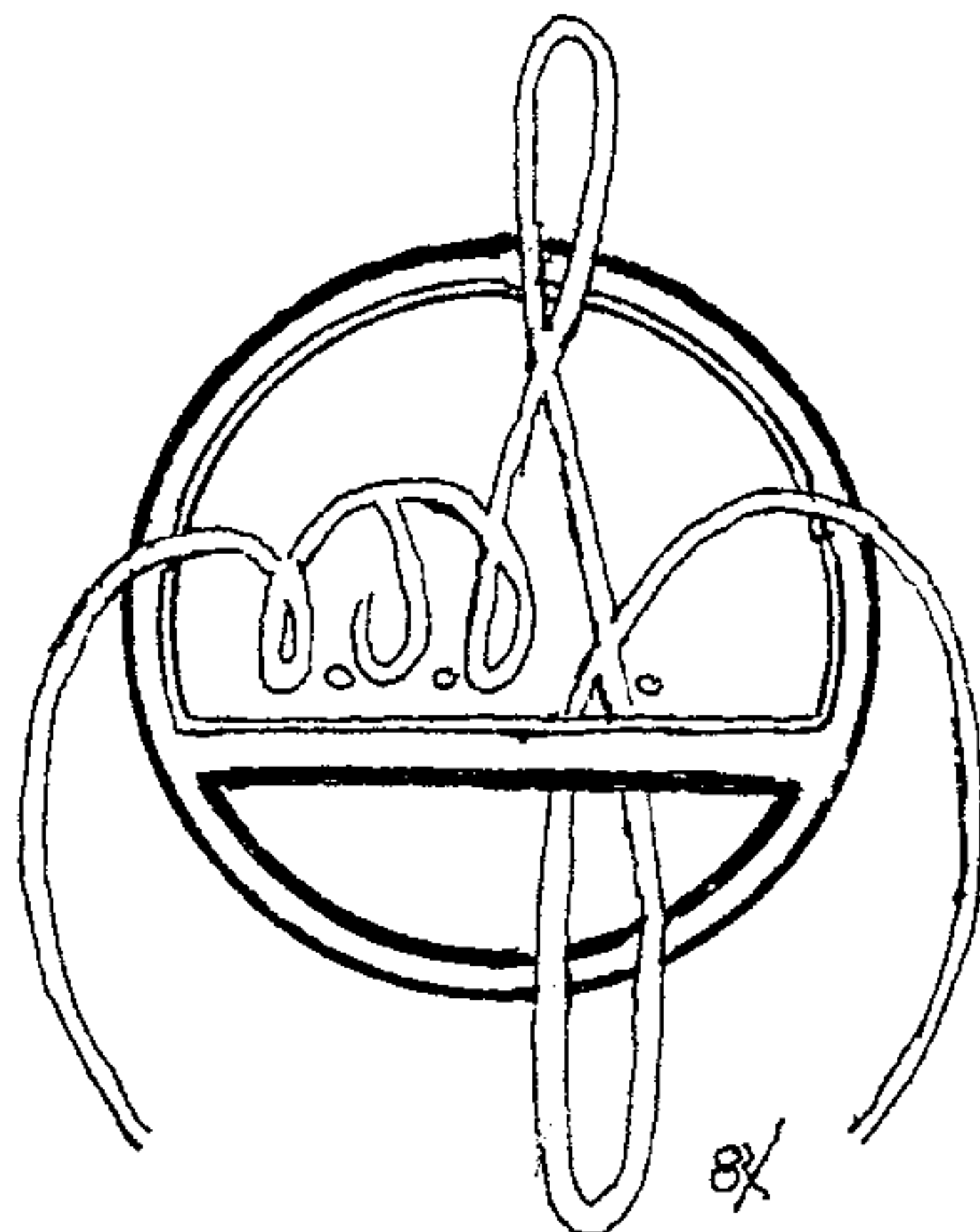


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Shield Art

SHIELD ART

Prepared and Illustrated
by



V. James Willow

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SHIELDS

The sizes, shapes, and designs of the shield are as diverse as the many cultures that used them. Shields were constructed of many different materials, depending on where, when, and in what society they were made. Various types of wood and metal were used as well as the hides of animals.

ROMAN/GREEK: In the ancient Roman Empire, the shield was part of the standard government issue of armor given to, or purchased by, each of the many soldiers that served in its various armies around the empire. These shields also had different shapes as well: ovals, rectangles, crescents, and circles. The shield was used for sport in the empire's gladiatorial arenas. The shields used in the arenas also varied in size and shape, depending on the gladiator's personal preference and style of combat.

In this culture, the shield was made by a metal-smith and was sold to whomever had the money to purchase them. Usually the purchaser was a gladiator, soldier, or a person representing a gladiatorial school. The shield was a very important part of the soldier/gladiator's equipment in battle and in the arena.

NORDIC: In the Nordic cultures, sometimes known as the Vikings, the shield was constructed of a mixture of woods and metals. Usually one person specialized in shield-making, but sometimes others also engaged in the craft. Shields were made for a specific person and no one else. Individuals could also make shields for their own use. A shield was rarely used by anybody other than the person for whom it was made. The shields owned by the Norsemen were painted with dragons, monsters, and other supernatural beings because these creatures possessed great power, strength, and courage. Sometimes the shield became useless to the men of the north, as they would be overwhelmed by what was known as "the berserker's fury." During these times it was believed that the gods controlled the warrior, and were greatly feared. The warrior consumed by the berserker's fury would not feel his wounds or even care if he were killed in battle. It was believed that upon dying he would be taken to the Viking heaven called Valhalla, the Hall of the Dead.

AFRICAN: A shield owner's tribal membership determined how the shield was to be made, shaped, and painted. Like the shields of the Northern countries, the African peoples also used shields as implements of war. Although these shields could stop spears, arrows, and blow-darts, they were not an effective defense against the more modern, more powerful weapons that came in later years.

The African shields were of different heights, usually reaching

from the shoulders to the ankles of the owner. The shields of the many tribes native to Africa were made and designed differently. Each shield was painted with the owner's tribal or personal designs. Like those of the Greco-Roman shields, the Africans made their shields in rectangles and ovals. One tribe might carve their shields from the wood of a tree, then heat the carved wood in flame to strengthen it. When this was completed, the shield was painted with that particular tribe's god, ancestry, or other fearsome power symbol. Another tribe might take a section of wood and scrape and pound it until the wood became flattened and smooth. The sheet of wood was then moistened until it became soft enough to be molded into the desired shape the maker or the tribe used most, before allowing the wood to dry and harden. These shields were also painted with symbols of strength to give the shield greater powers of protection, or perhaps to give the owner greater courage in battle.



The Africans were similar to the Native Americans in the manner of painting their shields with symbols of power.

AMERICAN INDIANS: In North America, the shield was employed by many of the Indian tribes that lived off, and with, the land. The shield held a significant role in the life of the owner. Although the shield was used in war, as in the eastern hemisphere, in America it was a warrior's most valued possession. To carry one into battle was something of a distinction, as the shield bearer was the most likely to be shot at. Capturing an enemy's shield was especially courageous and a distinctive feat. The shield was also a great help in battle, as it could stop arrows and small caliber bullets. A warrior depended more on the magic of his shield for protection than he did on the toughness of the thick hide of the shield itself(*1).

