

F. Kent Reilly III, Distinguished Professor Emeritus

October 26, 1945 - May 21, 2024

F. Kent Reilly III, Professor Emeritus of Anthropology at Texas State University in San Marcos, noted scholar of Mesoamerican and Native American culture, beloved teacher, husband, and friend, died of prostate cancer and complications from diabetes on May 21, 2024, at his home in Austin, Texas.

Born in Atlanta, Georgia, on October 26, 1945, Kent was the oldest of five children. His father, Frank K. Reilly Jr., was a US Marine test pilot who was killed in a jet crash when Kent was only eight. Kent went on to join the Navy, serving two tours in Vietnam from March 1966-December 1970, including 18 months as Hospital Corpsman First Class attached to the United States Marine Corps in the Republic of Viet Nam (Charlie Company, 1st Battalion 7th Marines). He appeared in a famous Life magazine photo from the battle of Hue attending injured soldiers atop a tank. For his service Kent was awarded a Purple Heart, Navy Commendation with Combat V, Vietnamese Cross-of-Gallantry, and Presidential Unit Citation with Two Combat Stars.

Dr. Reilly's lifelong passion for the study of indigenous New World peoples began early with a boyhood trip to the ceremonial center of the Mississippian world in Moundville, Alabama. At the University of Texas at Austin, Kent studied under noted Maya scholar Linda Schele, earning his PhD and becoming a respected expert on the ancient Olmec. During his tenure at Texas State University, Kent founded the Center for the Arts and Symbolism of

the Ancient Americas providing a forum for both academics and Native scholars. As testimony to his collaborative spirit, in 2011 he was chosen as the Field Anthropologist for the Muscogee Nation of Florida in their efforts to achieve federal recognition.

Kent was a gifted curator of museum exhibitions and served as a member of the Board of Regents: University of Alabama State Museum Board. His culminating 2021 exhibition Spirit Lodge: Mississippian Art from Spiro hosted by the National Cowboy & Western Heritage Museum in Oklahoma City showcased ancient objects from the Oklahoma site and contemporary Native artists, providing a pictorial narrative into the lives of these people. With fellow curator Eric Singleton, Kent coedited the accompanying book, *Recovering Ancient Spiro*. The exhibition took years to assemble and was one of the great joys of Kent's life.

A beloved teacher above all, Kent was comforted in his final days by a steady stream of former students, now settled in their professional lives across the country, who came to say goodbye. There was much laughter and lots of teasing, always his specialty. He had been honored in 2021 with a symposium acknowledging his role as mentor, adviser, and inspiration, shepherding a new generation into the field that was his life's devotion, and he will not be forgotten by them.

Kent leaves behind his longtime partner and husband, Michael Clark Scanlon; his brother F. Michael Reilly and wife Debbie of Tuscaloosa, as well as numerous nieces and nephews; and constellations of students, colleagues, and friends grateful for the light he shined into all our lives.

A memorial will be held October 12, 2024, from 1:00 to 5:00pm at St. Stephen's Episcopal Church, 6000 FM 3237, Wimberley, Texas.

Always an animal lover, Kent would approve of contributions to the Dian Fossey Gorilla Fund (<https://gorillafund.org/>). Donations may also be made to the F. Kent Reilly III Memorial Graduate Scholarship Endowment at Texas State University.

Previous Events

Visitation

MAY **25**. 4:00 PM - 6:00 PM (CT)

Austin Natural Funerals
3742 Far West Blvd #104
Austin, TX 78731

Memorial Service

OCT **12**. 1:00 PM - 5:00 PM (CT)

St. Stephen's Episcopal Church
6000 FM 3237
Wimberley, TX 78676
<http://ststeve.org>

Tribute Wall

JJ

“ Michael, William Walters told me about the loss of your husband. I remember you so fondly—always at the ready for a delightfully sarcastic observation of the library and those who peopled it. I wish I had known your husband. I am also a retired anthropology professor. So this is just a note to wish you well as you go on with your life and to thank you for the wisdom and humor you provided us in the library long ago.

jaclyn jeffrey - July 16, 2025 at 07:36 PM

FM

“ Dr Reilly got me my first job in archaeology and made a personal phone call to get me into grad school. At that time the only question I asked was if he could read my resume. He believed in me and helped most when I needed it. His presence is a big loss for the world.

