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Peer reviewed

# “I Saw All That”: A Lakota Girl’s Puberty Ceremony<sup>1</sup>

**MARSHA C. BOL AND NELLIE Z. STAR BOY MENARD**

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On 27 August 1994, Lakota elder Nellie Zelda Star Boy Menard was honored by her family and friends in a special ceremony at the Rosebud fair. The list of her extensive accomplishments in the arts was recited by relative Noah Broken Leg.

Menard was honored once before, but this time as a young girl. Her family venerated her in a special ceremony. At the age of fifteen, Menard underwent a traditional girl’s puberty ceremony. Born on 3 June 1910 in Belvidere, South Dakota on the Lakota (Sioux) Rosebud Reservation, Menard is one of very few living tribal members to experience this honorary ceremony.<sup>2</sup> As Nellie says, “They don’t do that [puberty ceremony] anymore. That’s a thing of the past.... So very few people go through that.... I was the only girl [in my family] for a long time, so that’s how come I went through that.”<sup>3</sup> No firsthand Lakota accounts of this ceremony have been published to our knowledge and only a handful of eyewitness accounts exist.<sup>4</sup>

In the early 1980s, Menard transcribed her memories of the *išnati awicalowanpi* and *tapa wankayeyapi* ceremonies.<sup>5</sup> She did this in response to a request by a Swiss gentleman who purchased her beaded ball, which was used in her ceremony:<sup>6</sup>

This is the ceremony they [my family] had for me when I first had my period going on 15 years old.

First they put up a tent away from the house—I would say about 50 yards or hearing distance. I am to stay in this tent with my grandmother, my mother’s mother [Helen Long Warrior Leads the Horse].

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Marsha C. Bol is associate professor of anthropology and museum studies at the University of Texas, San Antonio. Her writing and research have focused on Native American arts, specifically issues of gender and the arts of Lakota women. Nellie Z. Star Boy Menard lives on Rosebud Reservation in South Dakota. She is a traditional Lakota woman who has been honored numerous times for her lifelong achievements in the arts of quillwork, beadwork, and quiltmaking.

It was in the summer time they put pail of water quilts sewing, beading and porcupine quills, skins [tanned] anything that was needed to teach me how to do them.

Grandma took a little ax cut into the ground made a little dug out about 4 inches deep, she put loose dirt in then got some sage and made a bed. All I had to wear was dress and underskirt. I sat on these sage when too uncomfortable she will take the soiled sage and the dirt where blood soaked through, then put fresh in. If I itched anywhere I can't scratch. I had to use a special little forked stick.<sup>7</sup>

During the day all I did was sit and do either beadwork first. I have learned how to make the thread out of sinew then I sewed the beads on. Sinew and using awl to make to make a hole in skin—no needle. She told me to think about a design in my mind and try to apply that design in my beading straight lines. When tired she taught me how to select the porcupine quills into different sizes and thickness, cut little bit each end as its sharp wash it with soap and water wrinse it. Take about 12 to 16 quills and put it in my mouth and soak it—then she cut a rawhide piece into 3 strips. I had to take one quill at a time bite one end and flatten it with my fingernails. From there I had to wrap around this strips of rawhide center one first showed me how to end it. Next the[n] sew on quill onto buckskin. I always have to work with quills in my mouth to keep it soft while sewing or wrap.

Next I have started a pair of moccasins and with in 4 days or as long as I can see without lamp I had to finish at least one side of moccasins. All these done with sinew thread.

My last day grandma taught me how to soften the rawhide and cut the soles then sew the top tanned skin unto rawhide on wrong side then turn it inside out finish the strings to tie.

Of course I was clean up every so often. Wash and eat. I cannot look outside or go near any men or boys.

End of my time 4 days evening grandma boiled same sage and bath me with the sage water then she wipe me off with sage—no towel. I put on all new clean clothes. What I had on while sick they burned all my dresses and underskirt. They burned 8 dresses and about 10 slips but no pants. A man gave a talk first then he told me I was a woman now and said always try to do right. His name is Frank Good Lance.—After that they had the ceremony—*a ma lowanpi* and throwing the ball. The girl caught the ball [when] I throw it in the air. If she drops it is bad luck which side I don't know.

My Mom [Grace Long Warrior] was a widow as my father [Bert Star Boy] already dead when I had my time so it was my grandfolks and my mother gave the feast. They have killed two cows and all the trimmings and gave away besides.—The girl who caught the ball her name is Zallie Castaway. My mom gave her a horse with 2 rawhide boxes tied together thrown over the horse with thin and thick shawls one in each bag then a star quilt; of course there was moccasins, dress material in those bags also.

Nellie Menard writes of four different events during her puberty initiation: (1) the activities during her isolation in a separate lodge; (2) her Buffalo Ceremony; (3) her Throwing the Ball Ceremony; and (4) the feast and give-

away accompanying the other events. The rest of this paper will be devoted to a further exploration of each of these events based upon taped conversations in 1992 and 1994 and Lakota archival and published materials. The paper pays particular attention to the role of the arts in each of these rites.

### İŞNATI AWICALOWANPI: SECLUSION<sup>8</sup>

As Menard describes, when a young Lakota girl experienced her first menses, she was isolated for four days in a separate dwelling termed the menstrual lodge, which was within hearing distance of the house. She was instructed to stay inside the canvas tent at all times and not to look outside or go near any males. In this way, neither her contact nor her odor could ritually contaminate the potency of men or men's belongings such as shields, weapons, wearing robes, or ritual bundles. This isolation of menstruating women, termed *išnati* (to dwell alone), was the expected practice among Lakota women into the twentieth century.<sup>9</sup>

Women during their menstrual period were considered so powerful and dangerous that they posed a threat to others and themselves if they did not take the proper precautions.<sup>10</sup> They were a threat to a warrior and his war implements, both of whose efficacy might be impaired by contact with the woman. "The medicine-bow owner fears the menstruating woman as much as she fears him; when they pass each other, they believe that something evil will befall them. The woman fears she might contract some dread disease; and as for the medicine-bow owner, he thinks that when he next goes to war he will be wounded, if not killed."<sup>11</sup> As anthropologist Clark Wissler reported:

This condition [menstruation] was always looked upon with fear and dread. The odor of the flow or the mere contact of a woman with all objects of "magical power" was displeasing to the Great Spirit and would destroy all the power of shields, blankets, etc. The power of all "wakan" [sacred] men and their medicine would be destroyed by contact with the individual or the odor.

