
Mending the Sacred Hoop

Volume 2, Issue 3

April 2000

Peacekeepers

Tribal leaders form Coalition to prevent domestic violence

By Mary Wahpepah

In response to growing instances of domestic violence among Native American communities, more than thirty representatives of Oklahoma tribal government and law enforcement agencies met Thursday in Shawnee to address the problem.

With the assistance of the U.S. Department of Justice and the Minnesota based Mending the Sacred Hoop Technical Assistance Project, the group formed a Coalition aimed at preventing domestic violence and sexual assault.

Representatives of the Chickasaw, Choctaw, Tonkawa, Apache, Osage, citizen Potawatomi, Sac and Fox, Creek, Muskogee Creek, Cheyenne and Arapaho, Ponka and Quapaw tribes develop a mission statement during the morning session of the meeting, held at the Sac and Fox multipurpose facility, pledging to provide education about domestic violence and advocacy for

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The Journey of the Sacred Hoop

By Richard Simonelli

The Journey of the Sacred Hoop across America is about to begin. From April 2, until July 10 of 2000, a Hoop of 100 Eagle Feathers will be carried from Los Angeles, California to Washington, DC on a Walk dedicated to bring healing from drug and alcohol abuse and an ending to domestic violence in American Indian and Alaska Native communities everywhere. But the additions and domestic violence epidemic we live with is not confined to Native America. All four directions or ethnicities—the Red, the Yellow, the Black and the White—are cordially invited to make the walk with us and to share in the conferences and other wellness events along the way.

A Journey of 3800 miles begins with a single step. That step will be taken on Sunday, April 2 at the Southwestern Museum in Los Angeles after an opening ceremony and Blessing featuring wellness advocate and actor Danny Glover, Native American Elders, and ceremonial support from local California Indian tribes. Walkers based in California will then carry the Hoop across the desert to Blythe, California where their counterparts from Arizona will meet the caravan. In the manner of a sacred relay, the Hoop will pass through some 10 states and become the centerpiece at eleven wellbriety conferences between Phoenix, Arizona and Washington, DC.

The Sacred Hoop

What about the 100 Eagle Feather Hoop that is such a powerful rallying point for this historic walk? In 1994 an Indian man had a vision. In his visionary experience, he saw a small willow tree shed its leaves and form itself into a circle of about four feet in diameter. As the vision continued, he saw the feathers from both Golden and Bald eagles fly through the air and arrive at the willow hoop. One by one the feathers attached themselves to the hoop until a total of 100 feathers were fastened around the circumference of the willow. As the days and weeks passed after his vision, he understood that he was to facilitate the construction of such a hoop inside a sacred American Indian purification, or sweat lodge.

After speaking about his vision with elders in order to understand its significance, word went out on the "moccasin telegraph" that eagle feathers were needed. One by one, they began to arrive from Native peoples from around North America and even from around the world. The visionary Hoop became a reality.

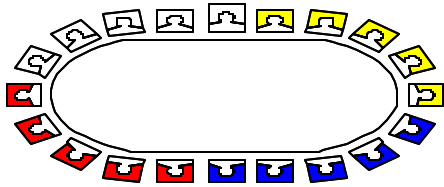
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victims of domestic violence.

Each of the tribes has a domestic violence prevention program in place.

"At the workshops and conferences we had attended, the information was geared toward (Native Americans who live on) reservations," said Rosalie Grothaus, domestic violence program coordinator for the Sac and Fox nation. "We decided to form a coalition because we (Oklahoma tribes) have very different cultures in different needs."



"Domestic violence affects the children and the family unit," she continued. "Sometimes the victims go back to the same situation because they feel 'no one is here to help me.'"

Domestic violence is on the rise in Native American communities, Grothaus added, and tribal housing authorities plan to target their residents to prevent abuse and neglect.

Attending the meeting were tribal housing authority officials, law enforcement personnel from tribal and state agencies, tribal attorneys, and domestic violence prevention organizations.

Later, they discussed how advocates, law enforcement authorities and criminal justice officials could cooperate in order to better serve victims of domestic violence.

Priorities include keeping victims, advocates, law enforcement and criminal justice personnel informed of the changes in federal and state laws regarding domestic violence; providing training, including counseling and first-aid, for those who work with domestic violence victims; and working in close cooperation with non-Native American law enforcement and criminal justice officials.

Rose Mary Shaw of the Osage nation coordinated the afternoon discussion along with fellow panel members Sarah Deer, program manager for the U.S. Department of Justice's Violence Against Woman Office, and Eileen Hudon, Mending the Sacred Hoop Technical Assistance Project, or MSH-TA, Coordinator.

