



Richard Collins'56 welcomed back to Wyoming High School

Written by Oliver Connelly, a junior at Wyoming High School

May 16th brought Foundation Day back to Wyoming High School; this year's Distinguished Alumnus being Dr. Richard Collins from the class of 1956. The day started off with a school-wide assembly in the Pendery Auditorium, with President of the Wyoming School Foundation, Peter Guggenheim, speaking and introducing Dr. Collins. Richard Collins' resume, everyone learned, is a bit more impressive than the average man. He graduated from Yale in 1960, with a Bachelor of Arts in Chemistry, and went on to serve in the United States Navy for three years, 1960-1963. After the Lieutenant left the Navy, he continued on to Harvard to receive a Bachelor of Laws in 1966. Currently, Dr. Collins is a Professor of Law at the University of Colorado.

With all of these incredible achievements to his name, Richard Collins is known for his efforts for Native American tribes, namely the Navajo, in court. When I spoke to Dr. Collins about what attracted him to the very specific field of Native American law, not the most affluent field a Yale and Harvard graduate could've pursued, he simply told me, "When I got out of school I didn't have any debt, so I didn't need a job with a lot of money. When I spoke to Jill Van Lokeren though, the Distinguished Alumni from last year and Executive Vice President of OWN Network, she spoke of his character as a man, as did his classmate and friend, Dan Jones. Dan Jones, the founder of the extremely successful company NewsBank and Distinguished Alumni from 2014, told me how Dr. Collins could've made much more money elsewhere, and how his tremendously outstanding character is largely the cause for his objective.

The rest of the day consisted of "class panel discussions," a chance for each individual grade to ask questions to Rick Collins '56, Jill Van Lokeren '86, Dan Jones '56, and Ambassador Thomas Boyatt '51. The most interesting answer from Mr. Collins stemmed from the question, "Which historical figure would you like to have dinner?"

After a brief moment of thinking, Dr. Collins answered, "Abraham Lincoln." An answer simple enough, and perhaps a fairly common one for that question, Abraham Lincoln didn't surprise me. But after Dr. Collins dubbed him "the greatest American," I started to get a real sense of 'Richard Collins the man' his peers spoke of, and not 'Richard Collins the name on the impressive resume.'

Abraham Lincoln, as everyone knows, fought for the rights of oppressed humans, and did a tremendous job of doing so. He abolished slavery, and is seen as one of the greatest testimonies of moral character in history. The great accomplishments of

Abraham Lincoln in the political sphere mirror the temperament of Abraham Lincoln the man, as is the case for Dr. Richard Collins.

Dr. Collins argued several important cases before the United States Supreme Court for the advancement of Native Americans, most of them pro-bono, and helped establish the new American Indian Law using the American judicial system. When he spoke of the issues facing Indian Reservations today, the welfare of the people was the greatest and most relevant to discuss. Dr. Collins expressed his marked concern over the widespread poverty Native Americans on Indian Reservations face, another great testament to his character.

Throughout the day, the common theme was the importance of the human spirit. Living in Wyoming, an obviously small and close-knit community, a place where everyone knows everyone, the virtue of kindness is perhaps the most important. Dan Jones told me that taking care of your people is the best attribute a businessman can have, and Jill Van Lokeren told me that whatever job you have, do it happily and with a spring in your step, even if it's just coffee runs or picking up your boss's car down a busy New York city street. To Richard Collins, these virtues are extremely apparent, and in Wyoming they are as well. This year's Foundation Day was headlined by a man who is successful as he is humble, and devoted as he is kind-hearted. His accomplishments shed light on the successes of the past, and give great hope for the prosperity of the future.

The Wyoming School Foundation is honored to recognize alumni who have distinguished themselves in their lives and in their careers. Foundation Day is a unique program that sends an important message to students that the excellent education received from Wyoming Schools will have a profound value in their life. Students may not realize or appreciate their Wyoming education until later in life, but we feel enabling them to see first-hand the successes and accomplishments of Alumni is a meaningful experience.