

Lions

Dan Press '64 Fights for Native American Rights

BY EUGENE L. MEYER '64

Dan Press '64, in a white shirt and tie, was headed to his Georgetown law office from his suburban Bethesda, Md., home one morning in June. But he was looking ahead to the following week, when he would herd cattle and fix fences on a ranch in the mountains of New Mexico.

"There's something about jumping on a horse and going into the mountains and wandering around," he says. "It does good things to you."

Press, raised in a working-class Jewish family in Flushing, Queens, rides the range three or four times a year, returning to his postgraduate roots as a young law student helping Native Americans achieve their rights to fair employment and union wages on their sovereign land.

In 1972, four years after graduating from Yale Law, Press left the reservation but not the cause. Back in Washington, D.C., he worked tirelessly on behalf of Indian tribes for economic justice. In 1971, Press helped to establish the first labor relations office on the Navajo reservation to ensure that companies doing business on tribal land adhered to Navajo preference in hiring. Later, he gave it a name: TERO, for Tribal Employment Rights Office, and the idea caught on. Today, more than 300 Native American tribes have TEROs.

Press also helped start the Native American Bank, jointly owned by 20 tribes; assisted one tribe with legislation awarding it \$450 million for land taken for a federal dam; and helped another tribe gain title to more than 9,000 acres of land at a former military base near its reservation.

"Dan is very humble, but he is one of the greatest lawyers who have made a national impact on Native Americans throughout the United States," says Kenneth White Jr., a Navajo who is CEO of Native Americans for Community Action, in Flagstaff, Ariz.

Press is also an adjunct professor in Columbia's anthropology department and is affiliated with Columbia's Center for the Study of Ethnicity and Race. He teaches undergraduate courses on Native American issues and, more recently, helped found the AlterNATIVE Education program for Indian youth. The five-day summer program, offered on reservations from Zuni, N.M., to Pine Ridge, S.D., covers topics from identity and tribal history, to efforts to exterminate Native Americans and their culture, to how to apply to college.

Given his background, Press' career path might seem surprising. His grandparents were Eastern European immigrants, his father a high-school dropout who sold magazines. Press assumed he was Queens College-bound. But his older brother, Phil SEAS'63, SEAS'65, had won a full scholarship to Columbia,

so Press applied, expecting to commute. A night in Phil's dorm dazzled him, however, so to afford on-campus life Press washed dishes in Johnson Hall, then a women's graduate dorm.

"Columbia was eye-opening," he says. "Taking Contemporary Civilization, thinking about all these big ideas, was the most wonderful thing that happened to me." His CC instructor was Robert Dallek GSAS'64, now a prominent presidential historian. Press majored in sociology and studied with Daniel Bell GSAS'60, whom he calls "my intellectual idol. I was interested in social theory — what made the world work."

The summer after graduating, Press worked at the New York World's Fair waiting tables. During his spare time he reread *The Adventures of Huckleberry Finn*, which inspired him to look west of the Hudson.

Press entered the Law School but after a year took a leave of absence to join Volunteers in Service to America (VISTA), one of President Lyndon B. Johnson's Great Society programs. Unexcited by his assignment at Columbia's School of Social Work — "it was not quite floating down the Mississippi River" — he immediately traveled to VISTA's Washington, D.C. headquarters to request another post. He could work with migrants, Southern coops or Indians, he was told. He chose Indians.

"I knew nothing about it," he says. Three weeks later, he was en route to Montana. "I got off the plane, looked at the mountains, and said, 'Yes, this is what I was looking for.'"

Press spent a year on the Crow Reservation. He and other VISTA volunteers tutored children, set up a library, created an after-school program. He also helped a tribal elder write a small book about treaties made and broken. Along the way, he went to a sweat bath, shot a deer in the mountains, helped gut it and ate deer liver cooked over a fire. So accepted was he that a Crow family adopted him into the tribe and family.

During that year, Press developed a love for horses and Indian law. He transferred to Yale and focused on learning about using the law for social change. As he was graduating in 1968, Navajo Nation recruiters came to campus to hire someone to start a legal services program. Press got the job and wound up in Window Rock, Ariz., the Navajo Nation's capital.

