



August FOCIS Newsletter

How these Native American Women Found the Strength to Heal Though Running:

“We’re Protecting each other.”



By: Elisa Tang



July 15, 2019

At 29, Sarah Agaton Howes weighed over 200 pounds and was told by doctors that she could be at risk for diabetes if she didn't adopt a healthier lifestyle.

She had also just lost her daughter.

"Part of you dies when you lose a child," Agaton Howes told "Good Morning America."

"I grew up watching sickness around me all the time, and that was where I was headed," she said.

But she found a way to save herself -- and others: running.

Never seeing and learning to believe

"I remember being at a 5K [run] at the [Fond du Lac] reservation [nine years ago] and, for me, it was probably the first 5K I ever ran," Howes told "GMA." "I walked up to the starting line and

there was a woman standing there, a Native woman, and she had running clothes on, and I [had] never seen a Native woman with running clothes."

The woman, Chally Topping, said Howes should run the upcoming half marathon with her. Howes didn't believe she could do it, until she saw her son and Topping at the finish line cheering for her when she completed the race.

"To me, that's the seed ... of imagining what we can be doing as Native women," Howes said.

The KwePack

Later, Agaton Howes, now 43 and a mother of two, created KwePack, a running group for women at Fond du Lac Reservation in Minnesota and the surrounding area, including the city of Duluth.

Nine other women from the reservation joined the group and now run together once a week.

They've all faced some form of personal challenge, be it grief, depression or addiction.

"[Running helped] us to see ourselves as strong, resilient people," member Alicia Kozlowski told "GMA."

"My mom got diagnosed with heart disease at a very young age, in her 40s, and I'm gonna be 37 years old this year, and it's a really scary thought to think that could be my future," Nashay Howes explained to "GMA." "I work really hard to maintain a healthy life and running allows me to do that."

"When you're running, you're forced to feel everything," Nichole Diver told "GMA." "Every twinge of physical pain, every discomfort -- and through that I've learned how to process all of the really uncomfortable emotions that I feel and deal with."

The motivation behind this running group became "much bigger than ourselves, Agaton Howes said.

Running to honor Native women

About 80 runners typically join the KwePack at various marathons and community events, but the group recently drew 125 people for an event devoted to the missing women in their communities for the National Day of Awareness for Missing and Murdered Indigenous Women. More than 5,700 American Indian and Alaska Native women were reported missing in 2016, according to the [National Crime Information Center](#). The same report showed that 96 of those cases were tied to broader issues such as domestic violence and sexual assault. The women said they had a tendency to feel unsafe running by themselves, but they said they feel safe with the KwePack.

"Part of running [in] a group is being safe," Diver told "GMA."

"When we are together and we are checking in with each other, then we're protecting each other," Amelia LeGarte said. "That's what we have to do as a community is to protect each other."

"If some person wants to rumble with us, they must really have a problem," Agaton Howes said.

Claiming space for Native American women

Through fundraising at its events, the KwePack has raised money to help other women afford running shoes, athletic attire and marathon fees.

The group spoke about the contrast of growing up wearing big shorts and T-shirts, and seeing other women wearing leggings and sports bras at gyms and within other running communities.

"You have a sense of you've been told your whole life you need to cover yourself up," Nashay Howes said. "I think you gotta find it in yourself to be able to put yourself in those clothes and it just becomes acceptable."

For these women, the most important thing is not that they have the right attire, but that they have a place in the running community at large.

"Something that has been so powerful for us about this group is we wait for each other at the finish line," Agaton Howes said. "And when we come across, we see each other and [that is not only important] for us and our children, but also for other people to see."

The women of KwePack also say that the reason they run is for their children, especially for their daughters.

"[It means a lot] to have my daughters asking me to go for a run and showing them just how strong females are. [It] has just created a space for me to be in and provide in," Katie Danielson said.

Eight years later, the group has grown from one woman's idea into one of the more well-known running groups in the Midwest.

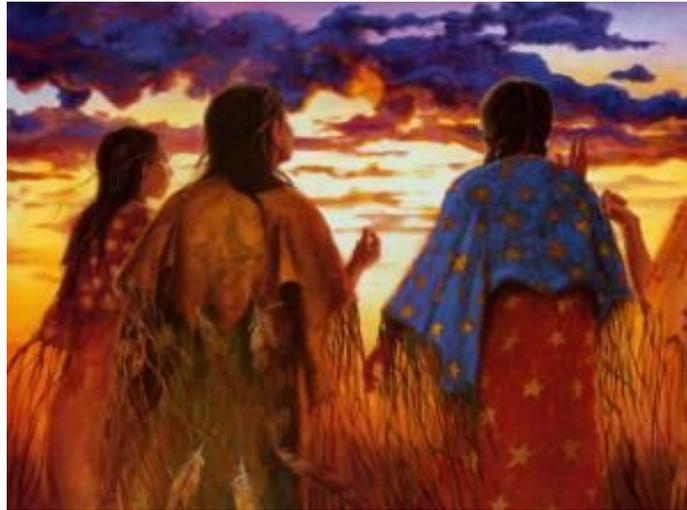
"Now, if you ask people in the running community -- the Native community or this region -- they know that Native women run," Agaton Howes said.

