

White, W. (2002). Introduction. *The red road to wellbriety*. Colorado Springs, CO: White Bison.

## **Introduction**

All things come full circle. The publication of this book marks a milestone in the history of addiction and recovery among Native peoples in America. It is fitting that the *Red Road to Wellbriety* offers Native interpretations of the Twelve Steps of Alcoholics Anonymous (A.A.) for it was in Native America that the first networks of recovery support groups were formed—nearly 200 years before the founding of A.A..

The history of alcohol problems among Native American tribes is not one of passive destruction, but one of active resistance. Addiction was an alien disease injected into Native cultures, but frameworks of recovery emerged, and have continued to re-emerge, that tap the deepest and most sacred roots of these cultures. There are dark truths in this book that are almost too painful to bear, but rising from the ashes of this pain are liberating truths that burn with the brightness of the sun.

As early as the 1750s, recovery circles grew out of Native American cultural revitalization and religious movements. The beginning of any history of alcoholism recovery in America should be filled with the names of Wagomend (Assinsink Munsee), Papoonan (Unami Delaware), Neolin (and the other Delaware Prophets), Samson Occom (Ojibway), William Apess (Ojibway), Kenekuk (the Kickapoo Prophet), Tenskwatawa (the Shawnee Prophet), Kahgegagahbowh (George Copway) (Ojibway), and Zuanah (Quanah Parker)(Comanche)—the central figure in the rise of peyotism and the Native American Church. One of the earliest equivalents of A.A.'s Twelve Steps and “Big Book” was the orally-transmitted teachings—the Gai'wiiò (“Good Message”) of Ganioda'yo (Handsome Lake) (Seneca) that became known as the Code of Handsome Lake following its introduction in 1799. From the Handsome Lake Movement to the Indian Shaker Church to the Native American Church to the recently emerging Wellbriety Movement, there is an enduring Native tradition of sobriety-based cultural and religious movements. It is hoped that this publication will spark interest in Native contributions to the history of alcoholism recovery in America.

What most Native recovery pioneers shared in common was a call for personal sobriety, the use of ancestral teachings to anchor sobriety, and adherence to a code of moral conduct. This way of living has gone by many names, including the “Red Road.” The Red Road is a way of achieving sobriety and healing personal and cultural wounds. The Red Road is a way of breaking the cycle of destruction that so often accompanies historical trauma and oppression.

The *Red Road to Wellbriety* is an invitation to walk the Red Road. The term *Wellbriety* is an affirmation that recovery is more than the removal of alcohol and other drugs from an otherwise unchanged life. Wellbriety is a larger change in personal identity and values and a visible change in one’s relationship with others. It is about physical, emotional, spiritual, and relational health. Wellbriety is founded on the recognition that we cannot bring one part of our lives under control while other parts are out of control. It is the beginning of a quest for harmony and wholeness within the self, the family and the tribe.

True Wellbriety occurs in the context of community. The *Red Road to Wellbriety* teaches that healthy seeds cannot grow in diseased soil. It teaches that injured seeds need a “healing forest.” The stories in this book make it clear that the sobriety and healing of the individual are inseparable from the sobriety and healing of the family and the tribe. In these pages are found the connecting tissue between personal sobriety, cultural renewal, nationhood, and sovereignty. (As the *Red Road to Wellbriety* teaches, “There is no sovereignty without sobriety.”) The voices that fill these pages reveal how the wounds the individual and community have inflicted on each other can be healed. These voices call for a new relationship between self and community. The Wellbriety of the community creates a healing sanctuary—a culture of recovery—for the wounded individual, just as the growing Wellbriety of the individual feeds the strength of the community. On the Red Road, the individual, family and community are not separate; they are one. To injure one is to injure all; to heal one is to heal all.

The Wellbriety path does not compete with A.A. or any other pathway of personal recovery, but instead enriches those pathways by embracing them within the web of Native American tribal histories and cultures. In these pages, you will meet people who have committed themselves to live their lives on the Red Road. Here you will meet Native people whose stories embody the living history of Native American recovery. You will hear the

details of their addiction and recovery journeys and feel the life and hope in their words. You will meet a woman of two cultures, a misplaced Indian who found his home, a woman who forget and then rediscovered who she was, a re-emerging man, and the children and grandchildren who have survived alcoholism. You will learn about A.A. and Al-Anon in the *Red Road to Wellbriety* but you will also learn about Talking Circles, Helping Spirits, the sweat lodge, the medicine wheel, sacred dances, smudging rituals, and praying with the eagle feather. You will hear men and women of many tribes and traditions illustrating the diversity of how they came to live sober, meaningful lives.

The tear-stained path of the Red Road leads to recovery, health, wholeness, and dignity, but it is not an easy road to walk. It calls for the power of the Creator, the wisdom of the elder, the courage of the warrior, and the heart of the mother, but like A.A., it is a path of progress, not perfection. Those who contribute their own tears to this path do so as an act of submission and an act of resistance. To walk the Red Road is to offer a silent proclamation:

“Here the destruction stops. We will heal ourselves, we will heal our wounded relationships, we will heal our children, we will heal our nation. On this day, our future history begins.”

The healing from addiction began more than 250 years ago in Native America. The teachings and stories in the *Red Road to Wellbriety* are a call to finish that healing and embark on the journey of Wellbriety. They are a call to open your heart and have faith in where this quest will lead.