During the time of the flow the women lived in a tent placed by the side of the other. When the camp is on the move, the women so afflicted must march along some distance from the main body and toward the wind, so that the odor may not be carried in. This is especially important when the camp is on the war path, for then the contact of women and the odor of the flow will destroy the power of all the weapons, shields, etc.<sup>12</sup>

Regardless of circumstance, such customs had to be observed. As Elsie Clews Parsons wrote in 1913, "A Sioux Indian agent tells me that once a month he had temporarily to release the Indian women prisoners, so great was the men's objection to staying in prison with them at that time."<sup>13</sup>

Medicine men also feared the periodic supernatural potency of menstruating women: "There is only one detail over which, as a group they paid the same attention, and that was the menstruation of women. It was believed that menstruation was at great enmity with medicine and if a woman deliberately

stayed near the medicine, she could create an obstacle, and render the medicine impotent so that it could not reach the sickness."<sup>14</sup>

The concern with the powerful capabilities of menstruating women is evident among the Lakota yet today. While preparing to attend a Sun Dance in 1993, Menard said that women should not attend if they were "having their time."<sup>15</sup>

A girl's first menstrual flow was considered "her most sensitive and impressionable hour," so those activities and thoughts in which she engaged were of utmost importance to the direction of her future as a woman.<sup>16</sup>

It is said that all sorts of influences are at work during a girl's first flow. In those days she may turn good or bad, depending on her own choice. If she chose the good she would ever be a good woman, but if she chose the bad, she could never hope to be good.

Habit is formed during those days that lasts forever. So a girl was encouraged to sit still and do beadwork and porcupine quillwork, and keep her voice low, and in all manner of ways to habituate herself to the ways of the good woman.<sup>17</sup>

Considering that the influences surrounding a young woman during menarche were believed to control her path throughout her lifetime, the events of her puberty cycle become extremely significant.

Historically, little information was recorded about what happened inside the Lakota menstrual lodge during the girl's initial isolation. Accounts agree about the significance of this event, yet neglect to report the actual activities, simply stating that the young girl "was instructed by an older woman in the things a woman should know, even in the making of moccasins and clothes. This older woman who helped the girl should have been a good and holy person, for at this time her virtues and habits passed into the young girl whom she was purifying."<sup>18</sup>

Nellie Menard is unique in telling exactly what activities she undertook while in seclusion:

Grandma took a little ax cut into the ground made a little dug out about 4 inches deep, she put loose dirt in them got some sage and made a bed. All I had to wear was dress and underskirt. I sat on these sage when too uncomfortable she will take the soiled sage and the dirt where blood soaked through, then put fresh in. During the day all I did was sit and do...beadwork first.... When tired she taught me how to select the porcupine quills.... Next I have started a pair of moccasins and with in 4 days... I had to finish at least one side of moccasins.

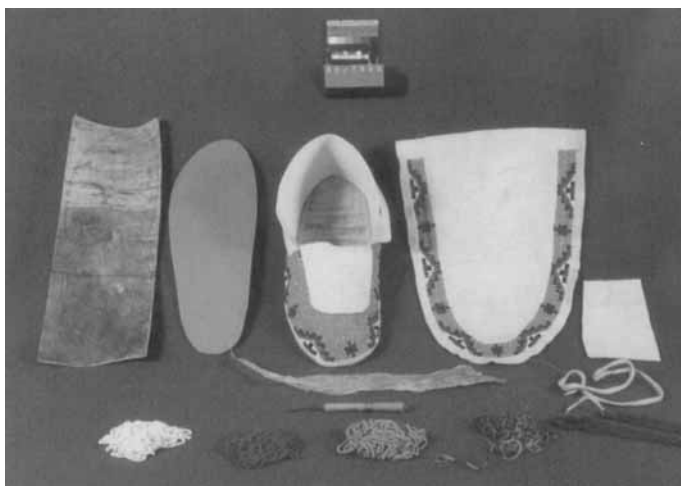
Menard spent all four days learning and practicing the arts of quill- and beadwork. She describes in detail the quilling and beading techniques that she learned during her first seclusion when she was instructed by her grandmother. The supplies (tanned hides, quills, beads, and sewing materials) were placed in the lodge ahead of time, ready and waiting for her appearance.

During the day all I did was sit and do either beadwork first. I have learned how to make the thread out of sinew then I sewed the beads on. Sinew and

using awl to make a hole in skin—no needle. She told me to think about a design in my mind and try to apply that design in my beading straight lines. When tired she taught me how to select the porcupine quills into different sizes and thickness, cut little bit each end as its sharp wash it with soap and water wrinse it. Take about 12 to 16 quills and put it in my mouth and soak it—then she cut a rawhide piece into 3 strips. I had to take one quill at a time bite one end and flatten it with my fingernails. From there I had to wrap around this strips of rawhide center one first showed me how to end it. Next the sew on quill onto buckskin. I always have to work with quills in my mouth to keep it soft while sewing or wrap.

Next I have started a pair of moccasins and with in 4 days or as long as I can see without lamp I had to finish at least one side of moccasins. All these done with sinew thread.

