



Wellbriety!

White Bison's Online Magazine

Volume 4, Number 6

MAKING RELATIVES
Hoop Journey IV Visits Mystic, CT
on April 19, 2003



Bill Iron Moccasin, Lakota Elder from Sisseton, South Dakota, speaks about Making Relatives on a new video that debuted on the Hoop Journey IV visit in Connecticut. In the background is a Lakota Star Quilt.



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White Bison Speaks

Making Relatives The Hoop Journey IV Visit in Mystic, Connecticut

We started the day in the best way found in years of traveling these Journeys—with prayer and the cleansing smoke of the medicine plants. The Sacred Hoop Carriers wound their way around the tables in the Conference Center of the Hilton Mystic Hotel in Ledyard, Connecticut and placed the Hoop on its stand at the front of the room.

Don Coyhis greeted the people who gathered here for this stop on the Journey. The room was very large and we pulled our chairs and tables closer together. We began right away to get a feeling of belonging. Don looked around at the people who had gathered for today's event, thought about how we had come to this place, and said, *"We prayed about having the event at this location, and we said to one another, 'there is some reason we are going to exactly this place.' We didn't know why. We talked it over and said 'we've got to go with it'."*

Don's Sharing

There were nineteen of us, total, in an intimate setting that allowed Don to speak his own gratitude about how we came to this coastal place in Mashantucket Pequot country.

"White Bison has received two grants from CSAT, the Center for Substance Abuse Treatment," he said. "The first grant focused on rural areas. During the second grant, we have been traveling to urban centers. CSAT has fourteen field offices that are called 'ATTC's,' or Addiction Treatment Technology Centers," he went on. "ATTC's have provided invaluable service and support to the participants and gatherings during our Hoop Journeys in 2002 and 2003."

"We share this with you today because we want you to know that this is not just a White Bison effort, it's an undertaking of many individuals and organizations who have contributed in an effort to help us make this Journey. There are too many to name, but I do want to acknowledge today the dedication to the families and communities we have witnessed by members of Al-Anon. Members of Alanon all over the country have come out to join with White Bison in the spirit of Healing. They had a presence at every event during last year's Journey—Healing Native Women and Children. They have been present, supportive, and freely offering their services and information at every event during this year's Journey—Healing Native Men and Children. We have found Al-Anon to be a vital link in the Wellbriety Movement. Their contributions toward the healing of individuals, families, communities, and nations is appreciated and honored by White Bison."

Don spoke then about the guidance



Don Coyhis smudges Angelita Pine as part of Entry of the Sacred Hoop. Angelita was one of the Hoop Carriers.

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and wisdom of the Elders that has been with White Bison from the 1980's, and would soon become vivid right at this Gathering on a new video. He said,

"The Elders who handed us down these teachings told us that change must come from within. They also told us that change and healing will come first to the individual—then to the family—to the community—and then to the nation. It must go in that order...the natural order. Our Journeys follow the Natural Law."

*"White Bison's first Journey was in 1999. Our efforts were focused on the Medicine Wheel and 12 Steps and creating Firestarter Circles of Recovery for the Healing of Individuals. We held our First Conference in September of 1999 following that Journey. The Conference was in Colorado Springs, CO: **Strengthening the Individual**. Our second Journey was in 2000. We walked for 109 days from Los Angeles to Washington D.C. That Walk focused on family issues and healing. So in keeping with the natural law, our second Conference was held in Rapid City, South Dakota and focused on **Strengthening the Family**. Last year—2002—We went on our third Journey, traveling West of the Mississippi River. That Journey focused on Healing Native Women and Children. The Conference that followed the third Journey in 2002 was held in Billings, Montana and the teachings and workshops were related to **Strengthening the Community**. So this is our 4th Journey—Healing Native Men and Children—and we are traveling the other half of our nation—East of the Mississippi. The Conference will be held September 18-21, 2003 in Albuquerque, NM, and its focus will be on **Strengthening Our Nations**."*



Grand entry of the Sacred Hoop in Connecticut. Mary McIntosh (far left) carried the Tobacco. The Hoop Carriers are Gina Reney, Theresa (Taffy) Perachio, Angelita Pine, and Ann Bonin.

A New Video Debuts

It was time, then, to introduce a "first" for the 2003 Hoop Journey, and at the same time, to bring an Elder's presence right into our midst. For the first time on Hoop Journey IV, participants got to view a short video greeting by Lakota Elder Bill Iron Moccasin and other men from his community in Sisseton, South Dakota. In This video, called "Making Relatives and the Roles of Men," Bill talks about how men can reach out to children needing adults in their lives through adoption and other traditional ways of making relatives.

