Reviving Traditions

Jerry Potts

I always had a passion for learning about our traditional ways. After I finished high school and came back home in the early 1970s, I approached a few different Elders for guidance. They all said, “You have to have a pipe.”

It was pretty clear that no one was going to just give me a pipe, so I decided to make one. As I began looking for someone who knew how to do that, everybody said, “Go see Joe Crowshoe.” I went out there, and Joe said, “I don’t know anything about that. Go see my brother, Old Man Jackie.” It turned out that he didn’t know anything about it either, and he said, “I know they get the rock by Bad Eagle’s place. There’s a quarry there where that stone is.” I went down to see Art Bad Eagle, and I gave him some tobacco and some other gifts. I asked him if he could show me where that rock was so that I could get some to make a pipe.
He took me down and he showed me the vein. He told me I had to put tobacco down as an offering. He knew the protocol for digging the stone.

I dug out some of the stone, and I guess that’s where my story starts. I made a pipe and stem—just by trial and error. When I finally made one, I took it to Old Lady Many Guns and asked her if she could give it a blessing. She went through that ceremony with my pipe. She was quite touched that a young guy had brought her a pipe and wanted to learn about it. Old Lady Buffalo heard about it, too. Those two Old Ladies were very close friends. My involvement with the ceremonies and with the different teachings all started with those Old Ladies.

**STARTING OVER AGAIN**

Joe Crowshoe, Old Man Joe, had the Medicine Pipe Bundle that Old Lady Buffalo once had. They call it the Short Medicine Pipe. That’s the one pipe on the reserve that never left. It was never sold to a museum. Old Lady Buffalo hung onto that pipe, and they used to open it at the Old Lady’s house. Later, Joe had it transferred to him.

Old Lady Many Guns was the last O’kaan [Sun Dance] woman we had on the reserve. Even when they had an O’kaan down in Browning, Montana—it was in 1970 or 1971—she was the one who actually went down there. Old Lady Many Guns, Old Lady Rides at the Door, and Mike Swims Under were the key people for that ceremony.

At that time, there were not many young guys participating in any of the traditional ceremonies. I started to go to the medicine pipe ceremonies and started to cut tobacco and worked at Kano’tsisissin [All Smoke] ceremonies. I grew up hearing about the Iitskinaiksi [Horn Society], and I knew they were still very active at Kainai. There were a couple of other Medicine Pipe ceremonies that we went to at Kainai. We also used to go down to George Kicking Woman’s Medicine Pipe ceremony in Browning. I saw Adolf Hungry Wolf at these different ceremonies. He eventually came up, and I talked to him and used to hang around with him. I guess that was all part of learning. I got to really see how Adolf could be an “Indian” when he wanted something from the Old People. But then, when anyone wanted to have something transferred back
that had come from the Old People, he would be a White Person and not share with the community.

This was the same time that Allan Pard began working at the Oldman River Cultural Centre. The federal government had a Cultural Education Centres Program, the whole intent of which was to preserve culture and save the languages in the communities. Allan was very organized and structured, and he started to get a number of books and tapes and gather all kinds of information. This was probably 1974 or 1975.

The other resource we had at that time was the late John Yellow Horn (fig. 17). I went to his place when I first wanted to learn about our traditions. He was a real man of action. He said, “Well, if you guys want to learn culture and be part of this, you have to learn how to sing.” He pulled his drum out and began to play, saying, “The only way you are going to learn is to do it.”

We used to go there and he’d be singing Sun Dance songs. That’s where we started to get the vision of having an O’kaan. He talked about the Kana’tsomitaiksi [Brave Dog Society]. In fact, he knew the songs so well he was like a tape recorder with the Kana’tsomitaiksi and other songs. He was a past Niinaimsskaiksi [Medicine Pipe Bundle holder] and a past member of Iitskinaiksi.

At the same time, we were saying, “There’s still only one Medicine Pipe Bundle on the reserve. What can we do?” That’s where Joe stepped up to the plate and said, “Well, you’ll have a Sun Dance.” In order to do that, we had to get the Kana’tsomitaiksi going and we needed a Natoas [Sun Dance woman’s headdress]. Joe Crowshoe had had one, but it was in the provincial museum in Edmonton. At that time, things were really messed up between us and the museum. Adolf Hungry Wolf had staged a breakout of the Long Time Medicine Pipe Bundle from the provincial museum. The museum staff members were very afraid of anyone who went up there to ask for anything. The Natoas bundle was one of the first repatriations to Piikani that I’m aware of. Allan Pard went up and negotiated with the provincial government to borrow the headdress. There was no way they were going to permanently return it. In fact, the only way we got the Natoas bundle was by Old Man Joe Crowshoe taking the Short Medicine Pipe Bundle to Edmonton and leaving it there in exchange for the Natoas bundle.