Unlike the shields of Europe, the Indian War Shield was made secretly either by the medicine man or by experienced warriors who had fasted and received instructions from their guardian spirits(*2). These shields were made of buffalo hide, and the front was painted with symbols that held a certain spiritual power. These symbols made the shield more personal and powerful to the owner. The shields were made after the cover was made. The shield was kept covered until the warrior went into battle; then at the last minute, the cover was removed. In this way the full extent of the shield's magic was exposed to the enemy.

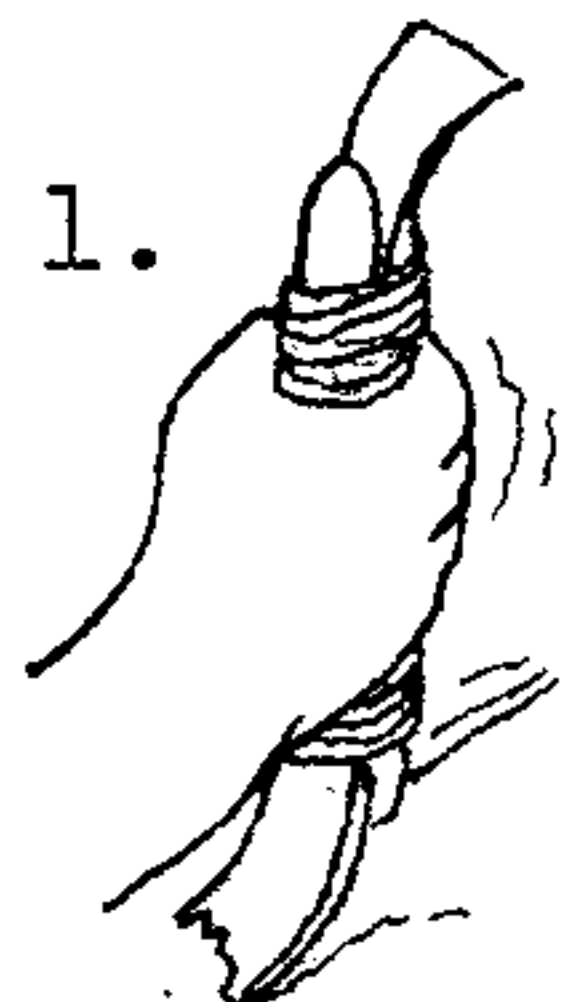
The size of the shield did not matter. It could be twelve inches in diameter, or one of the thirty-inch diameter shields often used by the Southwest desert Pueblo Indians. Regardless of the shield's size, the power remained the same. The smaller shields' powers of protection were as great as those of the larger ones(*3).

An overall look at the types of cultures using shields shows that most painted the surface of their shields with images of power as an added protection against an enemy's attack. Often these images served as spiritual aids as well.

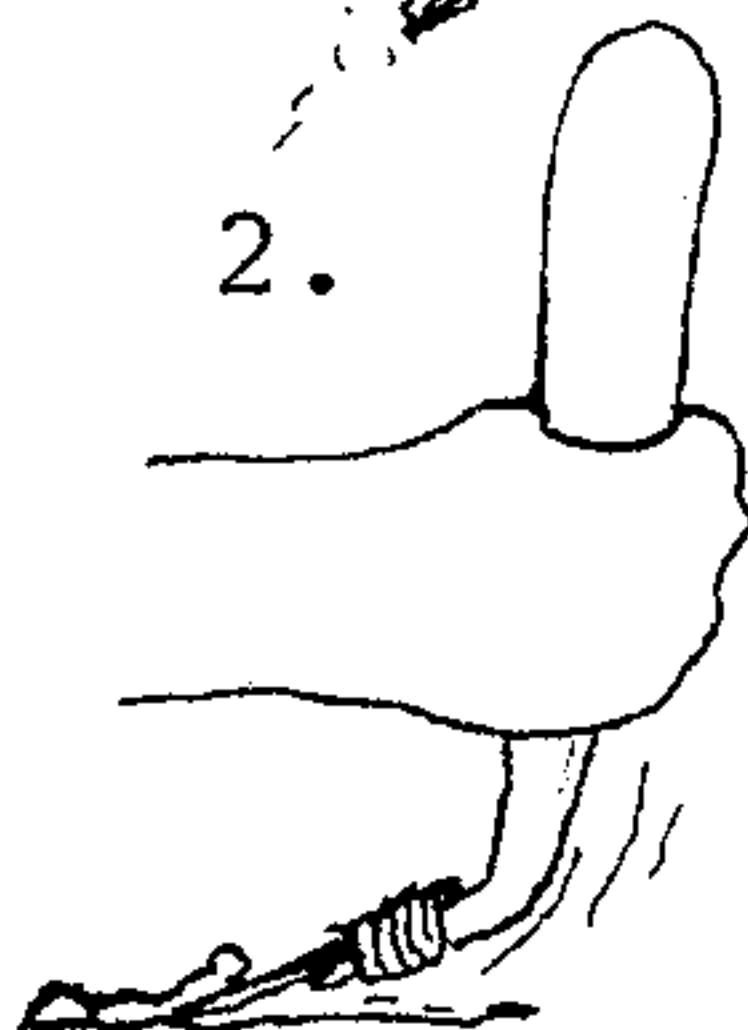
(*1, *2, & *3: see last page.)

RAWHIDE WAR SHIELDS

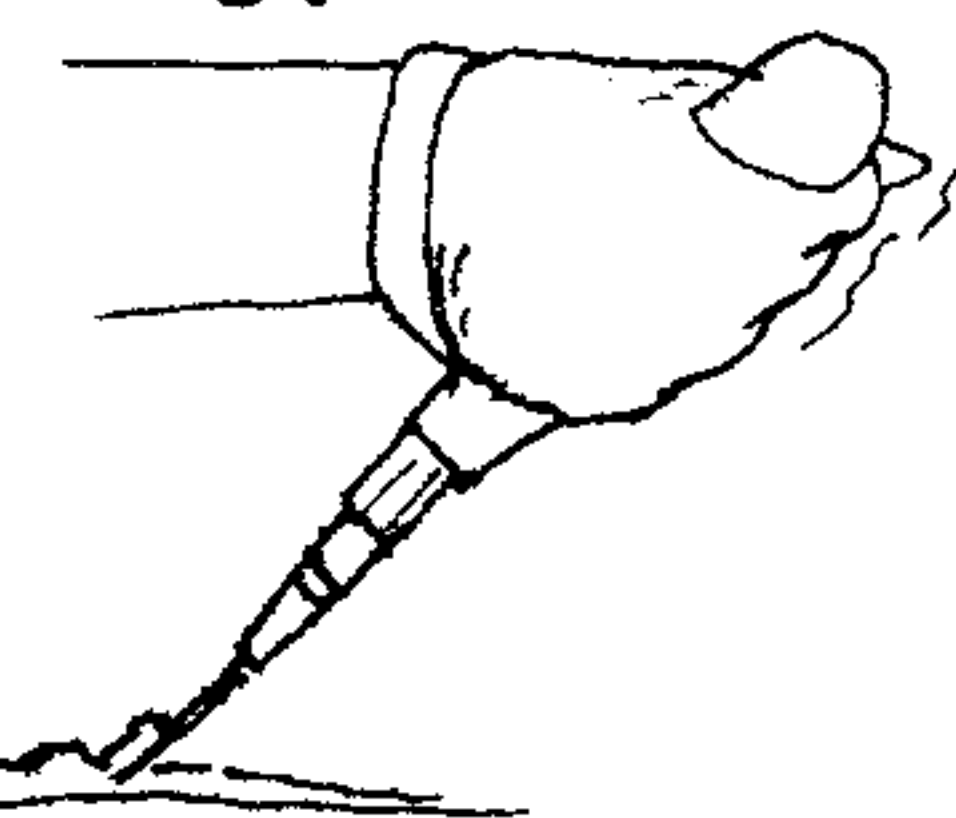
1.



