

WEAR PURPLE SHOES

My Secret Key to
Living Well with Diabetes

“ My phone rings, and
I don't answer. My fingernails
and toenails are painted.
I'm wearing purple sandals.
I wonder what my mother
would say if she saw me. ”

It's a warm summer day, smack dab in the middle of pow-wow season. A dozen years ago I would have been running around, making pow-wow outfits and casserole dishes. Today I sit in the coolness of my front porch, alone, contemplating a willow basket. My phone rings and I don't answer. My fingernails and toenails are painted. I'm wearing purple sandals and a crepe blouse. I wonder what my mother would say if she saw me sitting here in the peace and quiet, wearing a blouse and shoes that are not made of sturdy material. Would she say I am frivolous, maybe borderline useless?

My mother taught me how to be a good Paiute woman: Get up early and stay busy all day long, for every minute. Wear clothes made out of “good” material (doesn’t rip and you can’t see through it even if you hold it up to the brilliant sun). Wear practical shoes, ones that you can wear for many miles, if you suddenly find the need to evacuate.

CHICKENS CAUSE HIGH BLOOD SUGAR

I had been doing this my entire life, even the first few years I had diabetes. Then one day my blood sugar was very high and wouldn’t go down. I went to the doctor and had test after test. He asked me what I had been eating and what I was doing for exercise. He couldn’t figure it out. Then we came upon the answer: chickens!

Bob and I had a school chick-hatching program. We had thirty chickens. Every spring we would make sure the roosters were busy, and then we would carefully load up 48 fertilized eggs and deliver them to the school. Everything had to be timed perfectly. The roosters and the hens had to be in the right mood. The eggs had to be delivered to the school on the right day. The incubator lights had to be turned on immediately and kept at an exact temperature.

The chicks were to hatch just before Easter, so the children could see chicks pecking their ways out of the eggs. It was an uncompromising deadline: 48 chicks had to hatch before Easter or 48 children would be sad, very sad.

It was a huge responsibility Bob and I carried on our shoulders. We would give the children nothing less than the miracle of birth, just before Easter. Then one year the incubator malfunctioned, and the eggs didn’t hatch.

If we had been supplying eggs to Costco, that would have been no big deal, but 48 children were waiting. Forty-eight children already had chick names picked out. There would be no Fluffies, no Peepers, no Butterballs.

I had failed as a chick hatcher, as a school volunteer, as a daughter of a Paiute mother. My blood sugar soared.

THE DOCTOR’S WISE WORDS

When the doctor asked if I was under stress, I thought, “chickens.” Of course there were other things going on: the phone constantly ringing and family asking me to make moccasins and birthday cakes. One such cake could not be measured in inches, it had to be measured in feet. In its center was a Navajo design. On its edges were miniature baskets. The cake took me three days to make.

I didn’t tell the doctor about the unhatched chickens and the Navajo design/Paiute basket birthday cake. What I said was, “Yes. I am feeling some stress.”

And this is what the doctor said to me: “If you want things to stay the same, keep on doing what you are doing. If you want things to change, you have to change your behavior now.”



“If you want things to stay the same, keep on doing what you are doing. If you want things to change, you have to change your behavior now.”





The doctor gave me permission to do something I had never done: say no to people and take time for myself.

That same day, I started on a new path. I got home and the phone rang. I didn't even think of not answering it. I automatically picked it up and listened to the request: "Barbara, are you going to be at the baseball game?"

This time, instead of saying, "Yes, what time?" I tried new words: "I'm sorry, but my doctor told me I have to rest, and I'll have to miss the game."

By the end of the day, several more requests had been phoned in: "Barbara, can you come to the school play? Can you make your fry bread? Can you make a pow-wow dress?"

I answered each request in the same way, "I'm sorry. Not today. I must rest. The doctor said so."

My voice was unsure because these words had never come from my mouth. They were like four-letter words. I think the people on the other end of the line must have gasped. *Barbara said no! What's up with that? Can she do that?* I'm sure my voice sounded small and higher than normal, like a little girl unable to open a jar of jam: "I can't."

WILL I STILL BE LOVED?

I, too, gasped. I thought my identity hinged on my saying yes to everyone. Barbara can do. Barbara can make a cake, moccasins, pow-wow dress, fry bread. Barbara is a good daughter, sister, auntie. I realized my life had been about proving to others that I was a good person. My actions showed how I identified myself, showed my limited ability for self-love. I had to make all those things so that people found me lovable.