In 1972, he moved to Washington, D.C., where he continued to fight for Indian rights, first as a consultant, then as a solo practitioner, later joining a law firm. In 1990, he went to another



AlterNATIVE Education facilitators and faculty adviser Dan Press '64 at the Zuni (N.M.) Reservation in 2013.

PHOTO: ZOE BANDEAH

firm, Van Ness Feldman, where he rose to partner and where he still works.

While continuing to labor on behalf of Indians, Press decided to return to school — to teach, though he had never done so. In 2005, an Alumni Office representative invited him to speak to what was then the Columbia Native American Club. From that emerged his first course, on issues in tribal government, in Spring 2012. A second, on Indian education, followed, and like his first was jointly created by Press and students "who asked for a course in which they could actually do something about the problems on reservations," he says. A third course, on Native American economic development, grew out of the first two.

At the initial meeting of the first course, students were silent. Press thought he'd failed. But from the second class on, they talked nonstop. The subject of historical trauma came up, an intergenerational issue "that gets passed down," he says, similar to what's experienced by the children and grandchildren of Holocaust survivors.

Press arranged for his students to meet President Barack Obama '83's Indian affairs adviser at the White House. On the same trip, they visited the United States Holocaust Memorial Museum. They talked about Native American cultural genocide but also about resilience.

In Spring 2013, in his course on Indian education, Press and his students came up with AlterNATIVE Education. Press used his tribal connections to help launch the initiative that summer, and it has since blossomed into an annual experience offered on eight reservations. Press remains involved as an adviser.

"He's such a heavy hitter," says Fantasia Painter '13, a member of the Salt River-Maricopa Indian Community in Phoenix active in AE. "He's such a great advocate. He really just helped make it happen."

Eugene L. Meyer '64 is a former longtime Washington Post reporter, an author and the editor of B'nai B'rith Magazine.

Little Started Demartini on the Path to Success

BY JOHN E. MULLIGAN III '72

Dr. Felix E. Demartini '43, PS'46 spent his career at the University's medical complex and helped to usher it into the modern era, starting in 1977, when he became the first doctor to serve as both president and CEO of what was then called Presbyterian Hospital at the Columbia-Presbyterian Medical Center. But Demartini says his first mentor was not a prominent physician. He was a Lions legend: football coach Lou Little, who was a stickler for good grades and who pushed his players to be off-the-field leaders.

Demartini was an accomplished high school player in 1937 when he made a recruiting visit to Little, the engineer of Columbia's famous upset of Stanford in the 1934 Rose Bowl. But Demartini says he was also "a screw-up. I don't think I'd ever read a book all the way through."

An assistant coach delivered bad news: "You don't have the grades to get into Columbia." But, he said, Demartini might be admitted after a post-graduate year at prep school.

Back home in Ridgefield, N.J., this was not a tough call for Demartini's father, a successful textile salesman. Andrew Demartini started working after eighth grade and spent years building a career. To the senior Demartini, education was everything.

"Don't even think about it," Demartini's father said of the chance. "Do it!" So Demartini spent a year at Connecticut's Cheshire Academy, where, he says now, "I found to my surprise that I could do the work if I disciplined myself." The school's academic rigor and the individual attention wrought "a profound change in me."

And thus, in fall 1939, Demartini was playing freshman football at Baker Field. Great Britain was at war with Nazi Germany but Demartini says he and his friends "weren't concerned about the war yet." He was making his mark on the gridiron as a 6-foot-1, 185-lb. guard who stung opposing runners more with quickness than with strength.

A few weeks after the 1941 season, however, Pearl Harbor changed everything, Demartini says. Military service became a preoccupation on campus.

Demartini and All-American quarterback Paul Governali '43 were co-captains in 1942. "Our team was decimated because so many people were drafted or left school to enlist," says Demartini. He, too, had a foot in the future. Months ahead of schedule, he left the College for a war-shortened course at P&S — 36 months instead of four years. He later practiced medicine as an internist.

Also in 1943, Demartini began his nearly 67 years of marriage to his childhood sweetheart, Mildred Van Valkenburg,