



LAY YOUR HANDS ON ME

Part Canadian, part native Indian, Michael Higgins, or Rainbow Thunderbird to use his Indian name, is a natural born healer whose global travels frequently bring him to Warsaw. The *Insider* finds out more.

You're a healer! How did that start?

At college I took a BA in history, but I was like Van Wilder and it took me years to finish. I enjoyed that instant freedom too much. After studies I struggled for work, then one day in 2001 I had this amazing vision dream in which I was told by Cree Indians I would meet a medicine man and live off the land. Well, within months I met a Cree Indian, a sun dancer. Back in 1980 a group of elders had told him to expect me to knock on his

door and that he would hand down his knowledge. I was, he said, a natural born healer, so rather than teaching me how to be a healer, he taught me how to take care of myself as a healer. For seven years I was grandfather's – that's how I called him – fire keeper in his sweat lodge. He taught me the four sacred teachings of caring, sharing, kindness and truth.

So how did you end up in Poland?

When I finished my stint in the sweat lodge I wanted to spread my wings. Well, a friend of mine had been living in Poland since '91 and invited me over. I've been visiting regularly ever since and have built up a close circle of friends. I can never be rich healing, but I can travel!

Tell us about the process...

People approach me and protocol asks for tobacco and a gift – the only thing not accepted is alcohol. From my side, I need to feel they believe in me as a healer. The prayer ceremony typically lasts a minute or so, but I need about a week to prepare for it. I have to be clear and focused, as it's vital you say the right thing during the ceremony. Humility and respect are also key. I don't pray to the creator, but to the ancestors of the grandfathers. My prayer is then retained in the tobacco and after I'll usually go to a park and then bury it in the ground.

Sounds easy!

All sickness is the result of disharmony, an imbalance between mental, spiritual, emotional and physical wellbeing. My gift is to balance those bodies. I take the sickness, or rather the cause of the sickness, into my body, after which I'm rendered sick for several days. Every healing is different, but usually you're looking at 4-9 days to expel it, sometimes a moon cycle. Of the 400 healings I've been involved in, maybe 50-60 times I felt like I was going to die afterwards. The only time I've refused a healing was to a depressive; from experience, you don't want to be feeling suicidal for days. How do I recover? Sleep, sleep, sleep!

Skeptics might think it all sounds a little crazy...

I'm used to it, you learn to take it with a grain of salt. I respect modern medicine, but you have to recognize this is who I am and how I was born. After years of resisting and rebelling against it I embraced healing and it's turned into a good fit. I never asked to be a healer, I wanted to be a rock star!

What reaction do you get out here?

I was taught I'd never be accepted in my own country, and I actually get more respect in Poland than I do in Canada. Polish people are very spiritual and they respect the idea of a born healer. I've never had to advertise my services and it's all been through word of mouth. I've found it a great country to work in.

What's Warsaw's best secret?

It's churches. I walk into them and instantly feel I'm on holy ground. I'm happy to just sit and listen to the services – you see people of all ages, of course, mainly older ladies, but you can just feel the love and kindness in their hearts. You visit churches in other countries and the doors aren't even open!

PHOTOGRAPH BY ED WIGHT