Deer Became Involved with the Coalition since her office

assist Oklahoma tribal domestic violence programs. "I'm very impressed with the Coalition," she said. She will act as a federal contact in Washington, D.C., and provide information regarding legal issues.

"This isn't going to be a federal coalition, but grassroots," she noted.

"Mainstream society can learn a lot from the Native American community," she continued. "They have a strong tradition of protecting women, and I hope we can get back to that."

Hudon's organization will provide the coalition with technical assistance and support.

"We have a goal of regional development in seven tribal regions, which are Oklahoma, Alaska, California, the Northwest, the Southwest, the Plains and the East," she said.

"The reason we chose Oklahoma has a region is because of the unique circumstances the tribes deal with, and the numbers of tribes in the state."

Hudon, herself a domestic violence survivor, said she was motivated to help fellow survivors based on her experience. She co-founded the first Native American women's shelter in Minnesota, and has helped domestic violence survivors since 1982.



"We'll provide funding in the upcoming year for the coalition's statewide conference, and help pay for training," she explained. "The tribes will determine the agenda and select the trainers."

Hudon was assisted by her son, Jeremy NeVilles-Sorell, MSH-TA's communications coordinator.

The coalition has tentatively scheduled the statewide conference in mid-August.

This article was originally published in The Shawnee News-Star, Saturday, Feb. 26, 2000. You may respond to the author of this article at the Shawnee News-Star by e-mail: wahpepah@news-star.com

CALENDAR OF EVENTS

FACILITATORS AS ADVOCATES: AN ADVANCED TRAINING ON FACILITATING MEN'S RE-EDUCATION CLASSES

HOLIDAY INN RUSHMORE PLAZA HOTEL & CONFERENCE CENTER, RAPID CITY, SD

MAY 8 – 10, 2000

Have you ever struggled or wondered if you responded appropriately to an outrageous remark from a guy in your class? This experiential workshop encourages participants to bring questions, struggles and concerns to discuss at this advanced training designed for facilitators with limited and/or lots of experience conducting men's re-education classes. The workshop defines facilitators as advocates and stresses the use of paper and other processes that will enhance women's safety. For more information contact Sacred Circle at 877-RED-ROAD.

CONNECTIONS: CHEMICAL DEPENDENCY AND BATTERING

HOLIDAY INN RUSHMORE PLAZA HOTEL & CONFERENCE CENTER, RAPID CITY, SD

MAY 8 – 10, 2000

This workshop is designed for domestic violence advocates and chemical dependency counselors to provide a shared understanding of the connections between chemical dependency and battering. The goals of the workshop are to strengthen the working relationship between advocates and counselors and to ensure an appropriate and safe response to Native Women who are battered and chemically dependant. For more information contact Sacred Circle at 877-RED-ROAD.

NIN GIKENOO AMADIMIN (WE TEACH EACH OTHER) - IN OUR BEST INTEREST

BEST WESTERN CHARLESTON INTERNATIONAL AIRPORT HOTEL, CHARLESTON, NC

JUNE 26 – 28, 2000

This training sponsored by MSH-TA based on the In Our Best Interest support group and advocacy training for women. Room reservations can be made by calling the Best Western Charleston Hotel at 843-572-2200. This training is for women only, for more info contact MSH-TA at 888-305-1650.

The 100 Eagle Feather Hoop is the vision and inspiration of Don Coyhis, Mohican Nation, who was raised on the Stockbridge-Munsee Indian Reservation in Wisconsin. Coyhis is also the Founder and President of White Bison, Inc., an American Indian non-profit organization of Colorado Springs, Colorado. White Bison is the hosting or facilitating organization for the Journey of the Sacred Hoop Walk. White Bison has been facilitating programs of sobriety, recovery and community healing and change in both native and non-native communities in the US and Canada since 1988. Coyhis will be participating on some of the Walk.

In 1995 a gathering of indigenous elders from all four directions took place in Janesville, Wisconsin. At an empowerment ceremony during the gathering, the elders placed the following four gifts into the new Sacred Hoop: 1) The power of healing individuals, families, communities and nations; 2) The power to instill hope into all who spend time in sincerity at the Hoop; 3) The power to create unity among people and activities inspired by the Hoop; and 4) The powers to forgive the unforgivable.

Since 1995 the White Bison 100 Eagle feather Hoop has been brought to hundreds of native and non-native communities in the US and Canada so that individuals of all ages might pray in their own ways in the presence of the Hoop. Now the Hoop is about to pass through hundreds of native and non-native communities as it wends its way on the Journey of the Sacred Hoop Healing Walk.