I had to go on a long, inner voyage. I had to start saying, "Not today," and pay attention to how I felt about saying that. Would people still love me if I didn't do things for them?

This realization didn't come in an instant. I had to go on a long, inner voyage. I had to start saying, "Not today," and pay attention to how I felt about saying that. Would people still love me if I didn't do things for them?

But the doctor told me to rest and take care of myself. Like most of the critical points on my journey with diabetes, I thought about my mother. She took a different path and kept catering to people around her. She died before she needed to. I want to live a long time, so I can keep giving to my family and community.

THE BIG DEAL OF NAPPING

My different path started with saying, “Not today. Doctor’s orders.” It started with a simple task: taking naps.

For some people, taking an afternoon nap is no big deal. But for me, daughter of a Paiute woman, taking a nap was almost a sin. Napping is a near-public display of how, during two hours of prime-time life, you have nothing useful to do but sleep.

In my head reeled the list of things I needed to make: cake, moccasins, pow-wow dress, fry bread. Instead of doing those things, I was lying on my bed, thinking about how I should be doing those things.

I had no idea how to nap. The first few times, I laid on the bed, arms at my side, stiff as a board. In my head reeled the list of things I needed to make: cake, moccasins, pow-wow dress, fry bread. Instead of *doing* those things, I was lying on my bed, *thinking* about how I should be doing those things.

Bob helped me. He taught me how to relax. He taught me to start with my toes. Relax my toes. Relax my feet. Relax my ankles. It was hard not to hold my breath as I was doing this. But with practice, I started to relax.

Muzzie helped me. She was a master napper. She knew exactly what I was doing when I headed for the bed in the middle of the afternoon. “Finally!” she seemed to say. She hopped on the bed and made herself at home in the crook of my arm and was instantly asleep. The good Paiute/Diné dog owner could not awaken her pet. So I lay there, strapped down to the bed by this ten-pound mutt, and finally, I slept.

I bought books on meditation. I learned how to look at my thoughts, the jumble of them. I learned how to observe each one and observe how my body tensed up. I learned how to let the thoughts go, as if they were leaves dropping onto the surface of a stream. I watched them drift away, and I slept.

So with the help of Bob, Muzzie and meditation, I learned how to take naps.



OTHER TRICKS I'VE LEARNED

Slowly I became a master at taking naps. Now I think I could get a black belt in napping. I mastered other self-care tricks. I take time to paint my fingernails and toenails. I go for a walk every day. I might walk to the thrift shops downtown. I stop at coffee shops and have a fancy cup of coffee, alone.

I screen my phone calls. Many times I don't answer my phone. I call people back when my schedule is open.



DIABETES GIVES ME PERMISSION

At first I was overwhelmed with guilt by my new behavior. But then I started to look at it in a positive way. I was learning about self-love. I was learning that if there were a silver lining to the dark cloud of diabetes, this was it. Of course, I wish I did not have diabetes. But having diabetes gave me the opportunity to take care of myself. Diabetes gave me a reason to paint my toenails, screen my phone calls, go for a walk, take a nap. Diabetes gave me permission to say something I might not have ever been able to say. "I'm sorry. Not today. I have to rest, walk, be alone. I have diabetes."

Compared to a dozen years ago, my life is calm. There aren't 30 chickens running around. There are two. My phone rings, and I don't answer it. I'm busy making a basket.

Having diabetes gave me the opportunity to take care of myself. Diabetes gave me a reason to paint my toenails, screen my phone calls, go for a walk, take a nap.

Sometimes I make bookmarks to give away. Instead of rushing around making pow-wow dresses and fancy cakes, I leisurely make bookmarks. I give them to my loved ones. I adorn the little rectangles with feathers and beads. My feelings of peace and good wishes are captured between the lamination. See, I'm still worthy and lovable. And I'm well.

BEING WELL AND BEING LOVED

Having diabetes taught me many lessons. There will be more. The latest one I learned is that I can be good to myself and still feel useful and loved. Even though I screen my calls, and don't answer my door, I am a lovable person, and I am loved.

I am sure of this. Once while reflecting on my diabetes journey and all the choices I have made, I felt my mother standing beside me. I was wearing purple shoes and was feeling refreshed from an afternoon nap. I felt my mother place her hand on the back of my elbow and gently squeeze. It was her sign of approval. I am sure of this.





