I’m Mike Chesnick, outreach coordinator at the University of Arizona School of Journalism and a 1984 graduate of the program. I had the honor of knowing Professor Ridge as a student, as his next-door neighbor and as his life-line back to the school. He liked to grill me about any juicy rumors he had heard! Everyone at the school — including Director Carol Schwalbe and George’s longtime friend, Professor Mort Rosenblum — give their deepest condolences to Earlene and the extended Ridge family. Not only was George a two-time director of the J-school, but he also served as secretary of the UA faculty and chairman of the UA Committee on Academic Privilege and Tenure. The College of Social and Behavioral Sciences, under Dean JP Jones, also sends its sympathies, and University President Robert Robbins wrote Earlene a nice note and called George’s passing “a huge loss for the U of A family.”

In fact, it’s been a tough couple of years for the school. We also lost former directors Don Carson and Jim Patten and Professor Bick Lucas. All of them held court with George at the basement of the old Franklin Building. It’s torn down now, but I can still see the “Great Hall of Learning” and that gauntlet of professors’ offices, where we students had to endure those dreaded “face-to-face” editing sessions with our instructors. They were quite intimidating as they attacked our stories with red pens. I still remember a Chicago Tribune motto taped to the front of Professor Ridge’s desk that read, “It’s a newspaper’s duty to print the news and raise Hell.”

From 1969 to 1994, George preached that motto to students. In 1976, when Arizona Republic reporter Don Bolles was killed in a car bombing, George made sure the school was heavily involved in the media investigation that followed. The school still has the Don Bolles Fellowship, where a student covers the Arizona Legislature each spring. In 1978, George was named Arizona Journalism Teacher of the Year. He taught courses in Guadalajara and helped establish an exchange program there. He also served as an expert witness on First Amendment issues, and he gave presentations at U.S. embassies overseas on press freedom.

Jacqueline Sharkey, a former school director, said it best: “George had a deep understanding of the role of the press from his work as a journalist and
an attorney, and he focused on ensuring the school’s curriculum reflected the challenges and opportunities that students would encounter in the real world.”

That real-world experience came in Tombstone for a lot of us. George secured a deal in 1975 for students to produce the Tombstone Epitaph. I can attest that I learned a lot about community journalism, covering that small town and its crazy city council. The project was such a success that George received a congratulatory letter from President Gerald Ford in 1976 for using the historic newspaper as a teaching tool.

Like countless other J-school alums, I also took George’s famous Law and Ethics class, and it inspired us to be journalists. I still have my brown “Libel” book that he assigned. George gave some of the toughest tests, creating hypothetical cases, but somehow I eeked out an A. So I was a little worried in 1997, when George rang the doorbell of our new house. I thought he might want to take that A away, but he just wanted to welcome us to the neighborhood. That started a longtime friendship, and I learned more about George’s career when we walked my kids to school, at Monday Night Football gatherings and lunches with his old colleagues.

He landed his first real journalism job at the Arizona Republic while he attended ASU. He started out in news but quickly moved to sports, where his coverage of the 1954 Michigan State-UCLA Rose Bowl game was recognized by the Arizona Press Association as sports story of the year. After being drafted and assigned to Germany, George began working for the Stars and Stripes military newspaper. As a news editor, he covered construction of the Berlin Wall and the Soviet invasion of Hungary. When he returned to Arizona to earn his law degree at UA, he also worked full-time as city editor at the Arizona Daily Star. Later, George worked summers at the Denver Post and International Herald Tribune in Paris.

One of his proteges at the Star was a young Mort Rosenblum, who said: “George Ridge taught me journalism when that word was universally respected — a calling with ethics and tenets, not for hobbyists. George was ruthless with hard facts, full of ideas, and attuned to ‘human angles’ that connected readers to real news that mattered.” George brought Mort, a former Associated Press bureau chief editor and Herald Trib editor, back
from Paris to teach a class on “Covering the World” — a course that continues today.

George’s influence stretched beyond the classroom. He fought for tenure for Surgery Professor Marlys Witte and two of her colleagues. “He was my PERSONAL HERO,” she told Earlene in a note. “I would not be standing here today as the first tenured woman and long-time professor at the College of Medicine active in faculty governance had it not been for George Ridge.” In his honor, she is starting an annual $500 scholarship and lecture in his name for a faculty member or student who contributes the most to the climate of free speech on campus!

Mary Alice Kellogg, a 1970 journalism grad, in a note to Earlene, also thanked George for her 40-year career as an editor and writer, in which she swears, because of him, “I never once got a fact wrong or misspelled a name. Never a retraction or lawsuit. He taught me and countless others that accuracy and truth are this turbulent profession’s keystones.” She went on to say: “I learned through George that what makes a great journalist can also make a great human being: curiosity, compassion, a wild world view, responsibility, perspective, a hunger for truth and service, a good BS detector, a finely honed sense of the absurd … and infinite enthusiasm for life. All of these he had.”

Although George retired from the school in 1994, he continued to work as a journalist and as a public affairs consultant to the Army, teaching officers about the news media and traveling to bases in the U.S. and abroad. George started this new gig, thanks to John Barbee, a UA master’s student and Army officer who enjoyed George’s law and ethics class so much that he invited his old professor to Fort Leavenworth, Kansas, to be a guest lecturer in a military course. “Then, in late 1993,” John said, “army leaders decided to add media play to their large-unit computer simulated exercise program … and my first thought was to hire George to work as a role-playing reporter and to teach and mentor young officers. George did just that, and produced thousands of captivating stories.”

For several years, George also wrote a weekly travel column and restaurant reviews for the Arizona Daily Star, accompanied with Earlene and
sometimes with his best friend and doctor, **Hal Tretbar**. Some of you might have seen Hal’s wonderful tribute to George’s travel writing in last Sunday’s Star. **Bobbie Jo Buel**, former editor at the Star, took George’s law class as did her husband, **David Carter**. She told Earlene that, “George made us think and encouraged discussion about thorny topics. Later, at the Star, I looked forward to his visits to the office. He was still curious and still made me think (she underlined that word). Plus, he always said something to make me laugh. His lessons are with us, always.”

Those lessons are shared by countless UA journalism graduates, including **Steve Kelley**, Class of 1972, who called George’s libel and copy-editing classes his favorites. Steve is now a successful creative advertising writer in Los Angeles. “George was truly a great journalist and professor,” Steve said. “His students have made profound contributions to journalism and made the world a better place. We will miss him terribly, but his legacy will endure.”

Steve is right. And part of that legacy also lives on in George’s family, who called him “Poppie.” His daughters — **Carole**, **Deb** and **Ellen** — all took journalism classes and later helped George put out his weekly blog, **“hoboshoes (dot) net”** with other family members. His son, **Jim**, was editor of his high school newspaper. Grandchild **Connor Brown** worked for the Aztec Press at Pima College, and Grandchild **Cody Ridge** got his journalism degree at NAU. George took great joy in helping Cody as a football correspondent at the Tucson Citizen, where I was sports editor. George showed Cody how to take play-by-play notes, how to interview coaches and most importantly, how to make **deadline**!

In her note to Earlene, **Mary Alice Kellogg** quoted a fitting line by columnist **James Kil-patrick**, “To live in hearts we leave behind … is not to die.” “And so, George Ridge is alive and well,” Mary Alice wrote. “We celebrate him with gratitude and love, blessed by the immense joy he divided among so many.”

With those nice words, I encourage all of his former students, colleagues and family members — including **Cody** and **Connor** — to keep writing and **raising Hell**. Poppie would appreciate that! … Thank you!