

Mythological Creatures Are Among Us
TATANKA SKA - The Sacred White Bison



In memory of "Arizona" - Courtesy of The White Bison Association

Iconic myths about the American White Bison are scattered among the oral tradition of various North American tribes stretching from Canada to Mexico. Respected mythologist Joseph Campbell sometimes shared the essence of the white buffalo mythology in his lucid lectures. He spoke of the abundant wisdom and universal truth to be found in *the seed* of such oral tradition. Campbell declared the white bison oral stories to be more than myth. He characterized them as: "the keepsake of a sustainable culture." For nearly two millennia, clans of the Great Plains have revered White Buffalo Calf Woman. She is still entwined in the core beliefs of modern Indian spirituality. Among white bison lore, the Lakota mythos prevails and speaks of a heavenly entity with a fascinating prophecy.

The White Calf Mythos

Dating back nineteen *life-time* generations by Lakota accounts, the white bison became immortal when a mysterious spirit being known as a *Wakan Wiyan* (holy woman spirit) visited a gathering of the Teton tribes in the Sacred Black Hills of South Dakota. This angelic being first materialized before two scouts up on a ridgetop. The men were surveying the land by the elder's command, looking for game to feed the gathered clans. Crossing the sky like a *wohpe* (shooting star), Wakan appeared before the scouts in the form of a lovely Indian woman. She was *au naturel* except a head of long thick black hair covered her body like *Tashina Pte* (a buffalo skin robe).

Reminiscent of fire, brimstone, flaming sword and retribution seeking angels of the Old Testament, Wakan Wiyan was compelled to display her great powers. One of the scouts expressed his desire for this beautiful woman spirit. He claimed her for his teepee and went to embrace her without consent. He was enveloped in a swirling cloud of smoke. When it cleared, the irreverent scout was reduced to a pile of worm filled, scorched bones! The remaining brave thought to draw his bow on this dangerous woman, in fear for his life, but he wisely decided against it. He realized a great Wakan was before him. The scout averted his eyes and began to pray. He was rewarded for his humility and respect. The angelic spirit being kindly bid the honorable brave to go to his people and announce her coming visit. *Do not mourn your companion* she said, *he has gone where he wished to be*. Back in camp, the scout told of meeting a Wakan Wiyan and explained the fate of his companion. He implored the people to setup the Big Medicine Tipi in the heart of the encampment, so all could be blessed by her divine presence.



Encampment in the Tetons

Edward Curtis

Four days later, the lovely Wakan appeared in camp astride a massive white bison. The woolly creature reminded the people of an ancient story the elders recite. Wakan was dressed in white buckskin and adorned with the finest fringe, feather, quill and color, ever seen. Her exquisitely braided hair almost touched the ground and the beads on her moccasins sparkled like the stars as she walked. Wakan pronounced to the people she had come to provide the clans with abundance. A great feast ensued in her honor. She served everyone, feeding the children first, the mothers and elders next, then Wakan honored the men. For several days after, she taught the clans ceremonies honoring *Makoce Ina* (Earth Mother), *Wakan Tanka* (Grandfather Creator), and *Tunkasila* (Great Spirit Mystery). The ceremonies were created for: The Sweat Lodge - Naming - Healing - Adoption - Marriage - Vision Quest, and Sundance Ceremonies. Her gifts to the Teton tribes were the ceremonies of gratitude accompanied by song and dance, the sacred ceremonial prayer pipe (*Chanunpa*), and the trilogy of maize, melon, and squash seed. Wakan asked the clans to cherish the Chanunpa and evoke the Sacred Ceremonies often. She advised them to share her seeds and prophecies with all human beings. In return, the prayers of the clans would be answered.

As she departed, Wakan promised to reappear during: “A Time of Great Change”. *I will see you again*, she said. *Until then, you will find me in the smoke of the Chanunpa*. The people watched Wakan Wiyán shapeshift into a black colored bison calf, then a brown calf, a yellow one, and finally the sacred white bison calf. As the white calf galloped away, a herd of bison appeared and began grazing near the encampment, blessing the clans with abundance. Since then, Wakan’s given name has been *Ptesan Wi* (White Buffalo Calf Woman). Aho!

