



Rosemary Nelson is a member of the Astariwi Band of Pit River Indians. She has served on the Tribal Leaders Diabetes Committee (TLDC) for four and a half years as an Alternate representing the California Area.

CALIFORNIA AREA ALTERNATE TRIBAL LEADERS DIABETES COMMITTEE

Meet Rosemary Nelson: Bringing Attention to Intergenerational Grief and Trauma

At a recent meeting of members of the TLDC, Rosemary Nelson spoke passionately about intergenerational grief and trauma. She has seen her family and community members struggle to overcome the injustice and sadness that have been passed on through generations.

Rosemary says what has happened to Native people, from 300 years ago up to the present, has had a tremendous effect on individuals, families, and communities. When a Native person is having a “difficult life,” he or she might not even think some of the reasons for it could have originated long ago. “The loss of language,

traditions, and family was and is so huge. How can we understand that?” asks Rosemary.

To help non-Native and Native people understand the horrific effect of these losses, Rosemary asks them, “Imagine that someone takes away your holidays and traditions. You can no longer celebrate Christmas, Easter, or Thanksgiving. Imagine someone telling you if you speak your own language, you will be punished. Further, imagine someone taking your home away and making you move to a barren piece of land.” She asks people to imagine what kind of mothers, fathers, or children they would be if these things happened to them.

Rosemary believes there is a strong connection between intergenerational trauma/grief and diabetes.

At the TLDC meeting, Dr. Ann Bullock (Chippewa), who has researched the topic extensively, explained that grief and trauma do increase susceptibility to diabetes and other diseases. "If stress and trauma, both past and present, lead to diabetes, there is little wonder there is a diabetes epidemic surging through Indian country."

While this may seem like an insurmountable challenge, it can also be viewed in a positive way. Dr. Bullock's findings show that a person's spiritual and emotional wellness are the starting point to avoid and manage diseases. In other words, putting effort into being happy and peaceful is just as important as working out on a treadmill.

Rosemary believes this. She has battled pancreatic cancer and has diabetes. To keep the cancer in remission and to better manage her diabetes,

Beauty Comes From Beautiful Actions

Rosemary Nelson greatly admires the people who appear in this special weight-loss and fitness edition of Health for Native Life. She says: "I have absolutely struggled with my weight during my life. But as I've gotten older, I've become more comfortable in my own skin. What I've learned is that beauty exudes from the inner person. It's not external. Beauty is what you do with your life, what you leave behind as your legacy. The media has projected beauty in a very narrow way—skinny and tall. Yes, sometimes I think, 'I should lose weight.' But, I'm happy to be here, and I'm happy to serve."

Rosemary works on having a positive attitude. She says, "I am happy with my life."

She shares her ways to become happy. "First you need to get out of denial. And to do that, you need support from family, friends, and community. You need spirituality. You need to listen to the wind blowing through the trees. When I do this, my spirit is filled, and that is peace and wellness."

Even with this positive attitude, there are times Rosemary struggles. When

this happens, she thinks of her father, Erin Forrest. "He suffered from grief and trauma at Fort Bidwell Boarding School, but he turned his hurt and anger into something positive," she explains. Her father worked tirelessly for social reform for Indian people, both at the local and national levels.

Rosemary is carrying on her father's legacy, in part, by being a member of the TLDC. "Certainly, I represent my area on the TLDC. But I'm one of many people across the U.S. working to heal Native people from intergenerational grief and trauma and prevent diseases like diabetes. I want to help not only my tribal people and my area, but all Native people across the U.S. To raise the spirit of our Native people is a privilege," she says.



Rosemary spoke with Robert McSwain, IHS Director, at a TLDC meeting in Washington, D.C.