

THE STORY OF ROCKY BOY

NARRATOR:

The story of Rocky Boy Reservation began in the mid-nineteenth century. It is a painful story to hear but it must be told so that we learn the sorrow that is part of our ancestral memories. We are telling this story so that we can understand how this pain continues in our present time, challenging us to once again reclaim our identity, reclaim our purpose. We are people of the earth and we must heal ourselves, our communities, our country, and our planet.

ROCKY BOY:

I am known as Asinywewin, Stone Man, Rocky Boy. I want to tell you the story of how we came to live here in this place called Rocky Boy Reservation. Our story began around **1851** when we started having powerful dreams that warned us to head west. There were so many white people. They wanted more and more land. They were killing off the buffalo. We could no longer hunt. We could no longer pray the way we used to pray. We were told that we were worse than animals. We had no food. We had no land. We were afraid we would have no people. We had nowhere to live.

BIG BEAR:

I am Big Bear, Headman of the Red River Cree People. It was around this time I first met Rocky Boy as he and his people were heading West toward Montana. I was on my way back to Canada where I agreed to sign a treaty in **1882-1883** because we were starving and my people needed a place to stay. All of our buffalo were gone so we couldn't hunt. We had to depend on the government to feed us.

ROCKY BOY:

As we headed west I met Big Bear, headman of the Red River Cree band. His people continued to hunt and hauled their furs in their squeaky Red River Carts. Even a deaf man could hear their carts. (chuckles) Our small band continued our journey west. We traveled through Garrison, Missoula, Butte, Wolf Point, Havre, Deer Lodge, Anaconda, Helena, the Flathead and Blackfeet Reservations. Nobody would let us stay. We were not wanted.

LITTLE BEAR:

My name is Little Bear—Imasees-- and I am the son of Big Bear. When my father signed a treaty agreeing to live on a Reservation in Canada, I could not believe it! This was too

much...losing our freedom, no hunting or following the seasons. I had to leave my father's band and head to the Montana territory. We felt wild and free, stealing horses from both the white settlers and the other tribes. This got us into trouble and the army hunted us down, burning everything we had. We had nothing. Nothing!

In **1882-3** we were forced to return to Canada. We had no horses and many of us had to walk long miles back to Canada where we were not wanted. Our children were hungry, everyone was starving. We drank too much alcohol. We were fighting all the time. It got so bad that our women had to do the unthinkable. They had to prostitute themselves to get us some money so we wouldn't starve.

NARRATOR:

In **1885** Big Bear makes the hard decision to join Louis Riel in the Northwest Rebellion. Even though many of the Cree people were not involved in this massacre, it made no difference. They were all a hunted people.

BIG BEAR:

My Band and I got into trouble big time. We joined Louis Riel and the Metis in the Northwest Rebellion. We were tired of starving, being pushed around and not being able to go hunting. We killed some settlers in what the white folks called the Frog Lake Massacre. We were now wanted by the law.

NARRATOR:

1886 was a cold winter and the people were starving. The Cree people did their best to survive. Some stayed near Fort Assiniboine. Others did whatever hunting they could. The women took in laundry and the men did wood chopping.

LITTLE BEAR:

There was a generous man by the name of Samuel Ford. He fed our people. The next year we traveled to the Flathead Reservation to negotiate for some land. It failed.

NARRATOR:

1887 was the coldest winter and there was more than usual snowfall. The temperatures plummeted to 40 degrees below zero without the wind chill. 200 of the Cree people were camped along the Milk River. The newspaper reported, "...the only earthly good the Crees

are known to be is as scavengers, for they eat everything from a mouse to a dead horse, and they are not very particular how long it has been dead."

LITTLE BEAR:

We had 10 emaciated ponies, not enough clothes, not enough firearms to hunt, poor lodges, and little food. Many of our people became sick and died. We were starving. We were eating coyote carcasses that had been poisoned by the Home and Land Cattle Company of St. Louis.

NARRATOR:

Finally on February 11, **1887**, the War Department gave \$500 as a distress fund.

In **1888**: Montana cut down the huge northern Montana reservation to make Glacier National Park.

NARRATOR:

In the early **1890**'s the cattlemen joined other white Montanans in petitioning Governor J.K. Toole to work toward Cree deportation.

