

JONES, EADSLEY D. THIRD INTERVIEW

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Interview with Emsley D. Jones
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The Cheyenne Indians as I knew Them

My boyhood impressions of the Indians (Cheyenne) remain with me today. I was born in 1880 on the old Red Fork Ranch on the Chisholm Trail, where Dover is today. My father bought the lease to this ranch in 1875 and sold it in 1883 to Ralph Collins - but retained his headquarters at the ranch until 1887. This was not a ranch in the true sense of the word it was a large commissary from which cowboys replenished their supplies, a way-station for the stage line and a sort of an inn for Government officers and travelers on the trail.

From the time I was a baby and these Indians knew me as the first white child in their midst, calling me "schoo-oonce" (white baby) until young manhood, I was associated with them. The little Indian boys were my playmates and except for their dirt they made good companions. They knew no fear, of course that was their training. When they were babies or papooses if they cried the squaw would fill her mouth with water and squirt it into the baby's face; she would keep this up

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until the baby stopped crying. He soon learned it was more pleasant not to cry. They were thrown into the water when very young, so swimming became as easy as walking. I have seen papooses strapped to the back of colts. A colt was chosen because it always stayed near its mother and in turn the mother horse protected her young from rough going.

When Indian children were very young they were put on ponies and allowed to hold as best they could or fall. So they became fearless riders.

An Indian's word was his bond - at least that was my experience. My father would give them grocery credit at the commissary, sometimes for \$2.00 or \$3.00, which was a large amount in those days. Maybe six months might elapse or longer but always an Indian brought the money as soon as he got it. My father kept no books, it was a matter of trust. So many writers speak of the panther-like tread of the Indian, I suppose they mean his silent tread, for the Indian I knew was not graceful, he waddled like a duck. Meeting an Indian around the ranch or in his tepee, ^{he} was quite talkative but meet him

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out on the trail or in the great open spaces he faced the sky and was speechless. In the great open he seemed in communion with his God. That is the picture of the Indian I remember best - sitting on his horse alone on a height if possible, his face lifted heavenward devout in appeal to the Great Spirit.

Another characteristic of the Indian was his treatment of his horse. He was always especially kind to his ponies and his papooses. I never saw a poor Indian pony. Their sense of comedy was peculiar. What appeared to me a tragedy to them was a source of glee. For instance a man without legs or otherwise physically handicapped by accident or nature, the worse his physical handicap the funnier it was to the Indians and they seldom found anything else funny. Maybe it was because they had always been taught to laugh at suffering, the greater their personal suffering the louder the laugh.

I have seen them walk barefooted on beds of hot coals. One of the cruelest things I ever saw was their "skull dance". The young bucks took buffalo skulls, tied them with thongs on their backs. That is the flesh was

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pierced through in four places on the buck's back, then the buffalo skull was tied through these gashes with thongs. The bucks then danced until the thongs tore through the flesh and the skull dropped to the ground. Their medicine men were very skillful in healing these wounds and the next year they were ready for another dance with its attendant torture. The more scars the braver the brave.

A method of cure I saw them use for a child who had malaria was to dig a pit in the ground and build a fire in it until it became hot then they took the coals out. They wrapped the child in a blanket and put him in the pit and packed him in dirt. It cured him. As for their burial customs. They told me that it used to be their custom to place the bodies of the dead in trees and let them thus return to the elements. Later they left them lying on top of the ground. As I knew their customs they buried them in shallow graves. I would often see the old squaws take buckets of some kind of soup made from corn and leave the food at the head of the grave of the departed. They always buried the dead with feet to the east so the spirit on arising would face the rising sun.

My mother thought she was not afraid of Indians but she had an uncanny scare once that proved that she really was. It was when she was with my father up on Preacher Creek. They lived in a cow camp - a tent and a wagon body sheeted over the bows; this sat box like on the ground. My mother had made me a coat from an old soldier's uniform. The coat had been blue with a red lining. She took the red lining to make my first coat. One day she went away from the camp and left me asleep in the wagon box. When she was returning she saw from a distance what looked to her like a gaily bedecked Indian by the wagon. Full of fear she hurried to the camp and to her relief found my red coat hanging over the saddle in front of the wagon.

Those Indians had queer ways of playing pranks. These pranks were serious to us and sometimes led to serious consequences to them. A minor incident was one played on my mother. One day when she was in our living quarters alone, in came sixteen young bucks. They wanted "chucko", food. Mother had some biscuits made which she gladly gave them but having tasted white man's butter, they wanted "butter." They seized her and took her to the churn and demanded she "churn" them some butter. Father heard them, slipped in, raised his needle gun and the bucks quickly departed and were minus their "butter."

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My father had a great deal of trouble with Indians stealing his cattle. When this happened he would appeal to their chief and in return for the donation of a beef the chief would see that the cattle were returned. When we were living up on Preacher Creek, six miles northwest of Red Fork Ranch, the Cimarron River was the dividing line between the Cheyenne reservation and the unallotted land. It was a common practice for the Indians to slip across the river and get a few head of cattle.

One time my father missed six cattle. There was an Easterner staying with us at the time, a typical tender-foot. So Father took him and set out across the river to find his stolen cattle. They rode until dark and not finding them gave up and started back to the cow camp. Just before they arrived at the Cimarron they found themselves surrounded by fifteen or twenty Indians on horseback. The Indians wanted to know why Father and his companion were on the reservation side. They demanded that Father and his friend go back to the Indian camp. Father thought that might be ^{the} easiest thing to do. He knew the chief and wanted to talk to him about the missing cattle anyway.

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After riding three or four miles they arrived at the Indian camp. The Indian tepees were in a circle. The Indians took their Winchesters from them and put the men in a tepee under guard. It was about 7 P.M., night coming on and it began to look serious. The Indians were all young bucks and my father began to figure that this was "a young bucks' prank" which he would soon settle by talking to the chief. To make matters worse they began war-whooping and dancing around the tepee. The tenderfoot was frozen with fear. My father decided that enough was enough and demanded that either they take him to see the chief or bring the chief to him..

Imagine my father's anger and dismay when they told him that the chief was at Fort Reno. He and his companion had been hunting the cattle all day and were hungry. Finally the Indians brought them a can of coffee and some stew. They ate and Father said the stew tasted especially good. Later he found he had partaken of his first and last dish of cooked dog meat. Night wore on, the bucks kept up their reign of terror as far as threats could take them. My father said at no time did he fear bodily harm but the tenderfoot was in a frenzy expecting to be scalped at any moment and spent his time in praying.

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The next morning Father and the tenderfoot were allowed to depart. The bucks had had their good time while their chief was away. Father demanded the cattle. They told him they had just driven them across the river when they saw him coming. They hid the cattle and when Father had gone on in his search they had driven them back across the river. "All's well that ends well."