She said that she found her purpose through the KwePack.

"It's changed my life because what I've done with them," she added. "I would never have done [it] without them."

<https://www.goodmorningamerica.com/wellness/story/native-american-women-found-strength-heal-running-protecting-64279835>

THIS WEEK'S
TOP STORIES



STRATEGIES ABUSED WOMEN USE TO PROTECT THEIR CHILDREN

July 16, 2019

Trying to delay fights with the abuser until the children are asleep or out of the house.

Lying to the abuser to protect the children. (covering for children's mistakes that could lead to their being abused).

Getting the abuser mad to distract them from abusing the children.

Putting the children to bed early to avoid any late night eruptions.

Leaving them with relatives or babysitters often to keep them away from the abuser.

Enrolling them in activities to keep them out of the house and away from the abuser.

Being extremely cooperative and compliant ("putting up with abuse") to reduce their exposure to the abusers extreme reactions if she stands up for herself.

Punishing the children before and in a less severe way than the abuser would.

Physically or verbally intervening when the abuser is harming or threatening the children.

Saying nothing to the abuser when they are being abusive to the children. (this item applies if the abuser's style is one that retaliates against her by hurting the children more severely if she were to try and intervene).

Becoming an extremely strict parent to keep the children from upsetting the abuser.

Leaving the abuser for periods of time and then returning to the abuser after leaving them.

Trying to get friends or relatives to pressure the abuser about their behavior.

Trying to get the abusive party to stop drinking or doing drugs.

Making an exit strategy with the children in case of an extremely abusive episode.

<https://vawnet.org/material/battered-womens-protective-strategies>

He Never Hit Me

By: Reut Admit

October 17, 2014

How many times did I find myself on his bathroom floor cowering beneath him, feeling the hot spit land on me as he screamed?

Stop crying like a baby! You're crazy! No one else would put up with you!

How many times did I shudder on that floor counting my breaths, bringing myself back from the brink of suffocation during a panic attack that was triggered by one of these maniacal and regular assaults?

But he never hit me.

How many hours did I remain on that bathroom floor after he had gone to bed, my eyes red with burst blood vessels? How many times did I hear the sound of his snoring and realize he had fallen asleep, no more than a meter away, to the sound of me hyperventilating while still in the throes of that panic attack?

How many times did I whisper aloud, "How did I get here? How did I become this woman?" How many times did I tell myself to get up, call a cab and walk out the front door? How many times did I get up and look in that mirror and fail to recognize myself? How much hate I have for the broken woman staring back at me?

But he never hit me.

How many times did I crawl into bed, rather than into a cab, and wake up with his arms around me, telling me that I brought it out in him? *He wasn't like this. I made him like this. I needed to change the way I approached him about these things. Be less accusatory. If I just softened my approach, it would allow him to react differently.* How many times did I adjust my approach before I realized the only way to avoid the abuse was not to bring it up at all?

But he never hit me.

How many emails and text messages did I find? How many parties did we attend knowing that one of the women was there? I learned quickly not to address it so that "I" wouldn't ruin a perfectly nice evening.

When his family member asked me if a lipstick she had found under the couch was mine, I threw it away and said nothing more of it. Neither did she. Another humiliation taken in silence.

But he never hit me.

How many times did he tell me he was going to sleep, out for dinner with a client, couldn't hear his phone, but actually taking out another woman? How many times did he ignore my calls and call the next morning telling me nothing had happened? It was sadistic. I could see how much he enjoyed being that powerful.

How many defamatory lies did he concoct and propagate to my old colleagues and friends when I walked away from him? How many times did he smear my reputation? How many times did I go back, believing every promise that he was a new man, believing every half-hearted apology?

But he never hit me.

How many times did a friend pick me up because he had kicked me out of bed in the middle of the night for questioning him about one of the women? How many times did I go back before those friends had had enough. How many times did I defend him and justify his behavior when I told a friend about what he had done?

When did I stop telling anyone altogether to avoid the shame of the insanity of the circumstances I was somehow in the shame of being a strong independent woman who couldn't take care of herself enough to leave a situation that was so toxic? When did I stop expecting more?

But he never hit me.

How could I explain to someone that I believed it was partly my fault, even though I was embarrassed to hear those beaten woman's words spoken from my lips. *No one really understood. No one knew him like I did. It was my job to protect him from the truth of what he did to me. I couldn't let them think he was a monster. I wouldn't tell anyone.* I was entirely alone.

But he never hit me.

