

Rainbow Eyes
By Rev. Dr. Todd F. Eklof
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I was thirteen the first time I ever saw a white buffalo. It was in the 1977 movie, *The White Buffalo*, starring Charles Bronson as Wild Bill Hickock and Will Samson as Crazy Horse, whose characters are both haunted by the same frightening dream of a gigantic white buffalo powerful enough to shake the ground and burst through mountains. Years later, while in my late twenties, I began dreaming of a white buffalo. In one particular dream it appeared to me near cabin on a lake at the foot of a beautiful snowcapped mountain. Wearing a collar with license tags, it led me to a nearby stream.

The dream left me with a very positive feeling, although I was initially troubled by the image of this sacred being wearing a collar, as if it were merely a pet or something that belonged to me. But my mentor back then, a Jungian psychotherapist, suggested it could also be a symbol of belonging and affection, that the White Buffalo, a manifestation of Great Spirit in some Native American traditions, held meaning for me, and that I needed to pay attention to its invitation to follow it along the stream of my life.

This interpretation resonated with me, and I began contemplating the dream's deeper meaning. The setting, a cabin on a lake beneath snowcapped mountains, has always been my idyllic place to live—my heaven, if you will. So, to borrow from Native American mythology, I found myself outside Great Spirit's lodge at the foot of Thunder Mountain. Fortunately, I was not invited into the lodge, not yet anyway. Instead, Great Spirit, manifesting as a White Buffalo, takes me to the stream of life—an invitation to walk beside her by following her ways throughout my life.

I realize this sounds far more ethereal than is usual for me, but I don't know any other way to appropriately share this cherished experience. Before I say more, however, I want to tell something about the Lakota legend of the White Buffalo, so you understand what it means to walk beside her.

During a terrible famine, two desperate hunters noticed a *waken*—a sacred being—floating toward them from the distance. By the time the *waken* was close enough to make out, it had become the most beautiful woman they'd ever seen. She had two red dots of face paint on her cheeks and wore a bright white buckskin outfit, embroidered with colorful designs drawn delicately with a porcupine quill. Her long black hair hung loose, except for a single strand tied back with buffalo fur.

Overcome with lust, one of the young hunters became disrespectful and was immediately struck by lightning. Because the other hunter had treated her well, the *waken* told him to go back to the People of the Great Nation and tell them to prepare for her arrival by constructing a medicine lodge. Four days later the Lakota people saw the *waken*, whom they named, White Buffalo Calf Woman, approaching and carrying a bundle with her. When she arrived, Chief Standing Hollow Horn honored her and said, "Sister, we are glad you are here and happy to hear your instruction."

She then entered the medicine lodge they had constructed and circled its interior like the Sun. After showing them how to make an altar of the red earth, she opened her bundle and removed the *chanupa*, the Sacred Pipe. She filled it with red tobacco and demonstrated the right way to smoke it by walking around the lodge four times, like the great Sun, representing the Sacred Hoop, the circle without end. Its fire is the fire without end, passed from generation to generation, and its smoke is the living breath of Great Grandfather Mystery.

White Buffalo Calf Woman then showed the people the right way to pray by lifting the *chanupa* up toward Grandfather Sky, and down toward Grandmother Earth, then in all four directions, to complete the Sacred Hoop. "With this holy pipe," she told them, "you will walk like a living prayer. With your feet resting upon the earth and the pipe stem reaching into the sky, your body forms a living bridge between the Sacred Beneath and the Sacred Above. Wakan Tanka [the Great Spirit] smiles upon us, because now we are as one: earth, sky, all living things, the two legged, the four legged, the winged ones, the trees, the grasses. Together with the people, they are all related, one family. The pipe holds them all together."

After teaching them more about the sacred pipe and its meaning, she turned to the women of the tribe and said, "You are from the Mother Earth. What you do is as great as what the warriors are doing." She then turned to the children of the tribe and said, "You are the most important and precious ones of all because you are the coming generation. Someday it will be your responsibility to hold the sacred pipe and pray with it." She then turned once more to the Chief and to all the people and reminded them to take great care of the sacred pipe and to remember to use it in all their ceremonies. She said, "I am the four ages of creation and will return to you every generation. Every generation I will come back to you. You will see me again."

