



RICHARD RICKLEFS, M.D. 1920-2006

In recent years I was honored to be Richard Ricklefs' friend. While I did not know him during his long years of medical practice, and during his remarkable marriage to Elsie Mae Gardner, the consistency of his life continued. Through his gentle reminiscences I became well acquainted with the shape of his life. We don't often these days use the word exemplary to speak of a person, but it is certainly the word that comes to mind when thinking of Richard.

Richard was a man of courage and quiet persistence. As a lifelong pacifist he served as a conscientious objector during the Second World War. Both he and his wife, Elsie, worked in a psychiatric hospital in Connecticut at that time. Their work and that of other conscientious objectors became fundamental to the subsequent reform of state mental hospitals in our country. After World War II, Richard managed, with his wife's help, to return to school to study medicine at Hahnemann Medical College in Philadelphia, then doing a rotating internship designed for prospective general practitioners at St. Luke's Hospital in San Francisco. A few months into his internship Richard became aware that the pediatric training being offered was less than had been promised, and less than he felt he needed to practice in an isolated rural setting. Being a bit older than most of his fellow interns he was willing to approach the administration of the program about these deficiencies and appropriate changes were made.

In 1952 Richard began his practice in the Hoopa Valley.

To speak of Richard it is necessary to speak of the Hoopa Valley and the Hupa People. Richard first went to Hupa in 1934 as a teenager to visit his brother who was teaching there. He fell in love with the Valley and with Elsie Gardner, a Hupa girl a few years his junior. Their long courtship led to their marriage in 1942; a marriage which endured some sixty years until Elsie's death a few years ago. Their lives were intertwined with those of the Hupa Tribe and the wider community through Richard's medical practice, Elsie's work as community activist and educator, and more essentially through deep love and trust built up through years of commitment, dependability and courageous service. Their commitment to one another in itself required courage and independent mindedness, beginning as it did at a time when such a "mixed marriage" was not always welcomed.

Richard's work as a physician has been well known in Humboldt County since it began 55 years ago. He was a pioneer in the organization of health care, running a prepaid medical system in Hupa in the 1950's, emphasizing family centered obstetrics and the integration of Native American approaches to health care with the benefits of Western Medicine. His dedication and the quality of the care he gave are legendary in Hupa.

After retiring from full-time medical practice in the late 1980's Richard remained active as community organizer, peace activist and respected elder in the Hupa and Quaker communities. It

is through his Quaker connection that I came to know him well. During the last years of his life he traveled to the coast frequently to attend Humboldt Friends Meeting where he provided inspiration to many. He and Elsie had become Quakers in the 1940's but during the most active years of their lives it was not easy to attend meeting while living in Hoopa.

My friendship with Richard was based on many common interests but more than anything on a shared philosophy about medical practice. He had great respect for the ideals of the profession and remained active both in the Medical Society and in the organization of medicine in Hoopa into the last years of his life.

Richard was a truly modest man though intelligent enough to know his own worth. To live with simple integrity and in a humane and loving manner is not an easy task in our world. Richard managed to do that and the only tribute he would want is that others try their best to do the same.

by Fred Adler, M.D.