

WHITE BUFFALO CALF WOMAN

Every Lakota pipe has its origin in the first pipe brought to our people by the sacred Calf Pipe Woman, this is a story about the way the pipe first came to us.

A very long time ago, they say, two scouts were out looking for bison, and when they came to the top of a high hill and looked north, they saw a white cloud coming toward them from afar. It was a clear, sunny day, so they wondered about this strange cloud. As it came closer, they saw a young Indian woman dressed in beautiful white buckskin and carrying a bundle. She stepped from the cloud in front of them and they saw she was the most beautiful woman they had yet to see.

Then one of the scouts, being foolish, had bad thoughts and spoke to them; but the other said: "That is a sacred woman; throw all bad thoughts away." When she came still closer, they saw that she wore a fine white buckskin dress, that her hair was very long and that she was young and very beautiful. And she knew their thoughts and said in a voice that was like singing: "You do not know me, but if you want to do as you think, you may come," and the foolish one went. But just as he stood before her, there was a white cloud that came and covered them. The beautiful young woman came out of the cloud, and when it blew away, at her feet lay the bones of the foolish man.

Then the woman spoke to the one who was not foolish: "You shall go home and tell your people that I am coming and that a big tipi shall be built for me in the center of the nation." The man, who was very much afraid, went quickly and told the people, who did at once as they were told. There around the big tipi they waited for the sacred woman.

In four days, the woman came to the village, very beautiful and singing. As she went into the tipi this is what she sang:

With visible breath I am walking.
A voice I am sending as I walk.
In a sacred manner I am walking.
With visible tracks I am walking.
In a sacred manner I walk.

As she sang, there came from her mouth a white cloud that was good to smell. Then she gave something to the Chief. It was a pipe with a bison calf carved on one side - to mean the earth that bears and feeds us, with twelve eagle feathers hanging from the stem - to mean the sky and the twelve moons. These were tied with a grass that never breaks.

"Behold," she said, "With this pipe, you will be bound to all your relatives. All these people and all things in the universe are joined to you who smoke the pipe. With this, you shall multiply and be a good nation. Nothing but good shall come from it. Only the hands of the good shall take care of it and the bad shall not even see it."

The woman stayed with the people four days and four nights. During this time, she showed them how to prepare the pipe ... Then she told the men how to smoke it ... Thus, the pipe came to our people.

The sacred woman then took leave, saying, "Always remember how sacred the pipe is, and treat it as such. I am leaving now but I shall look back upon the people," and she promised to return in times of need.

She walked in the direction of the setting sun, and then she stopped and rolled over four times. The first time, she got up and became a black buffalo, the second time a brown buffalo, the third time a red buffalo, and the fourth time she rolled over she became a white buffalo. This buffalo walked on further, stopped, and after bowing to each of the four directions of the universe, disappeared over the hill.

*As told by the Lakota (Sioux) Elders
according to traditional knowledge passed down about
the White Buffalo Calf Woman.*

This American Indian cultural resource sheet was provided by United Tribes Technical College in Bismarck, ND. It is noted here that indigenous Tribes of the northern Great Plains have different variations about the spiritual significance of the white buffalo. The Lakota perspective described herein was adapted from information contained in the following references:

Mails, Thomas E. *Fools Crow*.
University of Nebraska Press, Lincoln, Nebraska. 1979.

Neihardt, John G. *Black Elk Speaks*.
University of Nebraska Press, Lincoln, Nebraska. 1961.

Pickering, Robert B. *Seeing the White Buffalo*.
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United Tribes of North Dakota Development Corporation. *Peace Pipe: Center of the Universe*. United Tribes Employment Training Center, Bismarck, ND. 1975.