She then departed toward the direction she had come, her beautiful shape silhouetted by the orange Sun. As she became more distant, the people saw her take on the shape of a buffalo, turning brown, then red, then yellow, and, finally, she became a white buffalo calf, all the colors of all the people of the world, just before disappearing. For this reason, she is said to have rainbow eyes, because she sees people of all colors as one.

After she vanished, the plains were immediately filled with an enormous buffalo herd, some of which sacrificed themselves so the people could have everything they needed to survive, meat for food, skins for clothing and shelter, and bones to make tools. This is why the People of the Great Nation, the Lakota, believe a white buffalo calf is the most sacred living thing anyone can ever encounter.

Alas, in real life, if that's what ours is, the last white buffalo known to have been born had been in 1933. Given that the national herd had become almost extinct by then, with less than 500 head remaining, it was believed the anomalous gene resulting in the rare birth of a white calf had been wiped out. But when I was in my thirties, many years after my dream, I

learned that in August of 1994 a white calf had been born on the hobby farm of Dave and Valerie Heider in Janesville, Wisconsin, just north of Chicago, Illinois. The Lakota named her Miracle.

I wanted to go visit Miracle the moment I learned about her because the impact of my dream years earlier had remained with me. But it would be six years before I finally had the opportunity to do so. My young son Julian and my friend Jim Carter accompanied me on the journey. I called in advance to ask if we could camp for a night on the farm. A kindly old man answered the phone and gave us permission, adding, "If anyone gives you a problem, just tell them grandpa said it would be okay."

Upon our arrival, we entered a small gift shop that had been set up on the property and asked where to pitch our tent. Valerie Heider politely informed us they didn't allow strangers to overnight on their property. She wasn't at all happy when I told her "We'd driven all this way after Grandpa said it would be okay." Shaking her head, she said, "Wait here while I go talk to my husband." A few minutes later she returned and instructed us to go out and speak with Dave Heider.

When we found him, he was sitting atop his noisy tractor—a tall, thick, rugged, gruff hobby farmer who worked as a truck driver by day. He gave us a suspicious once-over while determining whether or not to make good on Grandpa's promise. Being a staunch Republican, as it turns out, he was especially leery after my friend introduced himself as Jimmy Carter. Upon explaining he's no relation to the Democratic President, and that he prefers going by Jim, and a bit more ice-breaking conversation, Dave Heider agreed to let us stay. He even invited us to stay in a tipi some Native American dignitaries had permanently set up on the site for their visits. The idea of spending the night inside a real tipi thrilled my son.

Before setting up camp, I spoke a bit more with Dave who told me some of Miracle's story; about the day she'd been born and how, on a whim, he called the local paper in case they wanted to come take a picture of a rare white buffalo calf, and how surprised and overwhelmed he and Valerie were to soon after have tens of thousands of Native Americans, among others, coming to their small farm from all over the world. He also admitted that at first all they could see were dollar signs, but once they realized what Miracle represented, they felt morally obligated to share her, free of charge, with everyone, even though they had offers to buy her from all over the place, including from Ted Nugent and Ted Turner. Dave said the Indian Nation in South Dakota offered to trade every buffalo they had for her.

But he kept her on his humble farm, tucked on the outskirts of one of America's small working-class cities, riding his tractor and driving his truck, because it was the right thing to do. He told me about the many times he'd seen her come down from the hill, stand at the wire fence, and look at one person in a crowd of hundreds. "Inevitably," he said, "that

person would come to me afterward and tell me they're dying of cancer, or something like it, and that they wanted to come and visit Miracle before they died."

Astounded by all of this, I said, "I suppose she's the closest thing to a Pope or a Dali Lama we have here in the United States."

"He's been here," Dave replied.

"Who?" I asked.

"Him. That guy you just said."