Wit & Wisdom

I asked myself:

**Why is it important for me
to be well?**

**Can I say no and
still be loved?**

**How can I be useful in a
peaceful way?**

**What can I do for myself
today to be well?**



Barbara Mora Biography



Editor's note: Furnishing information for this biography was difficult for Barbara. She agreed to share her life story because she hopes to help others. Barbara provided this biography as a way to honor Native people who have suffered, as a way to help people heal.

Barbara Mora was born Barbara Bowman on January 10, 1947, in the heart of the Bishop Paiute Reservation in Bishop, California. Her early childhood was a full, rich experience of reservation life. Typical of the time, her family was large. There were 11 children in the family, including two who died in infancy.

The family was considered poor by non-Indians who had indoor plumbing and a bedroom for each child. Barbara thought it was just the Bishop Paiute Indians who were “poor.” It wasn’t until later in her life that she discovered other Indians were raised in similar material poverty. It was common that Indian fathers could not find jobs that paid enough to support their families.

BARBARA'S FATHER

Barbara’s father, Alvin Bowman, was born near Tuba City, Arizona, to parents who spoke only their native language Diné (Navajo), and lived in a traditional house called a *hogan*. He grew up in a time of very limited educational opportunities for Indians. Some of his sisters and brothers

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were made to go to boarding schools and others chose to go. Alvin desperately wanted an education. But his parents kept him at home to herd the family's flock of sheep.

One day when he was 12 years old, he told his parents he was leaving and walked to Tuba City Boarding School. He was put in a beginning grade. He was much older and taller than other boys in that grade. The other boys laughed at him for his raggedy clothes and his long hair worn in the traditional Dinè style called a *tsyéél*, a style where the hair is pulled away from the face, and fastened in the back by white wool yarn. School officials cut his long hair. At the school, Alvin learned two things: how to write his name and how to repair shoes. He left after a few years with a third-grade education.

When World War II broke out, two brothers with better educations joined the Army. Alvin was too young and had not graduated grade school, so he was not allowed to enlist in the military, and instead joined the Civilian Conservation Corps (CCC).

While Alvin was traveling with the CCC, he came through Bishop where he met Barbara's mother, Pauline, and they married.

BARBARA'S MOTHER

Pauline Harrison came from a family of six. Her mother, Amy Bulpitt, was born at a time when the government was just starting to send Native children to boarding schools. Grandma Amy was sent to Stewart Indian School in Carson City, Nevada. She was a small child when she left Bishop. She didn't return until she was about 18 years old. During her time there, she was not lovingly nurtured but raised by

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military rule and corporal punishment. She was one of many Native children who were raised in boarding schools until they were 18 and then let loose, just like prisoners set free. These young people started their lives with little education and a void of loving parental guidance. They often possessed only a trade skill, such as being a "domestic."

At boarding school, Amy met Barbara's grandfather, Sam Harrison, who was a Nevada Indian. The family never knew his specific tribe. When the couple was released from Stewart Boarding School, they married, moved to Bishop and started a family.

Barbara's mother did not enjoy talking about her childhood or any early memory of her family life. She was very selective with the few recollections she shared with Barbara and her siblings and never shared the saddest memories.

BARBARA'S PARENTS RAISE A FAMILY

It was with these unhappy memories, and lives negatively impacted by boarding schools and inadequate education, that Barbara's mother and father became a couple and started raising their own family. Despite the adversity, they were determined to give the best to their children.

The Paiutes and the Dinès are two separate tribes with many different beliefs. Both parents tried to give their children the most positive traits from each tribe.

They agreed not to let their children speak Paiute or Dinè at home, only English. They bought used books and magazines at garage sales to encourage the children to become more proficient at English. Over the years, Barbara's mother accumulated a nearly complete set of encyclopedias

from garage sales. Barbara spent many hours reading the mismatched books.

Barbara was not allowed to watch frivolous TV shows. Even as an adult, Barbara remembers her father changing the TV channel to a news or nature show saying, “Daughter, watch something *educationable*,” (his Dinè version of the word *educational*).

TIGHT BRAIDS FOR SCHOOL

In 1952 Barbara started kindergarten in Bishop. She went to school with her older sister Jeannette. For economic reasons, her mother dressed them identically. Some people thought they were twins. Their hairdos were the same, always squeaky clean, washed with Tide laundry soap because it was affordable. The sisters’ hair was glossy black, parted in the middle, with two braids. Barbara remembers her hair being pulled so tight, her eyes felt slanted.