Frank Mitchell - September 21, 2024 at 02:43 PM

SM

“ Dr. Reilly, Rest in Peace.

I enjoyed Dr. Reilly's lectures at SWT; I enrolled in several of his classes. He was a mentor and friend, and always had words of encouragement and support for this Chicana Anthropology major.

I just found out he transitioned this past May. He will be missed.

Sylvia Medellín #SWT95

Sylvia Medellín - September 15, 2024 at 09:53 PM

GW

Dr. Reilly was my advisor, mentor, and friend during my time at SWTSU. His classes were fascinating. He was truly brilliant and had a very positive impact on my life. I'm thankful to have been one of his students. Gene Williams, B.A. Cultural Anthropology 1996

Gene Williams - December 31, 2024 at 11:21 AM

PC

“ Kent was a friend and supporter from my earliest days as a student, and working together at ILAS (UT Austin) and throughout my career. i have only the fondest of memories of every conversation we ever had including being able to welcome him as a guest speaker in one of my classes. I was deeply saddened to hear of his death and would like to convey my condolences to Michael and to Carolyn and Virginia, all of whom I will try to reach in other ways.

Phil Crossley - July 08, 2024 at 10:54 AM

PL

“ I have spent a while grieving the loss of my dear friend Kent. Although I am not a professional archaeologist or a former student, he included me in his circle of friends and associates over the last 15 to 20 years. Kent was one of the most caring persons I have known. He has truly loved and literally cared for several students I knew of who were struggling emotionally with their lives. At the same time he was a gifted teacher and touched many lives throughout his career. He often humorously referred to his students as his children. Kent, you were one of kind and I am sorely missing your humor, your joy, your excitement, and the love you shared with me. And Michael, you are such a dear person. You are in my thoughts and prayers. Farewell Kent. Know that many folks are remembering you still and hold you in their hearts as I do.

Pat LoRusso - July 03, 2024 at 01:29 PM

RH

“*Dr. Reilly was an indomitable force of a person. He influenced me in so many ways and inspired me to continue on with higher education in archaeology, and although my career did not go the way in envisioned, Dr. Reilly was part of the catalyst that got me to where I am today. He was such a kind and thoughtful man, full of humour, and made learning enjoyable and fun. There was so much to learn from him, and I've often thought of him in the subsequent years between my graduation from Texas State University, through my masters, and now into my professional life far from the place I used to call home. I know Dr. Reilly touched many, many people in his life, and I am one of them. I was lucky to know him.*

L. Renee Hendricks

r. hendricks - June 03, 2024 at 10:09 AM

SK

“*Words cannot accurately describe how grateful I am to have had the chance to take classes with Dr. Reilly. Not only was he incredibly smart, and a genius in his field, he was funny and kind. I was saddened to hear of his retirement, and am deeply saddened at his passing. I'd like to give my condolences to his family, friends, colleagues, and students at this time. He will be incredibly missed.*

Savannah Kee - May 31, 2024 at 04:27 PM

“ It was a humid day in North Texas and - even when the occasional presentation ran long or the misplaced observation was made - we were all grateful to be in the air conditioning. We were packed in the UT Tyler auditorium, and I was grateful to have a semi-clean, wrinkled button-up shirt. Yet, I still had a two day bristle on my face and a faint smell of beer on my breath. The lights came on for a presentation break and chance to mingle. At the time, mingling was a thing I actually abhorred. I just wanted to see the field pictures and hear the findings from the anonymous darkness that didn't demand I talk with all the *better people* around me. The lights woke me like a vampire exposed to the sun. Then, turning at the call of my colleague, I came face-to-face with a spectacled man donning a prominent mustache and broad smile. If he saw the bristle and wrinkly attire, or smelled the awful stench on my breathe, it didn't alter his expression one bit. He introduced himself warmly and leaned in with a confident hand-shake, eyes glimmering like someone greeting a friend after a long trip. With a somewhat mischievous grin, he said “Young man, have I got plans for you.” Kent didn't need an application, an elevator pitch, or a resume. He needed a challenge.