Undoubtedly one of the most hopeful of all mystical prophecies, the four colored calves White Buffalo Calf Woman revealed portray a symbolic symbiosis among the four races of humanity, and a metaphorical unification of the four great islands (continents). No matter when this prophecy is said to come true, this Wakan upholds great respect, necessitates veneration towards all creation, and facilitates profound spiritual/intellectual awakening. Above all, this primal theology of a *sustainable culture* speaks to humanity’s dire need to rekindle great respect for Makoce Ina; our Sacred Mother Earth.

(Continue to Part II)



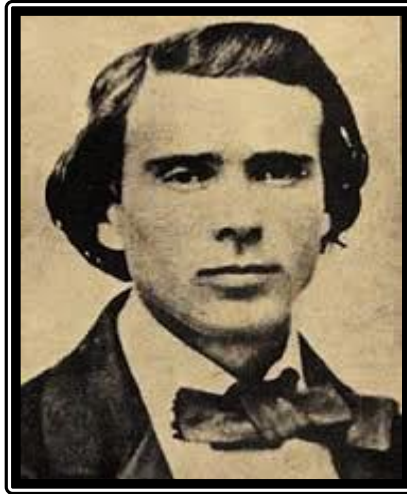
Artist’s Vision of Ptesan Wi / Courtesy of Pamela McCabe

Part II

An Eyewitness Account

What Are the Odds?

In the annals of *written* history, a few Euro-American wagon train journals describe seeing the rare white bison as determined pioneers came west across America's Great Plains. The respected explorer and author Dr. Josiah Gregg wrote an internationally popular book about his experience of traveling along America's Santa Fe Trail. Gregg states: "In 1833, a white bison was killed by the Cheyenne. The Cheyenne [sacrificed the sacred bison in good faith] during the Leonid Meteor Shower (The Night the Stars Fell) and scribed a peace and trade treaty [with the U.S.] on its skin." *This hide is on display at Bent's Old Fort in La Junta, Colorado; a National Historic Site.*



Josiah Gregg

Public Domaine

Dr. Josiah Gregg reportedly died in early 1850, near the north shore of Clear Lake, California. In November of 1849, he embarked on an expedition from the Trinity gold fields to locate and map the elusive Humboldt Bay. Starting with only ten days provisions, Gregg's party did find and survey Humboldt Bay but over a month expired in the process. After mapping the bay, the men wandered south through the ancient Redwood forest of the Mayacamus Mountains, heading to San Francisco. They exhausted all provisions and harsh winter weather struck them. The deep Redwood dirt turned to a thick muck and the giant fallen trees made the forests impossible to navigate. Game was scarce, ammunition and morale low. In fact, the party split up. A published account of *The Mad River Incident* tells of well-earned animosity held by Gregg towards a few members of his crew for their disloyalty. In mid-February of 1850, unable to find a trail through the impenetrable mountain terrain, Gregg changed direction, heading east to Sacramento. On February 25th, at Clear Lake's north shore, Josiah Gregg became so cold, hungry, and weak, he fell off his horse. It's said he died from the fall and was buried under a pile of rocks by his companions. Suspicion arose in Sacramento when the crew arrived. The men could not account for Dr. Gregg's precious transit, sextant, and expedition journals. Gregg's descendants offer an alternate version of his disappearance. They claim a Clear Lake Indian woman (likely of the Dannoka clan) found him in the bush, barely alive. She revived Josiah Gregg and he lived with "The People of the Lake" for the rest of his days.

A century to the year after Josiah Gregg witnessed the symbolic Cheyenne white bison treaty, a landmark event confirmed by Canada's First Nations says: "A white bison was born [there] in 1933." The birth of this calf fulfilled the Canadian tribes most sacred prophecy, signifying just as the Lakota prophecy does; a future era of hope and renewal that will bring about peace and harmony among all people of Earth. Since 1933, across the North American Continent, several white bison have been born. Most in the past few decades.



