

1-1-2015

## Editorial Tribute to Professor G. William Rice

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### Recommended Citation

Jordan, Christine J. and Connie Tsosie de Haro. "Editorial Tribute to Professor G. William Rice." *Tribal Law Journal* 16, 1 (2016). <https://digitalrepository.unm.edu/tlj/vol16/iss1/1>

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# **TRIBUTE TO PROFESSOR G. WILLIAM RICE**

Editorial By Concetta Tsosie de Haro and Christine J. Jordan

On February 14<sup>th</sup>, 2016, the Indian legal community lost an incredible warrior, Professor G. William Rice. He was a father, a grandfather, a husband, a brother, and friend to many people around the world. Professor Rice fostered the careers of generations of lawyers through his work as a professor, a distinguished attorney, and an accomplished scholar. As his last article, co-authored with Professor Angelique EagleWoman, about Indian children and federal policy is published, we reflect on a phrase that he would say to his students, “You have to make this world a better place for my grandchildren.” He worked hard to ensure all Indian children would grow into successful adults who celebrated and reveled in their culture. One of the ways he set out to accomplish this goal was to help educate generations of Indian lawyers through the Pre-Law Summer Institute for American Indians and Alaska Natives (PLSI).

Professor Rice’s warmth, kindness, and razor-sharp intellect helped students discover their ability to learn and apply the law to the real world. Karen and Harrison Rice shared their insight regarding their father’s inspiration:

We think Dad’s inspiration and drive came from his desire to help people, and his success and impact are a direct result of his courage and willingness to act. He wasn’t afraid to be the first to try something. He wasn’t afraid to ask for what he wanted, and he fought for what was needed without hesitation. Dad was full of catchphrases such as, ‘If you’re gonna do something, you might as well do it right.’ When asked exactly why it was important to do it right, he replied, ‘Saves you the trouble of having to go back and fix it.’

Heidi Nesbitt, the Director of PLSI and the Assistant Director of the American Indian Law Center stated:

Each of the four times that Bill Rice taught in PLSI was even more fun than the last, and his dedication to his students set the bar. Almost every evening after everyone else had gone home, you could find him sitting at the front table in the American Indian Law Center, where he would answer the students' questions, explain difficult concepts, or just wow them with his fabulous stories of life in the Indian Law

trenches! Professor Rice was kind, encouraging, scary-smart, and I was blessed both to have known and worked with him. His legacy will continue for many years to come through his students, colleagues, and friends. We are all the richer for having known him, none more than me, and I will always be grateful for his impact on my life.

In 2014, we had the honor of working with Professor Rice during his last summer teaching in PLSI. It was amazing to watch him teach the students in PLSI. During his Federal Indian Law class, Professor Rice would present a question to the students, and wait for the fun to begin. A student would dare to answer, and Professor Rice would ask, "Are you sure?" Another student would try to answer, and Professor Rice would ask the student the same thing. And the process would repeat. He would remain quiet, and ask the rest of the students what they thought. Professor Rice wouldn't tell them one way or another if they had the correct answer, and he would tell me later, 'The trick is they all have the right answer, but they don't know why.' Then he would smile. Professor Rice would gradually help them answer the question, but not without a little extra effort. His methods weren't sinister or punishing. Professor Rice helped students alter their thought process to think like lawyers. Some found the experience frustrating, but were grateful for the opportunity to learn from a man who spent his life advocating for indigenous people on a global scale. Professor Rice was always calm, always kind, and wanted every student to succeed. He was always available for student conferences or an amazing hug.

We witnessed the passion Professor Rice instilled into each of his students. Each lesson inspired them to be better Indian Law students and Indian Country advocates. He always maintained his sense of humor and reminded us that even in a serious industry like the law, we always have to laugh. Laughter is what makes the hard days easier. Professor Rice would greet students with a hug and a smile, and ask how the student was doing outside of law school. Then, he would ask how they planned to protect tribal sovereignty. Afterwards, he would share his stories about his argument at the Supreme Court or the talk he had with his chickens to make them lay eggs. When Professor Rice needed to have a talk with you, you would do what he said to improve and ensure you succeed in your endeavors. The Indian Law community lost one of the kindest and best legal minds. Alisha Schmidt, his 2014 PLSI Teaching Assistant, remembers that, "Professor Rice was big and burly, but he was approachable. We had a warm relationship, and I could ask him things that I felt I could not ask other professors."

Professor Rice charged the younger generations of Indian law attorneys with the task of making the world a better place for his grandchildren, and gave us the tools to carry out his wishes to “do it right.” Although we mourn the loss of this incredible man, we are comforted by the inspiration of his teachings and the memory of his hugs.