



## Melvin Sampson

April 20, 1938 - December 11, 2020

On Friday, December 11, 2020 the Heavenly Father called Melvin Roger Sampson to the gates of heaven freeing him from the disease and pain that crippled his body but could not succumb his brilliant mind and sense of humor. At the time of his death, he was surrounded by his family at home on the TePee S Ranch. Mel is survived by his wife and team roping partner, Betty Jean of 54 years. He leaves behind four daughters Teri Littleman (Art), Rhoda Sampson (Ed), Doreen Sampson (Josh) and Crystal Sampson. He is also survived by numerous grandchildren, great-grandchildren, two sisters; Alta Sanchez and Marie Sutterli (Gene) and many nieces and nephews.

Melvin was born on April 20, 1938 to Alex and Josephine Sampson. He was raised in White Swan, WA where he spent his early days riding horses and fishing in Celilo with his parents. He graduated from White Swan High School in 1956. In high school is where Mel began crafting the art of leadership and was also an accomplished athlete. Right out of high school, he enlisted in the United States Army. He would go on to receive his Associates of Arts from Lower Columbia College in Longview, WA and then studied Psychology at Central Washington University where he nearly obtained his Bachelor's degree. Despite not completing his degree, he would go on to accomplish countless accolades.

Melvin was instrumental to the Yakama Nation and Indian Country in a vast range of accomplishments. As a Yakama Nation Tribal Councilman, he put health services for Native Americans in the forefront, in addition to funding

resources he was responsible for securing the state of the art building (IHS Clinic). In his current capacity he provided national recognition skills secured both operational and structural funding to the Yakama Nation Fisheries Program, paving way for scientific and technological growth to enhance fisheries protection, preservation and production. Most recently having the new Coho Facility named after him. In addition to that, he was one of the founding Commissioners of the Indian National Finals Rodeo where his vision, dedication and tireless support helped Indian cowboys and cowgirls be nationally recognized. He was inducted into the INFR Hall of Fame in 2011. Not to mention, he was on the Board of Heritage College which is now a University.

Melvin is preceded in death by his parents Alex and Josephine Sampson, brothers; Levi, Eddie, Joe Sr., Ralph and sisters; Jane and Aletha, his children Simone and Paul and grandchildren Nim McAtty Jr. and Maurice McAtty. His family would like to extend a special thank you to Dr. Kruse and Dr. Sloop, and also the doctors, nurses and social workers at Virginia Mason in Seattle. We are forever grateful to the hospice care nurses through Virginia Mason Memorial and Josh Marquez for helping us all through the end of life care. A Visitation Service will be held on Wednesday, December 16, 2020 at Colonial Funeral Home in Toppenish, Wa from 10:00 am to 11:00 am for immediate family and from 11:00 am to 2:00 pm for the public. Graveside Services will be held on Thursday, December 17, 2020 at 11:00 am at Reservation Cemetery in Wapato, Wa. The family wishes that in lieu of flowers please consider donations to the Evergreen Neuroscience Institute c/o Parkinson's Center (Booth Gardner Parkinson's Care Center).

# Cemetery Details

## Reservation Community Memorial Park

West Wapato Road 5 miles west of Wapato  
Wapato, WA

# Previous Events

## Visitation

DEC 16. 10:00 AM - 2:00 PM (PT)

Heggie's Colonial Funeral Home  
228 S. Alder Street  
Toppenish, WA 98948  
(509) 865-3222  
[info@heggiescolonialfuneralhome.com](mailto:info@heggiescolonialfuneralhome.com)

## Burial

DEC 17. 11:00 AM (PT)

Reservation Community Memorial Park  
West Wapato Road 5 miles west of Wapato  
Wapato, WA

# Tribute Wall



“ *Melvin Sampson*

October 05, 2023 at 11:22 AM



“ *I served with Mel on the Yakima-Klickitat Fisheries Project (YKFP) Policy Group (PG) as the Washington Dept. of Fish & Wildlife (WDFW) policy representative for 18-1/2 years (Dec. '99 to June '18) until my retirement from WDFW. Mel was very knowledgeable, a skilled manager and totally dedicated to restoring all stocks of native salmon and steelhead in the Yakima and Klickitat Basins. Mel was always a gentleman, he was kind to me and we respected each other personally and our roles on the YKFP PG. I think we worked well together over the years to help steer the direction of the YKFP, together with our BPA funding partner. I was very gratified to spend some time with Mel reminiscing at the Melvin R. Sampson Coho Hatchery dedication in Nov. '19, and lastly, at Dave Fast's retirement party last Feb. just before the pandemic lockdown. My sincere condolences to Mrs. Sampson, his family and the Yakama Nation.*

**John Easterbrooks (aka "Easty")** - January 01, 2021 at 11:09 AM



“ *My sincere condolences to Betty and the entire Sampson Family. I am so fortunate for having had the opportunity to work alongside Mel to protect the fisheries resources that he held so dear. The commitment and drive he instilled in so many of us is still stronger than ever. I am grateful for the times he and I shared in the upper Klickitat, and our trips to Portland, where he would recount a lifetime of stories. I am honored to have known Mel and his memory will continue to inspire me.*

