

# INSPIRING ADVOCATES AT TLPI



## KEYNOTE address

By Gene Thin Elk

**KEYNOTE ADDRESS DURING THE NINTH ANNUAL JUSTICE FOR VICTIMS OF CRIME**



I greet all of you with a kind heart and all of you relatives that came here from all over this Turtle Island. We thank you for being here and even more so we thank you for taking that com-

mitment within yourself to be an advocate in one form or another to our relatives that need our help and that will be needing our help.

It is now 25 years since I began working in the grass roots with our people in the area of healing. When I look back I see it as a healing that was given to me by all the different people I had a chance to interact with. Over these past 25 years I have had a chance to interact with over 425 different tribes. I've had the opportunity to hear many different stories and I have also had the opportunity to call on the *Creator* in the name and the way that these people in the different areas call on the *Creator*. So I feel very blessed.

In that way I feel excited for you and the work that you are doing here and the work that you will be doing in the future. I think of this ninth gathering that you are having here and I remember when this organization first started out. There has been a lot that has been accomplished through out those years but there is still a lot that needs to be done. I want to thank the Agua Caliente tribal chairman Richard Milanovich for the welcome because it is an appropriate way of our indigenous people that we never go anyplace unless we are asked to come and then the people there welcome us. It feels good to be here and participate in all of the gifts that are being shared with me from this place and the people. Any time that you work with

Indigenous people you are going to feel someplace, somewhere, somehow that you are not just working with a group of people but pretty soon they become family.

Mr. Gillis, in

sharing his story, was very powerful because it bonded us in being able to put victims first and giving us the initiative and the internal commitment to be able to do the work that we are doing because of the love. We thank him for that and for the leadership. I Also we want to thank the Bird Singers. We are very grateful especially to see young people carry and articulate through the breath of the *Creator*, through the wind.

When I see young people like that singing and praying and coming up, I feel so strong because the thing that we are dealing with today in this space and time was brought about in another space and time. We are seeing the remnants or results of a concentrated, pre-meditated effort that was made upon our people. We are looking at the end results of genocide, the colonization, we are looking at what was done to about 60 or 90 million of our people being impacted by genocide.

When I think about that, I think how strong and beautiful a people that our ancestors are and were in their space and time and today. What did they have in them that

was so strong inside of them that no matter what came at them; diseases, war and abuses — still here we are — the fruits and dreams of our ancestors and we are strong. There is something that our people have that is so strong

that has caused us not to die and go away. What ever that is we call it by different names; *Wakan Tanka*, *Maheo*, *Miano*, this great mystery, this *Creator* that is inside of us today and I think that that is the first part that you are looking at when we take a look at the theme for this conference. Reviving our Sacred Legacy, each and every one of us has the strength of our ancestors inside of us. We have the genetic knowledge inside of us.

To be able to find that within ourselves I call it the sacred seventh direction. There are seven dimensions that the sacred creator made, the six dimensions are the four directions, father sky and mother earth, the human existence of the seventh dimension interacts with all of those dimensions and



makes relationships. It is through that that we can do the lighting the path of the future. When we look in and find that great resiliency strength within our self that our ancestors have and had and are sharing with us today, we will get the knowledge.

We heard this morning about the safety room where you have your medicines, the cedar, the sage, all of the different medicines that you have to help you and we have to be resilient and be aware enough to be able to include all of our relatives not just the human beings, but nature. That will make us stronger to be able to do the networking that we need to do today.

I know that 25 years ago when I started working with the Red Road I knew that the person who was hurting the most was one of the greatest teachers that was going to teach me. If I opened myself to the opportunity to serve, I knew that this person coming was a gift to remind me of where I may have been, where I could be and where I want to go. With that I am so honored in those 25 years to be blessed by so many. That is what you are going to be looking at as you are working here each one of you in your ways that you are working in your home areas, with your relatives. I am so grateful for you because you are bringing gifts and you are here together to refresh yourselves, revitalize yourself, to reconnect and get new ideas, maybe some new thoughts and new resources. You can take these gifts not for yourself, but take them and develop them and when you get home you will have a big giveaway so that the people can live.

The conference committee has done a lot of work and we really thank them and they came up with six areas that they really want to promote here. Number one is to put victims first. We are here for that purpose. Number two to promote healing. When we say healing we have to take a look at ourselves, we have to find that internal strength within ourselves. Number three we are here to

honor survivors. Fourth, we want to promote cooperation and networking. If you look around I think you are talking about federal agencies, state agencies, tribal government you are looking at churches, all coming together for the purpose of healing. As we make those connections with each other we are networking from the heart. Fifth, is building skills through technology and through all the modern ways to reach out to others and help each other. One is not greater than the other; diversity adds to the greater opportunities for healing and wellness. Sixth is to share promising practices I think that this is so important because unless something was empirically justified, empirically studied, and empirically documented it was just anecdotal.

In the middle of all of these we put the sacred, the great mystery, to have at the core of all of these and the opportunities that are being provided for us through the hard work of many people. I am really grateful for the opportunity to interact with all of you! Thank you!



*(Editor's Note: The preceding keynote address was spoken at the Office for Victim's of Crime (OVC) and Tribal Law and Policy Institute (TLPI) sponsored — 9<sup>th</sup> National Indian Nations Justice for Victims of Crime Conference: "Reviving our Sacred Legacy, Lighting the Path to our Future." Gene Thin Elk, Lakota, is a member of the Sicangu Nation and a believer in the Lakota way of life. He is a co-founder of the popular Red Road Approach to Holistic Healing, a therapeutic process which incorporates the modern medicine model of addressing diseases with traditional Lakota healing processes that address dis-ease of personhood and social structure.)*