

Official Speech by Don Coyhis at the 2009 Purpose Prize Award Event

My name is Don Coyhis. I am a member of the Mohican Nation. I was born for the Turtle Clan and my Indian name is Tatanka Wamble. I am also President and founder of White Bison Inc, a Native American non-profit organization dedicated to healing and Wellbriety. I am so honored to be here this evening.

To be honored in our Native culture is considered a great privilege and it is a sacred act. It is with this intent that I accept this recognition.

In 1991 White Bison held a gathering of our most traditional Elders in the remote mountains of Colorado. We described to them the helplessness we were feeling about the native communities. One community we were working in had over 85% alcoholism above the age of 12—the average life span was 37.6 years. In this community there was domestic violence, sexual abuse, elderly abuse, drug abuse, violence, the council was drinking. We felt this community was in a downward spiral and couldn't see how to turn it around. The elders said, no, it can be turned around. They said there are two states of mind you can be in, one is the state of I don't know what I don't know. So you can be doing what you think is right and not producing healing results. Second is the state of now I know what I don't know. So they said, we are going to give you some information which will help know what you don't know. This will get you get on the right track. During the next 4 days they told us of the spiritual laws, the natural laws and prophecies we were to follow. We had been looking in the wrong place. The information we needed was not on Google but right here in our Elders all along.

Our healing time began. The first community we worked in to bring the teaching of the Elders was to a tribe in Maine, the people of the eastern door. By the end of three years the tribe was over 65 percent sober. At the three year mark, the community held a celebration to honor the community members. A woman from the community was speaking about how she built a shelter house for women. While she was speaking, an 8 year old boy shouted, I want to do a dance for Don Coyhis. So, the drum started to play so he could dance. At the end, the people applauded. The MC asked the little boy, how do you know this White Bison change program is working in our community? At first he was shy; his family was sitting in the first row. Finally he grabbed the mic and he said, I know how I know it is working. He said, my dad has not beaten me up for over two years. Silence filled the room. See, his dad got into recovery and had changed. His dad stood up and ran across the room. The little boy ran to meet his dad, both were crying saying, I love you I love you. I learned our communities could be turned around if we lead the people back to their original teachings. Our culture is prevention. Over the next years we traveled over 75,000 miles with the sacred Eagle Feather hoopbringing the hoop's four powers: *Forgiving the unforgivable, Healing, Unity and Hope* to many communities across this Turtle Island, carrying the message, if we are to heal, we must heal ourselves using our teachings. This was the birth of the Wellbriety Movement.

Today, the life force of the Wellbriety Movement is the individual commitment of 1000's of men and women in our communities who are volunteering their time and energy to the healing of our people.

In 2009, we conducted a 12,000 mile journey across the United States stopping at 24 current and former Indian boarding schools. We called this the Hoop Journey of Forgiveness. We told the people who attended the gatherings at these events along the way, in order for us to be free from the historical trauma, we must forgive the United State Government for its role it played and what it did to our children in these boarding schools. This journey brought the Wellbriety Movement to the tipping point. We know the next steps.

My interest now is sustainability of the movement. When the time comes for me to make my journey to the spirit world, I need to know it will be carried on. So, one, we will start a National Native American Wellbriety Training Institute in Colorado Springs in January 2010. The Institute will deliver centralized training as well as training over the internet so we can teach 100 times the audience that we can now by only traveling to communities. We can reach the remote villages in Alaska as well as sharing our healing programs with other First nations and Aboriginal communities in places like Canada and Australia. Two, we will conduct a summit to produce a National Native Wellness vision for all 564 tribes. Three, we will convene the first US & Native American Truth and Reconciliation Summit so the healing can begin.

In order to do these next steps, we needed a miracle. You gave us the miracle. The greatest gift is to bring hope to the hopeless. Our Native people are bright, creative, spiritual and have a lot to bring to the healing of our mother earth. Thank you from the bottom our hearts. I thank you and our people thank you!

