

William Samuel DeCory Biography

William Samuel DeCory was born on June 4, 1936, at Two Strike Community near St. Francis, South Dakota, on the Rosebud Sioux Indian Reservation to Sam DeCory Sr. and Ada Schweighman DeCory. Growing up, family and friends called William by his middle name, Sam. Sam had two Lakota names: the first was Isnala Wakan Inajin, which means “Stands Holy Alone.” This name was given to him by his grandfather, Frank Fools Crow, a medicine/holy man from the Pine Ridge Indian Reservation who served as one of Sam’s special mentors. His second Lakota name was Wakinyan Akicita, meaning “Thunder/Lightning Warrior,” which was bestowed on Sam by his Grandmother Lucy.

Sam grew up in a very family-oriented environment. He always spoke of living in a household with parents who loved each other and their children dearly. However, Sam and his family still endured many hardships while he was growing up. Sam grew up in the 1930’s, experiencing the Great Depression on the Rosebud Reservation, until he and his family moved to Rapid City to a Native American encampment. Sam, his two parents, three siblings, and his grandmother all lived in a small canvas home. Their family was poor and struggled to find enough food to eat. On occasion, Sam’s mother would only have one turnip to make a soup that needed to feed the whole family. These hardships were carried in Sam’s memory even into late adulthood when he was financially secure. When he had a family of his own, he would often buy extra cans of food, even if they already had plenty to eat. He also bought extra socks and underwear because they couldn’t afford them when he was younger, so he was forced to wear his brother’s old clothes.

In the late 1950s, Sam signed up for the United States Marine Corps where he served in Korea. He later signed up for the U.S Army and completed four and a half tours in Vietnam. During his time in the Army, Sam was captured and held as a prisoner of war for a brief amount of time before escaping. For these tours and his endless bravery, Sam earned five purple hearts for being injured, a Combat Infantry Badge, several bronze stars, multiple silver stars, a Distinguished Service Cross, Army Master Jump Wings with one gold star denoting combat jump, Expert Rifleman and Pistol, as well as other Vietnam service medals. Sam had hoped to serve longer for his country, but was forced to take a medical retirement after being wounded several times as well as being exposed to Agent Orange, which is a dangerous chemical. Sam struggled for many years after service with post-traumatic stress disorder as well as substance abuse. He later became clean and dedicated his time helping others do the same.

After Sam returned from Vietnam, he worked to better his community by becoming a police officer in Rapid City and Pine Ridge, South Dakota. He later decided that his passion in life would be helping others in a different way. Therefore, Sam decided to return to college; he studied at Black Hills State University and received his bachelor’s degree in sociology and

psychology. He later went on to receive his master's degree in counseling and guidance from South Dakota State University.

Using his degree, he worked as an independent counselor with the youth and their families, but mostly with young males who struggled with substance abuse. Sam also worked with other veterans to help them try to overcome their post-traumatic stress disorder. People in the community thought highly of Sam because he was always willing to listen and give advice. He continued his connection to the service years after by praying with other veterans at the First Rolling Thunder Rally, as well as the Vietnam Veteran's Memorial, both in Washington, D.C. Sam also prayed at Bear Butte near Sturgis, South Dakota, on many occasions for prisoners of war and those declared missing in action. He also formed a warrior's society, called Tokala Society, consisting of men who served as role models in their communities. After Sam passed away, multiple people came to his wife, Jace, and claimed that Sam saved their lives.

Family was one of the most important things in Sam's life. Sam married Jace (Cuney) DeCory in 1980 and together they had two sons, Sam Jr. and Dawson. Before marrying Jace, Sam was previously married and had two sons, Dallas and Shawn, and one daughter, Christiane. As a Lakota man, he believed the way that he left his mark on the Earth was by what kind of a relative he had been and how he had impacted his immediate and extended family. Sam identified as a strong Lakota man who continued the warrior image by protecting his family and members of his tribe and community.

After struggling for many years with injuries and the aftereffects of Agent Orange, Sam passed away on May 24, 2002, at the age of 65. Even after his death, Sam's legacy carries on. He changed many lives by being an advocate for veterans, a healthy life, and racial harmony. Sam is buried along with his parents at Black Hills National Cemetery in Sturgis, South Dakota. His headstone is covered with his many prestigious battle awards, but most importantly, the words "Beloved Father." Sam's life and legacy will continue to influence others for years to come.