Many among us were moved by the video. Readers can get a taste of what Bill Iron Moccasin said by taking a look at **Volume 4, Number 2** of this Hoop Journey IV edition of Wellbriety! Magazine. Just go back into your browser and click on "**Lessons From the Old Culture**."

The room was quiet when the video ended but it was clear that people wanted to share what they felt. We'll continue now with some of the sharing that afternoon in Mystic, Connecticut.

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Don Coyhis shares some of the Teachings of the Elders just before showing the Elders video with Bill Iron Moccasin.

Feedback About the Video

1st Feedback

“When Bill Iron Moccasin talked about the importance of the relationships between the men and children of our Indian Nations on the video, and he spoke of the cultural customs of ‘making a relative’ rather than *adopting*, I found that difference to be so powerful. **To make a Relative**—you know exactly what that means. You know what comes with that and the feelings that go along with ‘making a relative’. Words are very powerful and I can really appreciate the difference in the feelings between those two terms.”

2nd Feedback

“I used to work in a children’s shelter. There were kids there...some could not get ‘placed’ and would live there until they were 18. Some were placed. These kids were like a *throw-away*. Literally, one was thrown out of a moving car onto the parking lot at the shelter. Eighty per-cent of those kids were there because of alcohol and drugs in their families. Reading their charts—the abuse would make me sick. The abuse they suffered... I couldn’t believe there

was no one in the community for these children. How reduced these children are. To rely on paid caretakers. **I have such a hard time believing that there is no one for these children. Our children are Sacred. But many of them are not being treated as Sacred because of alcohol and drugs.** And what they said about their fathers—either they never knew him, or they saw him once for a paternity test, or maybe a court case for child support. There are all these children that are just literally thrown away. It breaks my heart.”

3rd Feedback

“When the young man in the video was talking about being able to adopt children...it’s so difficult today. All the legalities. The paperwork. Everyone is afraid nowadays to do anything with children because of the legal issues. Back then, everyone was responsible for the children. Even if they had mothers and fathers, other members of the community would adopt them as their child, or niece, or nephew, or grandchild. We lost respect for parents and grandparents in our culture and communities for a while it seems to me. But in the last few years a lot of that respect is coming back as we return to our traditional ways. **All the children want is a sense of belonging and love.** And they can sense—just as animals can sense—whether you are good or not. That’s what the kids need today: People that are caring. People that take them under their wing.”

4th Feedback

“We need to raise our children with values. Even after I was sober, I was trying to raise my four children and work to put food on the table—and it is hard. They were ‘raising themselves’ while I was out working to put a roof over our heads. The older ones in my home were actually the parent figure for the younger ones. They fixed

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the dinners and did whatever had to be done.

"Today I am fortunate because I have remarried and my wife was brought up with strong family values. It is difficult sometimes, though. As the family changed, the older ones, who had the burden of the 'parental role' in the home during the times I had to be away at work, had a hard time adjusting to the new family values. **You weren't like that Dad when we were on our own. I used to be able to go out and do what I wanted to do. Run around...** That's what they say.

"The change is positive in our family, but it is still change and there is always a time of adjustment and testing. I just keep reminding myself that it was all I could do at the time. But Bill Iron Moccasin's words are definitely right about these 'making relatives' issues. I fully understand and appreciate what he says."

5th Feedback

Message to Dad from your Daughter

"I'm thankful for everything Dad. I wasn't thankful at the time. I didn't understand or appreciate what you were trying to do. I just felt like, 'hey! we used to get to have a lot of fun and now that's all changed,

and he wants to be a family after all we kids have been thru.' But it's been a couple of years. I've grown. I've changed and I understand now that you're trying to make it better for us. And you've done a good job. I'm even thankful for the hard times and the times before you got sober because everything we went thru made us who we are today. We are a bunch of strong kids. We are smart and we are strong. I wouldn't change anything. I love you Dad."

They say the Gift Goes in a Circle—and for us it did, when the last sharing comment was directed back to ourselves—the Hoop Crew

Final Comment to White Bison 'Hoop Crew'

"When you first got here oday, you said that you guys prayed and felt like you were supposed to come here today for someone or some reason. I'm that someone. I'm that reason. Thank you for coming."

White Bison honors the Great Mashantucket Pequot Nation in whose beautiful country this visit of Hoop Journey IV took place. ✚

*Vette Middleton
Richard Simonelli*