White Buffalo Petroglyph Creative Commons



Courtesy of Gretchen Del Rio

The DNA of Antiquity

Scientifically speaking, why are some buffalo white? Are they albino or a beefalo? (Beefalo are a cattle and bison crossbreed). In fact, the true white bison is the result of a recessive, *leucistic* gene, not albinism or a hybrid. Just as the polar bear is white by design, the massive bison of the ice ages (Bison Antiquus) were likely to be white, evolving over time to yellow, brown, or black coloration as diet, locale and climate changed. An explanation for the trait of white coloration is the genetic law which states that genes available to any organism come directly from the parents. Fewer parents produce less diversity. That means recessive genes and mutations, such as white coloration, tend to proliferate in an isolated, low population scenario. This effect is known as *genetic drift*. The intended extermination of thirty million bison in the 1870's, by anti-native factions bent on starving the plains tribes, created a genetic bottleneck, reducing the bison genetic code to its roots in *The DNA of Antiquus*. Genes are also sensitive to extreme environmental fluctuations and the biological stress of modern-day pollution. The proposal being: The American Bison appears to be on genetic alert, preparing to revert to a time when white coloration was a *dominant* gene. This radical response to a lack of genetic diversity, climate change and environmental toxicity entertains several questions.

What are the Odds?

Considering the odds of a white bison birth are estimated to be one in ten million, the math doesn't add up. Only about twenty to thirty thousand *genetically pure* American Plains Bison exist. Another half million are hybrid beefalo. With these odds in mind, one authentic white bison birth becomes an astronomically remote chance. So why the sudden resurgence? Since 1933, when Big Medicine was born in Montana, forty (40) white bison births have been documented across North America! Others go unreported. Questions arise as to the genetic origins of these animals. Statistically, a few are likely to be albinos, and more are surely Charolaise White Beefalo. In any case, two white bison are presently roaming about that were DNA tested at The University of California, Davis. U. C. Davis confirmed both specimens are healthy, pure blooded American Plains Bison. There are other obvious candidates across the North American continent that merely lack formal genetic authentication. This tally radically defies the odds, reinforcing the native prophecy of a time when four calves will be born white and progressively change colors prior to the return of Ptesan Wi. Are we currently in what White Buffalo Calf Woman referred to as: *A Time of Great Change*? Is the recent proliferation of white bison a genetic, environmental, as well as spiritual sign of the culmination of her prophecy?

*Continuing with this vein of thought, what are the odds of **The Guardians of the Sacred White Bison** (Cynthia Hart-Button and her husband Charles) bringing a herd of these magnificent mythical creatures to Lake County, California? Astronomical? Maybe yes and maybe no... but it is so. Cynthia Hart's amazing story and her life with Tatanka Ska is, as the Navaho people say: Hozho Naasha; A Walk in Beauty. (Continue to Part III)*

Part III
Guardians of the Sacred White Bison
A Walk in Beauty



Courtesy of the White Bison Association

Cynthia Hart-Button and husband Charles are the Guardians of the Sacred White Bison. They have cared for and nurtured a small herd of these rare creatures for nearly two decades. This couple's dedication to each other and their bison is, as the Navaho expression goes: *A Walk in Beauty*. And this is how it all came to be.

Cynthia spent her childhood on a ranch near Harrisburg, Pennsylvania. She was born in 1954 to Uriah Guss and Phyllis Garrison. Cynthia's heritage is unique to say the least. Her mother was of Welsh descent, coming from a long line of Celtic clairvoyants. Her father, of Lakota/German ancestry, was related to the great Lakota holy man Sitting Bull. Uriah's traditional name was *Tatanka Ska* (White Buffalo). "Little Golden Bear," as Cynthia was called by her father, had a rather idyllic childhood. Her father was blessed with a special gift for training and healing animals. He was called upon by various zoos as well as Ringling Bros. & Barnum & Bailey Circus to attend to exotic animals. Between circus animal visits to the family ranch, dance classes, ranch chores and a love of competitive barrel racing, there was little time for a bright, energetic girl to be idle or bored. Cynthia traveled to foreign lands with her family and experienced much for a youngster. One might say she was a precocious child.

We cannot continue with this intriguing story until first explaining a unique situation in the childhood of this extraordinary woman. Cynthia was born visually impaired. As the blind often do, she developed extra sensory skills to compensate. When she was six years old, her father took in a family from India who could not find any hospitality in town. This family taught Cynthia yoga exercises which partially gave her sight! As a result, she gained a worldly view, and yet, retained her extra sensory skills. On occasion, Cynthia's gifts helped find lost objects or kids who got lost in a wooded parkland adjacent to the family ranch. After working as a teen model for cosmetics and fashion, as Cynthia came into her twenties, she launched a career as an intuitive on a radio talk-show in Ohio. Her reputation as a clairvoyant became well known. However, an unusual seismic event would dramatically influence the course of her life.

