

Zora "Susie" Aikman



Zora Susanne "Susie" Aikman, beloved friend, artist, author, AlterNative Voices Public radio host, and floor director at Colorado Public Television for more than 20 years, died peacefully on June 21, the Summer Solstice, surrounded by friends who loved and cared for her during her struggle with cancer. Susie, Eastern Band Cherokee, was born on January 1, 1945 to parents Herb and Zora. Born in Dayton, OH, she attended Columbus College of Art and Design, Ohio State University and Metropolitan State University in Denver. She is the author of "A Primer: The Art of Native American Beadwork" and founder of AlterNative Voices, a Native American music and news radio show on Denver's KUVU-FM for more than 20 years. She was influential in launching the careers of many Native musicians. Through her weekly program, she introduced Native American music to thousands of people around the world. Susie said she founded AlterNative Voices so "our people could communicate." Many listeners met Susie at pow-wows, festivals and church events where she sold books and music to introduce many to Native culture, tradition and music. A lifelong Methodist and a national Native American ministry leader in the United Methodist Church, Susie served on many UMC national boards, including the Native American International Caucus and the Rocky Mountain Conference Committee on Native American Ministries. She was most proud of her work over the last 20 years with the descendants of the Sand Creek Massacre and a bridge towards healing the United Methodist Church with the descendants. It was Susie who notified the Northern and Southern Cheyenne communities that Silas Soule was buried at Riverside Cemetery in Denver. Soule served under the command of John Chivington. He defied orders to attack at Sand Creek, bore witness to the horror, wrote letters and gave testimony in the Congressional inquiry that brought the atrocities to light. Susie created the first Honoring Ceremony for Silas Soule at Riverside Cemetery in 2002 with organizers of the Sand Creek Run. Susie was also a participant in a first ever innovative project: the 2010 Census Tribal Road Tour. Traveling throughout the western US, she posted photos and commentary from the specially equipped vehicle fondly called "War Paint" as Native people were encouraged to be counted. She brought communities together and helped all understand everyone makes a difference. Susie is survived by many friends, colleagues and a circle of women who cared for her during her illness and final journey. A Celebration of Life service will be held at Wheat Ridge United Methodist Church, 7530 W. 38th Ave., Wheat Ridge on Thursday, July 3 at 10:00am. A community feast will follow after the service. Memorial gifts can be made to the Susie Aikman Memorial Scholarship for Native American Students at Iliff School of Theology, 2201 S. University Blvd., Denver, CO 80210, or to any Native American health organization that is committed to caring for Native people.

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