**Bill Sharp** - December 21, 2020 at 12:28 PM

DE

“ *Mel was one of our great tribal leaders. He was extremely helpful and knowledgeable about health care and many other issues during his time of leadership. Condolences to his family, he will be greatly missed and always remembered. Dee Pigsley, Siletz*

dee - December 18, 2020 at 08:09 PM

TG

“ *We were sad to learn of the passing of Mel. We had a lot of good memories of Mel and Betty back in the day. Always looked forward to the Annual White Swan Days and would go to their place for the famous salmon cookout. Mel was a good man and a card to be around. RIP Safe Journey friend. Always Ron and Toni Bird, 53 Bird Road, Cut Bank, MT.*

Toni A. Gilham - December 18, 2020 at 12:34 PM

JD

*I just wanted Betty to know how sorry I was to hear about Mel's passing. I remember when I worked at the Furniture Factory with Betty, Mel would come visit her. He always had a good joke to tell and had us all laughing. We always enjoyed his visits, especially Betty! You are in my thoughts and prayers Betty! Janet (Sterns) Doty*

janet doty - December 19, 2020 at 11:42 AM

KW

“ *Karen L Wolf lit a candle in memory of Melvin Sampson*



Karen L Wolf - December 17, 2020 at 05:53 PM

SA

“ *Sending our Love and Prayers to the Family.*

*From: Denny, Sarah , Deets*



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**Sarah** - December 17, 2020 at 05:19 PM

RD

“ *Sending our love and prayers to the family. Melvin was such an amazing man who was always so welcoming to our family as we would roped at his arena. He always had great advice and made every memory a great one. We will miss you Melvin.*

*The Dixon Family*

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**Robert Dixon** - December 17, 2020 at 03:40 PM

GS

“ *My deepest condolences to the family - May peace be a remembrance to our hearts of Mel*  
*Gary Sloan*

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**gary sloan** - December 17, 2020 at 03:12 PM



“ *Patti Smith lit a candle in memory of Melvin Sampson*



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**Patti Smith** - December 17, 2020 at 02:08 PM

TR

“ 1 file added to the album Memories Album



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**Tom Ring** - December 17, 2020 at 12:53 PM

TR

“ 1 file added to the album Memories Album



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**Tom Ring** - December 17, 2020 at 12:49 PM

JS

“ *I am sorry to hear of Mel's passing. My condolences to his family.*

*Jeff Schuster*

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**Jeffrey Schuster** - December 17, 2020 at 12:29 PM

TR

“ 1 file added to the album Memories Album



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**Tom Ring** - December 17, 2020 at 11:20 AM

PH

“ Prayers and condolences to the Sampson family



Phylistine - December 17, 2020 at 09:41 AM

JH

“ Beloved cowboys, like brothers, always had love for rodeo, cattle, the land and especially the family and friends, prayers for my friend Betty and the girls and grandchildren

Jennie Honanie - December 17, 2020 at 08:30 AM

GS

“ The INFR lost another founding father. My condolences to Mel's family; you're in my prayers. I had the privilege of working with him during WSIRA rodeos in the 70s and 80s. I especially miss Jake Grossmiller who we lost earlier last spring, and Jay Harwood and now Mel. Thank you for the memories.

Ginger Smith - December 17, 2020 at 03:18 AM

DF

“ My love and condolences to Betty and the family.



Deirdre Olney Fojuwaye - December 16, 2020 at 11:02 PM

SC

“ My prayers for uplifting and condolences to Betty and family.

Mel -

It was a great honor to share stories and laughs with you, down the hallway in your office or mine.....well, now you have those "front row" seats in all the BIG GAMES!! ; ) I will need that inside info before the BIG games come through, you surely will be missed not only during these games but everyday. I salute you!

Signed: YN BOOKIE!! (his dubbed name for me!)



Sandra Celestine - December 16, 2020 at 10:36 PM

GT

“ CONDOLENCES TO HIS FAMILY.....REST IN PEACE MELVIN.....



GINA TALPOCKEN-MEANUS - December 16, 2020 at 10:04 PM

JL

“ My Condolences & prayers to the Sampson families. He achieved a lot and was such a great asset to the Yakama Nation in all areas of leadership in TC, Rodeo Association, Fisheries, IHS, etc... He will greatly be missed.



Julia Leslie - December 16, 2020 at 06:27 PM

SS

“ Prayers to the Sampson Family. Melvin was a nice nice man. So sorry.. Rest in Peace friend.

Sue Shockley-Myra - December 16, 2020 at 03:03 PM

DJ

“ My condolences, love & prayers to Betty and the families whom have lost a great mentor and leader. May he have a Blessed journey.



Debra M. Johnson - December 16, 2020 at 02:00 PM



“ Sweet Tranquility Basket was purchased for the family of Melvin Sampson.



December 16, 2020 at 01:27 PM

DL

“ I worked a couple levels down the chain of command from Mel from 2000 until my retirement in 2018, and I personally owe him a lot. He spoke truth to bureaucracy, broke logjams and got things done to protect the Yakama Nation's resources and to create a productive environment for his employees. We always knew he valued us.