Although far from my mind at the time, that was the day that started my own transformation for the better. Looking back, I don't think Kent was ever concerned in finding a student that “oozed potential” or “wore the cloak of remarkable-ness.” Quite the opposite in fact. I think he was looking for someone who desperately needed to be introduced to a bigger reality; one that he both navigated during his life's adventures and in the ethereal dynamo of his mind.

Throughout those early years and beyond them, Kent courteously escorted me through a reality that was hidden in front of my own eyes, one that was blocked by the limitations of my own thinking. When we met those limitations together, he gave me the encouragement and patience to overcome them. I don't live far from North Texas now, but the road that Kent and I traveled from that hot day in Tyler seems like a place far detached from me in time and space. Kent was a remarkable mentor. More importantly, and to

echo the thoughtful memories being shared here by you all, Kent was an even greater friend.

There are many things that have been said about great men that embody what many of us strive to become. Kent embodied these things and more. He recognized the beauty of things that are often ignored or left unrecognized; the qualities of people, places, and things that were conveniently overlooked before he was around to admire them. Perhaps it is this ability he has championed that allowed him to reach out to and enrich the lives of so many people. I saw him touch the lives of students, friends, colleagues, and even total strangers that he would meet on the spot; bewildering me (and surely many others) with a remarkable empathy and readiness to help. I am privileged to have experienced this potent magical power for myself. Perhaps it was his quirks - juxtaposed with unparalleled wit, humor, and untamed curiosity - that made his actions and personality so inspiring. To my great benefit and to the benefit of so many others, Kent was perfectly imperfect. He could somehow connect with the shabby, narrow-minded me of the past and inspire positive change. He even made that journey incredibly fun and full of memories that I will always cherish. As he often loved to say, "We'll have fun, fun, fun, 'till daddy takes the T-bird away!"

I love you, Kent.



Grant Stauffer - May 30, 2024 at 09:05 PM

“ Kent Reilly was the first male role model I had in my life. He was the first guy I ever personally knew who I could look up to, and it took me 21 years and a bit of luck to bump into someone like that. I took his class as a junior because I needed an anthropology credit and the class I really wanted to take was full. Kent knew I couldn't care less about anthropology, and at that time there was little of substance in the world that I did care about, but like so many other folks here, his well-trained mentoring eyes saw SOMETHING in me worth guiding. It would be another 8 years or so until I saw that in myself, but I always had his words to keep me grounded.

I'm grateful for my friend and mentor of more than a decade, who visited me in the hospital when my issues got the better of me, who helped teach me to tie a Windsor knot for my first psychology conference, I couldn't believe I was flying on a plane to San Francisco! I had such little of everything and yet because I had Kent, I had a window to a world that was otherwise practically imaginary for people of my background. I'm grateful that I had a chance to tell him how much he meant to me, and that he got to see me conquer my issues and go on to doctoral study at my dream school, because he was a big part of what helped me get here; I badly wish I could tell him one more time.

Kent was a father to me. In him I had someone I could be honest with, and who would return the honesty. I've had scientific mentors, academic mentors, and in Kent I had a life mentor. I'm not even a little surprised to see this page covered in stories of other fortunate folks who Kent served. He was always about service. Well, and sarcastic jabs.

I hope there's something after all this, Kent, because I love you and I want to see that wrinkly old bulldog face of yours and give you a hug sometime down the line.

