

# *Esther Felipe:*

At 77 Years Old,  
She Walks Her Talk!

Story and Photos by Cheryl Dickinson



Twenty years ago, Esther Felipe's 10-year-old grandson asked, "Grandma, can you help us raise some money?"

"Yes, I guess so," Esther replied, not knowing how such a simple question would change her life. Esther (Acoma Pueblo) was 57 years old, and didn't know that her grandson wanted her to run a race with him to raise money. Esther had never run a race.

But she wanted to support her grandson and felt like three miles was something she could do. So, Ester ran the three-mile race and helped raise money for her grandson's school. "I didn't really run the whole three miles. I walked at the end," she says modestly.

That first race inspired Esther. She started walking and running to get in shape. She started entering 5K, then 10K races. Now, at age 77, Esther runs in half marathons, races of about thirteen miles!

Esther races to stay healthy and to encourage others to stay in shape. She has three daughters, 21

**Esther Felipe (Acoma Pueblo) finishes the Acoma Pueblo Sky City Seed Run with her niece, Shirley Laughlin.**



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grandchildren, and 22 great-grandchildren. Her grandson still runs with her sometimes. "One of my daughters used to run...until I started beating her!" she says with a quick laugh.

She encourages other seniors to be active. She knows it helps a person feel better, and helps them be able to get around more easily. "I hope I'm a good role model," she says. Her motto is, "Get active! Stay active!"

**A typical Esther race: eight miles of hot, dusty trail**

Boy, does Esther walk her talk! At the Acoma Pueblo Sky City Seed Run, Esther is wearing a blue runner's outfit and a big smile. Other runners are nervous, but Esther seems calm, maybe because she has done it many times before.

This race is eight miles long. The course takes runners across the dusty desert, up a steep trail onto sacred ground, then back on a dirt road. About 100 people are entered. Esther is standing near the starting line, chatting with friends and family members. Some runners are looking at the first place prizes: beautiful, hand-painted pots made by an Acoma artist.

"I don't know if I'll win a pot today. But, I don't race for the prizes anymore," says Esther. She says she has a houseful of trophies and



**Esther says she doesn't run to win a beautiful pot. She runs to stay fit.**

## Esther is glad she can still be a positive role model for youth through seniors.

plaques from placing in over 150 races!

When the starting gun goes off, Esther runs easily. She has trained for this race. She is in shape and confident. There are three other women entered in her division (age 60 and older). Esther forgets about winning or losing, and runs her best race. At the end, she is not the winner in her age division, but says, "I'm happy to finish the race. I'm training for my next half-marathon, and that's what's important today."

### Esther runs back

But Esther isn't finished running! She catches her breath and jogs back down the race course. She meets her niece, Shirley Laughlin, who is running slowly, but is very determined to finish. Esther runs the last hundred yards with her niece. She lets her niece cross the finish line in front of her, and applauds along with the crowd.

"I'm so proud of her," Esther says. "She was just diagnosed with diabetes." Esther encouraged her niece to start being more active, to help her manage her diabetes. "She's done a 5K race and now today's race."

### How it all started

After the race, Esther reminisces. "When we were young," Esther says, her eyes squinting under her sun visor, looking far away, back into her youth. "We had to carry water. We were active all day long. There were eight of us children. All girls!"

She smiles, but then becomes serious. "We worked hard," she says. "We worked in the fields. We would get up at four or five in the morning, and walk to the fields. We would water and weed and hoe. And then we would walk to school!" Esther continues, "After school, we would work some more in the fields. We raised corn, beans and wheat."

"I was never overweight," Esther recalls, saying it was due to hard work, and eating simple, home-grown foods. Esther is glad she can still be a positive role model for youth through seniors.

Though she's tired now, after the race she proudly shows off her plaque, and then sits, quietly, under the shade of a tree. She gazes off at the rippling heat shimmering on the desert horizon. "To be running at my age..." she begins. "...If you keep yourself strong and healthy, then, yes...at 77, you, too, can still do it..." She pauses, and considers her own future. "I have many more races to do before I retire."

**At age 77,  
Esther is  
proud to be a  
fit role model  
for other  
seniors.**



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