From the museum’s point of view, Hungry Wolf had committed a theft, although he calls it a coup. It really made it difficult for everybody else. We wanted to revive our ceremonies and societies, and we knew the museum had
Figure 17. John Yellow Horn (Apatohsiipiikani), who kept many songs and ceremonies alive during the 1960s. Courtesy of the Glenbow Archives (NB-44-70a).
all these bundles and the ceremonial regalia. Allan had been able to get access to a lot of that and even got some pretty good financial support to make that first O’kaan happen.

If we were going to undertake a transfer with the Kana’tsomitaiksi, we had to get the Leader’s, the Rider’s, and the Pa’ksikopyi Bundles. At that time, all the people who had had those bundles were still alive. A couple of the Pa’ksikopyi Bundles weren’t here, but the Elders said, “Well, you could go to the previous bundle keepers in Browning—those guys never transferred it.” And that’s where our sharing of the ceremonial material with the Ammskaapidipiikani began. Bundles are all communally owned among the Blackfoot-speaking people. Everybody owns them.

Everybody was approaching the different people who had the Kana’tsomitaiksi rattles. Everyone was in support of reviving the society. So we started the process. I remember I wanted to take a Rider’s Bundle. Everything was set up to do all of the transfers, but nobody would go after the Leader’s Bundle. The late Eddy Yellow Horn had that, so I approached him for the Leader’s rattle. He was a bishop in the Mormon Church, so you know that he had his priorities in life set out. When I approached him, he said, “Well, I want a pipe.” So I made him a pipe. He said, “I want to just keep it. I’m just going to keep it up on my mantle.”

So I was the one who ended up going there, and he agreed to transfer the bundle to me, and we sorted out all the transfers and rattles. That process is a long story in itself. Even at the Sun Dance camp, there were a couple of transfers that went on. It was very difficult. Three or four times, we set up a camp to do a transfer and none of the people that had the Kana’tsomitaiksi bundles showed up. That was very disheartening. But I guess that’s part of life. Sometimes, you think something’s going to happen and it doesn’t.

When the time came, there were about twenty-five members. The majority of the young guys who were in there at that time have gone on to become ceremonial leaders or have gone through a number of transfers.

The O’kaan in 1977 is the benchmark in our community for rejuvenating our traditional culture. In the Blackfoot language, we would say Siksikasitapi—the Blackfoot Way. We were the ones at the forefront of it.

The Kana’tsomitaiksi in Browning also had a Sun Dance—I think it was a year or two after we did. All the Kana’tsomitaiksi from up here went down, and
we were working with them, showing them what to do. Mike Swims Under was at our O’kaan, and he was down there, too. But we had a lot of support. There were a lot of Old Men, traditional Elders, from Kainai. They used to really support us here and would come over to help us.

I guess that is kind of the start. We were able to bring Kana’tsomitaiksi and the O’kaan back. We did it traditionally. I think that we held about three or four O’kaan while I was leader of Kana’tsomitaiksi. There’s been quite a number and so it has gone on. A number of people have had Natoas bundles transferred to them.

We have had a number of Piikani who have joined the Iitskinaiksi at Kainai. That is such an old society, and they still had many of the old Elders, so the teachings were really strong there. We were never taught a lot of basics here. I guess the Elders that we were learning from didn’t think that a lot of the preliminary teachings were important, so we were just put right up at a certain level.

Some people, such as Bob Black Plume (fig. 18) from Kainai, came over to our ceremonies. There were a lot of transfers—we never even asked for anything, they were just transferring us things—and we were asking, “Why?” Looking back on it, I guess there was nobody else to transfer to. They believed in these traditions and really wanted to keep things going. We caught the tail end of a generation of those old guys. But I think they really looked up to us for what we were doing.

We also believed that we needed more than just the one medicine pipe. I transferred the Kana’tsomitaiksi Leader’s Bundle to Reg Crowshoe. He and the Kana’tsomitaiksi brought the Rider’s Medicine Pipe Bunde out of Browning, and we had it transferred up here. The entire Kana’tsomitaiksi brought it up, and they all paid for the expense of transferring it.

