

A Dedication and Remembrance of Deb Nichols

Deborah Nichols's passing on July 27, 2022, dealt a hard blow to our archaeology community. She was, at that time, the deeply respected and respectful president of the Society for American Archaeology, actively enabling crucial changes in American archaeology. This issue is dedicated to Professor Nichols, or Deb, as many of us knew her, because of her unflagging support for community-engaged, service-oriented archaeological practice. Others have reviewed her many passions, connections, research, and contributions to the professions (see Gilman 2022; Carballo et al. 2023). The *Advances* team instead highlights Deb's devotion to students, future generations of service-oriented archaeologists. In 2022, *Advances* author Erik R. Otarola-Castillo blogged about Deb's mentorship during two key moments early in his career. Here, we invited two of Deb's long-ago students and longtime colleagues, Davina Two Bears and Richard Begay, to reflect on what her mentorship meant to them as Native American scholars coming of age at a time when few had opportunities to join our profession.

BY DAVINA TWO BEARS

I first met Deb Nichols when I was attending Dartmouth College as an undergraduate student back in the late 1980s. Having grown up on the Navajo reservation and in the border towns surrounding the Navajo "rez," I was used to seeing and being around my family and other Navajos. Adjusting to an Ivy League school like Dartmouth where most of my peers were wealthy and *not* Native American was a challenge to say the least. I discovered that I was drawn to the archaeology and anthropology courses at Dartmouth, and I took Debra Nichols's Prehistory of North America and Prehistory of Mesoamerica courses. For the first time in my life, I was learning about the ancient history of Native Americans on this continent. Deb Nichols was one of my favorite professors, and I felt very comfortable with her because she understood who I was as young Diné (Navajo) student.

In talking to Deb, I realized that she spent several years working with Navajo people on the Black Mesa Archaeological Project in northern Arizona. Deb was very enthusiastic about my budding interest in archaeology and encouraged me to pursue anthropology as a major. When I attended an archaeological field school at Wupatki National Monument in Arizona during my junior summer, I was criticized by an elder for excavating an Ancient Puebloan site. I decided to quit anthropology, but Deb showed me recent publications about Native Americans demanding that archaeologists, museums, and other institutions return Native American sacred items and human remains back to tribes. I was

thunderstruck, because this resonated with me and who I was as a Diné. It was then that I decided to be a different kind of archaeologist—one who listened to, respected, and consulted Native peoples, instead of excluding and ignoring them and their concerns. I desired to do archaeological projects that would benefit my tribe.

Deb influenced my life again about a decade after I graduated, when she invited me to attend a symposium at Dartmouth that she co-organized with Joe Watkins entitled, "On the Threshold: Native American-Archaeologist Relations in the Twenty-First Century," which brought together many Indigenous archaeologists and those working in the field like Richard Begay, Desiree Martinez, Dorothy Lippert, John Norder, Roger Echo-Hawk, and Janine Ledford, to name a few. This symposium changed my life when I learned of the decolonizing archaeological projects and research being accomplished by Native American archaeologists. Deb Nichols understood the value of bringing together Indigenous archaeologists to speak about their research and concerns within the field. Because of this symposium, I was inspired to pursue my PhD in archaeology. While a Charles Eastman Fellow at Dartmouth a few years ago, Deb and I were able to reconnect one last time. I am very fortunate to have had Deb Nichols as my friend and mentor throughout my life, and I will always appreciate her.

BY RICHARD M. BEGAY

I matriculated at Dartmouth College in the fall of 1983, and I met Professor Nichols in 1985. We became instant friends. She had worked on Black Mesa in northern Arizona, and I was Navajo from New Mexico; we had something in common. She provided me a link to my homeland, and also sage advice to get me through my college years. It wasn't easy for a "reservation Indian" to be at an Ivy League school. Today, I work as the Tribal Historic Preservation Officer (THPO) for the Navajo Nation. My work in the general field of anthropology and historic preservation has its roots at Dartmouth with guidance from incredible people such as Professor Nichols—I rarely called her by her first name; it was always Professor Nichols.