LITTLE BEAR:

In June **1890** we tried once again to petition the Flathead Indian people to allow his people to stay there. We were turned down. We continued to work at any odd job we could find. We dressed deer skins, polished horns from old buffalo skulls, selling the horns and buckskin garments to tourists at the nearby railroad depot. We hauled the buffalo bones that were used in making fertilizer, and some of the people used their rickety old wagons or Red River carts to gather the tons of bones that littered the plains to sell to dealers near rail lines.

NARRATOR:

In **1890** the Fort Benton River Press editorialized that "the day has about passed when these lazy, dirty, lousy, breech-clothed, thieving savages can intrude upon the isolated households and nose around in the backyards of private residences in communities of civilized beings with impunity."

LITTLE BEAR:

We couldn't hunt anymore because traditional hunting was made an illegal act. The settlers accused us of stealing their cattle but they did not have a case. When we had work, we did it. It was noted by the army officers that we were surprisingly well-behaved, considering we were almost always hungry.

NARRATOR:

Deportation was always a contentious issue between the United States and Canada. The United States tried to deport the Cree people back to Canada in **1891** saying they were Canadian Cree! In response, the Canadian government accused the U.S. of trying to deport people they were mistreating.

LITTLE BEAR:

We roamed around trying to figure out the safest place to be where we would not be screamed at or looked down upon for trying to survive.

NARRATOR:

In **1892** Secretary of State James G. Blaine answered demands from white Montanans to further discuss deportation with Canada.

Fearing deportation the Cree hired a Great Falls Attorney—John Hoffman who filed "declaration of intent" papers that would lead to US citizenship. But the US District Attorney put a stop to this so we Cree people had to purchase the forms for which we had neither time nor money.

LITTLE BEAR:

In **1894** my people and I were still without food and work. We were considered a bother to the people because we had to scrounge around to find something to eat. It got so bad that I decided to talk to the Great Falls Chamber of Commerce. I was begging them to endorse a sun dance at the fairgrounds as part of the county fair.

NARRATOR:

Local ministers led a campaign to forbid the dance, arguing that any such display of "barbarism" would hurt the city's reputation. The controversy stirred considerable interest among a population for whom the Indians represented a curious reminder of the past. The press described the Cree as "stoical and indolent," the women formed "as

complete an aggregate of perfect ugliness as can be found on any spot on the face of God's green earth," and the children were "fat, rugged, dirty, and hungry and will readily absorb anything from a section of barbed wire fence to the internal arrangements of deceased canine—and prosper on the diet."

LITTLE BEAR:

We encamped next to the fairgrounds and invited the press and ministers to witness parts of the activity. We knew the white people were curious and afraid of us. But we were starving and our children needed to eat. We were desperate.

The summer of **1894** we eventually were able to perform the ceremony (without the piercing) as part of the Independence Day celebration in the state capital, the governor's backyard.

NARRATOR:

In **1895** Little Bear moves his Band to Saskatchewan River Area.

LITTLE BEAR:

A number of us were able to join the Wild West Show in **1895**. We toured parts of the East before the show disbanded near the end of the year. When the Indians returned early the next year, all we heard were rumors of deportation back to Canada. Most of us scattered because we didn't want to be deported.

NARRATOR:

In **1896** Major J.M. J. Sanno of the Third Infantry arrived in June to investigate and organize the deportation of the Cree. Over the next two months Fort Assiniboine troops led by Lieutenant John J. Pershing gathered bands from around Great Falls, Havre, Malta, Glasgow, Missoula, Butte, Crow Reservation, and Piegan Reservation.

LITTLE BEAR:

In **1896** we were all transported by rail to the border, except for the group near Missoula. We were marched on foot after appropriations for the project had nearly run out. Attorney John Hoffman, an advocate for us, tried to stop the procedure by obtaining a writ of habeas corpus in a state civil court, but it was dismissed.

NARRATOR:

1896: Both Canada and the U.S. violated the deportation agreement from the start. Canada agreed to only accept Cree Indians, but they deported many mixed bloods who were actually enrolled members of Fort Belknap and Turtle Mountain Chippewa. As the army was about to take the Cree across the border, rumors spread that Little Bear and his followers would be arrested.