My last day grandma taught me how to soften the rawhide and cut the soles then sew the top tanned skin unto rawhide on wrong side then turn it inside out finish the strings to tie.<sup>19</sup>



**Photo 1.** *Moccasin-making set. Nellie Menard assembled this set to illustrate the materials, tools, and steps required to make a pair of beaded moccasins (Courtesy of Denver Museum of Natural History, #7885).*

**Photo 2.** *Quilled moccasins made by Nellie Menard (Photo by Marsha C. Bol).*



When Bol first held a conversation with Menard in 1992, the anthropologist's request was to discuss the Lakota traditional arts of quill- and beadwork. In response, Menard began telling the story of her puberty rite. As Menard made clear, her knowledge of the Lakota arts of quill- and beadwork are intimately linked with her puberty ritual.<sup>20</sup>

Other statements concur that creating art was the primary activity during a Lakota girl's first seclusion:<sup>21</sup> "She was encouraged to keep busy at fancy work; porcupine quillwork traditionally, and beadwork in more recent times, as European beads became available. If she originated interesting designs with her many colored media, so much the better.... She was encouraged to do fancy work, that she might prefer it to idleness."<sup>22</sup>

Nellie also describes other activities that took place in the menstrual lodge:

End of my time 4 days evening grandma boiled same sage and bath me with the sage water then she wipe me off with sage—no towel. I put on all new clean clothes. What I had on while sick they burned all my dresses and underskirt. They burned 8 dresses and about 10 slips but no pants. A man gave a talk first then he told me I was a woman now and said always try to do right. His name is Frank Good Lance.—After that they had the ceremony—a *ma lowanpi* [Buffalo Ceremony] and throwing the ball.

#### THE ACTIONS OF A RITE OF PASSAGE

Menard experienced what anthropologists such as Arnold Van Gennep and Edmund Leach have described as a classic puberty ritual.<sup>23</sup> Leach has identified a three-phase recurring pattern of actions in rites of passage wherein the initiate undergoes a change from one social status to another, in this case from adolescence to womanhood. First the initiate must be separated from her traditional societal role. This separation from normal life may be represented in a variety of ways, such as physical movement from one space to another, a removal of clothing, or a ritual washing.

Following the separation from the usual condition, the initiate enters a state of marginality or liminality.

The general characteristic of such rites of marginality...is that the initiate is kept physically apart from ordinary people, either by being sent away from the normal home surroundings altogether or by being temporarily housed in an enclosed space from which ordinary people are excluded.

The social separation is further emphasised by subjecting the initiate to all kinds of special prescriptions and proscriptions regarding food, clothing, and movement generally.<sup>24</sup>

During this transitional or marginal stage, ordinary people consider the initiate to be in a sacred state, or "contaminated with holiness," and therefore dangerous.<sup>25</sup> To prepare to reincorporate the initiate back into society in a new but normal status, ritual cleansing or washing to remove the "contamination" generally occurs. In the third phase the initiate is reintroduced into society.

The clothing worn during the liminal state is removed and the initiate puts on a new costume appropriate to her new status.

Menard was physically separated from ordinary society and ritually separated from asexual childhood when she was moved to the menstrual lodge. While there she entered a sacred and transitional state in which she was seated on a bed of sage, considered a protective plant to the Lakota, wearing only a dress and a slip.<sup>26</sup> She was ritually taught to perform the arts of quillwork and beadwork by a virtuous postmenopausal woman. Menstrual contamination is not a threat to postmenopausal women who, because of their physical status, often play sacred roles in rituals.<sup>27</sup>

In Menard's case, she did not already know how to do beadwork—"that's when I learned how. Four days you have to learn everything." She points out, "I had to finish at least one side of moccasins." Completion of a moccasin was an important outcome of this transitional phase. Menard reiterates: "I finished one side of a moccasin for myself cause I wear size fours at the time, so it was size fours that I made. You have to *finish* it, whatever you do, you have to finish at least one side." The necessity of completion was also present historically with certain types of Lakota quillwork that were never to be interrupted until the design was complete.<sup>28</sup>

During this holy time the Lakota believe that a woman's path either toward a good and productive life or a wasted and idle one is determined.<sup>29</sup> Dorothy Hammond and Alta Jablow, in discussing puberty rituals in general, state: "The whole process of enculturation is summed up in the puberty rituals. All of cultural ideals of feminine behavior are spelled out...[and] demonstrate, either explicitly or symbolically, the role of the 'good woman.'"<sup>30</sup> The Lakota quite clearly state that the ideal Lakota woman shall possess the desired virtues of chastity, fecundity, industry, and hospitality.<sup>31</sup> Since the young woman spends the majority of her time in seclusion engaged in learning the womanly arts of quill- and beadwork, it follows that these activities assist her in achieving the objectives of ideal Lakota womanhood. The performance of these womanly arts results in a completed moccasin top—evidence of her achievement. This would suggest that the artistic endeavor is directly coupled with the role of the "good" woman and that the product, a moccasin top, is a sign that the maker now possesses these inner virtues. However, according to Menard, after the ceremony is complete a girl may choose not to continue to practice the arts. "The ones that go through that ceremony, you can go on with it [afterward] and do the beadwork or if you don't care for it you drop it right there."

At the end of the four days of marginality, Menard was ritually bathed in sage water and dried with sage. She was dressed in new clean clothes and the garments she wore during her transition were burned. She was then declared a woman by Frank Good Lance and instructed to "always try to do right."<sup>32</sup>

### BUFFALO CEREMONY<sup>33</sup>

Nellie Menard was reincorporated into society in her new role as a woman during the Buffalo Ceremony. She explained the events of her ceremony on tape in 1993:<sup>34</sup>



They have a ceremony. They got a man to sing over you. And they pray for you and from there you're not a girl any more. You're going to the womanhood. So they pray for you that you'll lead a good life and...prepare to be a wife and a mother and what you should teach your children in the future. They pray for you like that and then this man has two sticks that are decorated with horsehair and he swings that as he's singing over you.... And they have that sweet grass. They take that and before this man used that those wands why they smoke you with that stuff. They smoke you all over.... And when he gets done, well then they sage this ball too. (If you don't have the sweet grass then you use sage.) So they smoke that and then you throw that ball.

