



IN MEMORIAM

Jonathon E. Ericson
Professor of Environmental Health Science and Policy
UC Irvine
1942 – 2009

Jonathon Edward Ericson was born in the Bronx, New York City on May 22, 1942. With his death on June 22, 2009 at his home in San Juan Capistrano after a lengthy illness, the School of Social Ecology lost one of its most original and eminent multidisciplinary scholars and a dear and valued colleague. Dr. Ericson began his research and teaching career with a tenure-track position at Harvard University. He returned to Southern California in 1983 as a faculty member in UC Irvine's interdisciplinary Program in Social Ecology and became a founding faculty member, and later, interim chair, of the Department of Environmental Analysis and Design in the School of Social Ecology. At the end of his academic career, he was chair of UCI's Department of Environmental Health Science and Policy.

Dr. Ericson's specializations were impressively broad. His areas of expertise included environmental health science and environmental chemistry with emphasis on source characterization, exposure assessment and health effects of lead in the urban environment. His scholarship in archaeological science focused on the documentation of population-level nutritional changes, metal production in early human societies, and radiocarbon dating. His scientific work also dealt with amelogenesis, bioremediation of organics, strontium isotope characterization, prehistoric metal production, urban air and soil toxics, GIS/ remote sensing, evidence of lead and cadmium absorption in prehistoric human bone, paleonutrition, and habitability requirements of humans in outer space environments. He had earned a Bachelor of Arts in Exploration Geophysics in 1970, an M.A. in Anthropology in 1973, and a doctorate degree in Anthropology in 1977, all from UCLA. He also completed a postdoctoral fellowship in Geochemistry at the California Institute of Technology.

Dr. Ericson received many prestigious research grants from agencies as varied as NSF, USEPA, USFDA, NEH, NIH, CDC, and Smithsonian. Through the enormous breadth of his research and scholarly interests, he quintessentially represented the interdisciplinary mission and character of the School of Social Ecology.

Dr. Ericson conducted groundbreaking research on improving obsidian hydration dating as a valuable investigative method in archeology leading to several important scientific discoveries. His research team developed exposure assessment methods based on the analysis of the metallic content of human dentine. Together with a graduate student, Dr. Ericson was able to demonstrate the association of environmental lead with prevalence of ADHD in children.

Dr. Ericson's genuine enthusiasm for scientific inquiry and his unusual ability to "think outside the box" led to the novel application of his research on analysis of teeth to investigation of the etiology of several childhood disorders. A few years ago, he organized an academic conference at the Beckman Center on interdisciplinary research on the health and behavioral effects of pre- and postnatal exposure to toxic metals such as manganese. In what was dubbed the "Tooth Fairy Project", he inspired two research teams to search for links between early exposure to neurotoxins as evidenced in shed baby teeth and later manifestation of autism and disruptive behavior problems. Even after his treatments had begun, he attended several working meetings and stayed keenly interested in the data analyses. This work culminated in two articles.

Dr. Ericson was a gifted, inquisitive researcher, who had an insatiable curiosity about the myriad ways that physical environments influence behavior and well-being. He was a widely-published scholar with eight edited books and nearly one hundred scientific articles and chapters. The breadth of his scholarship is indicated in the span of journals that published his work: Los Angeles Museum of Art Bulletin, World Archaeology, American Antiquity, Archaeometry, Paleogeography, Paleoclimatology, and Peleocology, Syrian Archaeological Bulletin, Journal of North American Archaeologists, Pacific Coast Archaeological Society Quarterly, Journal of Archaeological Science, Environment International, Environmental Health Perspectives, Environmental Research, Environmental Management, Journal of Environmental Planning and Management, Bulletin of Environmental Contamination and Toxicology, Science of the Total Environment, Soil Biology and Biochemistry, Journal of Non-Crystalline Solids, Journal of Material Research Society, Newsletter of Lithic Technology, Chemistry Education, Radiocarbon, Journal of Human Evolution, American Journal of Epidemiology, Nature, New England Journal of Medicine, among others.

