

of them are still here for us.

My first acquaintance with Adolf Hungry-Wolf came while I was announcing for our Indian Days celebration, back in the 1960's. I saw this fellow out there, dressed up and dancing. In those days we didn't often see an outsider joining in with our people like that, to be part of our traditional activities. We had lots of outsiders all through the years, but they usually just watched when we danced. So we were glad to see someone from outside taking part in what we were doing. There were no objections to him doing that from our old people. Then, after I met him, I would sometimes remark on the microphone, 'There's Hungry-Wolf, all the way from Long Beach, California.' That's how I first remember him, as a guest of ours.

Back in those first years when I met Adolf, I also remember seeing him around some of our old people, like Louis Plenty Treaty, old Jim White Calf, Mary Ground, and others. I never thought, back then, that someday I'd be sitting down with him, talking about all the many things in this book—I never even thought there would be books like these about our people, much less that he would be the one to write them.

Also, back when I first met him, I didn't expect to see Adolf move up here to join us, move up to Canada and learn to live the life of our old native people. Back in the Sixties, I didn't think he'd still be around here, among us, some forty years later. I didn't imagine he'd be the one gathering up all these old stories, photos, and information, or helping us to continue with our Blackfeet traditions and culture. It's amazing, when I think about it, that our early acquaintance, our early relationship, has developed into something far more than just being friends, just coming together at celebrations.

Adolf Hungry-Wolf has been among our people for a long time now, and he has learned a lot of our ways. He takes part in our dances, and he also performs some of our traditional ceremonies. For him to write these books, I think it is very important that he has lived the kind of life that our people did. I would say that he has shown more interest and obtained more knowledge of our traditional way of life than most of our people, today.

Another thing that has taken place in the time since Hungry-Wolf and I first met is that he has a family of grown children who are enrolled in the Blood band of

the Blackfoot Confederacy, and are taking leading parts in our way of life. They follow this path because of their father's example, his way of life among us. What they have learned will be handed on to their children and grandchildren, so this legacy should go a long ways.

Now, some people might say, 'Well, Adolf is not an Indian—he is not a tribe member.' But you take us as Indian people—a lot of us try hard to live the white man's way of life. So it's just the same with a person like him—he puts everything he's got into learning our traditional way of life. He doesn't just come around us at certain times—he's become part of us. I think it works both ways—we can't put one another down, criticize one another, over the choices we make for life. If you want to be like a white man, then do what you can to be like that. If you want to be like our old time native people—even if you're a white man by birth—then do what you can to be part of it. There is nothing wrong with what Adolf has done.

There are a lot of books that have come out in which the writers put things that they don't really know much about—white and Indian writers, both. People read such books without knowing that the information in them is not correct. Some of these writers come to us from cities and universities far away, studying us and our ways for a while, then they think they know all about us. It makes a big difference that these books are by somebody who lives among us, who joins with us in our traditional ceremonies and celebrations.

One summer I was up at the Blood Reserve while they were having their Sun Dance camp. I have relatives there, and they gave me a chair so I could sit in the shade and watch while the Medicine Lodge was being put up. When I sat down, they were still having their ceremonies in the Sun Dance woman's tipi—singing the songs and so forth—before going out from there to raise the Center Pole. I heard our old people singing those Medicine Lodge songs when I was young, so I know about how they go. I was thinking to myself, 'These songs that I'm hearing, they sound real.' So I asked my relatives, 'Who is doing the singing?' They said, 'That's Adolf Hungry-Wolf and his boys.' I was surprised, and I thought to myself, 'My, they're singing those songs the way they're supposed to be sung.'

That's the difference that I see between his work and others—he has a lot of knowledge that he gained

from the old people. It's not just something that he put together on his own. It is real knowledge, gained through all the years since I first met him. That's why I think these books are going to mean a lot to us Blackfeet.

As for the critics, the ones who will say things like, 'Oh, he's white, he's just doing it for fame and money.' We have that among each other just the same. If someone in the tribe works hard to get ahead, or to help the people, some others will try to tear that person down. Often these critics don't do much themselves, they don't know much. They usually don't understand what our traditional culture is really about, or even who the person is that they're criticizing. There's really no way you can respond to people like that.

When people criticize me, as a chief and a leader, I don't respond—I don't say anything. As long as I know that I'm sincere in what I'm doing—as long as I'm trying to do it right—that's what I consider most important. They can say whatever they want. If you don't answer, it just goes back to them. It will hurt them more than you. Even so, I still greet them, though I know that hurts them as well. Over the years, a lot of my critics have later become my friends, my supporters.

My dad used to tell us kids, 'If anyone says anything to you, walk away, don't say anything back. Only if someone really comes after you, then you do whatever you can to protect yourself. But otherwise, let them say what they want.'

There are some who think that we shouldn't show pictures or tell stories about our ceremonies and traditional ways. But usually those people don't know much about it themselves—they didn't grow up with it. I say that there should be a way for our people to learn our culture, even with all our old people gone. They should be able to find out our family histories and our backgrounds. For all that, I think these books will be very valuable and appreciated by most members of my tribe.



Earl Old Person

October 17, 2005

Honorary Chief of the Blackfeet Nation

Former Blackfeet Tribal Chairman

Blackfeet Tribal Council member for more than fifty years.