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IN MEMORIAM, ROSS STANLEY SMITH



Students, friends and colleagues were deeply grieved to learn, shortly before Christmas last year, of the death in Brisbane of Ross Smith, who lectured for many years in James Cook University's former Department of English.

Ross was born on 2 October 1927. He enrolled as a student in the Teachers' College, Brisbane, in 1945. After a year's experience as a teacher on the staff of the Murgon High School, he was awarded a fellowship by the Department of Education which enabled him to attend the University of Queensland from 1947 to 1950. In 1950 he graduated as Bachelor of Arts, with first class Honours in English and French. Ross went on to teach at the Townsville State High School. In 1955, he was appointed Lecturer, Grade I, at the Queensland Teachers' College in Brisbane, a post which he held until 1960.

Ross and Fay married on 6 January, 1961, and in the same year Ross became one of the first Lecturers to be appointed to the staff of the then University College of Townsville. At that early stage, the University College had offices in the AMP Building in Flinders Street. Ross was appointed Senior Lecturer on 1 January 1968. He passed away on 21 December 1999, after a long illness. He is mourned by Fay, their son, Philip, Philip's wife, Sonja, and three young granddaughters.

Elizabeth Perkins remembers ...

Students coming from James Cook Campus to St Lucia in the sixties told enthusiastic tales about their Townsville lecturer, so Ross Smith was well known to me years before we met. His clear, scholarly lectures with the quiet jokes appreciated only by the alert note-taker, his full, neat and helpful comments on essays, his obvious love of literature and cheerful presence all inspired his students. Ross Smith was a warm and stabilising presence in the English Department when I joined in 1970. Fay, his wife, cultivated a dragon-lady exterior as head invigilator, but was loved by desperate exam students when she rescued them from crises, and must have saved many an exam paper from disaster. It was obvious when Ross and Fay returned from their trips to England that he had found there his literary home, and the centre of all his careful scholarship on the work of Shakespeare, Jane Austen and the Romantic poets. The bibliographies of North Queensland writers that Ross prepared with Cheryl Taylor are an invaluable and as yet largely unpublished resource, and his monograph *Fanny Bertram: The Structure of Mansfield Park* is an example of his meticulous and loving literary analyses. When the slow onset of illness finally took Ross from our Department we felt the great loss of one of the few men of whom it can be truly said "He was a scholar and a gentleman."

Greg Manning remembers ...

When I arrived at James Cook University, in 1989, Ross Smith was nearing the end of his academic career. Though Parkinson's disease had slowed his body, nothing could slow the mind which played at speed behind his cardsharp's hint of a smile. Ross was a quiet man, a modest and self-deprecating colleague, who nevertheless had the gift of conveying, in a way you knew was true, that he was your friend.

I had not been at the university long when I happened upon him in the English staff room—later the Ross Smith Room—unpeeling the gladwrap from his sandwiches as if it was something he planned to keep. I smiled hello, and made myself some coffee. He unpeeled a bit more, and when I sat down he said, quietly, "There was only one candidate." I knew there hadn't been, either literally or figuratively, but in five words he had assured me of his confidence, support, and welcome. He made me feel as if I were being passed a baton. I knew Ross only briefly as a colleague, but he will always live for me in the kindness and generosity of that moment.

Cheryl Taylor remembers ...

Ross Smith was a constant, quietly supportive presence to students and younger colleagues. In a friendship of more than thirty years, I never saw Ross ruffled or

less than polite. I never heard him speak in a personally negative way about other staff members or students. (Anyone with experience of university life will appreciate the rarity of this.) When I visited him at home in the trying circumstances of his illness, he was cheerful, and interested in university news, and in news of our mutual friends. A keen enthusiasm for literature, especially Jane Austen and Shakespeare, was behind his outward stately calm, which was enlivened by a witty sense of humour. His humour found expression in some surprising poems and short prose pieces published in *LiNQ* (Literature in North Queensland).

In the years when we were busy preparing the bibliographies of North Queensland writers, I would be focussing on the complexities of collecting material, only to find that meanwhile Ross had meticulously prepared some of the longer bibliographies for printing. He had a wise sense of proportion, which was a useful counter to what were often excessive attitudes and responses by others. He was always a model of consideration and encouragement to our research assistants. On retirement, his parting gift to me was his cherished copy of Miller and Macartney's *Bibliography of Australian Literature*, a work which had been invaluable in our researches. The gesture was as thoughtful as it was generous and symbolic, very typical of Ross.

Tony Hassall remembers ...

I first met Ross Smith when I travelled to Townsville to be interviewed for the Chair of English. I recall a conversation we had on that visit about Henry Handel Richardson's *The Fortunes of Richard Mahony*. Ross said that he had not been able to bring himself to finish the book because the ending was so bleak, as indeed it is. I was deeply impressed by the truthfulness and the complete lack of pretension and self-importance that this disclosure demonstrated.

When I arrived to take up the Chair, Ross was the most self-effacing, quietly efficient and unobtrusively helpful former Head of Department that I could have wished for to guide me into the uncharted waters of running a Department.

I quickly came to value Ross as a colleague for whom I had the highest respect and affection. There are very few teachers of whom it can be truly said that they were loved by their students, but Ross was one. His lectures were meticulously prepared and gracefully presented, his passion for the subject was quietly but unmistakably communicated, and his students were always given room to develop their own responses while being warmly encouraged to share and to emulate Ross's own. I count it as one of the great privileges of my academic life to have worked alongside such a scholar and a true gentleman.

