

In Memoriam Professor Emeritus N. Ross Crumrine

Dr. N. Ross Crumrine of the Department of Anthropology passed away, in hospice care, on November 22, 2018. A service commemorating his life was held November 27 (2018) at St. Aidens United Church, Victoria where family, friends and colleagues shared many stories of a life well-lived that touched many people. Ross moved to Victoria in 1968 and spent over 30 years in the Department of Anthropology teaching in his specialty areas, which included the folklore, mythology and the symbolic life of Indigenous People around the world. Along with his life in Canada, Ross spent summers whenever he could on the shores of Lake Erie, in Ashtabula, Ohio and conducting a great many seasons of field research in Mexico, Peru, Guam, the Marianas and the lowland areas of the Philippines. He touched many lives in many places with grace and with genuine curiosity. The students, colleagues, research associates, and the many friends he made among the people with whom he worked always found a ready smile and a quiet laugh. He was gentle, kind, generous and good natured; all who knew him well would say he had a light touch with people, and with animals as well (he especially loved dogs).

N. Ross Crumrine was born in Beaver, Pennsylvania, which lies on the banks of the Ohio River, near Rochester, Pennsylvania in the United States. He sometimes joked that since he spent a good bit of his childhood in a town named Beaver, he was obviously destined to live in Canada. And, indeed he came to Victoria as an Assistant Professor in 1968, after spending three years teaching at California State College, Hayward. He also taught as a lecturer at the University of Arizona during his doctoral years and worked as a field Archaeologist for the Smithsonian Institute prior to that. Prior to obtaining his Ph.D. at the University of Arizona in 1963, and his MA also at Arizona, Ross attended the University of Chicago and the University of Washington where he took graduate courses to pursue the interest he had developed in Anthropology. He had previously taken his BA at Northwestern University where he earned a degree in Philosophy, graduating from there in 1957.

Ross arrived in Victoria shortly after the University was established in 1963. He played a strong role in its early expansion and development working collaboratively with other social science and humanities departments, the library and especially with film collections. He was always pleased to see how the university had grown, and loved the landscape, flowers and gardens which made it a place of peaceful contemplation.

Ross was deeply interested in how people undergoing tremendous, even wrenching changes to their lives managed to find meaning through ritual, revitalized traditions and religious symbolism that came both from their deep Indigenous past and their more recent colonial history. Syncretic religious practice drew his lifelong interest. His work often appeared in Spanish translation as well as in English, beginning with his doctoral dissertation which was published in Mexico by the Instituto Nacional Indigenista in 1974. His very first publication was a monograph published in 1964 by the University of Arizona, *The House Cross of the Mayo*

Indians of Sonora, Mexico: A Symbol of Ethnic Identity. It is still available and speaks to the kinds of issues with which Ross engaged throughout his career: Local meaning and identity in the face of great change. He referred to this as working with “Persistent Peoples” and often published under that rubric. Persistence in the face of great difficulty was something he admired, and which characterized aspects of his own life; he persisted in the face of difficulty and found meaning in acts of kindness and love.

Ross Crumrine’s entries in compendia on Indigenous Peoples published by the Smithsonian Institute are standard reference works. He wrote ethnographic books on the Mayo people in Mexico, edited books on pilgrimage and its meaning for peoples around the world as well; all of which have stood the test of time. His later work in Peru, Guam and the Philippines followed the same pathways of meaning that people use in their quest for meaning in their lives. Life he sometimes said, is in and of itself, a pilgrimage. Ross wrote detailed, empirical ethnographic work, carefully crafted to be meaningful both for the people it was about and for readers from not only anthropology, but other disciplines as well. His sizeable CV reflects the continuity of his concerns in both English and Spanish.

For his colleagues as well as for his students, Ross always had time—time for coffee, a chat to see how you were, how the family was doing, and what we were teaching, studying, writing and thinking. He was unfailingly kind and polite to administrative staff, laboratory instructors, students, janitorial staff, cafeteria workers and the university security officers who sometimes had to let him into his office because his keys had gone AWOL, again.

Ross continued to teach courses as a sessional lecturer for several years after his retirement in 1999—mainly for the pleasure of his engagement with students, and to be around the University, which was a place he truly enjoyed. His thoughtful presence will long be missed by those who had the good fortune to know him.

Written by Professor Emeritus Peter Stephenson

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