CH

How could I have forgotten: I was getting my master's degree, and despite working while doing research I was badly struggling to make ends meet. In fact, I was one (1) day away from being evicted from my apartment, and I didn't have anyone else to turn to. Kent stepped in and payed them the little bit of money I couldn't come up with, keeping me from ostensibly becoming homeless. Kent taught me a lot and let me make my own mistakes but he also picked me up by the scruff, like a lost little dog, when I was at my most vulnerable and got me on my feet. A big part of my happiness in life now was made possible by his generosity and mentorship back then, he didn't do the work for me, but he gave me the breathing room to work on myself. I love you man, now I need to go find Kleenex.

Chris - May 31, 2024 at 10:36 AM

ER

Dr. Reilly showed me compassion and empathy when my mother passed away during my semester with his class. He was a tremendous influence in my life and I have many fond memories of him. I will always be grateful and will never forget his kind soul. Rest in Power.

Ernest - April 15, 2025 at 09:38 PM

CD

“ Kent Reilly was a great man and a wonderful friend and colleague for 20+ years. He was my mentor, my confidant, the guy who could make me laugh with his always keen sense of humor, and he had the most amazing insight in all things iconographic. Kent brought me into his Iconography Workshop in 2003 and it changed my life – literally. I will be forever grateful to him.

I am still having trouble dealing with his passing. Not sure how long it will take to finally accept it – if ever. I am trying to find some comfort in the thought that Kent is finally without pain and at rest. Also, trying to visualize that he just may be with Linda, Bob, and others who have traveled the Milky Way before him, all happily "dancing the two-step" on the other side!

Carol Diaz-Granados

Carol Diaz-Granados - May 30, 2024 at 11:44 AM

JD

“ There are little options other than to suffer the banes of nitrogen narcosis as I re-emerge from the self-effacing depths of a loss so completely overwhelming.

Frank Kent Reilly, III was a mentor to me, a father to me, a guide for me, a thesis chair to me, a collaborative scholar with me, and a tried-and-true friend to me, often when no other person was there for me to fulfill those roles.

I am only ameliorated, mollified, and beguiled of my saturnine bereavement knowing that I am not alone.

But the loss seems so trivial when compared how it is illimitably engulfed by the gains: everyone whose pathway he illuminated and urged to become something other than a celebration of mundanity and mediocrity. He manifested tools unarticulated and hidden within yourself and gave you the self-confidence and wherewithal to become something, anything, everything beyond your wildest dreams of accomplishment and development, shattering your parochial vision and expanding your limits of self-betterment. His dedication towards education was unmatched.

He taught me how to see through structures of power and ideology, how to extrapolate intrinsic meaning embedded deeply within symbols at profound levels. How to respect and honor the complexities and artistic achievements of Indigenous expression. For decades he studied the veil between the living and the dead and skirted the obfuscated lines between natural and preternatural worlds. He broke my molds and challenged me to sequester my own ego for instead an objective perspective. I use these tools everyday.

I was there quite a bit for the last several years, and I noticed how he always maintained a gentleman's decorum soaked in politeness, even when pain was abounding.

My heart is fractured terribly and solemnly, but it is there for Michael Scanlon and for anyone that needs to talk, cry, sing, laugh, or pontificate.

In the Muskogee language, I have been told that there is no such thing as a forever goodbye: his last words to me were, "later gator."

*So evanesce into the wind, Doc,
displace the severed silence*

*Raindrops on Ekvnv Hvtke squaregrounds
make a mournful sound.*

Jesse Otis Dalton - May 26, 2024 at 01:10 AM

“ Kent always looked to see how he could help folks. The throng of students in his office along with other people that came from God knows where, is a testament of his kindness and his willingness to help others.

I joined the department at Texas State in 1999; Kent and I became friends instantly. The department was very different then; much, much smaller and in some ways more personal. In the fall of 2001, we co-organized a trip to Moundville (actually I was there to herd students into vans and make sure they didn't get left; we did leave a couple that year). It was a remarkable trip. We ended up having a formal (jacket and tie for the guys and formal dress for the women) soiree in the U of Alabama's unexpectedly fancy faculty club (a previous Governor's mansion). One of those students confessed to me that he had never been to a place like that, so lavish it was like a castle to him, and up until then had always eaten in fast-food joints. All the students eyes were wide-open and taking it all in. Kent introduced these students to a world they had never experienced, and it was a marvelous thing to watch.

