

h16 The *T. rex* Sue < its sex is not known >

Let me keep silence in this world ... an 'elected silence'.

—Thomas Merton (the expression in quotes is Manley Hopkins's)²

Sue is a 90 percent complete, and biggest, *T. rex* skeleton.³ A few bones from another adult, and a juvenile were found with it. Also, embedded in a rib of Sue, is a tooth fragment of some former *T. rex* combatant. These count for four of the twenty one *T. rex* fossils known!

The violence that Sue endured in life, and likely gave in turn, is recorded by skeletal scars aplenty: one leg shows a healed fracture, ribs on both of its sides were broken and healed (except for the tooth severed one), and along the side of its skull are gouges that **Peter Larson (Figure h16.1)**, who first described the fossil, suspects were fatal.⁴ The female name does *not* imply that the sex of the *T. rex* is known. On August 12, 1990, **Susan Hendrickson (Figure h 16.2)**, a member of Larson's team, spotted a piece of *T. rex* bone in the side of a hill on Maurice Williams' ranch near Faith, SD. Larson, the president of the Black Hills Institute of Geological Research, a commercial company dealing in fossils, had been invited by Williams to look for fossils on his land. Two weeks of excavation uncovered the dinosaur's skull. Larson asked Williams for permission to remove the fossil and, given the go-ahead, sealed agreement with check for \$5,000 made out to Williams with "for theropod Sue" written on the bottom. But, according to Richard Monastersky, who reviewed the case in 1995,

Williams offers a different version of the story, saying that he told Larson the fossil couldn't be sold without government approval because it was found on 'trust' land—real estate held in trust for Williams by the federal government. The trust agreement protects the interests of Indian landowners by giving the government oversight of the land. Williams denies that he reached any sort of agreement with Larson over the sale of the dinosaur. In fact, he says, Larson handed over the check without an explanation. 'I asked him what the check was for and he didn't choose to answer,' Williams told *SCIENCE NEWS*. 'We just considered it [was] for the right to search or for damage to the land.' [However], Williams deposited the check and kept the money. Larson, meanwhile, packed up and took the specimen, which he knew was probably worth hundreds of thousands of dollars, if not millions.⁵

Then ensued a legal battle over ownership that raged all the way to the U.S. Supreme Court. The outcome was that U.S. District Court in 1992 ruled that as Williams's land is held in trust by the U.S. government (he is a Cheyenne River Sioux), he cannot sell it—or anything on it—without federal permission.⁶ Therefore, the fossil remained the property of Williams' trust. This decision was upheld when the U.S. Supreme Court decided not to consider the appeal.



In October 1997, Sue was bought at auction for \$8.36 million by the Field Museum of Natural History, Chicago.⁷ At that price, you might find for artifice over authentic and buy a Gary H. Burgess glass dinosaur model!

The dinosaur Sue is now curated and is on display. One finding is that these dinosaurs had a feature common to birds, which is a wishbone.⁸ □

*Figure h 16.2*⁹

Q. *Robert Kurson* (reporter for *The New York Times*): "How does a dinosaur hunter support herself?"

A. *Susan Hendrickson*: "At best, I'll be fed during a dig. Until 10 years ago, I lived hand to mouth. Early on, I made money diving for tropical fish to sell to aquariums—I sold moray eels for \$5 a foot. I've worked commercial salvage, navigated boats, sewn sails. I made \$1,500 once when I caught 492 lobsters in a day. I've been financially successful only in the last 10 years, buying and selling conch pearls."