Mel must have had a name for everyone: mine was High Pockets, or HP for short. Among the things we talked about in recent years was the time he was stationed at White Sands Proving Grounds many years ago, and he enjoyed the old videos we found about the Redstone rocket program he had worked on.

Betty and family members, let me add my condolences and my affirmation that he was loved, appreciated and depended on, not only by the many whom you know, but by a host of others you've never met.

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**David Lind** - December 16, 2020 at 01:25 PM

TF

“ Heaven got another good cowboy

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**Tom Ford** - December 16, 2020 at 12:41 PM

WB

“ Mel was like a father and grandfather to many of us in Yakama Nation Fisheries and the Yakima-Klickitat Fisheries Project. We are forever grateful for his leadership, humor, stories, mentorship and friendship. A truly great person. Bill Bosch

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**William J Bosch** - December 16, 2020 at 11:46 AM

RD

“ Condolences to the Sampson's family ,in there loss !! 🙏🙏🙏



Roy and jaci dillman - December 16, 2020 at 11:30 AM

TW

“ Tamera Walker lit a candle in memory of Melvin Sampson



Tamera Walker - December 16, 2020 at 10:47 AM

RJ

“ Safe journey to Mr. Sampson. Our friend Mel. A respected and hardworking man for his family, his ranch, his many hobbies and events he was part of, the community, and the people of Yakama Nation, a true leader and a True Warrior.  
Brave and courageous true cowboy all his life.  
No longer ill. No more pain. Rest easy.  
Betty. Children. Grandchildren. Family. Friends. We share the loss today, but we send our prayers and love to help you in the following days.  
Blessings. 🛎️🕯️🕯️🕯️🛎️



Regina Jerry - December 16, 2020 at 10:30 AM

LC

“ *My condolences to Mel's family. It was my privilege to be associated with Mel for 28 years at the Fisheries program. He always had great rodeo stories to share.*



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**Lee Carlson** - December 16, 2020 at 10:12 AM

TG

“ *Lots of Love Hugs , Prayers out to all My Family and Friends.*



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**Tammy Sampson Gasca** - December 16, 2020 at 09:55 AM

TG

“ *Love You Uncle Melvin. Enjoyed growing up with You and Auntie , The Girl's. Lots of Precious Memories*



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**Tammy Sampson Gasca** - December 16, 2020 at 09:52 AM

BO

“ *RIP Uncle Melvin you will be missed but never forgotten 🥲💔🥲*



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**Bernice Owens** - December 15, 2020 at 09:02 PM

LM

“ Lexie Mesplie lit a candle in memory of Melvin Sampson



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**Lexie Mesplie** - December 15, 2020 at 08:20 PM

DN

“ David J Northover lit a candle in memory of Melvin Sampson



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**David J Northover** - December 15, 2020 at 07:43 PM

JO

“ Jackie Olney lit a candle in memory of Melvin Sampson



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**Jackie Olney** - December 15, 2020 at 07:36 PM



“ 4 files added to the album *Memories Album*



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**Heggie's Colonial Funeral Home** - December 15, 2020 at 06:14 PM



“ *Stacey Parr purchased the Beautiful in Blue for the family of Melvin Sampson.*



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**Stacey Parr** - December 15, 2020 at 04:41 PM



“ *Shasta Olney Watlamet lit a candle in memory of Melvin Sampson*



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**Shasta Olney Watlamet** - December 15, 2020 at 02:59 PM

JR

“ Jason Rau lit a candle in memory of Melvin Sampson



Jason Rau - December 15, 2020 at 12:22 PM

TS

“ Tammy Swan lit a candle in memory of Melvin Sampson



Tammy Swan - December 15, 2020 at 11:49 AM

ST

“ Susie Tynan lit a candle in memory of Melvin Sampson



Susie Tynan - December 15, 2020 at 08:23 AM

TS

“ Condolences, prayers and song to his wife and family he loved and his people he served. A wonderful father, husband, brother, and uncle. The Sampson family.



The Sampson's - December 14, 2020 at 07:53 PM

MG

“ *Maxine E George lit a candle in memory of Melvin Sampson*



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**Maxine e George** - December 14, 2020 at 06:50 PM

BE

“ *Beatrice lit a candle in memory of Melvin Sampson*



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**beatrice** - December 14, 2020 at 06:41 PM

YA

“ *Yakama Nation Housing Authority purchased the Tranquil Seas for the family of Melvin Sampson.*



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**Yakama Nation Housing Authority** - December 14, 2020 at 04:54 PM



“ *Prayers to Betty and The Sampson Family!!!  
A wonderful man who served the Yakama  
Nation Tribe. My sincere condolences from  
our family to yours. I know my late husband  
Roger always enjoyed working on program  
projects with him. Please take care.*



*Armetha Smiskin and Houle Sons*

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**Armetha Smiskin** - December 14, 2020 at 04:44 PM



“ *Gina M. Northover-Moore lit a candle in  
memory of Melvin Sampson*



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**Gina M. Northover-Moore** - December 14, 2020 at 04:02 PM