The Conferences

The Journey of the Sacred Hoop is like a traveling university. In addition to hosting hoop ceremonies and feasts along the route of the Walk, eleven communities will be sited for special educational conferences. Here is a glimpse at the conferences: ALCOHOL AND DRUGS, DOMESTIC VIOLENCE AND PREVENTION, FATHERHOOD, BOARDING SCHOOLS, NATIVE YOUTH SUICIDE AND FETAL ALCOHOL SYNDROME, LOST CHILDREN OF ALCOHOLICS, HONORING THE WOMEN OF THE FOUR DIRECTIONS, NATIVE LEADERSHIP, STRENGTHENING OUR FAMILIES,

Come Join the Walk!

The Journey of the Sacred Hoop across America is a gesture of Healing, Hope, Unity and Forgiveness for native peoples and for North America at large. It is said that the longest road that we will ever walk is the 18 inches between the head and the heart. Join the Journey of the Sacred Hoop for diversity, unity, inclusion, and the healing of our communities.

We need your support of the Walk with donations of money, resources or participation. Contact Laura Hom at White Bison, toll-free at (877) 871-1495 to make contact and to find your place in the Walk. E mail us at <info@whitebison.org> to communicate. And keep watching the website at www.whitebison.org for news of the Walk and latest updates.

Invisible War Zombies

Post Traumatic Stress Disorder in Domestic Abuse: Passages to Healing Part Three

By Di Murowski.

Domestic violence is not like a plane crash or a war. After an incident there will be no staging a psychological debriefing for you. You sit there in shock after your partner has physically hurt you or your emotional well-being has been smashed like a bug. Your body, your emotional, and spiritual self has been destroyed by your mate. You are in massive emotional pain and there is no one willing to help you. At the hospital you are ashamed, the police do not believe you, everyone looks at your shattered ego or your broken bones and just shake their head. "Her fault," they ramble on, "why don't you leave?" No one asks a plane crash patient "why did you get on the plane?" and "don't you know that they crash at times?" But you are the victim of a world of misinformation on the subject of domestic violence. So you wander around life feeling like the invisible war zombie, and daily you put on your mask of the happy woman, at least it does look good...but no one cares, do they?

Unfortunately there is wide evidence that the medical profession, therapist, pastors, social workers, police departments and the world at large do not understand posttraumatic stress in domestic violence. There is a belief that you will get over it soon and be back to normal with in a very short time. A still common attitude that domestic violence and its many experiences are not that traumatic and difficult, so it can be dealt with by not letting it get to you. "So hold your head up and carry on with life," and the attitude to "just forget it and move on." Fact is, we never forget those experiences that are so intensely disturbing, at times horrifying, that are so painful, and these feeling do not go away. They become apart of our experiences of life and can result in many upsetting and frightening symptoms, especially when we have buried and denied such horrid experiences. All these feelings and emotions become buried in our brain, waiting for the opportunity to come out, and will affect every other area of our world. Symptoms that are experienced years ago can show up and can become extremely upsetting. There may be a fear of going crazy, or losing control of your life. This will lead to avoidance and isolation. The brain and body copes with unacceptable.

One of the most popular ways of coping with domestic violence is through the denial processing. This denial can lead to thinking that the violence has not happened, or it was

not that bad, which leads to a totally high toleration for unacceptable behavior. Most women in violent situation will pride themselves on patience and forgiveness, in full denial of the abusive behavior of the person whom they love.

There is a belief that Post Traumatic Stress Disorder (PTSD) is a short-term problem. It soon will go away if you are determined not to complain and be upset about your problem and just get on with your relationship or life - toward better days. Unfortunately you do not get over PTSD, you only go into it. Then you will either stay in it or move through it and heal.

We need to be allowed to express our pain no matter how difficult or upsetting it may be. We begin then to cope, learn to take care of ourselves, and make a new life for ourselves.

The pain needs to be moved through, not forgotten nor pushed away. You will find the pain is locked deep inside. This pain will eat away at you like a cancer, which will prevent you from healing. When we come to terms with our personal domestic violence, we will learn that even at its worst moments it cannot destroy us that we have survived and can move on.

This pain caused by domestic abuse will not disappear. The feelings are still inside, but time and healing indicates that we do care about what has happen and the injustice done to us. Hopefully a new sense of well-being comes and we learn how to be apart of life again. Women can come from being victims of domestic violence as more capable, stronger and self-assured people.

CHAPTER TWO: INVISIBLE ZOMBIE BECOMES VISIBLE

The stages of healing need to be walked through in domestic violence. As one can get stuck in any stage, a therapist can help the movement start again. What are the stages of healing in PTSD?

