

shaped tank. I went out on the catwalk, took a few steps and I slipped. There were these little cone-head rivets on the top of the tank and I tried to grab them but I couldn't stop myself from rolling. I saw this pipe coming straight out toward me and I was about one foot shy of grabbing it. That's all I remember. Woke up in the hospital sixteen hours later. I had only fallen

about thirty-five feet, they said. Spent two months in that hospital. Still got a piece of silver in my shoulder and it bothers me sometimes. . . . Iron is my job. I just go ahead and do my work as best as I can, as fast as I can. That's iron work. You just got to get that piece of iron hooked up, take the choker off, and let them get another piece.

Sun Dance

A few tribes of the prairies still celebrate the Sun Dance: the Bloods of Alberta, the Blackfoot at Gleichen, the Cree of Poorman's Reserve in Saskatchewan.

The dance is performed in the summer at traditional places and is centred around special lodges built anew each year. The dance begins when a priest wrapped in a blanket stands beside a bleached buffalo skull and calls out to the powers of the world. The Fire Tender lights a blaze, and pipes of carved catlinite are passed among the priests who make smoke offerings to the Above, the Below and the Four Quarters of the Earth. Musicians in the shadows begin to drum and chant, honouring the setting sun: "The Sun is the cause of all life. It causes the grasses and trees to grow and the animals to grow which feed upon the grasses and causes man to live who feeds upon the animals." The drumming and chanting continue through the night. On the second day a lodge of cottonwood poles is erected and the forked centre pole hung with streamers of brightly coloured cotton cloth. First women followed by men circle four times in single file around the recumbent pole. The principal priest offers cloth and tobacco, placing them in a hole at the pole's base. "Oh Tree of Life, we ask that You reside gracefully over our camp. We have promised to plant You in a new place and to honour You with presents. These I have here and I put them in this earthen hole beside You. May You stand firmly in your new home."

Suddenly the men and boys heave on attached ropes and swing the pole up, setting it in the hole. Dirt is tamped into place and the pole made firm with wood wedges. The other poles are set in place around the Tree, and the circular Sun

Dance Lodge is ready. The dancing begins that night, accompanied by chanting, the wail of whistles and the beat of drums. The dancers focus their gazes on a red thunderbird, which is carved in the middle of the centre pole. The music and dancing go on for two days.

Pete Standing Alone, of the Blood Tribe of the Blackfoot Confederacy, described the present circumstances of the dance for a National Film Board documentary:

In the old days the Indians thought everything alive was sacred, and this was part of the Indian religion. They still keep bundles of animal skins. They call them Beaver bundles and Sacred Pipe bundles. Sometimes, in a teepee, they open one of those bundles, and there's a religious ceremony. Nobody knows how old the bundles are. They burn sweet grass to make incense, and they pray. They sing songs like hymns. This year old man Calling Last opened his bundle. He's about 85 years old. Only the people he invited had the right to be there in that teepee. I don't know much about this ceremony but I do know they have many songs—a badger song, a wolf song, an eagle song. They realize these creatures are creations of Natoosi (the sun), Apistoki (creator), Sapaitapia (source of life). These creatures are sacred to them.

The young people don't have much to do with the old ways. They come to the Sun Dance, but they don't take part in the ceremonies. Some come just to please their parents. For the young people it's more like a holiday than anything else. If Calling Last heard me talking about these mysteries he'd say, "Pete Standing Alone—what does he know about it?"

