it. All I knew when I was holding these pipes in my hand was that this was changing my life.

My prayers must have helped Mrs. Elk Head, because she recovered and lived for a number of years more. Before I left her she told me that some white Government people had taken one of the pipe bundles away from her but had become frightened and brought it back. She said, "Maybe I will have to bury them in order to keep them out of the wrong hands." She also told me: "The time will come when the Indians will rise again with this sacred pipe, when it will be smoked by all." More than thirty years later, when fifty-four tribes were praying with my own pipe, it came back into my memory what the old woman had told me. She really was *wakan* and had the power to see ahead. She also gave me a tattoo and a secret name that went with it.

From old Mrs. Elk Head the pipe bundles passed to Stanley Looking Horse, still among the Without Bows people. But to my thinking the Buffalo Calf Pipe belongs to all the Sioux. It belongs to the Hunkpapa at Standing Rock, where a woman turned into a stone, to the people of Sitting Bull, and to the Ogallalas at Pine Ridge, Crazy Horse's tribe. It belongs to the Oohenunpa—the Two Kettles—who share our reservation with us and who got their name when, starving and near death, they found a rawhide bundle full of meat, enough for "two kettles." It belongs to the Sihasapa—the Sioux Black Feet—who got their moc-casins blackened a long time ago when they had to walk over miles of earth charred by prairie fires. It belongs to the Sicangu—the Burned Thigh people of

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Rosebud—who had their legs scorched by flames when Pawnee enemies fired the grass around their campsite. It belongs to my own people, the Mnikowoju—the Planters by the Water. And, in a larger sense, it belongs to all Indians on this turtle continent.

It is a great task to keep the pipe bundle. It should be housed in a fine, old-style tipi. During the day it should be put up on a three-legged stand, and twice daily it should be faced in a different direction according to where the sun stands. It was not always possible to observe all the right ways in which the sacred pipe should be honored every day of our lives. I heard that for a time, when no other place could be found, the pipes were kept in a shed. I wished we could put up a tipi again for our sacred things. There have also been rumors that the big pipe has been lost or broken. I hope this is not true. I remember how upset the northern Cheyennes in Montana were when they found out that the keeper of their sacred Buffalo Hat was driving around with it, taking it out of the reservation, going toward Sheridan, where maybe some white anthropologist could have gotten hold of it. They didn't like it when this sacred hat left their land, and a big chase was on until they got it back. And they were right. Too many of our holy things wind up in museums, where people who don't know what they are stare at them, where their power can't work.

The sacred pipes have not been shown to the people for some years now. In the summer of 1969 we Sioux medicine men thought that the time had come to open up these bundles. But when word got around and there were rumors of TV crews coming in, offering us money for "exclusive rights" as they called it, we changed our minds. We have become like a strange horse: If you get too close to him, he takes off. I guess we have good reasons for this. We returned the

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bundles to their hiding places and everybody went home without having seen the pipes. The day will come when we will open them again, but it must be the right day, and those who come must do so for the right reason. When the day comes, we will know it.

We Indians hold the pipe of peace, but the white man's religious book speaks of war, and we have stood by while the white man supposedly improved the world. Now we Indians must show how to live with our brothers, not use them, kill them or maim them. With the pipe, which is a living part of us, we shall be praying for peace, peace in Vietnam and in our own country. We Indians say "our country" because it is still ours even if all other races are now in physical possession of it, for land does not belong to any single man but to all people and to the future generations.

We must try to use the pipe for mankind, which is on the road to self-destruction. We must try to get back on the red road of the pipe, the road of life. We must try to save the white man from himself. This can be done only if all of us, Indians and non-Indians alike, can again see ourselves as part of this earth, not as an enemy from the outside who tries to impose its will on it. Because we, who know the meaning of the pipe, also know that, being a living part of the earth, we cannot harm any part of her without hurting ourselves. Maybe through this sacred pipe we can teach each other again to see through that cloud of pollution which politicians, industrialists and technical experts hold up to us as "reality." Through this pipe, maybe, we can make peace with our greatest enemy who dwells deep within ourselves. With this pipe we could all form again the circle without end.

When an Indian prays he doesn't read a lot of words out of a book. He just says a very short prayer. If you say a long one you won't understand yourself what you are saying. And so the last thing I can teach you, if

you want to be taught by an old man living in a dilapidated shack, a man who went to the third grade for eight years, is this prayer, which I use when I am crying for a vision:

"Wakan Tanka, Tunkashila, *onshimala* . . . Grandfather Spirit, pity me, so that my people may live."

EPILOGUE

Inyan Wasicun, the White Man with the Rocks

We were sitting on the floor in a large, empty room, I, my wife Jean, my two teenage sons, my little daughter and about forty Indians. Some of them were old and close friends; others I had never seen before. The walls against which we leaned our backs were made of bits and pieces, logs, parts of an old railroad car, anything that the Indian, who had built this house many years ago, had been able to lay his hands on. A huge tree trunk propped up a sagging ceiling. A kerosene lamp cast a timid light on the many-colored patchwork of the blankets which covered the walls. Next to me stood a large kettle with dog meat, the dog's head floating at the top, grinning at me. There were the many sacred things used for a *yuwipi* ceremony—colored flags, eagles' heads, oddly shaped stones, rattling gourds, the sacred pipe.

The light was extinguished and we were left with our thoughts—human islands in a sea of darkness. The drums throbbed as many voices rose in a quavering chant. The steady rhythm of the drums transmitted itself to the walls from where I absorbed it into my body through the shoulder blades. I not only heard the drums; I felt them physically. Lights appeared out of nowhere like so many fireflies. They came floating up out of the darkness for a fraction of a second and were gone almost before eye and brain had been able to register them. The spirits were coming in.

It was a familiar scene that I had witnessed a dozen times before, yet it was also strange and utterly improbable that I, an ex-Viennese, born in the old