She describes the Buffalo Ceremony from the perspective of a young woman experiencing it as a participant on Rosebud Reservation in 1925. While the ceremony has been described previously, it was reported by male observers detailing the ritual activities at Pine Ridge Reservation. Nicholas Black Elk also described the original ceremony as it was practiced among the Oglala.<sup>35</sup> James R. Walker observed this ceremony among the Oglala during his eighteen years (1896–1914) as agency physician on the Pine Ridge Reservation and recorded the ritual at length. His record is well-published.<sup>36</sup>

Clark Wissler, curator from the American Museum of Natural History, witnessed a similar ceremony in 1902 also at Pine Ridge and recorded it in his field notes but never published the description. He reported: "When puberty arrives the girls are subjected to this ceremony, the object being to make them well and strong and fruitful. The ceremony is regarded as very sacred and only a few men venture to perform it, because of the evil consequences of blundering. The detail of it is considerable. It is still performed occasionally, but is 'frowned upon' by the Agent. The ceremony witnessed by me was performed August 29, 1902. Two girls were taken through the ceremony which was conducted by He Crow."<sup>37</sup> Because his interests lie in material culture and the arts, Wissler adds many details on the use of objects.

Some women put up a tipi which was kept for ceremonies of this kind. It was ornamented. At the top, on the middle back pole is the red stripe pattern with feathers as seen on the saddle bags. On the sides are the scalp ornaments. On the flaps are the porcupine ornaments. All these decorations except the red stripe pattern are common to all gift and ceremonial tipis....

He Crow led the procession to the tipi. He carried two sticks about two feet long on the ends of which were tied bags of medicine. One of his servants [assistants] carried a forked stick, also red.<sup>38</sup>

A set of wands was also used in Menard's ceremony. Many years later, she describes, "a man by the name of American Horse was visiting me at the museum and he said he made a set of wands that was used in woman's ceremony. There's a set at the Sioux Indian Museum. He saw those and told me. So I said then, I remember the ones used at my ceremony, and here he turned around, shook my hand, then said I was a good woman."<sup>39</sup> In regard to the tipi that Wissler describes, Menard points out: "I think they put this tipi up for giveaway after the ceremony

as girls who first have their period are regarded as wakan. [She would] not go near anything elaborate as this tipi to be alone for her time."<sup>40</sup>

Wissler completes his description, observing that, "Presents are given out and a general feast follows."<sup>41</sup> Menard, on the other hand, recollects, "then you throw that ball." The events that Wissler, Walker, and Black Elk describe vary considerably from those experienced by Nellie Menard. The differences in these versions make clear that the woman's puberty ceremony had a number of variables depending on the person, place, time, and interpreter. Ceremonies likely varied according to each ritual specialist's leadership. In addition, Rosebud and Pine Ridge reservations may have enacted the rituals differently, although many Rosebud families have relatives at Pine Ridge and there is much visiting between the two. The time period during which all of these ceremonies were recorded was an era of turbulent history and tremendous change. Other rituals felt the effects—some even were banned by the US government. Wissler mentions that the Indian agent "frowned upon" the ceremony. Not many years after Menard's ceremony was conducted, Lakota puberty rituals ceased to be performed.

As she never attended another girl's puberty ceremony at Rosebud or at Pine Ridge," Menard cannot comment on possible differences. "I just knew about mine," she says. "My folks spent lots of time, money, and everything." Her ceremony was a complete and elaborate one. Only once did she talk with another woman whose family wanted to give her a ceremony: "Only one I've talked to said it's so embarrassing I won't go. So they had to just honor her by giving gifts away. She's dead now."<sup>42</sup>

Certainly various versions of the ceremony were also greatly dependent upon the viewpoint of the interpreter or recorder: whether a female participant, a ritual leader, or an observer, Native or non-Native. At last we now can add to the record the memoir of a Lakota woman who actually experienced the ceremony.

#### *TAPA WANKAYEYAPI: THE THROWING OF THE BALL CEREMONY*

Information about the Lakota Throwing of the Ball Ceremony is quite rare. There are only three known accounts, one of which is just a mention in a footnote. Of these, Nellie Menard's is the only known first-hand account of an initiate:

When he gets done why then I took the ball and then the girl that's to received that, they pick the girl to receive that, and so she comes up, and I had to throw that ball and she's to catch it. And if she drops it they say it's bad luck. What kind I don't know.... The girl who caught the ball her name is Zallie Castaway.<sup>43</sup>

Black Elk describes the vision and reenactment that brought about the Throwing of the Ball ritual, the last of the seven sacred rites, to the Lakota people.<sup>44</sup> His description of the original ceremony among the Oglala varies from Menard's experience at Rosebud in several respects. He makes no direct connection between the rite and the occasion of a girl's puberty ritual,

although certain parallels are evident. For example, a young girl is selected to throw the ball and is equated to a buffalo calf just as she is in the Buffalo Ceremony. Black Elk says that the girl “has just come from *Wakan-Tanka* [the sacred one], pure and without any darkness” just as the young initiate who has been purified in the ceremony.<sup>45</sup> She tosses the ball in each of the four directions and with each throw all the people scramble for it. In Menard’s experience the girl made a single throw to a selected young woman.

The only other account of this ceremony is a brief mention in a footnote by Susie Hollowhorn to Martha Beckwith in 1926.<sup>46</sup> Hollowhorn says: “In old times they played shinny after the fourth day of a girl’s (first?) menstrual period. The girl took the shinny ball and threw it in each of four directions and someone caught it each time.” Hollowhorn’s account, like Menard’s, directly connects this rite with the time of menarche, although Hollowhorn cites the ball as a *shinny* ball. Nellie states that shinny is a sport ball game, and does not have ritual meaning like the *tapa wankayeyapi*.