I used to introduce myself to our team-taught and required Anthropological Theory course by saying, "I'm not your mother or Dr. Reilly, and I don't love you, so you had better work hard in this class." I'm sure they were all wishing Dr. Reilly was teaching that class instead of me.

Kent is the reason I got a tenure-track position at Texas State. I had founded the Center for Archaeological studies in 2000 and had talked my into teaching a class or two as a lecturer, but it wasn't permanent and everything else was soft money. In 2002 Kent took a leave of absence to direct the C.H. Nash Museum built at the Mississippian site of Chucalissa managed by the University of Memphis. While there they had an opening in the Anthropology Department for a tenure track archaeology position. He called me and said, "You have to apply for that position! If you get it, we can both be here and work on Mississippian mounds together". I did

apply, they offered me the position, but Texas State countered their offer and we both stayed in San Marcos and enjoyed every minute.

Often Kent and I would be talking about such and such or debating this or that, and he would stop in the middle of the conversation and say, "Can you believe that we get paid to do this? Wow!" One of our last conversations was debating the existence of southeastern European Bronze Age and Iron Age kingships.

He never lost his enthusiasm or his zest. Kent will be missed.

Britt Bousman - May 25, 2024 at 10:21 PM

KS

“ *We will miss you daily, Doc. You created so much in life, including who I am. May we all take part in Kent’s love, compassion, grit, and perseverance. Kent, you continue to make this world better in the lives you have inspired, taught, and loved. This pic is my airport send off to Oman in 1997 with Dr. Norman Whalen. Reilly made this 1st of many adventures happen for me. A pivotal moment in life... he was there when I left and when I returned... thanks Doc... I love you.*



Kevin Schubert - May 25, 2024 at 09:41 PM

TM

“ Dr. Reilly pushed me to go on the Anthropology departments trip to LA. I had never flown before and had barely been out of state. He poked and prodded and I finally gave and signed up for the trip. While we were on the flight he secretly told the flight staff it was my first flight and had them announce it over the intercom and present me with a child’s first flight certificate and wings. It was hilarious and made my fears of flying disappear.

He was a great man and had an enormous heart. I would be happy if I could do for just one person what he was able to do for so many of his students and friends.



Travis Metheny - May 25, 2024 at 06:30 PM

CP

“ Kent was a dear friend and godfather to my son Emmett. Always an inspiration. Many adventures and much laughter.