LITTLE BEAR:

When Lucky Man and I were accused of murder and arrested, we were shocked. They accused us of having killed several priests at the end of the Northwest Rebellion. We were soon released but the army broke its promise of amnesty so we were able to return to Montana. We were returned not only because they broke their promise of amnesty but because there was nothing to eat. Canada did not provide enough food and we were too far from any town to make a living. We were hungry. We lived on the outskirts of towns and the white settlers complained of us living out of city dumps or on offal from local slaughter plants.

We hunted when we could but we would be arrested if we were caught.

NARRATOR:

In **1901** a few members of the Cree staying on the Flathead Reservation contracted smallpox, and the band was driven off the reservation and quarantined north of Kalispell. A crowd of whites ran another group out of the Billings area the next year.

LITTLE BEAR:

1901: At the time some Cree people were suffering from starvation and disease. My people and I ran into a homeless band of Chippewa. There were about 110 Chippewa people and their leader was Rocky Boy.

NARRATOR:

If you recall, Rocky Boy met Big Bear 20 years before in 1881. Still wandering around with nowhere to go, Rocky Boy and his small band of Chippewa sought to learn how to use the judicial system to gain some recognition for their cause.

ROCKY BOY:

The U.S. government tried to put us on a reservation back in 1892 but we didn't want to be on reservations so we moved westward in search of better hunting grounds. Like the Cree we wandered around struggling to live. Twenty years later we are still homeless.

In **1902** I asked the attorney J.W. James to help me write a letter to President Theodore Roosevelt asking for a reservation. Mr. James suggested that we also contact Montana Senator Paris Gibson. His inquiries started an investigation that was handed over to Flathead agent Thomas Downs. He recommended that the Flathead reservation make room for us.

NARRATOR:

Senator Paris Gibson introduced a bill to that effect in **1904**. But Flathead opposition and lack of support from the Montana delegation of representatives doomed this bill to failure.

Meanwhile, there was another effort to deport the Cree people. Little Bear negotiated with Canadian authorities and the U.S. War Department officials but it didn't go anywhere. There was no interest.

ROCKY BOY:

1904: My Chippewa band was camped about 10 miles outside Helena around Birdseye and Little Bear had made camp about 7 miles from Helena. Soon the Chippewa and Cree were intermarried and Little Bear and I struck a lasting alliance.

NARRATOR:

1905: Rocky Boy's efforts eventually drew more sympathetic attention in some quarters as reports of starving and helpless people slowly replaced images of fierce and threatening foes.

ROCKY BOY:

1905: I continued my quest for a reservation. I pleaded my case before Senator Joseph Dixon, Senator Gibson's successor. There was a lot of prejudice against the foreign Cree but, from our point of view, there was no separation because we had intermarried and it was difficult to separate us. Because of the prejudice against the so called foreign Cree, Little Bear asked that I do most of the negotiating.

NARRATOR:

1908: Senator Dixon won an amendment to an Indian Department appropriations bill for \$30,000 to find a home for the Chippewas (not the Cree) on an existing reservation. Inspector Frank Churchill investigated the Blackfeet (Piegan), Crow, Fort Belknap, and Fort Peck Reservations but Indians on all of them voiced strong opposition.

ROCKY BOY:

By **1908** we started gaining powerful allies when Helena Judge James Hunt, Great Falls Tribune editor William M. Bole, and Helena insurance man Frank Linderman began petitioning the Montana delegation and the Department of the Interior.

NARRATOR:

1908: There seemed to be no other alternative than to set aside a reservation in Valley County. The plight of the Indians reached emergency proportions, and unless they moved quickly there would be no one left to live on a reservation.

ROCKY BOY:

1908: My people were starving and it was becoming impossible to keep our hopes up so many of them scattered to the winds, trying to stay alive. The white residents of Valley Country were openly hostile, complaining about us all of the time. I really was afraid that we would all die of starvation soon. Senator Dixon was worried about the intense opposition of the white residents of Valley County so he tried to push the creation of a reservation as quickly as possible.