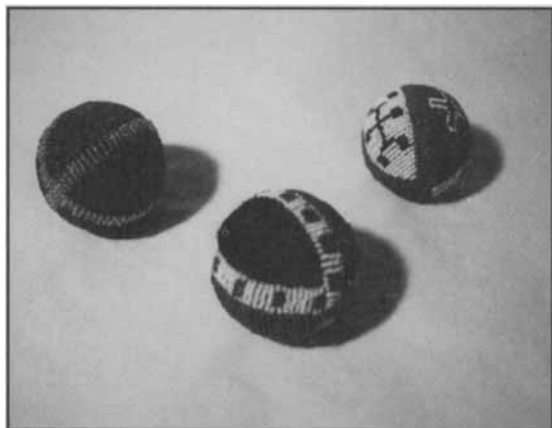
Both Menard and Black Elk treat the ball as a special object. She describes its construction in layers of meaningful materials—a round stone, sage, and buffalo hair:<sup>47</sup>

Well the ball...it’s a little tiny rock, when they find that why they wrap sage around it and then buffalo hair. They wrapped it around and that’s how they get it so big. And then they cut that buckskin. They sew it on and it has to be hard, you know, to handle and then they bead it or else they can quill it...but that rock is real round, real round just like a marble.... [T]hey find it someplace, but it’s very hard to find a real round one. And when they do find one why something guides you to take that. They believe that.

Round stones appear in several Lakota ritual contexts. White Buffalo Calf Woman, the bearer of the Lakota’s sacred pipe, carried a round stone in her sacred bundle.<sup>48</sup> A found sacred stone assisted those who dreamed of it to cure illness or to find lost objects, and it served as a powerful personal amulet to protect its possessor from misfortune.<sup>49</sup> Around the stone are wrapped a layer of sage, which is associated with ceremony, and buffalo hair, signifying the connection between buffalo and the initiate.

In Moves Walking’s reenactment of his vision of the first Throwing of the Ball Ceremony, “[he] picked up the sacred ball, which had been made from the hair of the buffalo and covered with tanned buffalo hide. He painted this ball red, the color of the world, and, with blue paint representing the heavens, he made dots at the four quarters; then made two blue circles running all around the ball, thus making two paths joining the four quarters. By completely encircling the red ball with the blue lines, Heaven and Earth were united into one in this ball, thus making it very sacred.”<sup>50</sup> In essence, then, the ball that the initiate girl holds in her hand represents the Lakota universe. The beaded designs found on the majority of these balls conform to this configuration. They tend to be divided into quadrants of color separated by two encircling bands that crisscross each other. In this way, the design reflects the sacred significance of the ball as representative of the universe with its earth, sky, and four directions. This is one of the few occasions in which we can ascribe a significance to geometric beadwork with a fair amount of

certainty. According to Black Elk as he retells Moves Walking's original ceremony, the young girl who will throw the ball stands at the center of the earth, as she holds the ball representing the universe in her hand. Whoever catches the holy ball will receive great blessings from Wakan-Tanka.<sup>51</sup>



**Photo 3.** *Special beaded balls were made for Lakota girls' puberty ceremonies. At the end of the four days of seclusion and the Buffalo Ceremony, which marked a girl's transition into womanhood, the initiate performed the Throwing of the Ball (courtesy of Carnegie Museum of Natural History, #14526-81,82, and 83).*

### THE GIVEAWAY AND FEAST

The girl who caught the ball.... My mom gave her a horse with 2 rawhide boxes tied together thrown over the horse with thin and thick shawls one in each bag then a star quilt; of course there was moccasins, dress material in those bags also. When she caught the ball why then they gave her all that stuff.<sup>52</sup>

Sponsoring the puberty ceremonies was a large financial obligation and not every girl was so fortunate to be honored. The production of gifts and food for the feast required the cooperation and participation of all the extended family members. Menard's beaded ball, for example, was made by an aunt for the occasion.

By gift-giving in the initiate's name, the family was bestowing honor upon the girl. James R. Walker observed that,

The parents should have the Buffalo Ceremony performed for their daughter as soon practicable after she has her first flow. If this is at a time when they have plenty, it should be performed as soon after the flow ceases as the friends can be gathered together for this purpose. But if it is at a time when there is not plenty, then they should announce that their girl has become a woman and that they will have the ceremony performed as soon as they can make the proper provisions for it so that she may become a buffalo woman.... But it is no disgrace to a woman if the ceremony has never been performed for her benefit, for such a one may, by her skill and industry, make herself as desirable as if she had been made a buffalo woman.<sup>53</sup>

Walker goes on to say that a woman who has been through the puberty rites has special privileges accorded to her because of her status as a buffalo woman. "The buffalo women form a class distinct from other women, but they do not form an association or society."<sup>54</sup> When Walker points out that "it is no disgrace" for a girl not to have been honored with a puberty ceremony, he offers an alternative—a young woman may gain stature through skill and industry. These are the same values that the initiate is ritually taught during her seclusion.



**Photo 4** A horse is laden with beaded moccasin tops and other giveaway goods at Pine Ridge, South Dakota, 1906 (Brennan Collection, courtesy of South Dakota State Historical Society).

