

## **Tom McFeat 1919-2004**

Thomas McFeat of the Department of Anthropology at the University of Toronto, Scarborough, a major figure in Canadian anthropology, died peacefully in hospital November 22, 2004 while undergoing minor surgery. He was 85 years old.

After serving in the medical corps during the Second World War, McFeat attended McGill University, receiving his BA in 1950 with honours in sociology and psychology. He then went to Harvard where he earned his MA in 1954 and PhD in 1957 in anthropology.

McFeat began his career at the University of New Brunswick in 1954 as an assistant professor. Then from 1959 to 1963 he served as chief ethnologist at the National Museum of Canada. After a brief stint at Carleton University, he joined the faculty at U of T in 1964. As head of the anthropology department from 1964 to 1969, McFeat oversaw a major transition, hiring a large new cohort of talented scholars. He moved to the Scarborough campus in 1973 where he retired in 1984 but continued to teach for several more years.

McFeat was particularly interested in culturally derived models of learning and education. In the early 1950s he carried out pioneering research on the integration of recruits into the Canadian Army and in 1953, a study of Zuni theories of learning. In 1955 he studied Maliseet family industries in New Brunswick and continued to work on the Tobique reserve on the St. John River from 1961 to 1965 and again in 1977-78, focusing on models for group restructuring in the face of community disjunction. From 1966 to 1970 and in 1982-83 he carried out a project “unique in the history of anthropology,” said Professor Michael Lambek, a colleague and friend, “namely what he called the laboratory study into the growth of small-group cultures.”

A prolific writer, McFeat’s numerous publications range from *The Parade Square as a Learning Model* (1952) through his classic edited collection *Indians of the North Pacific Coast* (1965), now in its 10th reprinting, and *Small-Group Cultures* (1974). As a teacher he taught on culture and communication and childhood as well as teaching a popular first-year course entitled *Peoples and Culture of the World*. He also lectured on Canadian and North American First Nations and the cultures of modern Canada and helped train numerous graduate students, especially those working on topics regarding Canadian First Nations, Canadian society and aspects of social communication. “As something of an anarchist, a staunch egalitarian and a man of great open mind but little patience with bureaucracy or formality, Tom was a hero and role model for many of us,” Lambek said. Citing the occasion when restrictions were placed on faculty use of the photocopy machine as an example, Lambek recalled McFeat’s protest against burdening the secretaries, writing a letter to Professor Ronald Blair, chair of social sciences, in

1978 to “kindly make arrangement to have a coin machine placed in the vicinity of the Social Science office as soon as possible.”

But McFeat was also an institution builder and active in numerous anthropological organizations. He was cofounder of the Northeastern Anthropological Conference and later president of the Toronto Semiotics Circle. During his tenure as chair of anthropology, “he cast an indelible stamp” on the department, Lambek said, by remodelling it along Zuni lines of quadripartite social organization. “Toronto is possibly the only anthropology department in the world to self-consciously draw upon models provided by ethnographic subjects in attempting to solve its own internal problems of organization,” he said. “Tom was a jazz pianist, a staunch friend and a much loved family man.”

*Credits to the University of Toronto*