The first stage is denial. The thinking that it has not happened at all - that "my mate is not violent" or perhaps "I did something wrong to provoke it". There is denial to the fact that he is violent and abusive; that he is just stressed, tired, drinks too much, has childhood problems, gets angry easily, or he did not mean it.

The next stage is grief work, when we open ourselves to learning that we had a mate that wanted to hurt us, a mate who was not capable of real love. We have a terrible sense of sadness and of lost dreams. Sometimes you feel you cannot stop crying. It goes on and on. I always remarked that I cried a river of tears and the ocean is full of my sadness. Crying is

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a natural way of relief of tension, pain or sadness.

Anger can be very upsetting especially if you think it is wrong and should not be expressed. Anger needs to be felt completely. Of course there are healthy expressions of anger. One method is called expressing and releasing, which is beating on a pillow to release and allow the expression of anger. Another expression is screaming in safe places such as into your pillow, in a car while in movement, underwater, or in a place where no one will get distressed at your cry of anguish.

The next stage is of blame and regret. We want to know the "whys?" There is the question of meaning and purpose. The "why did this happen me?" is a natural part of the process. Blame can be directed at anyone and everyone. In domestic violence it can be wide spread. This is at the police for not being able to help; the system and its injustice; at God, who is the blame for everything (Why would a loving God put such an evil man in my life?); at our parents who did not teach us to protect ourselves, that they did not teach us right; at a society that does not protect women; and at ourselves for getting involved with a man who does not respect us as a human being. "Why did it happen?" comes with the cry of despair, pain, and a depth of anger.

Next comes the longing for a real life - of a good man, a good marriage, and a safe home. We go over memories, trying to remember so as to relieve the pain. A mad search for any crumbs of love that were thrown our way - a search of reason. There cannot be a substitute for us when there is a void of true love and when so much hate was directed toward us. We look for solutions that will ease our burden of having a bad and hateful partner. The deep ache of never being loved the way we truly desired.

Anxiety and fear - it is normal to be afraid that same thing will happen again. Fear does not simply disappear once it is experience in such trauma. Fear feels dark, like horrid nightmares were the killer hovers, waiting to engulf us and cut us up. We cannot hide from these fears; they become a part of us. Anxiety emerges as confusion or panic. With questions like: What if it happens again? How can I go on? Will I ever be normal again? Am I going crazy? What do I do with this fear? But all these reactions are normal. Anger, blame, guilt, bitterness, regrets, searching, anxiety and fear are natural reactions to domestic violence and all that you have been through.

A descent into depression, which includes helplessness, loneliness, isolation, loss of self, and lost of hope and direction may come next. Feelings that will go toward,

"There was a time I believe in myself, today I feel no one cares. How could the world I live in allow this to happen? I feel terrible and so alone, and lonely, so just hide in my home. I just want to be away from everyone, so no one can hurt me again. I wonder why bother, what does it all matter, if we live in such a cruel world? If there is a God and he does these kinds of things then I don't want any part of him. It feels like my entire world is falling apart and that life is a waste of time."

Loneliness is another stage. The trauma of domestic violence requires a great deal of time and effort due to lost and burnt energy. But dealing with others can be too much! It is important to regain a sense of dignity and of one self. Those others, due to misinformation show a general reluctance to accept domestic violence as a criminal act against ones mate, compounding our pain, and deepen our sense of being totally alone. We need to remove ourselves at times to heal and rest. Rest and relaxation is a must to heal, to be away from the noise and others.

Healing is to move through a mass of deeply upsetting emotions and feelings. Finding a renewed sense of living, finding new interest, new friends and new hope. Seeing the good as well as accepting the painful fact being victims of domestic violence is a part of our life experience. Feelings do surface, but we know they are normal and cannot hurt the self that we are today. So we continue on with our new world that we have created. Emotional support at this time is a very helpful and growing experience. It is good to get into groups that support healing from the inside out. When we take off our happy-face mask and understand that our pain has become our strength, when the invisible zombie no longer walks the earth, a new visible self is born. Life then heals from PTSD as our experience is just one of life's experiences that we had to deal with.

This article may be used for public distribution...in order to help those in need. * Passage to Healing Part One: The Slide to the Bottom and how did this happen to me. Passage to Healing Part Two: Healing Check list is available. This article on PTSD was based on the fact that 97% of all Domestic Abuse Cases are Women.

* This statement is the written consent of the author. Mending the Sacred Hoop Technical Assistance Project received the Passages to Healing article from Minnesota Indian Women's Resource Center. Views expressed in the article are those of the author and do not necessarily represent those of MSH-TA, US DOJ, OJP, or VAWO.

Mending the Sacred Hoop Newsletter April 2000 Technical Assistance Project

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