Then I got involved doing other things and really wasn’t concerned with ceremonies for a couple of years. Later on, I was captured by the Iitskinaiksi at Kainai and went through the whole learning curve with that society. But everything I had done—Kana’tsomitaiksi, the O’kaan, and Kano’tsisissin—everything I’d done with Blackfoot ceremonies really helped me to understand the true meaning of a lot of things once I joined Iitskinaiksi. They say that when you learn something, sometimes you don’t know what it means until later. People say, “Ah—now I understand.” Today, there are so many things happening.

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Figure 18. Bob Black Plume (Kainai), who, during the 1970s, transferred many songs to Jerry Potts and other young men who were interested in keeping the ceremonies alive. Courtesy of the Glenbow Archives (NA-4978-2).

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What really got us interested in repatriation around here was the Native American Graves Protection and Repatriation Act (NAGPRA) passed in the United States. Museums were told that they had to return all ceremonial items to Native Americans. Well, that got everybody’s attention up here. A lot of the collectors who were working in Browning back in the 1920s, 1930s, and 1940s had inside men on the reserves in Canada going around collecting material. They took that material down into the United States, where all of a sudden it had big money value. Some of those collections were sold to museums and private collectors in Chicago, Washington, DC, Denver, Los Angeles, and other places.

Then, in the 1950s and 1960s, there was another round of collecting. That was when the majority of our sacred material left us. A lot of children were being sent to boarding school and the parents were left at home. It was a very rough time. When someone came along and offered money for something that was just hanging on the wall, not being used and with nobody to care for it, people readily made a deal.

There has always been controversy around our traditional ways. The Christian religious factions devastated the Blackfoot ceremonialists. This began when the first Roman Catholic missionaries came to the Piikani Reserve in 1885. In 1889, the Anglican missionary landed on the reserve, and then, in the early 1900s, the Full Gospels came. The Catholics didn’t want anything to do with the Anglicans. The Anglicans didn’t want anything to do with the Catholics. The Full Gospels—well, they just did not want anything to do with anyone.

Now, we have a generation of people who are the result of that attitude. The people who are working on repatriation face a lot of criticism from these other religions. It doesn’t matter how we approach it, whenever we repatriate something, we face criticism by all those groups.

It was happening. The bundles were coming home. When Adam Delaney was in the Iitskinaiksi during the 1970s and 1980s, he spent a good deal of time and his own resources getting some of the Iitskinaiksi bundles out. Adam was the kind of guy who went ahead without worrying about the consequences. He was the leader of the Iitskinaiksi, and he expected everybody to follow him. But then he ran into a government bureaucracy that did not respect anybody with traditional knowledge. It just followed policy and government structure. That
was what Adam was up against. But Adam was able to get some bundles out. There was a paper that he needed to sign, and the bundles would have been on loan. But he said, “No. This is no damn loan. I’m taking them. These belong to us. I don’t care what your policies say.” He did get bundles out.

Down in Browning, Montana, Bob Scriver’s father had owned a store and collected all kinds of Blackfoot artifacts and information. Bob was an artist, and he continued collecting. He ended up with many kinds of bundles. He had Iitskinaiksi material, Beaver Bundles, and other things that he had accumulated over time. It was a very big and very important collection. In the late 1980s, he sold his collection to Alberta’s provincial museum.

At that time, we were trying to get the medicine pipes and some of the other bundles out of the provincial museum. The director of the museum kept saying, “This stuff is too old.” He said, “Leave it here. Just remake it.” At Old Man Joe’s O’kaan, Reg actually got money to remake the Natoas headdress, and he was happy to leave the old one in the museum.

But then we came to a point when we had to ask: “Well, who is alive now who can put the right spirit into new bundles and make them the way they are supposed to be? Who is there alive who can do that? Some of these bundles are thousands of years old, and they go right back to the story of Creation when Thunder gave us the ceremony. Who is around who can sit there and say they can do that?” This is where I parted ways with Reg Crowshoe. He supported the museum and the assistant deputy minister in charge of the Department of Culture, who wanted to keep the bundles in the museum and make replicas for use. We wanted to bring our bundles back home.

After NAGPRA was passed in 1990, we started visiting museums. Allan Pard worked very closely with the Mookaakin Culture and Heritage Society from Kainai. A lot of Kainai are fully knowledgeable about the Iitskinaiksi and Medicine Pipes. But when it came down to Beaver Bundles, the Sun Dance, and other ceremonies—that was the Piikani’s area of knowledge. That’s what we started in. That’s what we understood. When the Kainai had a O’kaan, they had to get Mike Swims Under. He and Old Lady Many Guns kept things alive.