2.



3.



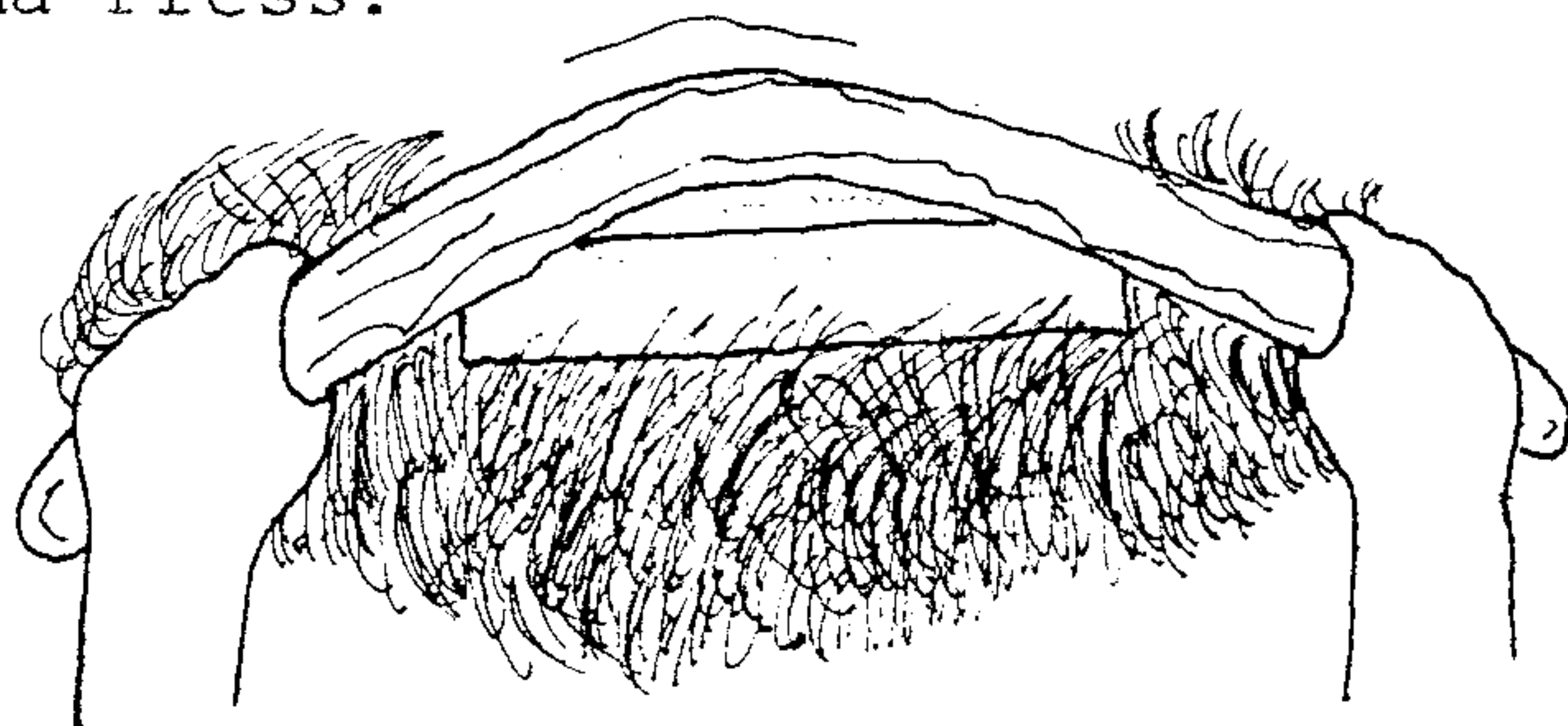
War shields were made from the neck or breast of a bull buffalo, since that part of the buffalo's hide was the thickest. As soon as the buffalo was butchered, the hide was immersed in water. To keep the hide submerged, heavy rocks were placed on the hide. After about four or five days, the hide was taken from the water and staked out on the ground with the hair side down. Using a "fleshing tool," all of the excess tissue was removed from the skin (See illustrations #1 through #3.). Once all of the excess tissue was removed, the hide was turned over and using an instrument similar to the one depicted in #4, the hair was scraped off. Once the hair was completely removed the hide was left to dry; then it was submerged in water for a few more days. When the hide was taken out of the water it was wrung out, again stretched out to dry. Once the hide was completely dry, the necessary amount of hide was removed for making the shield. When thinner hides were used, the shield was made from several layers of hide that had been sewn together for added thickness. The skin was steamed until the hide had contracted to the size desired by the shield-maker. Some tribes used hoops made of willow branches to give the shield its circular shape. The hide was stretched over the willow hoop before it dried, then lengths of sinew were used to tie the hide in place, with the willow hoop inside. Other tribes gave their shields a convex surface by staking the still damp hide over a mound of dirt until it dried. The shield was then shaped to the size that the maker wished it to be, and then was decorated.

The shield was among the owner's most prized possessions. It was not only his protection in battle, but also his medicine or spiritual power. The shield was hung in a place of honor at the back of the tipi, where the head of the family sat. The shield hung inside on days when the weather was bad and at night. On days of good weather, the shield was hung outside in the sunshine. The shield hung on a tripod, along with other medicine articles. The tripod consisted of three lances or staffs stuck in to the ground outside the tipi.

Like other articles made by men, a person had to fast and receive instructions from their guardian spirits before any work could be done on the shield. A medicine man may also have been asked to do the work and conduct the necessary ceremonies. The medicine man would be paid a previously determined amount of items: horses, robes, or other materials. Besides being painted, the shields were also decorated with various kinds of animal skins, feathers, and red flannel, whenever that material became available.

(This section based on Indian Rawhide: An American Folk Art, by Mable Morrow. Copyright by University of Oklahoma Press. Materials used by permission.)

(Also, thanks to Mrs. Helen Cedartree, for information on preparing hides for use in constructing the shield and the rawhide.)



