

BIRD SINGS DIFFERENT

Blackfeet Indian Woman

The choice of a camp along Birch Creek had been an especially fortunate one. The Blackfeet warriors had ridden out from this site to range far south onto the great plains of what is now central Montana and had returned heavily laden with buffalo hides and meat. Such good fortune called for a great celebration, so that the braves might recite their acts of cunning and daring during the hunt.

In one tepee, that of Medicine Boss Ribs, a different sort of event was being feted. A girl child had been born to his wife, Water Mirror Face, and, now the infant was to be named. The tribal medicine man, who chose the names for all babies had been notified and, even then, was walking through the willows and cottonwoods of Birch Creek, waiting for the Spirits to show their will.

When the medicine man returned to the tepee he spoke of a strange bird which he had heard singing among the trees. The bird had uttered sounds unfamiliar to his trained ears so, surely, it had been sent as an omen. Therefore, the infant must be named "Bird Sings Different."

Bird Sings Different was born into a proud heritage, that of the Blackfeet Indians. The early fur traders who made their way up the Missouri river to the beautiful Montana region, which now is Glacier National Park, feared and respected the

Blackfeet. Neighboring tribes, which sent parties near the hunting grounds of the Blackfeet, did so with the greatest trepidation because few tribes were more hostile than the Blackfeet.

From her mother, Bird Sings Different learned the art of tanning buckskins, beading and making par-fleche bags, and mixing bright paints from the clay and colored pigments to be found in the mountain areas. She learned that she was expected to look seriously upon life, to shun the frivolous, and avoid foolish giggling or joking.

A proficient squaw must be able to pitch or strike a lodge within a matter of minutes. When it is understood that a typical lodge might consist of 14 to 26 buffalo hides supported by as many stout poles, it can be seen that this was no easy task.

She learned to prepare meat in a type of fireless cooker. (Pottery was unknown to the Blackfeet.) A hole was dug in the ground and lined with a piece of hide. Then water and meat with, perhaps, a few herbs were added and hot rocks dropped in to set the meal to bubbling and steaming.

Winold Reiss, the distinguished artist who did this painting of Bird Sings Different, has depicted her in full costume. The Blackfeet are a deeply religious people with the women holding a prominent place in all religious activities. Bird Sings

Different participated in many important ceremonies including the Painted Lodge Ceremony and the Medicine Pipe Ceremony. The latter rite was an elaborate one which was performed by the unwrapping of the Medicine Bundle and the unrolling of the numerous little packages within. Since each object was one of special significance and veneration, this ceremony was long, sometimes taking a day and a night.

Today, Bird Sings Different lives on the Blackfeet Indian Reservation adjoining Glacier National Park. During the park season, from June 15 through September 15, a number of Blackfeet families, entertain park visitors with tribal drumming and dancing and singing, and with displays of their native arts.

Inquiries about vacation travel in Glacier National Park in Montana and the Pacific Northwest may be addressed to the Passenger Traffic Manager, Great Northern Railway, St. Paul 1, Minnesota.

Portfolios including 24 reproductions in color of Winold Reiss' famous portraits of Blackfeet Indians, and an authentic history of the tribe, are available from the St. Paul Book & Stationery Co., St. Paul 1, Minnesota, and at leading book stores in many cities.

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