Interesting Blackfeet Facts

- We Blackfeet are among the fortunate few. Fortunate because, of the 564 tribes in the United States, just six —the Blackfeet, Navajo, Hopi, Pueblos, Crow, and Seminole— still live on their ancestral lands.

- In July 1806, Meriwether Lewis and three of his men encountered a party of eight young Blackfeet braves near what they would later call Camp Disappointment, near present day Browning. The following morning the first and only conflict of the Lewis and Clark expedition occurred when two Indians were killed as they attempted to steal rifles and horses. Fearing the survivors would soon return with reinforcements, Lewis and his men immediately fled. Lewis' diplomatic mission had turned into a debacle and guaranteed that the already hostile Blackfeet would not deal peacefully with Americans in the future.

- For the Blackfeet, finding food in winter was not as difficult as one might imagine: Bison wintered in treed areas where snow is less deep and could not easily escape when chased because they couldn’t move quickly in deep drifting snow. So they made easy targets for hunters.

- The basic social unit of the Blackfeet was the band which varied from about 10 to 30 lodges, or about 80 to 240 persons --large enough to defend themselves against attack and to undertake small communal hunts. The band was a residential group rather than a kin group. It consisted of a respected leader and others who need not be related.

- A person could leave a band and freely join another. Thus, disputes could be settled easily by simply moving to another band. Should a band fall upon hard times due to the loss of its leader or a failure in hunting, its members could split-up and join other bands. The system maximized flexibility and was an ideal organization for a hunting people on the Northwestern Plains.

- "Blackfoot" is the English translation of the word *siksika*, which means "black foot." It refers to the dark colored moccasins the people wore, which may have been darkened by dye or by walking through burnt grass after common prairie fires.

- Blackfeet women were in charge of the home. Besides cooking and cleaning, a Blackfeet woman built her family's house and dragged the heavy posts with her whenever the tribe moved. Houses belonged to the women in the Blackfeet tribe. Both genders took part in storytelling, artwork and music, and traditional medicine.

- Leadership of a band was based on consensus and a leader lacked coercive authority over his followers. He led only so long as his followers were willing to be led. A leader needed to be a good warrior, but, most importantly, he had to be generous. The Blackfeet despise a miser!