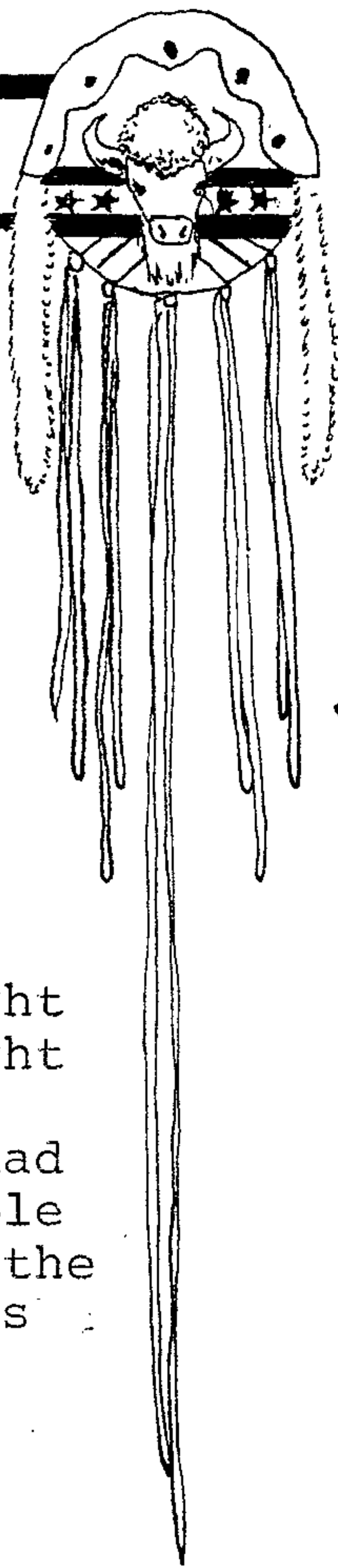
SHIELD ART/SHIELD MAGIC

The art of the Indian War Shields cannot be called true art, in terms of many of today's styles of art, even as artistic as it was. It was a mixture of symbolism, pictography, and sacred meanings that had been painted on the shield. It was believed that the painting itself had a special magic all its own. The designs on the shields were often realistic, much like the type of artwork used on the Winter Counts and men's possessions. Besides being painted, the shields were often decorated with different kinds of feathers, fur strips, and parts of hides. Whenever it became available, bright red flannel was also used. (*4)

The designs and decorations on the shields usually had a special meaning incorporated into the painting. The painting might show the animal that protected the owner; or the design might be from a dream or vision the owner had once had. The shield might also be a "family shield" that had been handed down for several generations. Because of the great number of family members it had protected, it stored up a great deal of power and was very valuable to the family. The decorations held a kind of mystical power in the painted design. The design painted on the front of the shield was either the same, a similar design, or an all together different image was placed on the soft buckskin shield cover. So as not to waste, or allow any of the shield's special powers to escape, the covering was not removed until the warrior went into battle.

Shields were made in secret to ensure that an evil spirit did not find and weaken the shield's special magic that was to be placed on the shield. As with the shields used and constructed in the European cultures, the shields employed by the natives of North America were also of different sizes. The shields of the Indians may have all been of the same circular shape, but they were decorated in a style and fashion that was unique and far more personal to the owner than the European shields were to their owners.

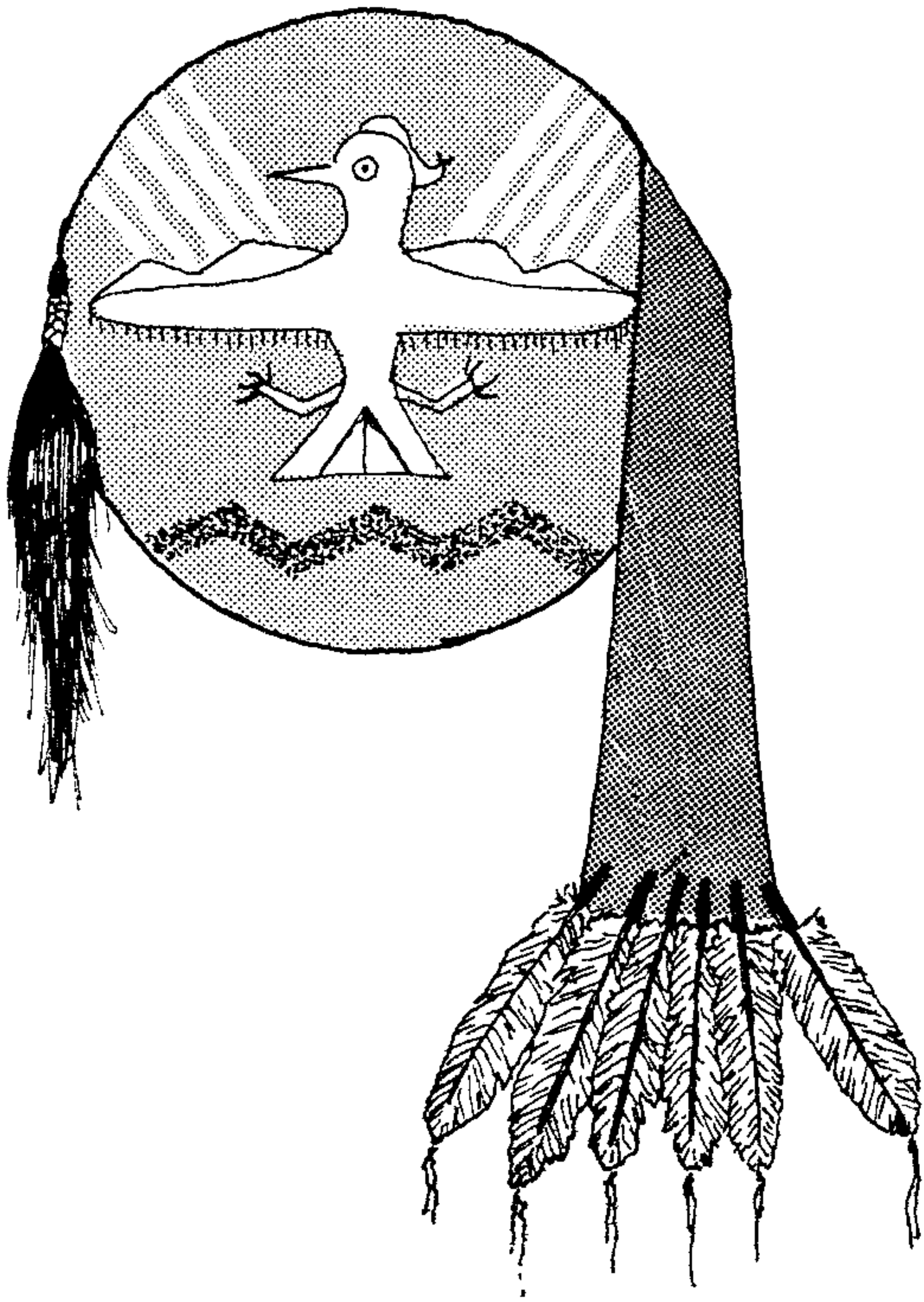
Animals, birds, symbols, and other objects painted or sewn onto the shields were the direct result of a vision the owner or the shieldmakers once had. A bear might mean that the owner would receive the strength of the bear; a deer might be used for its swiftness; or an eagle might give the shield bearer its swiftness and cunning. A turtle, which lived a long life was added protection. Other objects or symbols painted on the shield were clouds and rain, which meant the owner would have abundance and good hunting. The thunderbird gave the strength and power of the storm to the shield owner, while the image of the thunderhorse symbolized the thunder that rang from the cloud covered mountaintops. The thunderhorse symbol on a shield meant that the owner's horse would receive power, strength, and courage in battle.



(*4, see last page.)