During this time, Barbara’s father worked in construction, building roads around Bishop. But steady work was not available. The parents struggled to pay bills and buy necessities. In 1959 the family moved to Arizona with high hopes of getting steady work and eating regular meals.

MOVING TO ARIZONA

Barbara was eleven years old when her life changed dramatically. Arizona provided fewer jobs, and the family descended into extreme poverty. They fell behind on their truck payments. But they learned that the truck could not be repossessed if someone was in it. So that became the family plan—certainly there were enough children to keep vigil.

The older children had to stay in the truck longer than the younger kids. Many months went by that the truck was kept safe by having a child or parent occupy it, day and night.

Barbara’s family still argues about how the truck was lost. The older children were attending school in Tuba City, so Barbara didn’t actually see it happen. She guesses that one of the younger children stepped out of the truck to play, or just wandered off, and the truck was repossessed.

Barbara’s father started walking to find jobs. Her mother became ill, exhausted from the stress of raising nine children with little money. Everyone helped with the chores. They cooked their meals on a wood stove. They did laundry by hauling water to the house in big metal barrels. On Saturdays and Sundays, everyone did laundry and ironed clothing with heavy irons heated on the wood stove.

BOARDING SCHOOL

It was after the birth of one of Barbara’s younger brothers that her mother became gravely ill with pneumonia. She was hospitalized. Her father could not find work. Simply, her parents could not feed or clothe their children.

The older children were sent to boarding schools. One brother was sent to Anadarko, Oklahoma. Barbara and her older sister, Jeannette, were sent by Greyhound bus to Chilocco Boarding School in Oklahoma. For this 14-year-old girl, the school was like a cold, alien prison. She had no idea what the school would be like, but got an idea by what she remembers as the “you are not welcome to boarding school” speech.

In the speech, new students were told they were far from home, with no one to depend on but school officials. She

remembers someone yelling at them that they were no longer on “Indian time” and that they would be expected to be on time, or would suffer dire consequences. Barbara was not used to being yelled at and wondered what she had done wrong. She had thought boarding school was for learning, not being yelled at, and that the speech maker must have made a mistake. Barbara was confused and frightened.

Barbara and her sister were immediately separated. Children from the same tribe were not allowed to socialize with each other. It was forbidden to speak Native languages.

BARBARA'S ARTWORK

For the first few months Barbara tried to stay positive. She loved to paint watercolors and draw pencil sketches of life on the reservation. Soon a woman director of the school took interest in Barbara's artwork.

She told Barbara she was “taking her under her wing,” and collected all of her paintings and drawings to keep in a safe place. Barbara never saw her art again. The director asked for more, but Barbara refused. Soon Barbara found herself cleaning bathrooms in the dormitories while the other girls went to eat. She was secluded from others. She was told that her sister didn't want to see her anymore. Her sister was told the same. During this time, her brother sent her letters, but Barbara never received them. When she wrote to her parents, her letters were read by the director and rejected if they contained anything about the chores or seclusion.

She started to get ill. Periodically, the director asked her to paint for her and Barbara always refused. She kept doing the chores she was given. One day the director gave her a butter

knife and told her to get on her knees and remove chewing gum from the floors of the dormitory. The students had never seen anything like that and stared at Barbara. But she was told to not talk to anyone. The students were told not to talk to Barbara because she was being punished.

The punishments varied from month to month and they always ended with the director asking Barbara if she were ready to paint. When winter came, Barbara was confined to the school's basement to mop excess water. She was constantly wet and cold and became more ill. She asked to see a doctor but her request was refused. She remembers a critical moment, when she was so light-headed she thought she could float out of her body. She sat upon a bucket, and considered going to sleep and never waking up. To this day, she remembers a voice inside her saying, “You can leave this life now, or you can rescue yourself. No one can help you but yourself. Your parents and family members don't know what's happening to you. They cannot rescue you. You must get yourself away from here.”

BARBARA'S ESCAPE

Barbara knew what she had to do. She climbed the steps out of the basement, and went straight to the director and told her she was ready to paint. Immediately she was allowed to rest and began eating meals with the other girls. She painted and gave her art to the director.

Barbara had a plan to escape. The school had a summer work program. Girls were placed as live-in babysitters and domestics for families in Chicago, Illinois. Barbara kept painting and drawing and being a model student. She asked

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the director over and over to be considered for the summer work program. When the spring classes ended, the director granted her request and sent her to a family in Chicago. No one in the family was allowed to talk to her, and her loneliness grew.