"The Dali Lama?" I asked in disbelief.

He then told me he'd once noticed, in his words, "a couple of little monks running around the place," which wasn't terribly unusual since he'd had visitors from all over the world. He remembered this particular occasion, however, because one of the monks eventually came to him and said, "My master wishes to speak with you." That was an unusual turn of phrase, to say the least, but Dave Heider followed the man to see his master, who told him, "Miracle and I are on the same path this lifetime and it has been very important for me to spend time with her. I want to thank you for all you and your family are doing for her and for allowing us to come here."

The next day the servant returned and handed Dave a silk scarf, explaining it was a gift from His Holiness the Dali Lama, who apologized for not being able to reveal his true identity, but he needed to keep his presence concealed because he had risked leaving his bodyguards behind in order to spend sacred time alone with Miracle.

Just before sunset, Julian, Jim, and I sat on a log just outside the electric fence separating us from Miracle's pasture. The fence was covered with hundreds of ribbons and dreamcatchers that past visitors had tied upon it. It might surprise you to know that Miracle was no longer white. Unless they are albino, white buffalos are born pure white, instead of brown, as other buffalos are, but within their first year turn from white, to yellow, to red, to brown, all the colors of all the people of the world, just like White Buffalo Calf Woman does before disappearing. By the time I met her, Miracle looked like any other buffalo and was accompanied by a small herd consisting of herself, her own young calf, another female with a slightly older calf, and a large bull.

While setting up camp I had observed her acting like any mother bison might, chasing the bigger calf away from her own when they were playing too rough. But as we were sitting, they all came by to briefly check us out, first the bull, then the other female, the two calves, and finally, Miracle. Upon doing so, however, she stopped and stood still before us, within our reach. In that moment, she stopped being the attentive mother I had witnessed earlier, allowing her calf to frolic freely with the other in the distance. It was as if she understood our presence and decided to personify the goddess we had come to visit.

She wasn't tamed. Bison aren't, not even those raised on farms. She let us know immediately she wouldn't tolerate any physical contact, that it was improper. It reminded

me of the ancient belief that touching the sacred is profane, that contact with the totem is a taboo. So, instead, as is my custom when I demonstrate reverence for something I consider sacred, I prostrated myself before her three times. My son and Jim followed my example. Miracle dropped her head low enough for me to feel her breath blow against my face. I pulled some sweetgrass that was beyond her reach and placed it on the ground beneath her as an offering. She ate it. She also remained with us, standing in the same spot, throughout the entire sunset, never departing, or moving, or even turning her attention toward her calf. She didn't leave until we did, sometime after dark. The next morning, she came and stood before us again, not leaving us until it was time for us to go.

Miracle's life was full of what Carl Jung would have called synchronicities, referring to uncanny acausal connections between things or events—or what we might simply call lots of weird coincidences. According to the Lakota story, for example, White Buffalo Calf Woman's return is supposed to signal the beginning of world peace. Miracle was born just across the street from a lake called Geneva, the name of the Swiss city where the United Nations offices are headquartered. And the name of the road she was born on is Avalon, same as the mythological island where a young boy removes Excalibur from a stone to become legendary King Arthur.

A few years after my trip to Janesville, I was having lunch with Huston Smith in Indianapolis. Huston Smith was one of the world's leading experts on world religions, and the subject of Bill Moyers 1996 five-part miniseries, *The Wisdom of Faith with Huston Smith*. Huston, who died at age 97 in 2016, not only studied world religions, but practiced all of them while doing so. During our lunch I told him about Miracle, whom he'd never heard of. "His Holiness was there!" he exclaimed in delight and disbelief. "Wait till I tell Kendra," referring to his spouse. "This is the reason I came here," he exclaimed, even though he'd come as the keynote speaker for conference of Unitarian ministers. His thrill upon learning her story pleased me to no end.

