

# EAST OREGONIAN

JULY 9 – 10, 2022



146th Year, No. 86

WINNER OF 16 ONPA AWARDS IN 2021

\$1.50

# VOICES of RESILIENCE



Kathy Aney/For Underscore

Sarah Frank, who was raped as a 17-year-old while unconscious at a party, finds comfort in her faith and attending services at Bethel Baptist Church in Pendleton. Frank also found healing in advocating for survivors and telling her story to perpetrators, hoping to spark change.

## Indigenous women share their stories of violence and recovery

*Editor's Note: Readers should be aware the following stories depict issues of sexual assault and violence.*

By **BRYCE DOLE AND ZACK DEMARS**  
*The Bulletin*

**M**ISSION — No one story can encapsulate the trauma that Indigenous survivors of domestic and sexual violence have endured.

But taken together, the stories of three Indigenous survivors in Oregon show what it means to forgive, to raise a child in a painful world, to find the strength to keep fighting, to

build a community and find a home.

Shaped in isolation by the traumatic events they faced, their stories are linked by one woman who helped them find their voice and inspired them not only to press on through their pain but to bring other survivors with them.

A growing body of research shows that Native Americans nationwide endure disproportionately high rates of violence. The Centers for Disease Control and Prevention says nearly half of all Native American women have suffered physical or sexual violence. A separate Justice Department report found that 1 in 3 Indigenous women have been raped or

experienced an attempted rape — more than twice the national average.

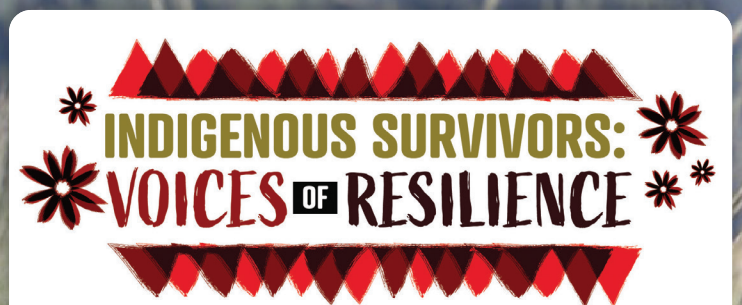
While the national research indicates high rates of violence on tribal land nationwide, official crime statistics from authorities in Oregon paint a murky picture at best. Federal statistics obtained from the FBI's Summary Reporting System contain violent crime data from just one tribal police department in Oregon — Umatilla — prior to 2006. Data is missing in the system for one or more tribal police departments for seven of the last eight reporting years, and more before that.

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Kola Shippentower-Thompson, who experienced rape at age 19 and violence at the hands of an ex-boyfriend and ex-husband, says she found peace and healing when a friend first took her to this spot near Grouse Mountain. The mixed martial arts fighter helps other abuse survivors by training them in safety and self-defense techniques.

Kathy Aney/For Underscore



**VOICES OF RESILIENCE:** Indigenous women across the country have endured disproportionately high rates of violence stemming from systemic and cultural obstacles: mistrust, limited policing, a lack of resources for support services and a dizzying array of jurisdictional issues for crimes committed on tribal land are all factors. In a two-part investigative project in partnership with Underscore.news, a nonprofit publication focused on Native American issues, the series will show how those obstacles prompted Indigenous survivors to use their stories of trauma to empower others, initiatives encouraging change and the policies shaping the legal landscape.

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Jessica Joaquin/Contributed Graphic

## Indigenous assault survivor empowers others

Desireé Coyote recounts abuse, assault, more on her life's journey

By **ZACK DEMARS and BRYCE DOLE**  
*The Bulletin*

**M**ISSION — Desireé Coyote endured struggles at nearly every turn in her life that so many Indigenous women in Oregon have faced. It could have led her to ruin. She refused to let that happen.

Her determination and strength to find her voice, and help others find theirs have served as an inspiration. Coyote's story, told through hours of interviews and documents, reveals how years of trauma and systemic

failures drove her to fight for survivors like her. To understand it, you have to go back to the beginning.

Coyote grew up in Sweetwater, a single-block, unincorporated town on the Nez Perce Reservation in North Idaho. The family moved into a two-story home there when Coyote was 3 years old, and when she and her nine siblings arrived, the children were thrilled to see a swing set and merry-go-round in the backyard.

In school, a 2-mile walk away, Coyote took up softball and wrestled on the boy's team.

"Not that I could compete," she said, "but I could practice with them."

Though Sweetwater was on reservation land, Coyote recalled seeing few Native Americans like

her around town. She grew up learning little of the customs, traditions or ceremonies of her people. Her father, Clifford Allen Sr., a handsome war veteran of many trades, worked under Idaho Gov. Cecil Andrus. As a member of a state-run committee on education, his focus was revamping education around tribal nations in Idaho, Coyote said. But during childhood, he taught her: "It's a white man's world, you gotta learn the white man's ways," she said.

Her father eventually started a relationship with Coyote's aunt. When Coyote was 3, her aunt became her abuser, she said. When Coyote was 7, her father kicked her mother out of the house. It would be nearly a decade before Coyote would see her mom again.

Meanwhile, Coyote's relationship with her aunt soured. To avoid her, Coyote began doing her chores early in the morning and would stay at school late after athletics.

"It wasn't safe for me at home, with her," Coyote said.

One day when Coyote was 10, her aunt stormed into her room, furious that she had found blood in the bathroom. She accused Coyote of being on her period and scolded her for making a mess. Coyote replied it wasn't her. She began hitting, punching, slapping and pushing Coyote. For the first time, Coyote fought back. Then, Coyote's older sister jumped off their bunk bed and "got involved." They never fought again.

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