Carolyn Palaima - May 25, 2024 at 03:12 PM

SH

“ 1 file added to the tribute wall



sherrispivey - May 25, 2024 at 12:28 PM

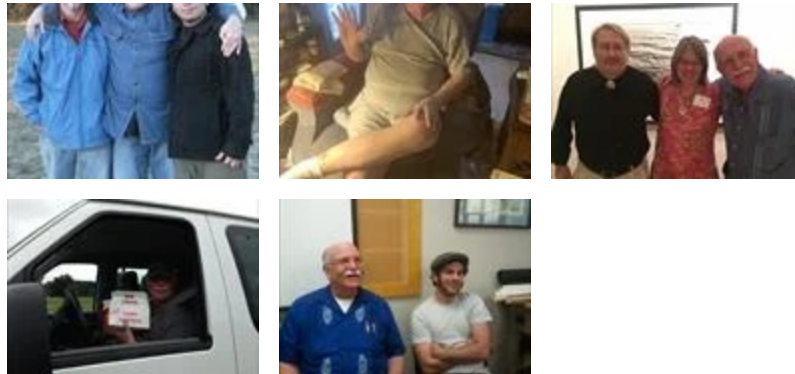
DZ

“ Kent didn't give me an education, he gave me my life. I met Kent when I was 18 years old in Vietnam. I was a combat Marine. He was our Navy combat medic. No matter how deep we were in the jungle, in the valleys or the mountains, he was there with us Marines. He looked after us and we looked after him. He saw each of us every day. He carried a 50+ pound medical bag everywhere he went. He gave us a pill every day so we would not get Malaria and made sure we swallowed it. 1 of our major battles were near Hamburger Hill in June 1969. We were set up in an ambush on Ho Chi Minh Trail where we encountered 100+ NVA's, there was about 30 of us Marines and Kent. We lost 7 Marines that night and unlive 30+ NVA's. Us Marines were fighting as hard as we could. Regardless of the dangers, Kent was moving from wounded Marine to wounded Marine, with his 50 lb medical bag, patching them up, he saved many Marines lives that night. A reinforcements of another 30 Marines came to help with the battle, we ran what was left of the NVA out of the area. Kent earned the Bronze Star Metal with combat "V" that night for his bravery. I live near Ocala Florida, I re-met Kent 30 years later at Our Square Grounds in Blountstown, Florida. We were chatting in the North Arbor one day about Vietnam and I said our Corpsman delivered a few babies. He said he did too and asked who I was with, we were in the same unit. I gave him a hug and thanked him again for saving my life. He said he delivered 13 babies while in Vietnam. He never said how many Marines he saved, but I know he saved alot of us Marines. He has earned the title of a United States Marine. Kent you will never be forgotten. Michael, thanks you for loving and taking care of our Brother.

David P Zeigler - May 25, 2024 at 08:39 AM

Johann Sawyer

“ *Kent was like a father to me. No words can really describe how important he was to me and others. To me and like those others he was also a friend, teacher, and mentor. He was and will always be there in our hearts and minds. May his journey along the Great Road be well and full of his cheerful laugh.*



Johann Sawyer - May 24, 2024 at 05:09 PM

MC

*Thank you, dear Spanky. Kent cared for you so, worried & wondered, asked after you, remaining very proud of you.
...abrazos, hermano, Michael*

MCS - May 25, 2024 at 08:54 AM

DA

“ *1 file added to the tribute wall*



Dan Penton, Ekvnv Hvtke Tribal Town and - May 24, 2024 at 04:24 PM

DA

“ 1 file added to the tribute wall



Dan Penton, Ekvnv Hvtke Tribal Town and - May 24, 2024 at 04:14 PM

DA

“ Indian people, especially those in the southeastern U.S., have lost a true friend and advocate. For more than 30 years, Kent has been my friend and I will sorely miss him. He has attended ceremonies at Ekvnv Hvtke (White Earth) Tribal Town since the 1990s, and years ago he was seated in the Warriors Arbor, as a full citizen, at the direction of the Mother of the Grounds. Her comment to me at the time was simple and beautiful, "He's one of us". Kent often brought his best graduate students, and sometimes, his favorite professional colleagues to the Grounds where we all enjoyed intellectual and cultural interactions and some really bad humor. Kent also extended invitations to some of us to attend and participate in his classes and professional iconography workshops in Austin and San Marcos. His departure leaves us with a heavy heart, but I'm sure he is well along the Dog's Road (Milky Way) on the way to his family's campfire. We will remember and honor your service, Heleswa Harjo. Godspeed.

Dan Penton, Ekvnv Hvtke Tribal Town and - May 24, 2024 at 03:54 PM

MC

Thank you!
Followed instructions well kitted, w enhancements & a flourish yet to come. Nearly there?
Thank you.

MCS - May 26, 2024 at 03:51 AM

MG

“ Nothing finer can be said at a man's passing than he made the world a better place. Loved by royalty and rogues, scoundrels and scientists, he was friend to so many and will be missed by all. Peace Kent and thank you for your friendship.

Matt Gage - May 24, 2024 at 03:26 PM

AT

“ The Tribe lost a dear friend on a personal and professional level. He believed in us, our efforts, and our history as Euchee Creek people. He shared our story with many well respected organizations over 30 years. We will miss him and wish him safe journey across the Milky Way and extend a special thanks to Jesse Dalton and Michael Scanlon for their loving care.

