

Obituary

Ian Whitaker (1928–2016). Dr. Ian (Rice) Whitaker (Fig. 1) died on 19 May 2016 at his home in White Rock, British Columbia, Canada. He was a Professor Emeritus from Simon Fraser University and a key anthropological authority on circumpolar peoples. His wife Martha, daughter Kythe, son Ronan and grandchildren Dana, Brittany and Devon survive him. He was born in Nottingham, United Kingdom on 4 July 1928 to Thomas Rice and Gertrude Whitaker (33rd Baroness de la Ville de Beuge) (Lumley 2007). After his initial education at the University of St. Andrews, he went on to earn a B.A. and M.A. at the University of Cambridge and a Dr. Phil. at the University of Oslo.

Ian's love of anthropology was awakened at Cambridge by pedagogical activities that included being required to master the use of a number of traditional indigenous weapons. He had a wonderful sense of humour and often joked that the first anthropology book he read was chosen because of its titillating title, *The sexual life of savages*, but that the content fell dramatically short of his expectations (Malinowski 2002 [1929]). His interest in circumpolar peoples began as a student of the charismatic Dr. Ethel J. Lindgren, a noted expert on reindeer herders.

Ian nurtured a close connection with Cambridge throughout his academic life. He was a proud member of Peterhouse, through which he maintained a flat located only a few doors away from the apartment of famed naturalist Charles Darwin during his studies. As part of his dedication to circumpolar scholarship, Ian was involved in the Scott Polar Research Institute at Cambridge for two decades (1976–1996) where he served in a variety of capacities including visiting scholar, senior research associate, lecturer and supervisor of students in the MPhil programme. He donated his family coat of arms to the Cambridge Heraldry Society in 1996.

He regularly dined at Peterhouse over the years and kept a running ethnographic account of his experiences there as part of his lifelong commitment to scholarship in everyday life. His ethnographic notes about the high table were covertly taken with a small pen and paper concealed in his pocket. His legendary wit led him to wonder whether the fellows at the table ever speculated about why he ate with only one hand while the other remained in his pocket during most of the dinner.

Ian performed fieldwork amongst Inuit, Albanophones (Albanais), Scottish and Icelandic fishers, Evenki (previously known as Tungus) of China, Tajiks, Newfoundland coastal fishing communities and the Sámi within Norway, Sweden and Finland. His work with the Sámi began in 1951 when he actively engaged as a reindeer herder for two years making him the first anthropologist to live amongst this particular group. By the time of his final fieldwork visit, the book published



Fig. 1. Ian Whitaker, anthropologist and reindeer herder, in traditional Sámi clothing, 1954

from his research had become an accepted historical record of Sámi culture (Whitaker 1955). His humility and reflexivity were illustrated by how he lamented that the results of his fieldwork had become social fact despite their shortcomings that are an unavoidable part of all human enterprises.

Ian had a distinguished lifetime of service as an educator. His teaching career began in 1952 with his last graduate student, the author, completing his PhD at the University of British Columbia in 2003. He served Canada's university institutions from one side of the nation to the other beginning at Memorial University of Newfoundland where he was co-founder and director of the Institute of Social and Economic Research. He also contributed to teaching at the universities of Durham, Carlton and Simon Fraser where he was initially brought in to be the Chair of three departments: sociology, anthropology and political science. He maintained an international presence in the teaching realm throughout

his career making contributions at the universities of Edinburgh, Cardiff, York and Cambridge.

Ian wrote in English, French, German, Norwegian, Swedish and Lappish (Sámi). His publications included a book, two edited volumes and over 85 academic papers. He received numerous academic awards including the Tennant Studentship (Cambridge), Wallenberg Prize-man (Cambridge) and Wygard Award. He was elected to the Royal Gustav Adolf Academy of Sweden in 1981.

Ian also had an exemplary record of public service. Under the leadership of former Canadian Chief Justice Thomas Berger, he served as a consultant to the MacKenzie Valley Pipeline Inquiry, a renowned public process that highlighted Canada on the world stage with respect to the rights of aboriginal peoples. He served Canada through military service and retired from the Canadian army (militia) as a captain. In the final stages of World War II, he employed his language skills in European villages to gather information required to identify and repatriate the remains of fallen air force pilots so that they could be buried nearer their families. After his retirement, he continued to volunteer his time as a teacher in impoverished regions of the world and arranged for his vast personal collection of books to be donated to an assortment of libraries including some of the most humble of educational settings.

Beyond being a collector stories, Ian was also master storyteller. He encouraged students to embrace what might seem like 'out of the ordinary' communities and

cultures not so much as distant 'others' but as a meaningful part of our human family from whom there is a lot to learn. His stories were always infused with humour, humility and social conscience. As time marched on and he became more established, his fieldwork took on characteristic changes. As a professor he was able to ship his own car to the site of his original fieldwork. Unpredictably, his cherished vehicle was deployed in a utility function that merged modern and traditional forms of reindeer herding. He hilariously described the dangers of driving with reindeer alongside him as passengers as their breath, heavy with condensation, covered the windows with a thick fog. These and other stories inspired generations of students to celebrate differences and to examine not only other cultures but our own

Dan Small

Department of Anthropology, 6303 N.W. Marine Drive,
University of British Columbia, B.C., Canada V6T
1Z1 (dansmall@mail.ubc.ca).

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