In this article, social anthropologist Richard Lee learns an important lesson while working in the Kalahari Desert studying the !Kung Bushman. Lee had been working studying hunting and gathering subsistence economy of the !Kung. In order to study this effectively, Lee was restricted in his cooperation in terms of sharing food with the !Kung. "While liberal handouts of tobacco and medical supplies were appreciated, they were scarcely adequate to erase the glaring disparity in wealth between the anthropologist who maintained a two month inventory of canned goods, and the Bushmen, who rarely had a day's supply of food on hand" (Lee 1969: 12). The Bushmen were less than happy about this giant wealth disparity and were generally disgruntled about the issue, often calling Lee "stingy and hard-hearted" (Lee 1969: direct quotes need page numbers).

That being said, Lee wanted to make up for his supposed stinginess by purchasing the Christmas ox. This is a tradition within among the Bushman where it is custom to slaughter an ox for the community as an annual goodwill gesture. One would find the largest youngest ox with a thick layer of fat underneath their hide to feed the entire Bushman community for Christmas dinner. 10 days before the holiday, Lee purchased a solid black ox, weighing approximately 1,200 pounds. Confident with his purchase he returned to the village where word had already spread that "whitey" had purchased the ox. For the next several days Lee was harassed about his purchase. Everyone within !Kung were appalled that he had bought a bag of bones, that would feed almost no one for Christmas dinner. For days on end, it was the talk of the people. Disheartened by this constant disapproval Lee attended Christmas dinner, only to find that when they cut open the chest of the ox, there was a thick layer of white fat almost two inches thick.

That dinner was an important lesson for Lee and the !Kung Bushmen. It was a lesson on humility and arrogance and how the Bushmen treat that kind of behavior. "When a young man kills much meat he comes to think of himself as a chief or big man...we cant accept this. We refuse one who boasts, for someday his pride will make him kill somebody" (Lee 1969: 14). It is customary for the !Kung to belittle and disparage those who become to arrogant. With Lee being the primary supplier for tobacco, his manipulation of trading tobacco for cooperation made him seem superior. He realizes that buying an ox did not make up for a year of that behavior and and thus the perfect target for the Bushmen lesson on humility.

Good overview