SHIELD DESCRIPTIONS

1.



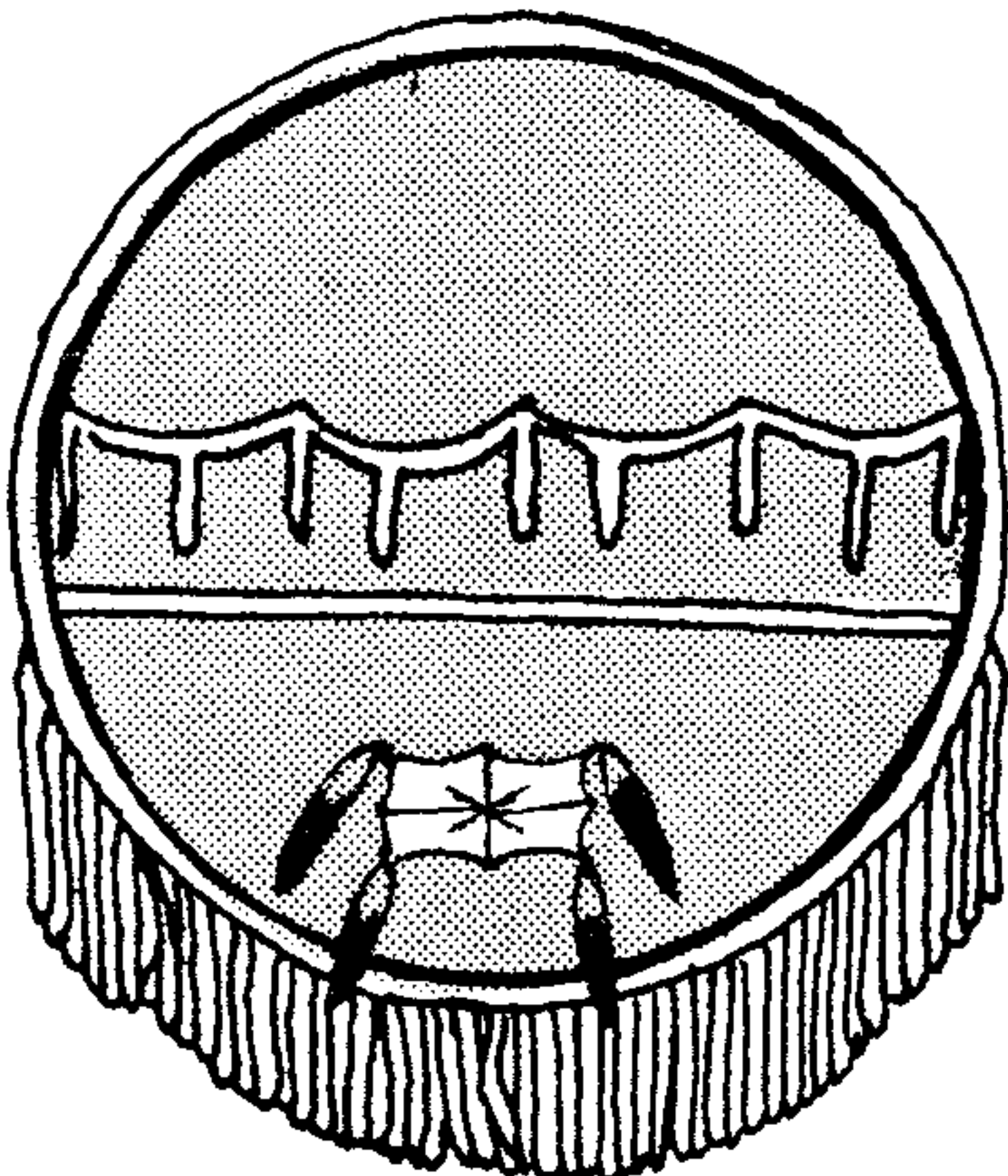
With shield depiction number one, the painting is either of an eagle or a thunderbird, although it maybe the latter. This symbol represents protection. A length of red material is sewn along the top. Usually the red material goes around the top and hangs evenly on both sides of the shield; sometimes the material only hangs on one side. Six feathers are sewn into the bottom of the material. Shown here, the eagle is blue with yellow sun rays coming from behind its wings. Along the bottom edge of the shield is a red bolt of lightning, symbolizing its death-dealing power has been conferred to the shield owner. Hanging opposite the red material are bits of fur, horse hair, or even a human scalp.

2.



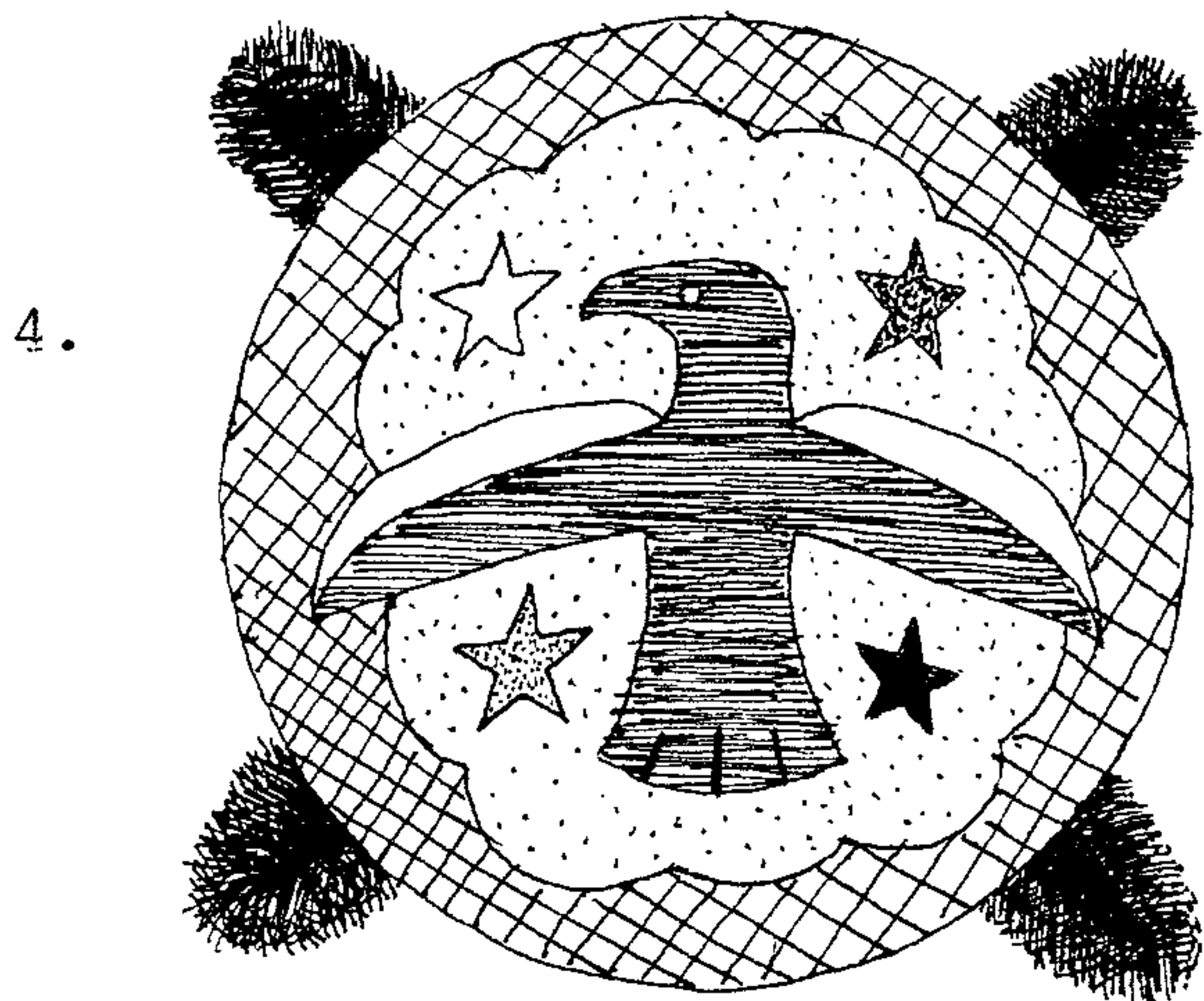
Shield depiction number two is probably Nez Perce. The horse painted on the shield is decorated with feathers and is colored light blue, which symbolizes smoke. The shield itself is also decorated with feathers, four on each side. The background is yellow, symbolizing the dawn of day. Along the edges are painted red arrow points.

