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Rufino Uchurte was probably the last Kiliwa Indian who was able to teach others about his native culture. He could teach it because he believed in it and because he lived it.

There was a benignness that characterized Rufino, the memory of which will live long beyond his death, which occurred April 18, 1977. But his kindness was only one facet of this gentle man. Underlying an aura of simplicity dwelled a sensitive, wise, courageous, generous, and affectionate man. He had a vast knowledge and understanding of his world and

of himself which added up to an extraordinary dignity.

His character was a reflection of a hard and tragic life and of a triumph of survival over adversity in a changing world. He survived the massacre of his father and all other close male relatives at the hands of troops during the 1911 revolution. From that time on he was responsible for his own welfare. Later, when he had a family, he provided for them mainly by hunting and gathering from the desert. Over the years he burned many of his houses because of deaths in the family, as his custom required.

When students of Native American culture entered his world, he became their friend and teacher. He gave freely of his knowledge of survival in a desert environment, of the languages he spoke, and, best of all, of the complexities of his world. A long walk through the desert was an education in itself. Information was volunteered about everything encountered; from the spirits on a distant mountain, a rockpile beside the trail where his ancestors left tokens to ensure a safe trip, a medicinal herb, how to take honey from a hive hidden in a cleft in the rocks, whether a certain kind of cactus was ready to harvest, and, perhaps, how one should care for one's self in order to maintain stamina for a long walk.

In the evening, by the light of a small fire, he would reluctantly sing some of the old Kiliwa songs, though it saddened him because there was no one left alive with whom he could

share their full meaning.

Other songs were meant for dancing. He was always willing to sing the Bird Song or the Wildcat Song while the younger people laughed and played. Rufino could laugh and play also. His wit was irrepressible. Once, while hunting with Rufino, a student mistakenly shot at a bush, thinking that it was a rabbit. Later, whenever the student came to visit, he was greeted with the question, "Did you bring some ammunition so we can go hunting for bushes?"

Adversity and hard times were just part of the normal scheme of things, but most of life was for good living. A hot summer afternoon

was a time for contemplation while lying in the cool shade. For the cold, a warm fire was better than a good overcoat. Good food was a pure delight, especially when it could be enjoyed with good friends, and the company of good friends was compensation for the lonely times.

For those of us who knew Rufino well, he will always remain one of the most unforgettable people we have ever known. We were the fortunate ones; we were taught by a great teacher and touched by his great warmth.

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