NARRATOR:

1908: The railroad and homesteading interests throughout Montana, North Dakota, and Minnesota raised an overwhelming protest. Great Northern Railroad delayed the move by quoting unusually high rates to transport the Indians to their destination. This required the BIA allotting agent in charge of operation to request new authorization to pay the higher than expected costs. Louis W. Hill had recently committed about two million dollars toward the construction of a RR branch line through Valley County and was counting on the new white homesteaders to make his investment pay off.

ROCKY BOY:

I think we would have starved to death if it hadn't been for the help we got from some of the residents of a local Commercial Club led by Charles Russell and William Bole. They volunteered emergency supplies and began a fund for starving Indians.

NARRATOR:

1909: Representatives of local railroads and agricultural industries, and local land speculators protested to President William H. Taft and the Department of the Interior, demanding that the lands be re-opened and not held for a future reservation for those renegade Cree from Canada!

ROCKY BOY:

1909: The white powers that be kept referring to us as undeserving foreign Indians. The Havre Plains Dealer criticized the Great Falls Tribune defending the "rights of Rocky Boy and the wasted band of his savages. The government could better afford to take Rocky Boy and his whole band to the Waldorf Astoria in New York and feed them until disease completes its labor."

NARRATOR:

1909: Near the end of October, the government reopened Valley County to homesteading, and began shipping the Chippewas to an unused portion of the Blackfeet Reservation near Babb, Montana.

ROCKY BOY:

1909: In mid-November, the winter was just setting in and we learned that we had to move. We were loaded onto railroad cars and arrived in Browning in the middle of a snowstorm.

NARRATOR:

1909: Within months the BIA started to distribute land allotments to the Chippewa. But it was impossible to separate the Cree and the Chippewa and the Metis. They had intermarried so it was impossible to separate people into the original tribal groups.

ROCKY BOY:

Little Bear joined us in July **1910**. The failure of the Valley County land acquisition was another set-back for our people. The government then assigned us to settle on the Blackfeet Reservation. It turned out to be another dismal failure. The land was impossible to farm and the provisions were not provided to feed our people.

NARRATOR:

1911: Little Bear moved back to Great Falls and Rocky Boy and his Chippewa Band moved to Helena.

LITTLE BEAR:

1911: The fiasco of putting us on land that could not be farmed was beyond ridiculous. There was no hunting, we were always starving and the Blackfeet were not friendly toward us so I moved back to Great Falls.

NARRATOR:

1912: The BIA restarted its search for a Reservation for the Chippewa and Cree now known as the "landless Indians". Fred Baker, supervisor of Indian Schools, was given the task of finding a place for the Chippewa/Cree landless people. Baker and other advocates recommended land near the Bear Paw Mountains. It was currently occupied by Fort Assiniboine.

ROCKY BOY:

1913: We were destitute and eventually got a small break. The Chippewa and Cree were allowed to stay on the land while the Congress deliberated. Residents in Havre rose in vehement protest. Havre officials promoted a scheme of turning the old fort into an industrial school.

NARRATOR:

1913: They described the Indians as "a most serious menace to our city, spreading disease, exciting immorality by their improvidence, becoming destitute, as heretofore, and requiring provision throughout the winter months, adding an obnoxious and offensive element to our community, appropriating the most valuable lands adjacent to our city, discouraging settlement in communities near them."

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NARRATOR:

1915: Havre won a change in the measure that confined the reservation to a couple of townships in the mountainous

southern part of the military reserve where the Indians would be farthest removed from Havre, from the best agricultural lands, and from most streams running out of Bear Paw Mountains. The bill passed and was signed by the president on 11, February 1915.

ROCKY BOY:

When we learned how we had been swindled out of the best land we protested. Our friend Robert Livingston jumped in to help us convincing the Department of the Interior that we could not support ourselves on the two southern townships. Congress thus passed an amendment to the original bill on 7 September 1916, adding portions of adjacent townships to the north.

NARRATOR:

1916: A large number of Metis were rejected for aid by the government since there was a question of whether they were Indian or not. They continued their landless status.

ROCKY BOY:

1916: Little Bear and I were in disagreement on who should qualify to enroll. I thought it should be the Chippewa and Cree since we had pretty much intermarried. Little Bear would not give up on including the Metis.

Finally, I just wanted to keep the peace so I agreed to Little Bear's terms. But this included only a small number of Metis.

NARRATOR:

1917: Rocky Boy dies.