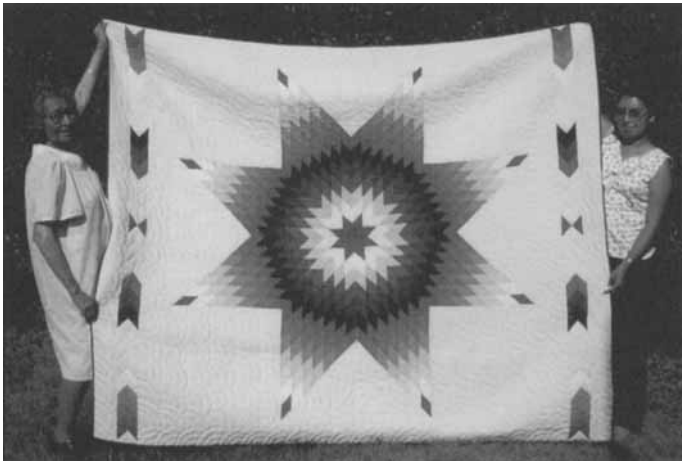
Today, as in the past, Lakota women are greatly respected for their artistic abilities. In 1994 Menard was honored in a ceremony sponsored by her family. Her lifetime of accomplishments in the arts were enumerated: She worked for thirty-five years for the US Indian Arts and Crafts Board as a specialist in Plains Indian traditional arts; from 1937 to 1942 Menard initiated and managed the Rosebud Indian Arts and Crafts Board museum and shop; she worked with all the quill and bead workers in the surrounding communities; during World War II she managed the Museum of the Plains Indian in Browning, Montana;<sup>55</sup> and thereafter she spent the rest of her career until 1972 at the Sioux Indian Museum in Rapid City, South Dakota, devoted to Lakota traditional arts and artists.

Nellie Menard is an accomplished artist. During her schooldays she drew seven of the beadwork designs which later appeared in *Quillwork and Beadwork of the Western Sioux*, the first in a series of Indian handcrafts publications by the US Department of Interior.<sup>56</sup> In her lifetime she has made beautiful quill- and beadwork, countless flat fringe shawls, feather bonnets (including twelve for the World's Fair "Expo '67" in Montreal), and star quilts for family and community events. In fact, she is still making them. Menard took three newly made quilts to Washington, DC when she was honored as a recipient of a 1995



**Photo 5.** *Nellie Star Boy Menard at Denver Powwow, 1996 (photo by Martina LeDeaux).*

National Endowment for the Arts National Heritage Fellowship in the Folk Arts award. On that visit, Hilary Rodham Clinton was a lucky recipient of one of her shawls. In 1997 the Smithsonian's National Museum of the American Indian commissioned one of her quilts to hang in the Rayburn House of Representatives' Office Building on Capitol Hill. Considering that the influences surrounding a young woman at the onset of puberty were believed to control her path through life, Menard's puberty ceremony clearly set her on a pathway to skill and industry as a traditional Lakota woman.



**Photo 6.** *Nellie Star Boy Menard, quiltmaker, and her granddaughter, Teresa Star Chief, display Nellie Menard's star quilt (courtesy of the Carnegie Museum of Natural History, #35882-1. Photo by Marsha C. Bol).*

## NOTES

1. Marsha C. Bol would like to acknowledge the Netting and O'Neil research funds of the Carnegie Museum of Natural History for funding this project. The research was completed while Bol was associate curator of anthropology at the Carnegie Museum of Natural History.

2. Menard's ceremony took place around 1925. William Powers writes that among the Oglala of Pine Ridge Reservation the girl's puberty rites have not been performed since the 1920s; William Powers, *Oglala Religion* (Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 1977), 143. In 1917, James R. Walker recorded the following: "The Buffalo ceremony is now almost obsolete among the Oglala, but certain rites relative to it are occasionally practiced"; James R. Walker, *The Sun Dance and Other Ceremonies of the Oglala Division of the Teton Dakota*, in the Anthropological Papers of the American Museum of Natural History, vol. XVI, pt. II (New York, 1917), 141. Bea Medicine, "Indian Women and the Renaissance of Traditional Religion," in *Sioux Indian Religion*, eds. Raymond J. DeMallie and Douglas R. Parks (Norman: University of Oklahoma Press, 1987), 168, points out that, "Despite the present interest in revitalizing traditional religion, one ceremony that has so far been overlooked is the girls' puberty ceremony.... [T]hey are curiously absent in Northern Plains revitalization movements." Marla Powers agrees: "The Sacred Ball Game, and the female puberty ceremony have become obsolete"; Marla Powers, *Oglala Women: Myth, Ritual, and Reality* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1986), 190. Nicholas Black Elk observed in 1947 that the "Throwing of the Ball" Ceremony was played until recently: "But there are only a few of us today who still understand why the game is sacred, or what the game originally was long ago, when it was not really a game, but one of our most important rites"; Joseph Epes Brown, *The Sacred Pipe: Black Elk's Account of the Seven Rites of the Oglala Sioux* (London: Penguin Books, 1971), 127.

3. Nellie Menard, interview with Marsha Bol, 10 September 1993.

4. See Clark Wissler, "Field Notes on the Dakota Indians," collected on a museum expedition of 1902 (New York: American Museum of Natural History), 134-143; Walker, *Sun Dance*, 141-151; James R. Walker, *Lakota Belief and Ritual*, eds. Raymond J. DeMallie and Elaine A. Jahner (Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 1980), 241-253; Elaine Jahner, "Spatial Categories in Sioux Folk Narrative" (Ph.D. diss., Indiana University, 1975), 91; Brown, *Sacred Pipe*, 116-126.

5. "*Isnati, awicalowanpi*, and *tapa wankayeyapi* are the same in the ceremony. It's a woman's ceremony and they never tell anyone what they are doing in the tent, how the girl is being taken care of," says Menard (10 April 1995).

6. Menard wrote her statement, which she keeps in her possession, for Joseph Balmer of Switzerland in the early 1980s. She gave Bol a copy in July 1993, after first telling Bol about her ceremony in September 1992. In the summers of 1993 and 1994, Bol taped interviews with Menard discussing the ceremony in greater detail. The authors have continued to discuss details through the various drafts of this paper.

7. Menard verbally added this information about the scratching stick to her statement as part of the instructions that she received.

8. The Lakota term *ishnati awicalowanpi* ("they sing over the one dwelling alone") includes both the first seclusion and the Buffalo Ceremony that follows.