Another sad synchronicity came September 19, 2004, when Miracle unexpectedly died the same week George W. Bush came to Janesville to address blue-collar workers while stumping for his reelection. It was odd given that she'd been well cared for, hadn't been ill, and was just ten years old, only a third of her normal lifespan. I couldn't help but wonder if the death of this peaceful being wasn't some kind of cosmic response to the presence of a man who had begun two unholy wars, responsible for far more innocent civilian deaths than have occurred in Gaza during the past two years.

As uncanny as her death was, exactly nine months later, the gestation period for buffalos, another white buffalo was born.

More astonishing, the new calf was born only a few minutes from my home in Kentucky, not far from the State Capital, on the border of a small town named Bagdad, same as the name of Capital City in Iraq where one of Bush's unholy wars was happening, although spelled without the "h." Just as Miracle was symbolically born in Geneva, a place of world Unity, on a

street called Avalon, symbolizing her high status, it was as if she'd been symbolically reborn in a warzone, where her presence and message of peace and unity was most needed. Call it synchronicity, coincidence, mysterious, or just plain weird, this new calf's birth seemed a continuation of Miracle's story and her peaceful purpose in the world. I went to the new buffalo's naming ceremony, led by a local tribe of Native Americans who named the still snow-white calf, *Cante Pejute*, which means "Medicine Heart" in the Lakota language, a name that represents their hope she might bring healing to our world. Could Medicine Heart have been White Buffalo Calf Woman's rebirth for a new generation?

I can't explain the meaning of all this and would rather just let the mystery be. What I will say is that my encounter with Miracle and her story has been among the most profound experiences of my life. It was an experience of awe and wonder that filled me with hope and gratitude and appreciation for the many mysteries in life we are better off accepting than explaining. What I do understand is what it means to walk beside her along the course of our lives and to walk in harmony with all that is.

Rather than merely explaining it, after my encounter with her, I was inspired to write song lyrics about what it means to see the world through her rainbow eyes. Until recently, being that I don't write music, I could only read them as a poem, but now, thanks to the magic of Artificial Intelligence, you are among the very first to hear them as the inspiring song they were always meant to be.

Rainbow Eyes

I went searching for a vision, with Jimmy Carter and my boy
We met a goddess in Wisconsin, north of Chicago, Illinois
She came walking off the mountain, through the mists of Avalon
And though we could never hold her, she touched my friend and touched my son
She held my heart within her beauty, pulled this strong man to his knees
Jim and my boy fell down beside me, as her breath became the breeze

She came to us white as snow, on the first day of her birth
Then turned brown and red and yellow, like the people of the Earth
She showed us how to live, she taught us how to give
To walk in harmony with all that is

She came to us with a mission, saw the world with rainbow eyes
Pray in every direction, bless the Earth and bless the skies
See your own reflection, in the face of everyone
Take what you need each day to live, learn to love and to forgive
Walk in peace, wonder and beauty, revere all creatures great and small
Offer thanks for every blessing, and your heart to one and all

She came to us white as snow, on the first day of her birth
Then turned brown and red and yellow, like the people of the Earth
She showed us how to live, she taught us how to give
To be in harmony with all that is

She fell down one September, days before war reached her town
Now our hearts must still remember, the great Miracle we found
So we'll try to walk in beauty, and we'll try to live in peace
To fulfill our sacred duty, help awaken those who sleep
'Til White Buffalo Calf Woman returns to walk the Earth again
We'll give our thanks, care for the land, and treat all people as friends

She came to us white as snow, a sign of sacred birth
Then blossomed into every shade, the colors of the Earth
She taught us how to live, she taught us how to give
To live in harmony with all that is

She promised each generation, she'd return to the promised land
Teaching all the Nations how to gather hand in hand
Who knew that I would live to see a new Miracle reborn
Nine moons since the day she fell, in a home broken and war torn
Her tears of love, her healing heart, can mend the wounds of pain
Give this violent world a brand-new start, to live anew again

She came to us white as snow, a sign of sacred birth
Then turned brown and red and yellow, like the people of the Earth
She showed us how to live, she taught us how to give
To join in harmony with all that is

She showed us how to live, she taught us how to give
To be in harmony with all that is
To be in harmony with all that is