

Ron His Horse is Thunder

It is with great sadness that we announce that Ron His Horse is Thunder passed away on March 26, 2025 on the Crow Indian Reservation in Montana. Born on March 19, 1958 to Ina Brown McNeil, he just celebrated his 67th birthday. A member of the Hunkpapa-Lakota Oyate, his Lakota name was Tasunka Wakiya (His Horse is Thunder). Ron was raised in Little Eagle, SD and lived in Rapid City, SD and Long Island, NY before moving home to the Standing Rock Indian Reservation as an adult.

He attended Standing Rock Community College (now Sitting Bull College) and then transferred to Black Hills State College earning a bachelor's degree in Political Science. Ron then completed a Juris Doctorate degree from the University of South Dakota. Upon moving to Standing Rock, he was hired by Sitting Bull College as the Title III Project Director and then became the President of the College. As College President, Ron was proud of his role in working with the College Board to develop plans for a new college facility with two of the classroom buildings in place when he left this position. Ron was a strong advocate for Sitting Bull College and education. Ron resigned as College President when he was elected Chairman of the Standing Rock Sioux Tribe in October of 2005. He served in this capacity for four years and maintained a strong national presence for his Tribe. In leaving politics, Ron established a cattle ranch and became a rancher. He also joined his wife, Deborah, doing educational consulting work primarily with tribal colleges and universities throughout the nation.

Ron had four biological children: Josephine Half Red-Mendoza, Ron (aka Little Ron) His Horse is Thunder, Wiyaka Wastewin His Horse is Thunder, and Akitcita Cistila His Horse is Thunder and four grandchildren. He married Deborah Wetsit in 2003 which brought him additional family with sons, Rick Desjarlais and Koshon LaCounte (Nikki); daughters, Cher Old Elk (Leon) and Michelle Desjarlais, fourteen additional grandchildren, and fifteen great-grandchildren. Ron loved his family and being a husband, son, father, grandpa, uncle, brother, nephew, Tribal Leader, political activist, educator, horseman, rancher, tinkering with his projects and enjoyed attending rodeos, ropings, basketball games, wrestling tournaments, pow wows, and any other event in which family members participated. The little ones called him "Papa LaLa."

Ron was considered one of the original Big Foote Memorial Riders and made this 300 mile, December horseback ride for many years as a rider and then in support of the riders. He always kept his horses ready and still had Ekalaka, a beautiful paint, who he rode for many years. He loved his motorcycles and enjoyed trips to Santa Fe, NM, Niagara Falls, NY, Canada as well as joining the Big Foote Memorial Motorcycle Ride. Ron also enjoyed traveling. He traveled to nearly every state and internationally to Canada, Mexico, New Zealand, Italy, Peru, and France.

Fixing old motorcycles and cars (e.g., Bronco) brought Ron great joy. He talked about going to swap meets when he was young and poor to build his first motorcycle which was registered as a 1949 bike. He also was proud of building two log homes – the first in Fort Yates, and the second was on the Crow Indian Reservation near Hardin, both very distinctive.

Ron is preceded in death by his daughter Josephine. He is survived by his wife. Deborah, mother Ina McNeil, father Joseph McNeil, Sr., brothers Alan McNeil (Shirley), Frank McNeil (Dawn), Joseph McNeil Jr. (Sheridan), sister Jacqueline ____ (Robert), and his children, grandchildren, and great-grandchildren. Our family is large, if we missed anyone please accept our apology.

A four-day feast and ceremony will be held at the Wolf Point Community Hall on Saturday, March 29, 2025, from 2:00-6:00. Services are planned at a later date in ____, North Dakota, and burial services in ____ South Dakota. Updates will be posted as the service and burial date nears. Due to Ron's strong belief in education, on-line donations to Sitting Bull College in Ron's memory would be a meaningful way to honor him: www.sittingbull.edu