She saved the small amount of allowance she was given. Just before the boarding school was to start in the fall, Barbara took her small savings and ran away.

BARBARA MARRIES AND HAS A SON

In Chicago, Barbara met a man who helped her hide. The two kept moving so Barbara would not be found and married in 1965. Her husband immediately became abusive. In 1966 Barbara gave birth to her son Alfonso. He was healthy, happy and the light of her life. Barbara's husband was not happy to have a child. She endured many severe beatings, and they divorced in 1975.

A BELOVED SISTER DIES

During the same year, Barbara heard that her beloved sister Jan had died. By the time Barbara got home, her sister had already been buried. She had been killed by her abusive husband. She left behind three children.

STRUGGLES CONTINUE

In 1976 Barbara met Bob Mora. They married in 1978, and Bob became a major influence in her wellness journey. Barbara thought leaving the abusive relationship, and starting over with her son and supportive new husband would start her on a positive life. But the struggles continued.

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Alfonso was resentful that Barbara had left his “real father.” He grew into a troubled teenager and started using drugs and alcohol. He was in and out of jail. He was in a serious car accident which left him with a head injury. He was diagnosed with schizophrenia due to head trauma and drug use. He blamed Barbara for his unhappiness. One day, Barbara received a letter from Alfonso through his court-appointed guardian stating that he no longer wanted any contact with Barbara.

In 1990 Barbara's brother died of acute alcohol poisoning at the age of 28. Barbara and her parents identified the body.

Five years later, Barbara's mother died from diabetes. A year later, her father stepped in front of a truck and was killed. Barbara identified his body.

RETURNING TO TRADITION

Right after her father died, Barbara found out she had diabetes. She had been depressed for many years, and getting diabetes sent her into a deeper depression. But Barbara says getting diabetes on top of the other traumatic events of her life forced her to seek help. She desperately needed answers and relief from almost constant emotional pain. With the aid of her husband, Bob, and supportive friends, family and health staff, Barbara started to overcome depression and get well.

She returned to traditional ceremonies, songs and teachings. She found help and healing in the traditional ceremonies of the sweat lodge. She sought out others who were Native and, in many cases, endured trauma even worse than her own.

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She found the sweat lodge ceremonies worked for her and other suffering Natives when nothing in the modern world did. When she first started attending sweat lodge ceremonies, she was struck by the sound of people praying out loud while the singing was going on. She heard women weep, asking for help for their sons or daughters, those in trouble, those in prison.

Barbara joined them in asking the Creator for help. She says she is blessed to have received that help.

WIT & WISDOM

In 2004 Barbara wrote an article about beading and wellness for the Indian Health Service magazine *Health for Native Life*. Because of that article, she was asked to write this book about diabetes and wellness. The drawing on page 53 is the first art that Barbara has produced since boarding school.

Barbara lives in Bishop, California. She is a certified Pilates instructor and teaches community members beading, shawl making and traditional basket weaving. She is active in tribal politics, and speaks up about the need to help people return to wellness and the importance of caring for elders and children. She speaks at conferences about wellness, healing and diabetes. She is writing her second book, an autobiography. Barbara has found that writing and talking about her struggles have helped her to heal.



“ I have been there, crying,
asking Creator to have pity, help me.
I have been so blessed
to have received that help.

*I have peace and certain knowledge that,
should hard times come in the future,
and they will,
I will never be alone or helpless.*

*When the sweat leader lifts the dipper
of water to pour on the hot, heated stones,
I see him lifting a Grail of Goodness
for all of us to share.*

*My heart no longer hurts.
Aho. Aho. ””*

(Thank you, thank you, Creator)



A Note About Depression



It is common to have depression when you have diabetes. Depression is an ongoing feeling of sadness that won't go away. If you have any of the feelings listed below, mark them with a check.

- feelings of sadness or emptiness
- loss of interest in things you used to enjoy (family gatherings, hobbies, sex, etc.)
- changes in appetite or weight
- changes in sleep patterns
- others telling you that you seem restless or not as active as before
- loss of energy or feeling tired all the time
- guilty feelings or feeling you are worthless
- repeated thoughts of death or suicide

Show this list to a friend, family member, spiritual leader or healthcare provider. Don't wait to get help.