In 1980, while climbing Mt. McKinley, Cynthia had a vision of an intense earthquake in Ohio. She realized lives and property would be in danger when the quake hit. She hurried back to Ohio to warn people. What?! An earthquake in America's Midwest? No way. Weeks after Cynthia uttered this premonition in public, an intense earthquake rocked Northern Kentucky and rumbled all the way up to Canada! It measured 5.1 on the Richter scale, causing moderate damage in Ohio and Kentucky. Thankfully, her reputation for accurate predictions convinced a nearby nuclear power plant to shift a nuclear waste storage site on Lake Erie to a more secure, inland location before the quake hit. That's the good news. Difficulties began for Cynthia when she became a media sensation after her prediction came true. In public and at home, people began hounding her for readings and healing. It became apparent to Cynthia that she would have to relocate to have any semblance of a personal life. A family friend came to her aid with an offer to work as a ranch hand in Sedona, Arizona. A bit overwhelmed by sudden fame, Cynthia welcomed the opportunity. A picturesque high desert plateau richly steeped in ancient tribal traditions became her sanctuary, nudging this remarkable young woman closer to her true calling.

A Guardian Comes of Age

In Sedona, Cynthia regrouped and became part of Arizona's unique southwestern culture. She worked for a time as a ranch hand and a pack mule tour guide on the south rim of the Grand Canyon. Part of her quest in coming West was to fulfill her father's wish that she seek the essence of her Lakota heritage. Uriah wanted his daughter to find balance and inner peace. Cynthia traveled to various tribal areas across the western U.S. in search of answers. She also met and married the love of her life, musician Charles Button. Life was good.

In 1988, Cynthia's father Uriah became terminally ill. Her world suddenly fell apart. This father and daughter were so very close. She couldn't believe what was happening. Little Golden Bear braved her sorrow and was a precious joy to her father in his final days. As he lay dying of cancer, Uriah told his daughter he was glad he raised her on a ranch because in the coming years, she would need those skills to care for The Sacred White Buffalo. Cynthia was surprised and a bit skeptical of her father's words, thinking it might be a dying man's feverish dream. After all, she was familiar with the Sacred White Buffalo Prophecy, but the white bison itself was practically a mythical being. Had Uriah foreseen something in his daughter's future? Cynthia thought it strange, but her father's dying words stuck with her. Although initially skeptical, in the back of her mind she believed her father and wanted to be prepared. Cynthia always carries around an old dog-eared copy of the book: *Black Elk Speaks*. This book is one of the premiere psalms of modern Indian spirituality. She was honored with her copy by Black Elk's grandson Wallace. It is a book that has inspired and spoken to her. The wise words of Hehaskapa (Black Elk) would show her the way. Cynthia had to prepare. Maybe the Vision Quest Black Elk mentions in his book would be the best way for her to do so.

(Continue to Part IV)



Hehaskapa- Black Elk (left) Elk (right) - 1887

Part: IV A Vision Quest



Cascade Mountains Creative Commons

In the early 1990's, Cynthia decided to go through with a Vision Quest. This spiritual rite of passage is for those who wish to discover their personal power and life's path. It was a daring decision meant to deepen her traditional spiritual essence and prepare her for what was to come. Hollis Littlecreek, an Elder of the Creek Nation was living in Sedona then. He was teaching Cynthia traditional ways. She mentioned the Vision Quest to her mentor, and he agreed it would be useful. What Mr. Littlecreek didn't mention was the modern version of this spiritual sojourn had been pared down to a week or less. What Cynthia didn't mention was her intent to go on a traditional spiritual quest. She did so, unaware of the modern way. Cynthia isolated herself deep in the wilderness, dedicating a year of her life to solitary meditation.