When the Mookaakin Society went down to New York, Allan went with them. That was when the Beaver Bundles started to come back. At the same time, Chris McHugh and the people at Siksika wanted to get the Iitskinaiksi going again.
It was another world at Siksika. Here were these young guys who really believed in the traditional ways. I remember one of the first meetings they had—Allan and I went up with Bruce Wolf Child and Frank Weasel Head to meet with Chris and the others. They were saying that the only way they could get things going was to use the grandfathers of the Iitskinaiksi at Kainai. The Elders who had anything in Siksika wouldn’t have anything to do with them. Chris had already met with people at the provincial museum in Edmonton. He made them aware that they would be coming back. He let them know that he was a force that had to be dealt with.

In order to get bundles back that were in the United States, we had to work with our counterparts in Browning, Montana. People like John Murray and Carol Murray. Some of the people who were running the cultural program were not ceremonialists, and that sometimes complicated matters. At the same time, Leonard Bastien was chief here, and he got a couple of bundles out from Denver or some other place. He and G. G. Kipp (from Browning) got the Elk Tongue Beaver Bundle. Originally, that was from up here. The Snake Pipe Bundle, which Conrad LaFrombois has, is a Thunder Medicine Pipe Bundle from this reserve that ended up in a collection down south. But Leonard got it out and gave it to people in Browning.

ALBERTA’S REPATRIATION ACT

We took a different approach to working with the museums in Alberta. The provincial government knew they had to set up a process to deal with the Blackfoot people and other repatriation issues. In terms of policy, it all started with the Glenbow Museum’s efforts. Gerry Conaty, the Glenbow’s ethnology curator, and Robert R. Janes, the president and CEO, really respected Blackfoot ways and always showed us goodwill. The will of the Glenbow to work with the Blackfoot people on a more traditional level was very important. Their hearts were in the right place. They saw what was going on and acted. The provincial government couldn’t say no.

The repatriation process described in the act [First Nations Sacred Ceremonial Objects Repatriation Act] and its regulations set up the procedures by which First Nations can begin dealing with the provincial government.
We said, “Well, we better form a committee that’s going to give us strength. But if we’re going to do that, it needs to be a committee that represents all of the Blackfoot, especially the people involved with Blackfoot ceremonies. The government needs to understand that we can work with each other.” The people who were brought to the table included Herman Yellow Old Woman, Irvine Scalplock, Frank Weasel Head, Narcisse Blood, Martin Heavy Head, Allan Pard, and myself.

As a group of ceremonialists with transferred rights, we had to develop an approach that represented who we were and what we do. But we didn't want to be viewed as sellouts of the culture—to be giving up information or anything that is sacred and has real heart and meaning to us. At the same time, we were dealing with lawyers and with the government policies. The Alberta government’s view was that all Albertans owned the provincial museum collections, including the Blackfoot sacred material. But we said, “No. This belongs to us. If an individual has it, they don’t have the right to sell it to you, or you, or you, because it belongs to all of the Blackfoot-speaking people.”

We started to work with that process and that opened up the door. One of the last Iitskinaiksi bundles from Kainai that was in the provincial museum came out. The meetings the committee had with the provincial government led to policies and eventually to legislation. It was just a matter of working through the policy and getting the paperwork in place. This was a legal process, and of course, lawyers were brought into it. We never used a lawyer. While we always had to work with the language of the Alberta government’s legal team to appease them, we also had to maintain the integrity of what we were representing. But we also knew we had the right spiritual help behind us to make it happen. Because it did happen; it did!

On a more traditional level, the legislation didn’t have anything to do with the ceremonies or the bundles. Once the bundles came home, we were able to transfer them in the traditional way. They went to a lot of people and have allowed families to have access to ceremonies and the spiritual help that they have to offer. Right here on the Piikani Nation, there have been two Beaver Bundle transfers and several Medicine Pipes—there are a lot of things that have come home.

When we began working with repatriation, we had to ask, “What are we going to give up so that we are going to be able to bring something home?” We
concentrated on the bundles. That’s what was important. We still have people who can run the ceremonies. There is a desire and will on the part of different families to get involved with it.

When somebody wants a bundle, they send a request to the Royal Alberta Museum. They need to have a letter of support from someone who is directly affiliated with the repatriation process. Once they submit a request, the repatriation committee reviews it. The minister of Alberta Culture still has the last say. We could recommend everything “yes,” and they could still say “no.”