3.

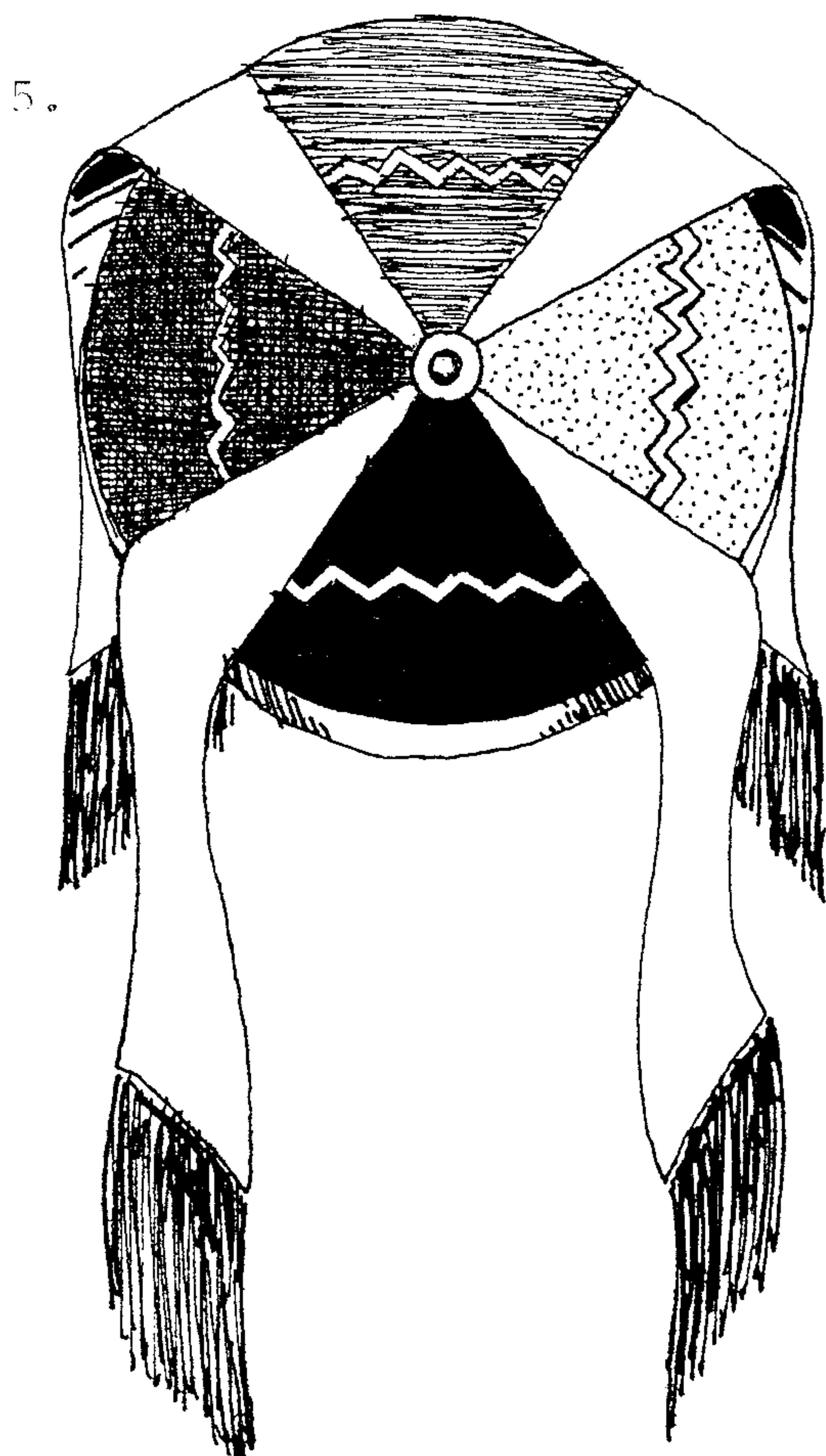


The background is white on shield depiction number three, while the rain pattern is blue, although it could be nearly any color. Below the rain pattern is a yellow star, from which hang small eagle feathers. A band of buckskin was sewn along the rim and along the bottom are fringes made of buckskin.

5.



In shield drawing number four, the eagle pattern is in dark blue on a white background. The four stars are painted in different colors: Yellow for the dawn, red for the day, green for the sky, and black for the night. A light-blue cloud bands the shield and four tufts of downy feathers decorate the shield's edges.



Depiction number five represents the Four Directions of the Universe in colors of red for the east, black for the south, yellow for the west, and blue for the north. Lightning connects the four points indicating the awesome power of the shield. Strips of fringe and colored buckskin extend from the four directions pattern of the shield.