My years at Dartmouth were in the aftermath of the settlement of the Navajo-Hopi Joint Use Area (JUA), which resulted in the relocation of thousands of Navajos and a few hundred Hopis. And not coincidentally, Peabody had just completed the massive Black Mesa Archaeological Project (BMAP) in preparation for their mine expansion. Professor Nichols had worked on the BMAP project

Advances in Archaeological Practice 11(3), 2023, pp. 265–266

Copyright © The Author(s), 2023. Published by Cambridge University Press on behalf of Society for American Archaeology
DOI:10.1017/aap.2023.27

and was familiar with the strip mining on Black Mesa, the economic and social impacts of the mining operations, and the devastation of forced relocation on Navajo families. Many were relocated by the federal government near Sanders, Arizona. In 1986, I worked with Dartmouth's Native American Program to sponsor a symposium on the JUA issue. Professor Nichols was right by my side in planning the event. She suggested David F. Aberle, PhD, University of British Columbia, and Richard O. Clemmer, PhD, University of Denver, to present their work with Navajos and the Hopi; both had worked on the JUA and relocation problem. Danny Blackgoat (1952–2022), a Navajo relocatee who was in Vermont at the time, joined the discussion and provided a sobering personal account of his family's experience. Without her guidance and expertise, I would not have been able to organize the event.

Over the years, I joined the American Anthropological Association, the Society for American Archaeology, and other professional and avocational organizations. I occasionally ran into Professor Nichols at various conferences. She was usually busy with her own papers and sessions, and other engagements, but in more than one instance she was in the audience when I gave the occasional paper. She had turned her focus to Mesoamerica, but she always maintained her interest in Black Mesa. Later in my work as the Navajo THPO, I called her on at least two occasions on issues related to the return of BMAP human remains and the archaeological collections from SIU-Carbondale (and UNLV) to Arizona at the request of the Hopi and Navajo Tribes. At Dartmouth she continued to support Indigenous students from all across the country, the Native American Studies program, and the Native Americans at Dartmouth student association. Many alumni have great memories of her. In my infrequent visits to my alma mater, I always made an effort to visit her, and despite her busy schedule,

she always managed to find time for us to chat and catch up. We often talked about what was happening on the "rez" and about developments and initiatives on the campus.

Professor Nichols and I had a few friends and professional colleagues in common. So when I received the news of her passing from several people, I was shocked. I last saw her in 2019 in Hanover, New Hampshire. Over the years I had gotten to know her husband and colleague, John. Aaron, her son, was a just a youngster when I met him. Deb occasionally sent me photos of him on his travels. I also remember meeting her dog Peabody, which I believe she rescued from an animal shelter. I have fond memories of Professor Nichols. Black Mesa (and Mesoamerica) surely recalls her too. I will remember her when the Wind blows and the Rain falls. We should all reflect on our own lives and how we make a difference in this world when we hear the wind howl, or the rains dance on the earth. It makes us accept that we are part of something bigger, and we will always be part of the earth and part of the lives of the people we loved and befriended. Deb, you are my friend, and I will look for you on Black Mesa.

REFERENCES CITED

- Carballo, David, Davina Two Bears, and Daniel Sandweiss. 2023. In Memoriam: Deborah L. Nichols. *SAA Archaeological Record* 23(2):59–60.
- Gilman, Julie. 2022. Passing of Deb Nichols, William J. Bryant 1925 Professor of Anthropology. *Dartmouth Department of Anthropology News*, August 8. <https://anthropology.dartmouth.edu/news/2022/08/passing-deb-nichols-william-j-bryant-1925-professor-anthropology>, accessed May 29, 2023.
- Otarola-Castillo, Erik. 2022. Monico Origins, a Bayesian Story. *Cambridge Core Blog*, October 10. <https://www.cambridge.org/core/blog/2022/10/10/monico-origins-a-bayesian-story/>, accessed May 29, 2023.