

It is with the deepest sorrow that we announce the recent passing on January 23 of David George Huntley, PhD, Professor Emeritus of Slavic Linguistics at the University of Toronto.

Born in 1928 into a working-class family in Bradford-on-Avon, an English West Country town, from a very young age David showed a great aptitude for and an interest in foreign languages (one of which apparently was BBC English, since David was the only child in his native Wiltshire elementary school who could flawlessly imitate the pronunciation which he had acquired by listening to the radio). After first enrolling in the London School of Economics, where he earned a BSc in Economic History, David was subsequently accepted into the prestigious University College London School of Slavonic and East European Studies, where he graduated with First Class Honours as the first external student in the history of the school. His brilliance and erudition eventually enabled him to get a position at the University of Toronto, where he taught Slavic linguistics for thirty-two years until 1993.

David was an excellent scholar, justly renowned for his encyclopaedic knowledge of Old Church Slavonic. Drawing upon his virtual “native” command of this dead language, David’s chapter on Old Church Slavonic in the 1993 edition of the Routledge “Slavonic Languages” handbook contains an astonishing variety of interesting observations on syntax and morphosemantics, notably, for example, the hierarchical relations between lexical features and case usage (such as the choice between Genitive or Nominative form in Accusative function in masculine nouns), all supported by comprehensive statistical information. David was a brilliant and original intellect, with a phenomenal command of early Slavic texts (including those of Old Russian), and an expert knowledge of phonology (as is evident from his comparative study of palatalization of dental and velar sonorants in Celtic and Slavic), as well as other fields of general linguistics. His knowledge of languages extended far beyond Slavic. Not only did he read literature extensively in fourteen languages, including Finno-Ugric, Celtic and Basque (whenever possible, he would begin his reading with the oldest extant translation of the New Testament in the given language), but his gift for mimicry and a keen ear for phonetic features enabled him to converse in several languages as well (his funeral oration at a memorial ceremony held in honour of a young Estonian colleague at U of T was delivered in that language with such accomplished conviction that members of the Estonian community in attendance were astonished). After retirement David ventured into North-American languages, and in his last years, undertook Amharic.

David was an inspiring teacher. He derived great pleasure from this aspect of his profession and enjoyed a devoted following among his students, particularly those who took his year-long course in Old Church Slavonic, which was considered a jewel.

It should be noted that David had a lifelong passion for classical music (Haydn being his favorite composer) and he was also an accomplished, self-taught pianist.

David was a well-loved figure in the Annex neighbourhood in which he lived, known for his kindness and wonderful humour. While he still had his health (and weather permitting), he would sit, reading, on his porch, surrounded by books (among his favorites were Shakespeare’s historical plays, Dostoevsky, and Proust, the latter two in the original, of course). Towards the end of his life he was cruelly bedridden, but bore his affliction with amazing forbearance. His mind was brilliant to the end. He is survived by his wife Olga Floegl-Huntley, daughters Katherine, Nicola (Glenn), Sarah (Kevin), and granddaughter Leanne (Joel).

**There will be a Celebration of Life in David’s honour,  
at 1:30 p.m. on Saturday April 13th, 2024,  
at the University of Toronto,**

**Hart House, Debates Room (2nd floor), 7 Hart House  
Circle, Toronto, ON M5S 3H3. Please RSVP to Olga  
at [DavidHuntleyCelebrationOfLife@Gmail.com](mailto:DavidHuntleyCelebrationOfLife@Gmail.com).**