

Dr T. Christopher Brayshaw Obituary

BRAYSHAW, Timothy Chris BA, MA, PhD, Botanist Born July 2, 1919. Died December 22, 2014, age 95, in his sleep. We are honoured to share the story of a remarkable British Columbian and celebrate his life. Chris was born in Yorkshire, England, and came to Canada with his parents at the age of one. They homesteaded on a farm in Vernon BC where he grew up in a unique house that still stands today. His father taught at the local school and sold farm vegetables and fruit. He was a renowned fly fisher and fish artist and his love of nature rubbed off on young Chris. His mother had studied botany at the Max Planck Institute in Germany, and she was a respected botanical artist. Chris was their only child and, as he often mentioned, the last of a long North-Yorkshire lineage. Much to his displeasure, Chris was sent to boarding school in England for his high school years. He returned home and enrolled at the University of British Columbia to train as a geologist just before the war, a field of knowledge that fascinated him. To his disappointment, he was instead put into biology. At the outbreak of WWII in 1939, Chris enlisted in the Canadian Air Force in Toronto, was sent to Quebec and then to High River AB, at the (just opened) Empire Flying Training School for Navigator and Bombardier training. Seconded to the RAF in England, he served as navigator for coastal defence and U-boat hunting along the Irish coast, where he had many close calls. For his service he received the Distinguished Flying Cross. Chris completed his BA in biology after the war at UBC, and then went to the University of Saskatchewan, where he earned an MA on 'Prairie Grassland Research' in 1950. From there he returned to UBC, where, in 1954, Chris earned his doctorate, defending his dissertation on 'Ponderosa Pine Ecology'. He was one of a several distinguished botanists who were learning together at UBC at the time, and with his colleagues he began a transformation of our understanding of British Columbia's plants and ecosystems. Joining the Federal Government in 1954, Chris ended up working in Ottawa and nearby Chalk River. His health deteriorated for a while so he adopted the credo that nature is humankind's best medicine. Chalk River is set near extensive forests, hills, and numerous lakes, rich in native wildlife typical of the south edge of the Canadian Shield. Always returning to nature, Chris made numerous field trips, taking extensive notes, and making many excursions into the wilderness of Algonquin Park and his health rapidly improved. Mindful of his love for the outdoors and his health, Chris declined a promotion in Ottawa. In his own words, Chris "had a canoe, a VW beetle, and some money", and decided to return to BC. He joined the BC Provincial Museum at the Legislative Buildings as a botanist in 1963, his "perfect job". For the next forty years he served our province advancing and promoting knowledge of plants. He prepared for the move of the collections and facilities from the Legislature to the current site. He wrote several seminal books that he exquisitely illustrated as a true nature artist and son of his mother. He helped plan and develop the new facilities and exhibits, now so famous around the world. His VW Beetle, with canoe on top, traveled our province adding thousands of specimens to the botanical collections. One of his major achievements was the planning and establishment of the first major Native Plant Garden in western Canada on the grounds surrounding the museum buildings. For the garden, he collected hundreds of living plant specimens around BC, some of which live in the garden today. He loved doing research on native species and tackled botanically challenging plant groups including willows and aquatic plants. At the same time he promoted the field of botany, leading public tours and writing a widely used booklet on plant collecting for the amateur. He broadened his knowledge of plants through trips to exotic lands. As Curator Emeritus, his botanical contributions continued for 18 years beyond his retirement with the publication of even more

books, including the comprehensive and richly self-illustrated 'Trees and Shrubs of BC'. He was a passionate supporter and botanical advisor of Beacon Hill Park and the Friends of Beacon Hill Park Society. He was a prime contributor to the living and natural values of the Beacon Hill Park Official Management Plan. The Park's nationally important flora survives in great part due to his persistent efforts. Chris never married, but was proud of his family tree and heritage rooted in the landscapes of Giggleswick, in the Craven District of North Yorkshire. His true love was taking his canoe on top of his VW beetle to some lake and spending time collecting plants, fly fishing, and cooking his fresh-caught fish over an open fire. In August 2011, Chris moved into Douglas Care Community on Niagara St. in the block next to his beloved Beacon Hill Park. Mary Lou Florian and Helen Oldershaw, long-time friends and Chris' Health-Care Representatives, would like to thank the staff for their considerate care of, and friendship toward, Chris during his stay at Douglas Care. Chris had the unique gift of being scientifically aware of the intricacies of nature, yet able to engage ordinary folks with the wonders and surprises of our natural world. He inspired and educated generations of botanists and naturalists. Yet, this gifted man remained humble and unassuming. His legacy will endure long into the future. The people who met and knew Chris will miss him.