My solitude meant that I could no longer see the reflection in other people's eyes indicating what was normal. I could only see the reflection in his eyes and began to believe what he told me about myself. I began to believe his irrational explanations despite my own heart and eyes. I let him define reality.

I became isolated. It became easier to cut off my support networks completely than to have to lie about everything. Than to face the humiliation of my reality. A part of me knew that once they knew the extent of what was happening, they would force me to get out for good. I wouldn't be able to go back. I knew I would always need to even in the worst of times..

But he never hit me.

I set a benchmark. The red line I wouldn't cross. The minute he hit me, I would leave. But the truth is, I know I wouldn't have left then either. I would have rationalized that in hitting me, he would realize how out of hand things were. Everything would change now.

I wouldn't have left. By hurting me, he showed me he loved me. He cared enough to go that crazy. He cared so much that he was overwhelmed by anger or jealousy or sadness and simply couldn't control himself.

When it was over, I wasn't permitted to mourn him. No one could understand how love, hate, fear and comfort could coexist simultaneously. They could not understand that in addition to my abuser, I also lost my confidant, the person to make dinner with, the person to watch movies with on a rainy Sunday, the

He Never Hit Me Cont.

person to laugh with, the person who knew me. I lost my companion. How can you explain to someone that the abuse was only a part of who he was? How do you explain that to yourself?

There are still days when I remember tender moments and wonder if it really was that bad. I still struggle with reconciling how he could love me to the point of tears and yet hurt me as if I was an enemy. Like a child, I'm learning to redefine the borders of normal behavior and to realign my expectations. I remind myself that acts of violence can never be acts of love.

For the first time, I see my own reflection in other women who have emerged from the depths of such darkness. Indescribably courageous women whom I have never met, but who have shared their stories and in doing so, saved me.

These women embraced me with their pain and unknowingly convinced me that I was not alone, that I am worthy of more. I hadn't believed that singular truth in a very long time.

Knowing that others were there has allowed the shame to dissipate. I used to default to the trained belief that I was crazy, overly sensitive or had imagined it all because I could not reconcile the love and the abuse.

I have permitted myself to accept that both existed. Their stories have allowed me to forgive myself. To recognize how arbitrary that red line was. Seeing myself in their eyes has allowed me to name my abuser. To name my experience as an abused woman. And then to let go.

I pray now that my words will travel to the broken woman staring back at them and embrace her. I hope they equip her with the strength and love she needs to raise herself from the depths.

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https://www.huffpost.com/entry/he-never-hit-me-domestic-abuse_b_5974386

Play with a Poem



By: Julis Meinl

Tonight, a new life begins
I am turning over a new leaf
Giving myself a new chance
I want to feel joy in my life
I just need some hope for better days
A miracle to push me forward
To believe in trust and faith
And for someone to take my hand
Look me in the eyes and say
The glint in your eyes is for no one to take away
Believe me and shed those heavy tears
Life is like a beautiful melody
Just be careful to whom you will allow to play with you



Happenings

Fatherhood is Sacred Motherhood is Sacred Parenting Group

Parenting Certificate Program
Contact Kayla @ 532-6181

FOCIS Women's Support & Craft Group

Native American Women's Support Group
Thursday afternoons from 3:00pm to 5:00pm
For info call Kayla @ 532-6181

Leadership and Life skills Teen Group

Open to all, ages 12-18 years old.
For more information call
Andrie or Anthony, 532-6181

HISTORY KEEPERS

Elders Group, 55 and older. Monday 1-2pm
For more information or to attend
Contact Ashley Weiss, 532-6181

White Bison Group

Wellbriety Movement
Intensive Outpatient Program
6 week group
Wellbriety- Medicine Wheel and 12 Step Program
Individuals 18 & older - Must be a registered
FRTH patient
To register please call Cathi Garrity 532-6181

LOCAL DV SERVICES

FOCIS PROGRAM SERVICES

Advocacy Services, Restraining Order assistance, court accompaniment,
Community education and in-service training, Crisis intervention services,
Resource information & referral service.
Feather River Tribal Health 530-534-5394 ext. 270

Catalyst DV Services

24-hour hotline for DV intervention & referrals,
Emergency Shelter, Children's
Program at HAVEN, Transitional Housing & Household establishment
Drop-in centers, Individual counseling, Support groups,
Restraining Order assistance & Court Accompaniment, Community Outreach.
24-Hour Hotline 800-895-8476 Oroville Drop-in Center
530-532-6427

SHARP (Self Help and Referral Program)

Self Help center that provides general assistance to people who do not have attorneys. Assistance is provided in the areas of family law, guardianships, evictions, small claims, name changes, and restraining orders.
1675 Montgomery Street Oroville, 530-532-7015

FOCIS Staff

Tarrah Egan BHS Director
Mark Kroll FOCIS Community Rep. Kayla Eley FOCIS Community Rep.



Feather River Tribal Health Inc.

