Qua tsina, qua tsi, Hopa Hano. I have been a student off and on for decades, but it was March of 1973 which had an enormous impact on my life. KIVA Club members were concerned about threats to sacred sites and our environment. Back in those days, Black Mesa was our primary focus. Today, the mining activity has ceased and the Mohave Generating Station is shut down. Other victories have come to be since then and the protection of the San Francisco Peaks near Flagstaff, Arizona is the latest and greatest.

In the 1970s KIVA Club began to address major issues impacting Native Americans in Gallup, New Mexico. In 1973 Larry Casuse was president of the KIVA Club and he led a crusade to improve how Native Americans were treated in Gallup. The appointment of then Gallup Mayor Emmett Garcia to the University of New Mexico’s Board of Regents by then Gov. Bruce King caused an immediate reaction. Garcia owned a number of bars which were frequented by Native Americans in the Gallup area. KIVA Club and others marched to protest Garcia’s appointment, but more importantly to raise the issue of local bars profiting off the alcoholic additions of our people. Unfortunately, the cost was high and Casuse sacrificed his life at Stearn’s Sporting Goods on Gallup’s main drag. March 3 commemorates our fellow KIVA Club member and his valiant efforts to right the wrongs afflicting our Native people.

The “People’s March for Humanity” brought together a force who marched from the ceremonial grounds to the downtown courthouse in Gallup. Hundreds of people joined together en masse to celebrate our collective humanity and Casuse’s message. Security forces were on hand in the case of possible violence but we were and were peaceful.

Those early days of KIVA can’t be replaced. Initially, we had our own house on Las Lomas where Dane Smith Hall is now located. No value can be placed on having our own home away from home. Granted, I may have spent too much time shooting pool in the basement, but I and my fellow students did have a solid foundation academically. The decolonization process had less formal ideals then. Today, Native American Studies has grown into the field of study for our youth and the department serves students in many ways. The degree program is symbolic of where we stand on this diverse campus and it was not accomplished without a lot of sincere dedication by professors and support staff over time.

Today the KIVA Club is active and open for your participation and gatherings are held on a weekly basis. One way to get involved is to take part in Nizhioni Days and don’t forget to tune into “Singing Wire” on KUNM 89.9 FM on Sundays from noon to 4:00 p.m. You’ll hear about area events, music and maybe join in the conversation. You might even catch the Boy Wonder from San Felipe Who Made Good aka “FM” who is otherwise known as Francis Montoya. Thanks for hearing me out, Peace!

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