Dr. Ericson's field research took him beyond California to Arizona, New Mexico, Oregon, Nevada, Massachusetts, Maine, and to remote areas in Mexico, Peru, China, India, Syria, Canada, Spain, and Italy. Among his collaborators were scholars from India, Germany, and Japan. For his research partners, collaboration with Dr. Ericson was always stimulating and rewarding. Dr. Ericson was not only a driving force but also the "glue" that united researchers from disciplines as diverse as developmental psychology, biological science, and anthropology and kept them motivated despite various setbacks. These collaborative works led to many publications.

The contributions of Dr. Ericson's scientific inquiries were far-reaching. In recognition of his outstanding and sustained contributions to cross-disciplinary scholarship, Dr. Ericson received the Social Ecology Award for Excellence in Interdisciplinary Research in 2004. In 1998 he received the Lifetime Achievement Award from the International Association for Obsidian Studies.

Dr. Ericson's service record is awe-inspiring. He held several museum positions, such as Conservation Chemist at LACMA, Assistant and Associate Curator of Anthropology – Scientific Archaeology at the Peabody Museum, Harvard University, Member Board of Directors and Vice President Museum of Natural History and Science. At the same time, he was a consultant for NASA on US Space Station (1983) and Variable Gravity Space Station (1985). He also served as a Regent of United Societies in Space, Inc. He was Fulbright-Hays as well as Fulbright Senior Scholar, and a Research Fellow at Stanford University and Cambridge University. He served as Vice President and President of the Society for Archaeological Sciences, as well as Vice President of the Western Association of Art Conservation, and President Elect and President of the International Association for Obsidian Studies.

Professor Ericson was an inspirational, devoted and particularly caring mentor to junior colleagues and took special interest and pride in their accomplishments. His advice helped establish several junior researchers. Over the course of his career, Professor Ericson trained numerous research students, many of whom have gone on to become successful professors, research scientists, and administrators. His teaching was hands-on. He took his graduate and undergraduate students on field trips and thereby built strong relationships with them. He mentored hundreds of university students, all of who are an important part of his enduring legacy to scholarship and education. He taught a wide array of courses including Spatial Analysis, Spatial Archeology, Natural Disasters, Life in Space, and Dating Techniques (which attracted numerous undergraduates who mistook or misread the Radiocarbon part).

Jon Ericson was our close and patient colleague in Social Ecology for 25 years. We sat in many faculty meetings with Jon, served on dissertation committees with him, and co-taught courses with him, one of which focused on human habitability requirements for space exploration. Several of us shared mutual interests with Jon in social ecology, autism, and public health. Not one of Jon's colleagues with whom we have spoken can ever remember him uttering a negative word about another person. He treated others with

respect and he stood as a model of courage, human decency, and kind- heartedness for his family, colleagues, and friends. He left his mark on us through his leadership, collegiality, friendship, humility, and caring nature.

Yet, his legacy extends far beyond academia. Outside of work, Jon was knowledgeable about art, antiques, and antiquities and was somewhat of a collector. He wrote poems and also had an abiding interest in architecture. He liked to travel and was very fond of Hawaii.

Throughout his life, Jon had an enormously positive impact on his family and friends as he was a towering exemplar of kind- heartedness, grace, and optimism in his interactions with others. Even while battling illness, Jon remained optimistic, hopeful, productive, and he met each challenge with amazing grace. He continued to work on multiple book projects up until the last few days, dictating voluminous notes from his bed. He warmly welcomed visitors, never mentioning to them the rigors of his illness and treatments for it, and he remained a bastion of strength and optimism for his family and friends to the very end.

Jon had a wide circle of friends, and his deep connection and close bond with his family and friends and playfulness with them sustained him. His love of his pet dogs was an important source of satisfaction for him. Jon's treasures in life were his beloved wife Glenda, his daughters, Hana and Marissa, and his son Burke. His love for them was profound and everlasting.

To have achieved such breadth, inspired so many, sown so much good will and so much love while on this earth is the mark of an exemplary and well- lived life. We will miss Jon greatly but will treasure our memories of his extraordinary kindness and grace.

Sanjoy Mazumdar
Daniel Stokols
Oladele Ogunseitan
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