

DAVID RISLING JR.
MY "ELDER BROTHER" WALKS ON
by Jack D. Forbes

He was known as "Boy Blue," growing up on the Hoopa Indian Reservation and along the Klamath River in northern California. David Risling Jr. came to be my elder brother as we worked together for almost forty years, fighting many battles together to advance the cause of Native Americans. Dave was one of eight children, the son of David Risling Senior (Chief Su-Wohrom) and Mary Geneva Orcutt. He was born near Weitchpec on the Klamath River, near its junction with the Trinity. Although a member of the Hoopa tribe, Dave was of Yurok, Karuk, and Hoopa ancestry. As "Boy Blue" he was inducted early into the life of northwestern Indians, participating continually in a cycle of river fishing, hunting, ceremonies, agriculture, and forestry. Dave was a great fisherman, not only bringing in Salmon of huge size but also he had a magic touch with trout. He also had a magic touch with his fellow human beings.



Drawing by Jason Lacy

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Boy Blue was born April 10, 1921. He was a person of absolute personal integrity, honesty, and courage. He embodied in his life all of the attributes of a Native

American leader: warrior, compassionate father, host, pathfinder, caretaker, facilitator, friend, and counselor. He was physically active and very athletic as a youth, not only excelling at every sport offered by Hoopa High School, but going into boxing with great success. During World War II he enlisted in the US Navy, becoming Lt. Commander of a PC 1139 (patrol craft), escorting larger ships full of supplies to war zones in the South Pacific.

With the help of his wife Barbara, Dave graduated from California Polytechnic College, San Luis Obispo, going on to become an outstanding teacher of agriculture at Modesto Junior College, a much desired judge of livestock, and the father of four children: Kathy, Ken, Peggy, and Lyn. During the 1950s and early 1960s Dave helped his father travel throughout the state, reviving Native dances and bringing people together on key California Indian issues. Dave loved to talk to me about his Golden Gloves boxing days, and he was a fighter, a fighter for all that was good. He has been a man without the least tincture of self-promotion or self-aggrandizement. In fact, he has given of his own resources and life-blood to help Indian people of all tribes, always with the help of his artist wife Barbara. In 1966 Dave's sisters Vivian and Viola were attending an education conference in Berkeley where I spoke on California Indian history. They became very enthusiastic when at long last hearing a Native perspective and they told Dave: "You will have to meet this man!" Not long after that Dave invited me to the conference on California Indian education held at Stanislaus State College and we became collaborators ever after.

Boy Blue proved to be a mighty organizer, a brilliant facilitator, and a bulldog-like fighter for a brighter future for Native People. His father had told him when he went away to school: "If you forget who you are, don't bother to come home!" He never forgot. He founded or co-founded the Ad Hoc Committee on California Indian Education, the California Indian Education Association (prototype for the National Indian Education Association), California Indian Legal Services, Native American Rights Fund, and many other groups. He contributed greatly to the development of Native American Studies as an academic discipline, being the very first person whom I turned to at UC Davis in 1969. In fact, he was the key reason that I decided to launch the discipline at Davis instead of Berkeley (where I had been offered a senior position. Dave believed that Davis would be a better spot for Indians, so I turned Berkeley down and came to Davis). More recently, Dave has been known as the co-founder of D-Q University. It was a dream that the late Carl Gorman and I had worked on from 1961-2, but it was Dave's organizing skill and patience that came to the fore in 1971 when DQU finally acquired flesh and bones. Dave became the chair of the Board of Trustees of DQU, a board, incidentally, which has never ceased to function, which has never been replaced, and which has never given over its legal authority to outsiders or schemers.

For all these many years, Dave served as chair of the DQU board, weathering many a rough sea, or one could say, many a South Pacific typhoon. The ex-boxer and ex-commander never stood in awe of any opponent, whether a hostile government bureaucrat or the plotter of a hostile takeover. A true Indian, David Risling Jr.,

always continued to sacrifice himself for Native People all through his seventies and into his eighties. He continued as a faithful member of the Native Elder's Circle (of North and South America) and of the Association for the Advancement of Indian Affairs. Dave loved to fly, it seems, and he was a frequent visitor to reservations all across this land, seeking often to help traditional elders in their struggles to preserve sovereignty and values.

Dave had hoped that one day he would be able to surrender leadership of the DQU Board to younger Indians but somehow he had become "Mister Indispensable" and he was always being called back into service, in spite of aging and tiredness. Of course, always with him was his wife Barbara and his family, including now grandchildren and great-grandchildren. But still, the latest threat to DQU and to the legal board which he continued to head caused him considerable anxiety, pain, and, at times, exhaustion.

Boy Blue has now gone on to join six of his brothers and sisters, and so many other great Indians of the past. He walked on March 13, in the evening, with loved ones at his side. His memory will be strong among all Native Peoples, in South America (where he had visited other Indians) as well as in North America. Yes, we are still producing heroes to rank with the best of the past: Tecumseh, Sarah Winnemucca, Sitting Bull, and now, David Risling Jr. We became brothers, bound together in so many ways. He will always be with me and whenever adversity strikes, I will recall him and feel his strength, his caring.

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A memorial service was held at on Saturday, March 19, in Hoopa.

Donations in Risling's name may be made out to the UC Regents for the David Risling Award, a scholarship given to UC Davis students of California Native American descent.

Send checks to Judy La Deaux, Department of Native American Studies, One Shields Ave., Davis, CA 95616.