When we look at what makes something eligible for repatriation, we have to think about its role in ceremonies. A headdress is a ceremonial item. It is transferred, there is paint that comes with it, and there is a song that comes with it. It is a public ceremony. It is a real thing of honour. Former premiers Ralph Klein and Ed Stelmach both had headdresses transferred to them, and I am sure they have really cherished them. Something like a headdress is of real significance to an individual, especially if it has been transferred. But if it is just a headdress that was made to be sold, well, that makes a bit of difference. It may have sentimental value as opposed to transferred ceremonial value. However, this brings up an important question concerning what kinds of items should be repatriated. This is a whole other level of discussion that will have to be visited by the government, in discussion with the committee. I think, like everything else, it’s something that can be amended. It is something that needs to be discussed.

Our approach to repatriation helped get us in the door. We recognized that it was a give-and-take situation. While we knew that museums were afraid of losing all of their collections, we could identify what we wanted. It was a matter of negotiation. These government people aren’t ceremonialists or First Nations people. Most don’t care about our communities. They might have some emotional tie to the well-being of people—but they don’t know who we are or what we are doing.

When we are going to go do something and reaching out to it, there is a proper way to go about doing things. If you set out to do one thing, you really need to look at the larger context. It’s not just the one thing. That might open the door, but there are larger implications.

A government repatriation committee was set up to review applications. One drawback to the committee that I experienced is the requirement that we
work to the province’s schedule. The committee only meets twice a year, and only if there are enough applications. Although I try to attend and I want to contribute, sometimes my work takes me out of the province and I end up missing the meetings.

A lot of bundles have come out of Alberta museums, and they are all being used in Blackfoot territory. These bundles are working for our spiritual well-being as Blackfoot people.

**The Long Time Medicine Pipe Bundle**

After the implementation of NAGPRA in the United States, museums knew that they had to work with the Blackfoot people, at least to identify what the museums held that were holy items. We went down to Denver with some Kainai people to get some Maoto’kiiksi bundles. We saw things that grave robbers had dug out and sold to the museum. Those things have a certain odour that doesn’t go away. We could see the dirt. The way we’ve been treated is appalling—just as objects and not as real human beings.

When I was in Ottawa, I saw the Long Time Medicine Pipe Bundle. [The Piikani and Kainai each have a Thunder Medicine Pipe Bundle named the Long Time Medicine Pipe Bundle.] It was up on a shelf. I remember going in there and making a vow that I was going to take that pipe. I told that pipe, “I’m going to do everything I can to get you out of here.” I just felt so, so sad with it being there. I talked to Morgan Baillargeon, the curator of Plains ethnology at the Canadian Museum of Civilization, and he said, “Well, there have been other people trying to get it out. If you’re going get that pipe out, you have to go through the Siksika, because the Siksika passed a band council resolution saying that any Blackfoot bundle in the museum here belongs to the Siksika Nation. If anybody is going to get any bundle out, you have to get a letter from them.”

That letter came from Chief Strater Crowfoot and the band council. When repatriation was starting and they were getting interested, they went down east with some Elders. Those Elders said, “Ahh. This stuff all belongs to us from the reserve here.” They just claimed all of it. Although the museum records didn’t back that up, the museum’s Board of Governors was afraid of bad publicity.
I wrestled with it and asked different people for guidance. When my wife, Velma, and I went to an Indian Days celebration at Sikhsika, two Old Ladies were pointed out to us, and we were told, “If you can get those Old Ladies to agree to it, there will be no problem.” I brought the Old Ladies traditional gifts and explained to them how we were trying to get the bundle out of the museum. They said, “Hey, no problem. It’s not good that it is there. You and your wife should go and get it out.”

But when we went back to the Sikhsika band council, they still said “no.” They would not have anything to do with it. This was at the same time that bundles from the Scriver Collection in the provincial museum were coming back and the Sikhsika Iitskinaiksi was starting up. When the Iitskinaiksi started at Sikhsika, they also established a traditional affairs committee, with Irvine Scalplock and Herman Yellow Old Woman as members. Irvine and Herman were part of the group that was reviving the Iitskinaiksi. They recognized what was going on, and they wrote me a letter without any hesitation and sent it down to Morgan Baillargeon.