Cynthia & Buddy
Courtesy of White Bison Association



Courtesy of Gretchen Del Rio

Cynthia Hart knew she must complete a Vision Quest in order to prepare for the challenges that lay ahead. For this purpose, she chose a cave in the Cascade Mountains, high above her friend Shane's property in Washington State. The Cascades are no joke. It's one of America's most lush and rugged ranges. This rainforest is loaded with wildlife of all description, including top predators who will eat human beings, especially during the harsh snow-bound months. Cynthia did not come unprepared. As companions on her vision quest, two Alaskan Tundra Wolves came along that she had raised from pups. These amazing snow-white wolves literally saved her life during this year long hiatus. This marvelous story was recently published (Feb. 2018). It is an intimate autobiography entitled: *The Light Within: My Journey Home to the White Buffalo*. This saga reveals sage insights for vision quest initiates as well as Cynthia's personal account of this profound spiritual experience. The book also gives us a look at her life since and a glimpse at what is in store for the future.

After her incredible quest in the Cascades, Cynthia ran across her former mentor Hollis Littlecreek back in Sedona. He was glad to see her and wondered where she had been hiding for so long? Cynthia told Littlecreek of her year long hiatus. She then discovered the modern Vision Quest could be completed in a week or less! They had a good laugh over that one. Her preparation was complete.

A Vision Comes to Life

In November of 2001, Cynthia and Charles Button crossed paths with the white bison. The Riley family had sired two white bison females on their Wyoming ranch. Cynthia heard about this and wanted to support the wellbeing of these amazing animals. She also wanted to fulfill the Riley's wish to bring their bison to a ranch near Flagstaff, Arizona. Cynthia organized a fundraiser in Sedona to do so. The fundraiser went well and the Riley's moved to Spirit Mountain Ranch outside Flagstaff. Cynthia and Charles visited the bison at the Flagstaff ranch soon afterwards. With his health failing, Jim Riley asked Cynthia and Charles to caretake his bison part-time while he recovered. Fate, synchronicity, divine providence or co-incidence, call it as you see it, her father's prophetic words filled Cynthia's eyes with tears of joy and her heart with warm recollections as she fed the white bison for the first time. Her father's vision was right on after-all.

The first white bison born into the Riley family was Miracle Moon, delivered on April 30th of 1997 at their ranch in Colony, Wyoming. Big Momma was the mother of Miracle Moon. They moved afterwards to the Dream Maker Ranch in South Dakota, located near to where White Buffalo Calf Woman appeared to the Teton tribes so long ago. In 2001, when the Riley's moved to a ranch outside Flagstaff, Arizona, they met up with Cynthia and Charles Button. A handful of calves with white bison DNA were born into the family there.



Courtesy of the White Bison Association

In 2008, Jim Riley passed on. His widow was disabled from a car crash and relinquished care and custody of the bison to Cynthia and Charles. They were now the sole guardians of the herd. Four years later, the new Guardians of the Sacred White Bison moved to a ranch outside of Bend, Oregon. As it turned out, this ranch didn't fit their needs. The herd was growing too. Where could they find a safe, hospitable place for their thriving bison family?

During Thanksgiving weekend of 2015, the Guardians of the Sacred White Bison moved to a historic ranch outside of Upper Lake, in Lake County, California. The intent was to make this special Northern Californian community a permanent sanctuary for the bison. However, circumstance intervened, sending Cynthia and Charles on another path. In late August of 2017, this dynamic couple and their mythical bison moved cross country to a lush 200-acre ranch in the Ohio Valley. The Guardians and their herd arrived safely in Ohio on August 27th of 2017. With her "second sight," Cynthia had seen wildfires coming to California and moved the herd just weeks before the Tubbs fire devoured parts of the City of Santa Rosa, and other fires threatened rural towns near her ranch. In August of 2018, the area immediately surrounding her former Lake County ranch burned in another wildfire. This monstrous inferno, known as the *Ranch Complex*, scorched a half million acres of forest land.

Ironically, Cynthia has come full circle, returning to Ohio where her journey began nearly four decades ago. A magnificent medicine wheel has been drawn in the earth across the heartland of North America by the Guardians of the Sacred White Bison. Aho!

*To keep informed about the White Bison, dates of community projects & spiritual workshops, or to make a tax-deductible contribution to help sustain the herd, go to: www.whitebisonassociation.com

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