

## Teacher of the Month: Trib Choudhary

Written by By Jennifer Kerr For the Sun  
Friday, 25 December 2015 08:35

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Mr. Trib Choudhary who is a professor at UNM Gallup and Zuni campuses, won our “Teacher of the Month” honor and took the time to sit down with me and answer some questions.

I always love it when I see that interviewing someone is a requirement for kids in school. When you sit down and ask someone questions about their life, you never know what you’re going to get. It could be a life-changing experience, and sometimes the hidden treasures that people have never told unless someone asked them about it.

In our interviews with local teachers who were nominated by their students, I have learned so much about their passion – teaching, and am also able to give them some recognition at the same time.

“I do my best to understand my students, their strengths, their weaknesses, so I can think of a way to teach them so they will understand,” Choudhary said.

**Sun: Start by telling me a little about yourself.**

**Choudhary:** I was born in Nepal, received my BA there and my Master’s in what was called the Soviet Union at that time, and is now Russia. I came to the United States in 1979. Sometimes it seems like yesterday, but when I look back it was quite a long time ago! I worked in Los Angeles making shelves for stores, but it was a very stressful job and I really didn’t like it.

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Then I worked for the Navajo Nation doing research for the Department of Economic Development for 20 years. (If you Google my name, you will see the research I did.) Every once and a while I still get phone calls from people all over the world asking questions about the research I did concerning census data, so I teach people about that too. I taught at Dine College in Window Rock for 17 years, Navajo Technical College in Crownpoint for 3 years, Gallup UNM for 7 years, and have been teaching in Zuni for a little over a year

**Sun: When did you decide that teaching is what you wanted to do?**

Choudhary: "Since my childhood. By the third grade I was already teaching my classmates math lessons. I always knew I wanted to be a teacher."

**Sun: Who or what influenced your decision to teach?**

**Choudhary:** My father. I come from a very educated family and my father always wanted me to get my Master's degree. He passed away when I graduated from high school, so unfortunately he did not get to see me become Head Master or receive my Master's degree, but I did it with his leadership and encouragement.

One of my grandchildren that goes to school in Rio Rancho won first place in the whole state of New Mexico for an essay she wrote, she is in eighth grade and I am very proud of her. My son-in-law has his PhD and teaches in Albuquerque, one of my daughters is an engineer, and one is a pharmacist.

**Sun: What is the most rewarding thing about teaching?**

**Choudhary:** When students start out struggling and having a very hard time in the beginning, then end up understanding and rising to the top of the class with pride and confidence, I know I did something right.

*Mr. Choudhary told me numerous stories of students that have caught up with him years later and have thanked him for being the best teacher they ever had. One student told him she went on to earn her Master's degree because of the help and encouragement he gave her. Another student, he recalled, started his class always putting herself down and saying she just couldn't do anything. With constant encouragement and understanding, she received the highest grade in the class one time; he said that was the day she changed, and there was no stopping her from that moment on. It is so rewarding for him to witness students like this.*

**Sun: Tell me about a funny moment or situation you recall regarding teaching.**

**Choudhary:** Oh! There are too many to tell you. You know, there are so many little things that get mixed up with the English language and being here in the U.S. Every time I say "Thank you very much," I think about my niece, who always used to say, "Thank you big much," and said it for many years because she did not realize, and nobody told her that this was not the right way to say it!

Another joke I like is one I always use to help students remember the order of the x and the y in equations is  $x=2$  and  $y=3$ , the x is always first because my x came first, and then my wife!

**Sun: What words of encouragement would you give to other teachers?**

**Choudhary:** Try to think from your students point of view, not your own. Connect with them all the time. Their strengths, their weaknesses. My students' weaknesses make me a stronger teacher because I need to adjust my teaching so they can understand. Make no assumptions of your students, get to know them. Sometimes I observe students in classrooms that are not engaged at all, they are in another world, disconnected, thinking about other things ... not in my classroom; all my students are always engaged.

One story that has always meant a lot to me over the years is this: two men were walking and they saw a scorpion floating on the water. One man scooped it up and was going to put it on dry ground so it wouldn't drown. When he picked it up, it stung him, and he dropped it back in the water. He tried again, and it stung him again. This happened three times altogether, and finally

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he was able to get it on the dry ground and it ran away and was safe. His friend asked him, "Why did you keep trying to save it when it kept stinging you? I don't understand." The man answered, "The scorpion did not forgot his character, (to sting, his defense) and I will not forget my character, (to save and not give up)"

Camille's Sidewalk Café continues to award a candidate each month for the 2015-2016 school year and is happy to recognize the incredible contribution and influence teachers have in our community.

***To see a complete list of all the nominations, or to nominate your teacher, visit Camille's Sidewalk Café at 306 S. Second Street in Gallup to fill out an entry form!***