Allan Pard and I just happened to be in Ottawa at two different meetings on tribal business for the Piikani. We went out for supper with Morgan one evening, and he told us, “Hey you guys, I got that letter through, everything is processed. Everything is a go. You better take that pipe out of here today.”

We began thinking of how we were going to do this. We didn’t have everything we needed to wrap it up and take it out properly. There is a protocol to handling bundles. Allan was opening Medicine Pipe Bundles and running ceremonies. With anything like that, when you go and you do something, the person who is giving you advice is responsible for everything going right. If there is something wrong, it is that person’s responsibility.

We headed to the museum to look at the bundle. But first we had to go to Canadian Tire to buy some containers for the pipe and everything else in the bundle. When we were both leaving Ottawa, we took that pipe out of the museum. Allan had it up in his hotel room, and we fixed everything up before we left. We thought, “Well, if we don’t make it home, we know we screwed up.” Allan even got on the plane with that pipe. He went right through all the security checks. There was no hassle, no problems. Nothing. We brought it home. Now, we’ve opened it each year for twelve years.

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We researched the history of that medicine pipe. Velma’s dad—Old Man John Yellow Horn—used to have it. This pipe came to John from Little Leaf. Little Leaf used to live just down the road from us. John transferred it to Emil Wings at Kainai. Emil Wings took that pipe and gave it to Cyril Olds from Siksika. He never transferred it; he gave it to him as a gift. Cyril Olds didn’t know what to do with it, so he gave it to Dick Brass to keep. Dick Brass sold a lot of things to a collector in Calgary, who, in turn, sold his collection to the museum in Ottawa. That was how that pipe ended up in Ottawa. No one from Piikani knew where it was. I would hear that it was in Germany or in Seattle or somewhere. But when we checked the museum records, that’s where we found out that it came from Dick Brass. Dick Brass got it from Cyril Olds, and then Cyril Olds was given it by Emil Wings. When we asked Velma’s mother about it, she said, “Well, Old Man John transferred it to Emil Wings.” All of sudden, everything just connected.

It’s interesting that Old Man Little Leaf had it and transferred it to John Yellow Horn, and they all had lived in the area where we live now. It left here, went over to Siksika, and spent some time there. I don’t know how many years it was in Ottawa. Then it came back home.

That’s the most intimate repatriation story I have.

**Repatriation and the Effects on the Community**

I think repatriation has really helped our community. A lot of young people would not normally be exposed to our traditions; well, now they see it. We have a few young men who want to learn about it. They’re pretty sincere about it, too.

I am concerned about what will happen when some of the people who are considered Elders today get into a position where they are determining what happens. It isn’t our way to stand up and shout, “I have this. I can do that.” That isn’t what these bundles are about. If somebody is going to learn about it, or use it, they will come and want to be a part of it. But we always have opposition, no matter what we do. Perhaps it is just part of life on a reserve where some family grudges go back four generations. Some of these situations get handed down.

As I think about it, many people have influenced the process. Everything that is going on today on the Piikani Reserve goes back to those two old ladies, Old Lady Buffalo and Old Lady Many Guns. They prayed for us. They gave us

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their blessings. They are the ones who were tied directly to Brings Down the Sun and all the ceremonialists from the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries. Old Man Joe Crowshoe would not have had his Medicine Pipe Bundle if Old Lady Buffalo hadn’t given it to him. The Sun Dance came from Old Lady Many Guns. John Yellow Horn was the one who started us off singing.

All those teachings that we got from Apaikii (Bob Black Plume), Pat Weasel Head, Chief Calf, and other ceremonial Elders were very important. I don’t know how many times Bob Black Plume would say, “Come and sit here. We’ll transfer this to you. Make sure you have enough, so that when you sit in Kano’tsisissin, you’ll have enough songs to sing.” There was Willie Eagle Plume, and Ben Calf Robe from Siksika. He used to come down to the ceremonies here. That’s what I mean when I say these Old Guys were very special.

I remember the time I went to a Kano’tsisissin at Kainai. I think there were fifteen pipes there. I had made every one of those pipes. In the Blackfoot culture, everything starts with the pipe. Making pipes was the one thing I worked very hard at learning how to do, mostly through trial and error. That was my first contribution to repatriation—bringing back the knowledge of how to make pipes. Willie Eagle Plume was a pipe maker, and I learned some things from him. Willie told me that someday the Iitskinaiksi would be coming to get pipes from me. I have made pipes for Kainai, Siksika, Piikani, and Ammskaapiipiikani ceremonialists.

It’s quite the thing. That’s something. We made that happen.