Looks Long and the First Shield
Fiction by V. James Willow

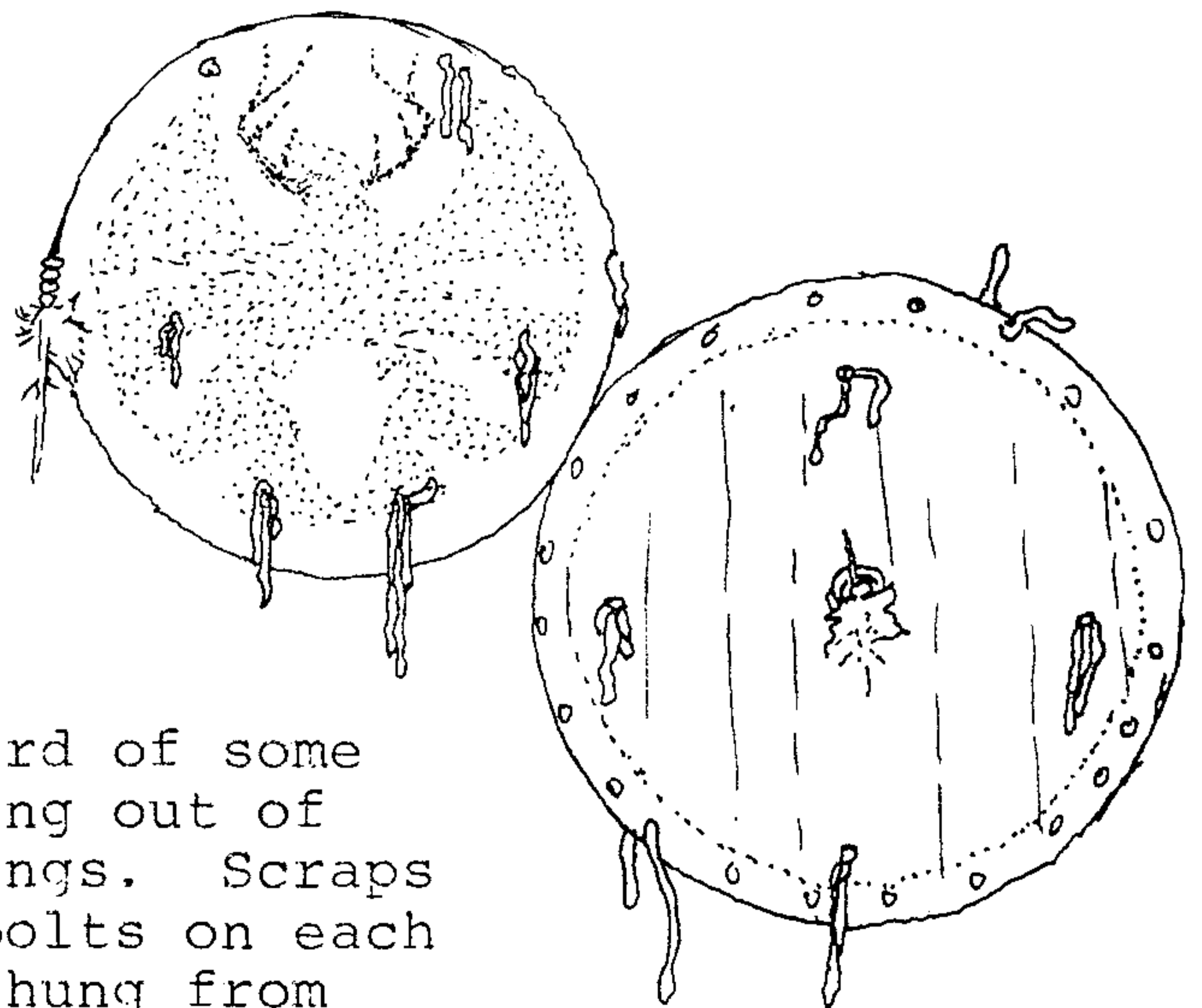
(Summer; 1947)

One day Johnny Walks Far was wandering through the hills around his reservation home, where he lived with his mother. Having a great desire to learn, he would sit for hours, listening to the elders of his tribe when they talked of long ago. That was how he got his nickname, "Listening Boy," a name he was proud of. Johnny always walked when he had thinking to do, and the harder he had to think, the longer he walked. Right then he had some very hard thinking to do. His grandfather told him to find a story that he would not believe, as Johnny rarely believed any of the stories that his grandfather told. Johnny found himself walking a long time and had gone a greater distance from his home than he had ever walked before. He did not mind, since he was used to walking long distances because his family did not own a car.

As he walked, Johnny found an old piece of animal hide half buried in the side of the hill. Picking it up, he examined it from every angle while he wandered on. He wondered how it came to be buried where he found it, and how long it had been buried there. Johnny could tell that it was very old and thought that it might be made of buffalo hide. He had heard that many things were once made from buffalo hide way back in history.

He sometimes felt sorry that he had never seen a living buffalo, like the kind that his grandfather spoke of with great reverence and saddened longing. In a way Johnny was also glad that he had never seen one, he did not want the sadness that haunted his grandfather's eyes when he spoke of the buffalo. He reasoned, "How can you miss something you never had, much less even seen?" Once in a great while, he would catch himself wondering about the mystic animal that had given his people all the things that they needed.

He thought that the piece of hide he found was a shield, like the kind he had seen in the mission museum. It may have been old and dirty, but to Johnny's eyes it still looked magnificent. At four points along the top and sides were bits of leather that had once held feathers. A scrap of a feather still hung on one side, as if too stubborn to let go. Johnny was not sure, but he thought that he could see a faint painting on the front of the shield. It looked like it was a bird of some sort, with four bolts of lightning coming out of its chest and spreading out over its wings. Scraps of leather hung between the lightning bolts on each wing. Another pair of leather strings hung from where the backs of the wings met the body of the bird. Between the two lower strings of leather there seemed to be a white outline of a buffalo head. The antlers of a deer appeared over the bird's shoulders.



Johnny stopped short, then went back to where he had found the shield. After a quick search, he found another leather object. This

one was larger around than the first, but was not as thick. It seemed to have a "pocket" of some sort inside of it, but opened on the bottom. Lengths of leather thongs hung from the top, bottom, and sides. In the center, a tiny piece of feather was tied to a small hollow bone. Johnny was sure that it was a shield cover. The object had painting in vertical lines of red, blue, white, and black. The paint was as faded as that on the shield.

Johnny was looking over his discoveries, not watching where he was walking, when he wandered into the small camp of an old man. The old man had been sitting patiently, as if he were waiting for someone.

"What have you got, grandson?" asked the old man, who was dressed in worn buckskin clothing. The old man hid his amusement when he saw how he had startled the boy.

"I do not know, grandfather." Johnny quickly pulled himself together and answered the old man. Johnny called the old man "grandfather" because the elders of the tribe still called any child "grandson" or "granddaughter," even if they were not related.

