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In Memory of Professor G. William ("Bill") Rice (1951-2016)

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**In Memory of
Professor G. William ("Bill") Rice*
1951-2016**

Dean Lyn Entzeroth,
Dean John Rogers Endowed Chair

A teacher, a mentor, a scholar, an advocate, a colleague, a friend—these are just some of the many elements that made up Professor G. William ("Bill") Rice's character and life's work. The passing of Professor Rice on February 14, 2016, was a tremendous loss not only to The University of Tulsa College of Law, but also to the broader global legal community where Professor Rice studied, wrote about, protected, defended and advanced the rights of American Indians and indigenous people. As Linda Benally, President of the National Native American Bar Association, said: "Professor Rice was one of the greatest Indian lawyers ever. We have all stood on his shoulders for decades. We will stand on them forever."¹

In reflecting on Professor Rice's extraordinary career, I am drawn to his article entitled, *There And Back Again-An Indian Hobbit's Holiday "Indians Teaching Indian Law."*² Written at the beginning of Professor Rice's career in academia, the article eloquently captures and lyrically pulls together the strands of Professor Rice's academic life, in particular his role in academia as a professor of American Indian heritage. As Professor Rice wrote:

The frost of racist and assimilative federal Indian policies has settled deeply into the Indian country, yet our memories have not withered and our roots yet retain their strength. We bring to the Academy not simply a different racial or political perception of Indian law from our view down the barrels of federal Indian policy, but a different view on other aspects of the law that can enrich the learning experience for both students and members of the academy. After two hundred years, Congress finally recognized the debt

* In writing this tribute to Professor Rice, I relied on conversations with Professor Rice's colleagues and friends. Most especially, I drew on the memories and written tributes of Professor Rice that Professor Judith Royster and Dean Vicki Limas kindly shared with me and that they collected in a tribute to Professor Rice in the latest volume of *The Federal Lawyer*.

1. Vicki Limas, *G. William Rice*, FED. LAW., Apr. 2016, at 18.

2. G. William Rice, *There and Back Again-An Indian Hobbit's Holiday "Indians Teaching Indian Law,"* 26 N.M. L. Rev. 169 (1996).

owed by this country to the League of the Six Nations in the synthesis of ideas that bore fruit as the Constitution of the United States, and certain Senators have come to recognize the critical importance which the knowledge of Indian law has for a Justice of the Supreme Court of the United States.

Who can say that the unique perspectives of Indian professors will not bring a deeper understanding, not only to the scholarly discussion of Indian law, but to the scholarly melody dealing with constitutional law, jurisprudence, alternative dispute resolution, conflicts of laws, comparative law, federalism, civil rights, international law, property, women's rights and others. We are destined to sing our songs, not only to the tune of Indian law, but to different tunes. We must sing the songs which are ours, but must not allow ourselves to be limited to the drum nor hesitate to lift our voices, whether in harmony or discord, with those who sing these other songs of the academy. Above all, we must not hesitate to speak the truth as we know it, and the academy, and perhaps our legal system, cannot help but be expanded, enhanced, and enriched as a result.³

Without question, Professor Rice immensely expanded, enhanced and enriched the academic life of the faculty, staff, students, and visitors to TU Law. For students, Professor Rice challenged assumptions, bolstered dreams, "blaz[ed] a path,"⁴ and illuminated the way forward.⁵ For colleagues, he offered his intellectual brilliance, his mentorship, his insights, his vision, his sense of humor, and his calm guidance even in the midst of turmoil.⁶ For visitors, Professor Rice shared his passion for the rights of indigenous people and extended the reach of TU Law to Geneva, Switzerland, where he and his students engaged in the process of implementing the U.N. Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous People.

In addition to his scholarly articles and his regular contributions to Felix Cohen's classic treatise, *Handbook of Federal Indian Law*, Professor Rice expanded the scope of Indian scholarship and teaching with his casebook, *Tribal Governmental Gaming Law* (Carolina Academic Press 2006), which was the first casebook addressing this important topic. His instrumental and foundational roles in TU Law's Native American Law Center, LL.M. in American Indian and Indigenous Law, and Master of Jurisprudence in Indian Law had a profound influence on the shape and focus of intellectual life at the College of Law.

3. *Id.* at 189 (citations omitted).

4. Limas, *supra* note 2, at 19.

5. *Id.* ("NNALSA President Hunter Cox summarized Bill's influence on his former students: 'Bill Rice was not simply a great legal scholar, advocate and practitioner. He was a mentor and respected elder for many of us. His warmth eased our worries and self-doubt, and his advice helped guide us in our careers to protect our sovereign rights. Thank you for blazing a path for us, and lighting our way. We are proud to carry on the torch of tribal sovereignty.'").

6. *Id.*

However, Professor Rice's reach and influence extended far beyond the confines of the cloistered walls of the legal academy. Professor Rice's steadfast work as a fearless advocate for American Indians and indigenous people included service as Attorney General for the Sac and Fox Nation, Chief Justice for the Citizen Potawatomi Nation, Assistant Chief and Chief Judge for the United Keetoowah Band of Cherokee Indians in Oklahoma, Associate Justice for the Kickapoo Nation of Indians in Kansas, and active member of the U.N. Working Group on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples.⁷ Among his notable victories, he prevailed on behalf of the Sac and Fox Nation in *Oklahoma Tax Commission v. Sac and Fox Nation*, 508 U.S. 114 (1993), and played an instrumental role in the U.N. General Assembly's eventual adoption of the Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous People. Indeed, Professor Rice stood front and center in revitalizing the legal and political systems for indigenous people across the globe.⁸ In recognition of Professor Rice's life's work, President Barack Obama contacted Professor Rice's widow, Annette Rice, to express his personal condolences.⁹

While Professor Rice's accomplishments as an advocate, scholar and teacher are truly remarkable, when I think of him, I see his smile, hear his infectious laugh, feel his passion for the things that mattered to him, and remember his warm, kind demeanor. As several who know him well recall, Professor Rice, "with a twinkle in his eye"¹⁰ "would frequently say, 'Indigenous people—that's ME!'"¹¹

7. *Id.* at 18.

8. *Id.* at 18-19.

9. *Id.* at 19.

10. *Id.* at 18.

11. *Id.*