

David Risling Jr.
A GIANT FOR TWO MILLENNIA

Dave Risling is like an elder brother to me, one who I have known and worked with steadily for 34 years, since 1967. I was only 33 when I met Dave. I was young and still teachable, and Dave has taught me more than I can ever describe. Not only Dave, of course, but his father Dave Senior and his sisters and brothers as well.

I also want to mention Barbara Risling, Dave's wife. Barbara has been a very good friend to Carolyn and myself. More importantly, she has really been a key factor in all of Dave's accomplishments since they were married. Barbara is a very capable artist, a poet, and a writer as well as the person who has had to feed guest after guest, many unexpected, and raise fine children. There is no doubt but what her wisdom and insights have played a major role in Dave's achievements.

From "Golden Gloves" to "Gentle Warrior," is one way that I would describe Dave. As a youth he was a very strong athlete, competing in almost every sport that Hoopa had to offer. He was a Golden Gloves champion and I believe that his boxing days taught him a great deal about how to never give up, how to hang in there and take the punches, and, most importantly of all, how to discover your opponent's weaknesses and take advantage of them.

Dave has been a warrior for Indian people, for all Indian people, for many years now. But he has learned how to pace himself, how to aim for the long-haul not for the quick knock-out. He was taught to be a fighter by his father and he was also taught that victories, for Native People, often take a long, long time and that we have to be able to be strong for the long stretch, not giving out just because victory does not come quickly.

I say that Dave went from Golden Gloves to Gentle Warrior because he learned how to be tenacious without being bitter, to be tough without being angry, to accept temporary setbacks, to continually respect one's opponents and to give them time to come around to the Native viewpoint. Many times I used to give long-winded lectures of 2 to 3 hours at California Indian Education Association conferences and often my content was hard for non-Indians to take, because I pulled no punches. But Dave was always the moderator, the one who

would then come in and work the audience over with respect and compassion, and he usually would persuade them to see the right path to follow.

Sometimes we would be in tough negotiations with government agencies, or with California state legislators, and again I would often hit them hard with facts they might not have liked. But then Dave would take them in hand and we would carry the day -- except with one Senator, Coombs, from San Bernardino, who kept trying to create a non-Indian-controlled state commission in the late 1960s. We defeated Coombs at his own game, bested him in front of his colleagues, and then offered him an olive branch but he would not take it. He withdrew his own bill, which we had completely amended to create an all-Native commission anyway.

One of the most important things about Dave is that he possesses a very broad vision. This is often unusual for Native People, or for any people, for that matter. What we so often have found in our struggles in California is that many Indian People are very short-sighted and localistic. Often they do not care to work on something unless it will bring rewards - usually immediate- to their own family , relatives, or rancheria or organization. Sometimes, one finds also a lot of jealousy, petty bickering, personal positioning, and even animosity towards other Indians. Needless to say, one cannot build successful statewide or national movements based upon such attitudes and behaviors.

Dave Risling is just the opposite of all of that. Like his father, he is interested in all Native Peoples. But even more than that, he has been able to see into the past and from that into the future, so as to be able to create, or help to create, such successful groups as CIEA, California Indian Legal Services, Native American Rights Fund, D-Q University, Native American Heritage Commission, and Native American Studies at UCDavis. Moreover, he has been a key factor in making the Association on American Indian Affairs, the National Indian Education Association, and the Elder's Circle vital and relevant to Native Americans.

David Risling, Sr., was very active in protecting and preserving the customs of the Northwestern tribes and in taking the beautiful heritage out to be shared with other peoples. Dave Risling has continued that tradition and is an active force in the revival and survival of Native ceremonies along the Trinity and Klamath rivers. He also is a great fisherman and maintains the practice of traditional fishing along those same rivers.

DQU is one of Dave's greatest accomplishments, not just the founding of it, but its very survival. Time and time again, as chair of the board, Dave was able to prevent the destruction of the university. Attacks have come, over the years, from many directions, and often it might have appeared to many that California's only tribal college would disappear. But it still survives! And the reason for that can largely be summed up by one four-letter word: Dave!

When I began to establish Native American Studies at Davis I knew that there was one person I had to have with me, and that was Dave. I wanted a Golden Gloves champion to help steer us through the rocky rapids of the College of Agriculture! He had been a great judge of livestock at Modesto Community College and he proved to be an excellent judge of people. That's what I wanted!

I have, of course, seen Dave in action countless times, from the halls of the legislature, to the board room of DQU, to the old meeting room at Tecumseh Center on the UCD campus, to motels where we were holding explosive sessions of the Indian Legal Services, and on and on. I have never ever been disappointed with him! He has always risen above pettiness and personalism to point us in the right direction, the direction of high-minded actions which benefit our Native People.

Don't misunderstand me, Dave has been attacked by many. Government agencies and hostile groups have, time and time again, sought to undermine his efforts. Often other Indians, with their own private agendas, have tried to spread gossip about Dave, to bad-mouth him. But he always comes out clean as a hound's tooth, as they say, because his morals, his ethics are of the very highest. More than that, he never becomes bitter or vindictive in return. He is always seeking the spiritual path of the high moral ground and his feet are absolutely firmly planted on that good red road!

Some of our tribes used to have special kinds of doctors. They had doctors who dealt with physical illnesses, or with psychological illnesses, or with poisonings and the like. But they also had doctors whose role it was to care for the health of the whole people, as a people, and these were the chiefs it seems. They were not elected. They chose themselves, as it were, by their own behavior over their lifetime. Then they were chosen by the people and recognized as the most important kind of doctors. Very few such persons appear in any given lifetime because it is so hard to possess the qualities of humility, generosity,

kindness, sympathy, concern, caring, courage, honesty, and unselfishness which such a leader must have.

Many have wished to be such a leader -- but only a rare few can succeed. Crazy Horse comes to mind. Because such a leader, in addition to all of the above qualities must also have a thick-hide, great inner-strength, be slow to anger, be without jealousy, and must have great intelligence with vision like the eagle. Far-seeing is such a person, guided by the Sun which is always looking down on its children with never-ending sustenance.

To me David Risling, my elder brother, is just such a person. He has reached that stature. From Golden Gloves to Gentle Warrior, a Giant for two millennia!

Jack D. Forbes
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