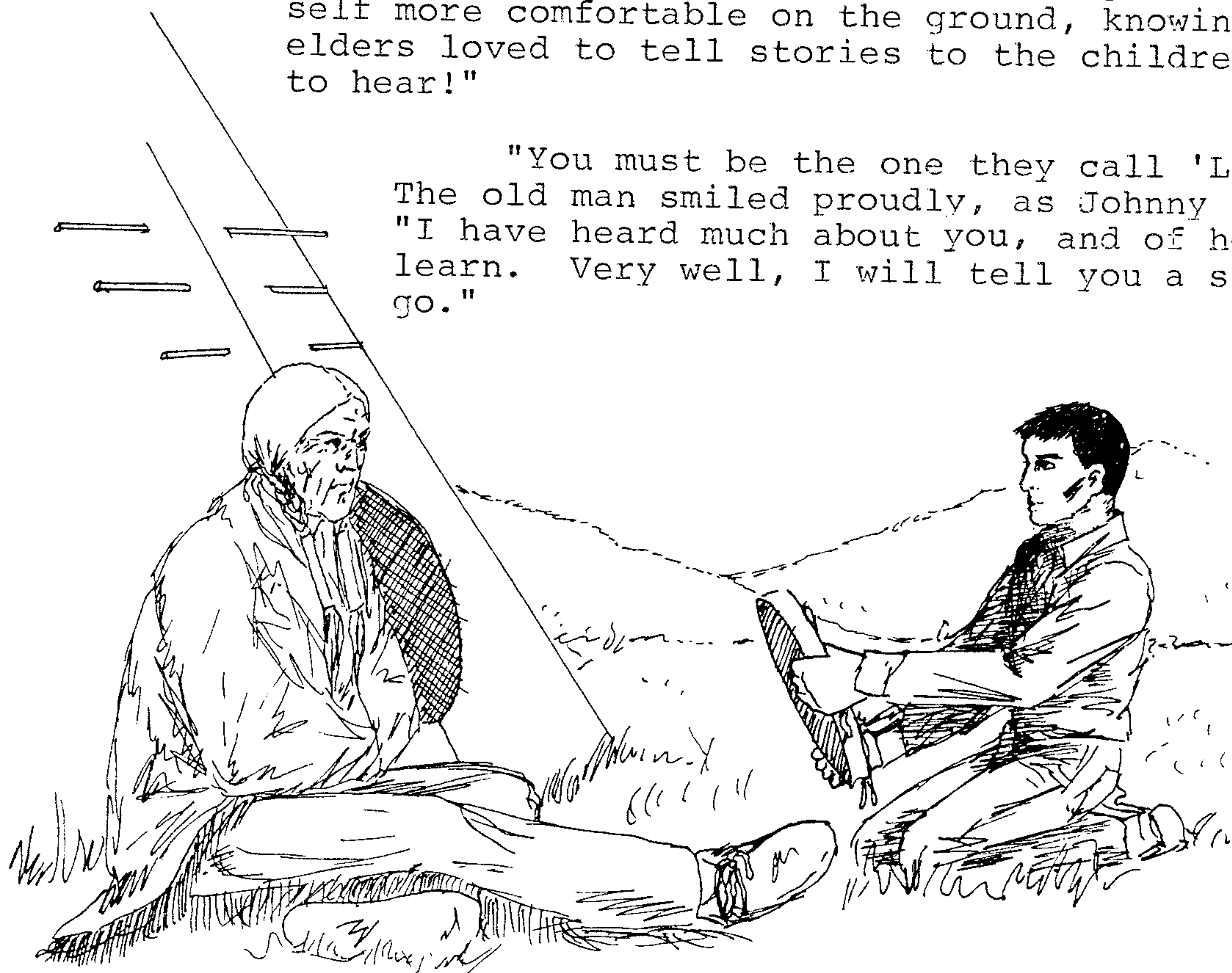
"I think it is a shield of some sort. It is very old and probably is not much use to anyone nowadays," said Johnny.

"Let me look at it." The old man held out his hand, while Johnny knelt down in front of him. "Yes! It is a shield! I have not seen one like this since I was a young man. Once this shield held great power."

"Tell me about it, grandfather, please?" Johnny made himself more comfortable on the ground, knowing that the tribal elders loved to tell stories to the children. "I would love to hear!"

"You must be the one they call 'Listening Boy'." The old man smiled proudly, as Johnny nodded his head. "I have heard much about you, and of how you like to learn. Very well, I will tell you a story from long ago."

"Thank you, grandfather!" Johnny smiled, knowing that the old man would have a good story to tell him.





"This story began long ago." The old man picked up the shield and looked at it before gazing off into the distance, as if he were looking through time to when the past still lived.

"Long ago, before the white man came to this land, and the Indian was still free, a young warrior, called Looks Long was walking through the mountains hereabouts. In his heart, he felt great sadness. His people had no way to protect themselves from the arrows of their enemies. Being a great warrior, as well as a great thinker, Looks Long wandered off into the mountains to try and find a way to help his people. He walked far and deeply into the wilderness, until he found a secret place where he felt a great peace come over him. It was here that he prayed, fasted, and sang in hopes that the Unknown-One-On-High would hear his prayers and look down and have pity for his plight and give him help for his people.

"Finally, on the third day, Looks Long fell asleep. In his dreams he saw many things. He knew that he was still on the mountainside, but it was covered with snow. From further up the mountainside, he saw a great white buffalo coming down to meet him. After a time, the buffalo was joined by a large buck deer. Together they began to stamp their hooves on the mountain, drumming out a beat that they began to sing to. Soon, they were joined by an eagle, which landed in a tree and sang along with them.

"The song sounded familiar to Looks Long, but he could not place it. He knew that these were not "true" animals, but were, in truth, spirits using the forms of animals while they came to aid him. Knowing this, he sat quietly listening to their song, patiently waiting until the time he would understand what the song meant.

"Looks Long awoke, just as the sun was coming over the mountains in the east. He was rubbing his eyes when he heard the sound of someone coming to his secret place. He got up, just in case it was an enemy. To his surprise, it was an old man wearing a buffalo robe. The old man's hair was white with age, and his eyes looked frosty gray.

"'Hello, grandson," the old man spoke as he entered the small camp clearing. The old man was carrying a bundle on his back that looked like a parfleche made by the women of Looks Long's tribe.

"'You must be hungry; let me feed you." the old man, called Buffalo-robe, first offered Looks Long a bit of sage-hen. Looks Long refused, although he was hungry and had not eaten in three days. Second, Buffalo-robe pulled some fish out of the parfleche, again Looks Long refused. The third time, Looks Long accepted the food. It was buffalo meat.

"'My thanks, grandfather.' Looks Long took the meat and ate it. The meat was fresh and good tasting. Looks Long looked to where Buffalo-robe had thrown the other meats, and saw that they were old and bad looking.

"'Now, grandson,' Buffalo-robe stood beside the fire, 'Tell me, why

are you way up here all alone, and crying for your people?'

"'My people do not have a way to protect themselves from the arrows of our enemies.' Looks Long began his sad tale, 'So I have come here to sing and pray to find a way to help my people, that they may grow great and strong.'

"'Do not worry, grandson.' Buffalo-robe comforted Looks Long after hearing his sad story, 'I am a great and powerful medicine man. I may have the knowledge to help your people. I must leave right now, but I will be back soon. So wait here, sleep if you can.'

"With that, Buffalo-robe turned and walked up the mountainside. Looks Long watched him go, but soon found himself falling asleep against his will. He slept long and peacefully.

"'Grandson! Grandson, wake up! I have returned!' Looks Long found himself being shaken awake by the old man, 'I have brought my brother, Deer-blanket, back with me. He is also is a great medicine man, and has agreed to help you!'

"'Tell me, what do I need to do!' Looks Long quickly sat up, eager to be about the task of finding help for his people.

"'First, you must find an elk or deer hide.' Deer-blanket spoke. He wore a robe made of deer hide, that had the antlers of a deer fixed to the robe's hood, 'It is from these animals, that hide should be used to make the shield cover. The cover must be soft and decorated with symbols and designs of power, as in the manner of shields.'

"Looks Long listened, as Deer-blanket spoke. Hearing about the ways and manner the hide should be prepared.

"'You must always make this cover first, before making the shield.' Deer-blanket finished telling Looks Long the directions.

"'How will I be able to do this?' Looks Long asked the two old men, with great confusion in his eyes. 'I do not know how this is to be made.'

"'I will teach you, grandson.' said another old man, as he came walking out of the woods. This third man was wearing a robe made out of eagle feathers. 'I am Eagle-feather. I, too, have knowledge that can be of help to you.'

"'Grandfathers, why would I make a shield cover,' Looks Long knew the answer before he finished asking the question, 'If there is no shield?'

"'The shield cover is, and always must be, made first.' Buffalo-robe said, 'I will show you how the shield is to be made. Now listen,

