

STOKES, LAWRENCE D.

IN MEMORIAM

Farewell to a friend

By Jack Crowley

With the sudden death of Lawrence D. Stokes on Christmas Eve, the Department of History lost a cherished colleague.

Larry's dedication as a teacher was legendary. He committed himself to whatever subject he was teaching – whether the history of Germany, the study of European culture or George Orwell – with an intensity and enthusiasm that successfully encouraged students to raise their intellectual expectations of themselves. He had a uniquely effective teaching strategy that used carefully organized seminars for an intensive dialogue about demanding readings. As challenging as his classes in Weimar and Nazi Germany may have been, they invariably filled before the term started. He had a moral gyroscope that enabled him to analyze the historical contingencies and complexities of totalitarian regimes without conceding a relativism about their violations of humanity.

After playing goalie behind Frank Mahovlich at Saint Michael's College School, Larry forwent a promising hockey career to study at the University of Toronto, where he graduated with First Class Honours in Modern History. An internationally competitive Woodrow Wilson Scholarship took him to The Johns Hopkins University, where he studied with Vernon Lidtke and received his PhD in German History in 1972. In 1967 he joined the Dalhousie History Department, where he taught for the next 31 years.

With students as well as departmental colleagues, he was an assiduous marker, microscopically reading each paper to make stylistic comments, grammatical and typographical corrections, and recommendations for further reading. He was a generous but absolutely honest reader and marker: when students and, indeed, colleagues received high plaudits from him, they knew that it meant something.

Larry was a historian's historian. His devotion to archival research resulted in monumental publications of documents from the Schleswig-Holstein town of Eutin during the Nazi period; the town's citizens organized several meetings to mark their publication. This research provided the base for over two dozen articles, many of them in German, examining experiences during the Nazi regime in every aspect: from minor careers and everyday life, through neighborly betrayals and complicity in genocide, to heroic resistance. His classic article on reports of "Einsatzgruppen" murders in the eastern theatre studied some of the earliest documentation of the Final Solution as a Nazi program.

Larry was a pillar of collegiality. He meticulously edited the department's annual report so we had a comprehensive idea of the department's academic contributions. He kept track of each colleague's research so he could pass on reviews of potentially interesting books and articles. He crucially initiated and sustained the department's remarkable Graduate-Faculty Colloquium. He was always good for a 20-minute in-the-hall seminar when asked a casual historiographical question.

In retirement, Larry remained a keenly active historian, with a fruitful interest in the transnational careers of writers such as Alfred Ernst Johann Wollschläger and Thomas Wolfe during the 1920s and 1930s. He died on his way to the National Archives in Ottawa.

Larry is survived by his wife, Erika; his daughter, Kathrin Stokes-Bonhomme (Eric Bonhomme); his son, John Stokes (Katie Smith); his grandchildren, Eric and Anna Stokes, and Maya and Eva Bonhomme; his sister, Patricia Goodwin (Robert); his brother, Richard Stokes (Nancy); his sister-in-law, Anneliese Voss (Richard); and nieces and nephews in Canada and Germany. Donations in Larry's memory may be made to the Heart and Stroke Foundation or the Canadian Diabetes Association. A memorial service will take place in early spring in Halifax.

Jack Crowley is Professor Emeritus with Dalhousie's Department of History.

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