

A Body at Rest Stays at Rest a Body in Motion Stays in Motion

The sun shone down on the third day of my Xoqi't Chiswal (Woman's Ceremony). As I left my sanctuary, my face covered by a blanket to veil me; I came to a circle of women. Lifting my blind, I recognized these strong and intelligent women, all of them who are pillars of strength who have impacted my life. My auntie with her humor was there with my supportive English teacher. Across from her was my stepmother with her caring nature, next to my Grandmother, the knowledgeable matriarch of my family, who was looking after me. Last but not least, my mother was there: the Medicine Woman who gives part of her soul for these ceremonial dances. These women came to support me in my Xoqi't Chiswal and vowed to support me throughout my life.

This past year has been the most personally difficult one of my life because of abuse. I won't go into sordid detail here, but it illustrated to me the importance of having a strong support system. These women have kept me upright. Because of their knowledge and reinforcement, I inherited part of their strength--bringing me to the following question: How do people handle their personal crises without a support system?

Hoopa, California, the reservation where we live, is in the throes of the poverty cycle. There are those with the potential to accomplish great things in life, yet they get caught up in the various abuses present. According to the Center for Disease Control, the rate of alcoholism among Natives is six times higher than that of the US average which stands at 12.6% (Ghosh). Our community suffers similarly. I want Hoopa to shine to its fullest potential, but we need to first address the impacts of drugs, alcohol, violence, and abuse to an individual's health and well-being. As my English teacher says, "You can't pour from an empty cup."

Participating in the youth training track at the Warrior Institute, a local non-profit organization that focuses on improving mental health, physical fitness, youth leadership opportunities, and knowledge of traditional tribal values is one way our youth can begin the process of filling their cups. All you have to do is show up.

Warrior Institute has become my passion; it helps me to feel like I have a place where I belong when it feels like I am out of control. I recruit other youth to participate with the mantras, “A healthy body is the base for a healthy mind.” Warrior Institute provides a positive base for youth who need reminding of the positives in their lives. From the minute they cross the threshold into the gym it supports them to be clean and sober. The more they involve themselves, the greater exposure to a healthy lifestyle they receive, from healthy food choices, to counseling, to positive outdoor and cultural activities--all this leading toward healing.

Self-esteem is the key to healing. According to a study about self-esteem and Native American cultural identity, students who identify themselves as American Indian by participating “in practices, traditions, and spiritual beliefs resonant with tribal culture” have higher self-esteem and are less likely to be lured into the cycle of apathy that encompasses their community” (Whitesell). Furthermore, the study goes on to say that “re-emphasis on involvement with American Indian culture might provide a variety of resources – clear cultural values, sense of community, validation of self, etc. – that would enhance school success” (Whitesell). Self-esteem is a drumbeat throbbing throughout all areas of our lives--keeping us moving toward a healthy life. Knowing one’s full potential and achieving it are key goals of Warrior Institute.

Without Warrior Institute, I would not have been able to "get away" from the negativity surrounding me. Young men cannot learn traditional ways through ceremonies if they do not stay

clean and sober. Young women will not participate in ceremonies if they're experiencing PTSD. They are not living the tenets of our culture. Warrior Institute teaches traditional ways, how to be healthy physically, emotionally, and spiritually. Joseph Marshall, the founder, says, "We must look to our past for answers, our ancient practices mixed with modern science will help us navigate through..." Crossfit workouts help youth learn to push through challenges and reach the goals of having balance in life. Most importantly, no one does it alone. We workout together and support each other.

In addition, Warrior Institute provides youth opportunities to be a part of overnight rafting trips, hikes, cultural internship opportunities, farming experience, ballet, counseling, diet consultation, youth leadership, and ceremonial participation. Another aspect is an annual cultural exchange. Participants meet other Native youth and our support system becomes even larger. Everyone understands what it means to be a Native struggling with historical trauma--trauma that doesn't feel "historical," but more like it happened this morning.

A body at rest stays at rest; a body in motion stays in motion. Since Warrior Institute has increased my stamina, strength, and energy level, I have involved myself with other Warrior Institutees in a run that raises awareness about the impact that the diversion of water from the rivers has on the salmon that are native to the Trinity and Klamath Rivers. This run has been put on every year by students since the Klamath River's fish kill in 2002, and the eight schools that are a part of the Klamath-Trinity Joint Unified School District participate by raising awareness in the "Salmon Run." Warrior Institute's participants are key people in this event, giving back and have a positive impact on our community.

Involvement through the cultural exchange, and my volunteer work at Warrior Institute has helped me, and others, to become better Tribal youth leaders and water rights activists. Two summers ago, it culminated in our participation in a cultural demonstration at the Trinity Dam near the fish hatchery. We were protesting the Bureau of Reclamation's decision to take water from the Trinity and ship it south to the almond growers. Water is our life, and everything we do involves water. This demonstration resulted in the BOR giving us a pulse flow at a key time in the Coho Salmon life cycle during a historic drought in California.

If it weren't for Warrior Institute, I wouldn't have received healing and specific knowledge to help fix our community. A challenge for our Native youth then is how to keep this support network going. Forging new generations of young leaders with strong minds, bodies, and spirits empowered to create health, economic equality, and environmental justice for our community is one way to achieve this goal. Another goal to keep the momentum going would be to create indigenous leaders who are grounded in the past and present, who can implement solutions for the next seven generations, and lead our tribal communities to be in balance with the world, sustainable, healthy, happy, and loving. These new leaders would serve as models for people of all cultures; they would be stepping stones for a "world renewal." Creating the momentum to keep this support network for the next generation is the challenge for Warrior Institute; it is my challenge.

(1186 words)

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