*Ann D. Tucker,
Muscogee Nation of Florida*

Ann Tucker - May 24, 2024 at 02:27 PM

HB

“ Doc was a force. His laugh, kindness and brilliant mind could fill a room. He will be missed by many.



Heather Bohac - May 24, 2024 at 12:13 PM

HM

“ I was laden down with posters for a protest on campus. A fellow grad student & I were headed to see Carl Rove during his visit to campus. Prior to leaving the Anthology building I was stopped by Kent. He inquired and gave a wry smile, walked to his desk and jotted down his digits. He said "If you get into trouble call me. I am good for bail money."

Kent was able to share passion, joy, & the search for justice wherever he went.

Holly Meier - May 24, 2024 at 10:35 AM

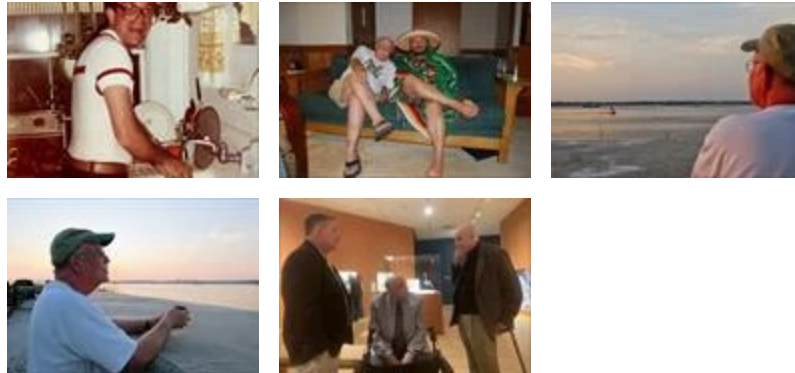
DF

“ Kent would call with his students in the office. Such calls were collective conversations, and for me, opportunities to listen in on the wonderful rapport he sustained as mentor and teacher with his people. When he was at the Dallas Museum of Art speaking with Eric Singleton and Michelle Rich about Recovering Ancient Spiro, I got to join the entourage of students going through the exhibition. I sat with them at his feet as he embraced them with his warm humor and glowing smile. At home with him on the last weekend, students spanning generations, along with old friends like me, came to be with him and Michael and Shelly. I kissed him and told him I love him. He said he loved me. We his people took turns being close and we sustained conversation with him, knowing he was listening and sometimes looking up with those blazing blue eyes. Once we were joking about nicknames he had given some of us and he looked up at me sitting at the foot of his bed and announced Cutie! Thirty-Five years and counting, he had finally dubbed me of the blue velvet pants (which I gave him eventually); a gift I cherish. Later, I was at the top of the bed recounting a dream of walking amidst yellow posts, in retrospect an experience of building the Spirit Lodge, he turned to me and grinned. Thank you, Kent. I will always talk to you and dream where you are.

David Freidel - May 24, 2024 at 10:31 AM

JD

“ 6 files added to the tribute wall



Jesse Otis Dalton - May 24, 2024 at 10:20 AM

DJ

“ *Kent was the light in every room he walked in to. His intellect and wit were a challenge that brought out the best in all of us. He will be long remembered and missed!*



David and Jonatan - May 24, 2024 at 03:06 AM

LO

“ *Only met Kent once, when he and Michael came to dinner at our house in Santa Barbara. I remember him as a vibrant, engaged scholar and dinner companion, even about thirty years later. I am sorry for his passing and know that Michael has many loving memories of their life shared so happily and well. May he now rest in peace.*

Lisa O'Connell - May 23, 2024 at 12:12 PM

JD

“ 11 files added to the tribute wall



Jesse Otis Dalton - May 23, 2024 at 09:33 AM

BB

“ 5 files added to the album Kent Reilly



Britt Bousman - May 22, 2024 at 05:47 PM