

IN MEMORIAM

WILLIAM “PARKER” FRISBIE

William “Parker” Frisbie was a Cowboy Demographer. Parker was born to ranchers in Yorktown, Texas, in 1940. He married his high school sweetheart Elaine in 1959 right out of high school and worked on the family ranch. In the late 1960s, he decided to go back to school and obtain his B.A. in sociology from Southwest Texas State University.

Always strategic, and with an eye on how best to increase the odds of getting back to Texas to pursue an academic career, he migrated from Texas to the University of North Carolina for his M.A. and Ph.D. Clearly he missed Texas, because he completed his graduate work in only three and a half years and returned to Texas in 1972 as an Assistant Professor in Sociology at The University of Texas at Austin, achieving the rank of Professor in 1985. Eventually, he earned the status of Professor Emeritus. During his tenure at UT, Parker served as the Director of the Population Research Center and as Chair of Sociology. Parker was an eminent scholar who contributed to the growing prominence of UT Austin.

Parker had a nose for great questions and a dedication to rigorous scholarship no matter what the findings were, qualities that led to a long and distinguished career as a demographer and sociologist. The National Institutes of Health (NIH) also recognized the quality of Parker’s research. He was supported almost continuously throughout his career with NIH grants. His profound contributions were primarily in the areas of urban ecology, family demography, and health and mortality. He became one of the nation’s authorities on infant mortality, and his work dramatically advanced scientific understanding of racial and ethnic differences in infant mortality risk. He loved his many graduate students, guiding them through their dissertations and into

distinguished careers in academia, government service, and population research. But this distinguished academic history does not capture the essence of what we most remember and loved about Parker. Known as a true “Son of Texas,” Parker spent most of his adult life working at his ranch on the weekends—running cattle, fixing fences, riding horseback, and educating his granddaughters in the ways of Texas ranching. It was reported that on one such occasion, while baling hay with a farmhand, he was asked:

“Parker, is it true what they say that you’re a professor at the University?”

“Yup, that’s right,” replied Parker.

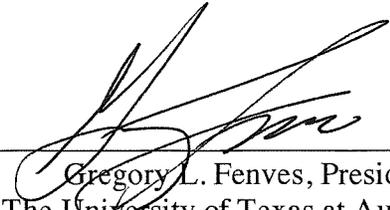
After a long pause, his co-worker reflected: “Well, Parker, I still say you’re a good guy anyway....”

Parker was an excellent teacher who was particularly popular with graduate students. He motivated and coauthored journal articles with them to help them prepare for academic and other careers. In his graduate seminars, he was always ready to patiently explain statistical research methods to students who were inexperienced with quantitative analytical approaches.

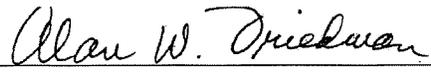
Parker was an iconic Texan who happened to also have a keen curiosity about social conditions that influence health, tremendous quantitative talent, and the heart to care about disadvantaged people and families. He wore a cowboy hat and boots into the classroom—and when he went to D.C. to advocate on behalf of the population sciences. He was a man of incredible honor and trust; when he spoke, his colleagues listened.

UT Austin established the *W. Parker Frisbie Fund for Excellence* in Parker Frisbie’s honor in 2008 to support outstanding faculty and graduate students in the Population Research Center. In 2010, Frisbie received the Pro Bene Meritis Award, the highest award conferred by the UT Austin College of Liberal Arts.

Parker Frisbie passed away in February 2018, to the great sadness of the UT Austin community. His loss is felt by all of his many friends, colleagues, and students. We at UT Austin look forward to supporting his legacy as a first-rate scholar, a cowboy, and a unique, down-to-earth, honest man. He is UT's one and only Cowboy Demographer.



Gregory L. Fenves, President
The University of Texas at Austin



Alan W. Friedman, Secretary
The General Faculty

This memorial resolution was prepared by a special committee consisting of Professors Debra Umberson (Chair), Mark Hayward, Nestor Rodriguez, and Peter Ward.