9. Menard doesn't recall when isolation practices ceased. According to Ella C. Deloria, "The Dakota Way of Life," n.d., Institute of Indian Studies, University of South

Dakota, 377: "The withdrawal custom had long been obsolete. Only the oldest informants could describe it in detail out of their own experience. It died out because changing conditions made its proper observation unfeasible," for example, attending off-reservation boarding schools.

10. Information collected by Thomas Tyon, who frequently served as James R. Walker's interpreter at Pine Ridge around the turn of the century, delineated some of the precautions that menstruating women should take: "if a woman comes in contact with a weasel skin while she is menstruating, she becomes very sick, it is said.... Here is another thing. If a menstruating woman tans a bear skin, then she becomes a bear...and the woman is black all over, it is said. And her face is hairy all over, it is said" (Walker, *Lakota Belief and Ritual*, 168, 159).

11. Ella C. Deloria, "Dakota Tales," Ella Cara Deloria Papers, no. 843 (Philadelphia: American Philosophical Society, 1937a), 15–16.

12. Wissler, "Field Notes," 127.

13. Barbara A. Babcock, ed., *Pueblo Mothers and Children: Essays by Elsie Clews Parsons, 1915–1924* (Santa Fe: Ancient City Press), 18.

14. Ella C. Deloria, "Dakota Commentary on Walker's Texts," Ella Cara Deloria Papers, no. 834 (Philadelphia: American Philosophical Society, 1937b), 32. As Raymond DeMallie, "Male and Female in Traditional Lakota Culture," in *The Hidden Half*, eds. Patricia Albers and Beatrice Medicine (Lanham, Maryland: University Press of America, 1983), 257, points out: "According to Deloria, the menstrual blood gave a kind of temporary power to a woman, a *wakan* [sacred or spiritual] quality. This was not thought of as polluting but rather as at odds with the *wakan* power of men; a woman's menstrual power clashed with a medicine man's power. The clash was characterized by the word *ohakaya*, 'to cause to be blocked or tangled' (Deloria n.d.: 375). Hence women had to be secluded from men during their menstrual periods."

15. Menard stays away from any kind of ceremony, such as sweats, sun dance, *yuwipi*, and *heyoka* ceremonies. Sheryl Looking Elk of Pine Ridge wrote in a letter, "My daughters received their Indian names after the Sun Dance four years ago.... I didn't get a chance to see them in the ceremony as it was 'that time of month,' so out of respect for the Lakota way, I stayed in the car but got out after everything was over." Quoted in Carolyn Reyer, *Cante ohitika Win (Brave-hearted Women): Images of Lakota Women from the Pine Ridge Reservation, South Dakota* (Vermillion: University of South Dakota Press, 1991), 40.

Bea Medicine ("Indian Women," 168) writes: "Yet in any ceremony that one attends, there is always the request that women who are in 'that phase of the moon' remove themselves. When something goes wrong with the ceremony, there is always the subtle underlying accusation that its failure can be attributed to the presence of an impure woman—even though there is never any way of determining if this was so." According to Marla Powers (*Oglala Women*, 200–201): "It is still believed that menstruating women diminish the power of sacred things, and if they should accidentally come in contact with them, the objects must be taken into a sweat lodge and be prayed and sung over by the medicine man to restore their power."

16. Ella C. Deloria, "Dakota Way of Life," 374. Similar beliefs about a girl's first menstruation were held by other American Indian groups. For example, among the Tlingit: "The most important event in a girl's life was her first menstruation, for her conduct then would determine her own future and that of her relatives," according to



Frederica De Laguna, "Tlingit," in *Handbook of North American Indians*, vol. 7, ed. Wayne Suttles (Washington, DC: Smithsonian Institution, 1990), 217.

17. Deloria, "Dakota Way of Life," 32. Ella C. Deloria (1899–1971), a Yankton Sioux who collaborated with Franz Boas, was raised on the Lakota Standing Rock Reservation where she learned to speak Lakota. She took a special interest in the cultural and social lives of Lakota women. According to Menard, Deloria interviewed Menard's mother, Grace Long Warrior, on numerous occasions. It is likely that much of Deloria's information on girls' puberty rites was told directly to her by Menard's mother.

18. Joseph Epes Brown, *Sacred Pipe*, 117. The reports given by males (Black Elk, Walker, Wissler) not surprisingly do not discuss the events within the menstrual lodge, since they would not have had access to this information. Marla N. Powers, "Menstruation and Reproduction: An Oglala Case," *Signs* 6 (1980): 58, writes only that the young woman is instructed "in her new duties as a potential wife and mother." In *Oglala Woman*, Powers elaborates: "Each month thereafter the young woman would be required to isolate herself in the *isnati*, where she would be waited on by her older female relatives. They would tell her to relax and to perfect her skills at quillwork and other crafts" (70).

19. When Bol asked, "So you learned to do star quilts and beadwork and quillwork?" Menard replied: "No, I learned just making a pair of moccasins and then a little straight piece. You can use that piece for same stitches, different steps of quillwork I had to do. But the rawhide first and then the soft buckskin. I had to do the two types of quillwork, the sewing down—the one that crisscross—and the other one is the wrap around like, you sew down on each side. And those you can use it on dresses, on moccasins, or anything like that, armbands, or cuffs."

20. Acting as a judge at the 1993 United Tribes Indian Art Expo in Bismarck, North Dakota, Menard told the story of her puberty ceremony and then went on to discuss the making of Lakota women's arts.

21. Royal B. Hassrick, *The Sioux, Life and Customs of a Warrior Society* (Norman: University of Oklahoma Press, 1964), 42, 301; Jahner, "Spatial Categories," 91; Jeanette Mirsky, "The Dakota," in *Cooperation and Competition Among Primitive Peoples*, ed. Margaret Mead (New York: McGraw-Hill Book Company, 1937), 412.

22. Deloria, "Dakota Way of Life," 374–376. Another Lakota elder described a Lakota girl's first seclusion to anthropologist Royal Hassrick, *Sioux, Life and Customs*, 42: "Even though she has learned quilling before, the girl must quill continuously for four days. If she does this she will be good with the awl; if she does not, she will never be industrious."

