How the People Prayed Before the Pipe - Duane Hollow Horn Bear - Storytelling

Here's a story that Joe Eagle Elk had shared with me a long time ago in the 1980s. He told me this story about how the people prayed before the coming of the sacred pipe. He talked about a village of our people a long, long time ago. In the middle of the winter, they began to realize that their food supply was dwindling down. And so they had to start rationing their food, smaller and smaller. Very little food left. Hunters went out, came back with nothing. In every direction, they went out. Nothing could be found.

And then one day, a stranger comes to the village. At the far edge of the camp, he's brought to the center, to the chief's lodge. And the chief says, bring him in. Bring some food. On a broad leaf, you have parcels of food. The chief gives it to him and he says, there is not much here, but I'm hoping that you don't think that. We are not generous people, but we don't have very much, but we are willing to share with you what we do have. And the stranger says, I understand. Call from your young man, one of your honorable young warriors.

A young man is designated and brought. From that food, he takes a small pinch of every food item. He tears a piece of that broad leaf out and he puts it on there. And he tells the young man, on the north side of camp, on that hill, take this food up there. Face to the west. Say a prayer and offer this to all of the relatives who have gone on to the spirit world and to where this food comes from. Say a prayer. When you come back, we will eat. When the young man returns, he eats. They all have something and they visit through the night.

And as they are all retiring, the chief says to the stranger, tonight you will sleep in my lodge. The stranger thanks him and he says, I want to share with you something here and do this tomorrow because I will be gone before the camp wakes up. This place I am describing, you know where it's at. Go there tomorrow with a small group of hunters and you will find there is enough food to get you through the winter. The chief thanks him, but as he's going to sleep, he says to himself, you know, we've been all over these hills.

There's no buffalo, no deer, no elk, no rabbits. But he thanks the stranger and the next morning, sure enough, the stranger is gone. Honesty.

Honesty was a way of life for our people. So he believed in this man. He gathered a small group of hunters and he went to this place that was described. And in that little valley, he found a small nursery herd of buffalo. There was enough there and more to get him through this harsh winter. To get him through that. And since that time, that little

prayer offering has followed us down through the centuries. It came long before the coming of the white buffalo calf woman and the pipe.

Today in our gatherings, you will see in our celebrations, whenever we gather, a prayer is made. A spiritual prayer is made offering food to our relatives who have gone on to the spirit world before we eat. We always do this. In our own homes, we could take a little saucer and we put a little bit of food in there. We could smudge it with sage. And we give thanks. Because there was a time when, in this next story, I was talking about traditional nutrition. When your child comes to you and says, Mom, I'm hungry. Dad, I'm hungry. Grandma?

Grandma, I'm hungry. How do you address this child's need? This child has a need for nutrition. How do you address this? And today, today, how do we find ourselves when many of us are guilty when we say, I've got no time to eat. Eat a bowl of cereal. Or we put a packet of bologna and bread on a table. Make a sandwich. Guilty? Well, for me, when I was growing up, when I'd go to my grandmother and say, Oonchee lawatchee, Grandma, I'm hungry. How did Grandma address my needs? Grandma would take whatever food items she's going to prepare for me.

She has me sit down. And in a very gentle and pleasant way, maybe singing a little song or murmuring a prayer. She sends out her voice to, where did this food come from? The meat product came from a four-legged bean. The vegetables came from a rooted relative. She reaches out in spirituality and prayer, asking them, with your gift of nourishment, will you nourish my grandchild? So she is fulfilling my need for physical nutrition, as well as fulfilling my need for spiritual nutrition. How many of us do that today?

To take the time to think, where did this food come from?