23. Arnold Van Gennep, *The Rites of Passage* (1908; reprint, Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1960); Edmund Leach, *Culture and Communication: The Logic by Which Symbols are Connected* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1976), 77–79.

24. Leach, *Culture and Communication*, 77.

25. Leach, *Culture and Communication*, 78.

26. George Sword explained the significance of sage to Walker, *Lakota Belief and Ritual*, 77, in 1896: "the spirit in the smoke of the sage is very offensive to all evil beings and they will fly from it. They even fear the herb of sage and will not stay where it is. So if anyone carries sage, or keeps it near, the evil beings fear to come near such a one."

27. Barbara Myerhoff, "The Older Woman as Androgyne," *Parabola* 3 (1978): 75; Powers, *Oglala Religion*, 64.

28. Marsha C. Bol, "Gender in Art: A Comparison of Lakota Women's and Men's Art, 1820–1920" (Ph.D. diss., University of New Mexico, 1989), 195–196.

29. Walker, "Sun Dance," 141; Deloria, "Dakota Way of Life," 32, 374–376; M. Powers, "Menstruation and Reproduction," 58; Hassrick, *Sioux, Life and Customs*, 42.

30. Dorothy Hammond and Alta Jablow, *Women in Cultures of the World* (Menlo Park, CA: Cummings Publishing Company, 1976), 18.

31. Walker, *Sun Dance*, 141.

32. As Black Elk states, "She should realize that the change which has taken place in her is a sacred thing, for now she will be as Mother Earth and will be able to bear children" (Brown, *Sacred Pipe*, 16).

33. This ceremony is sometimes referred to in literature as the White Buffalo Ceremony. The White Buffalo Festival as reported by Alice Fletcher, however, is a ceremony with an entirely different purpose: to fulfill the obligations required of a hunter who killed a white buffalo (Alice Fletcher, "The White Buffalo Festival of the Uncpapas," *Peabody Museum of Archaeology and Ethnology Reports* 16:304 (1884): 260–275). Menard says that, "White Buffalo ceremony its just a prayer ceremony for someone sick and got well so that is their 'thanksgiving.' If you honor your loved one from sickness or come home so its just a family having a giveaway and feed in their honor" (Nellie Menard, Letter to Marsha Bol, 12 December 1994).

34. The taped interview took place on 26 July 1993 at Menard's home at Rosebud. The ellipses are only used when Menard repeats information.

35. Brown, *Sacred Pipe*, 116–126.

36. Walker, *Lakota Belief and Ritual*, 243–255; Walker, *Sun Dance*, 141–151.

37. Wissler, "Field Notes," 134.

38. Wissler, "Field Notes," 134, 136.

39. Menard, Letter to Bol, 10 April 1995. The wands were located in the former Sioux Indian Museum in Rapid City, South Dakota. The collection has been moved to the new Rapid City museum, The Journey.

40. Menard, Letter to Bol, 10 April 1995.

41. Wissler, "Field Notes," 140.

42. Menard, Letter to Bol, 31 May 1995.

43. When asked if the initiate usually received the ball back from the recipient, Menard replied: "No, she takes it and then if she can't go through that ceremony then they give it back to you. So she [Zallie] said she didn't know what it's about, 'I don't think I'll ever use it.' So she gave it back to me. So that's the way I learned anyway."

44. Brown, *Sacred Pipe*, 127–138.

45. Brown, *Sacred Pipe*, 137. The age of the girl described by Black Elk is somewhat open to interpretation. He says: "I, Black Elk, should now explain to you several things that you may not understand about this holy rite. First, it is a little girl, and not an older person, who stands at the center and who throws the ball" (p. 137). However, when Black Elk describes Moves Walking's vision, Black Elk says, "in her life you will see four ages," whereupon the "tiny girl" turns first into a buffalo calf, then a white yearling buffalo, then a larger buffalo, and finally she is full grown (p. 134).

46. Martha Beckwith, "Mythology of the Oglala Dakota," *Journal of American Folklore* 43:170 (1930): 414. Beckwith identifies Susie Hollowhorn as follows: "Mrs. Susie Hollowhorn at the time of my visit was camped near Manderson in a small tent, where she dried strips of meat in the sun for food and occupied herself with porcupine quill

work...and the painting of parfleches” (p. 339). William Powers, *Oglala Religion*, 103, gives a brief description of the ritual which appears to be taken from Black Elk’s account.

47. Frequently the beaded balls made for the Throwing the Ball Ceremony are stored in museum collections as children’s playthings. Menard says that balls for play are, “just skin. They don’t bead them or nothing.... It don’t have the rock in it.”

48. Powers, *Oglala Religion*, 82.

49. For information on sacred stones, see Frances Densmore, *Teton Sioux Music*, Bureau of American Ethnology Bulletin, vol. 61 (Washington, DC: Smithsonian Institution), 204–247; and Walker, *Lakota Belief and Ritual*, 153–154.

50. Brown, *Sacred Pipe*, 132.

51. Brown, *Sacred Pipe*, 133, 135.

52. Black Elk (Brown, *Sacred Pipe*, 136–137) and Susie Hollowhorn concur that each person who caught the ball was given valuable presents. Hollowhorn recalled: “The four who caught the ball each had a present of a horse. The girl wore leggings marked with porcupine quills, moccasins, a robe, blanket, bags, and all these were given away. There were no particular patterns or colors used for these articles” (Beckwith, “Mythology of Oglala Dakota,” 414).

53. Walker, *Lakota Belief and Ritual*, 243.

54. Walker, *Lakota Belief and Ritual*, 253.

55. Menard took John Ewers’ place while he was called away to the war.

56. Carrie A. Lyford, *Quill and Beadwork of the Western Sioux* (Lawrence, Kansas: US Department of the Interior and Haskell Press, 1940).