

Stewart Crysdale, 1914-2002

Stewart Crysdale was born on May 20th, 1914. On his passing at age 88, he had accumulated a most impressive biography, filled with energetic and wise service to others. This brief overview of his life can hardly do justice to the immense amount of good that he accomplished as an academic researcher and colleague, teacher and friend, founding member of the Department of Sociology at Atkinson College, member of committees, church minister, and so on.

Stewart attended the University of British Columbia, receiving a Bachelor of Commerce in 1935. After almost two decades of work in other areas, he took up theological studies at the University of Toronto. He obtained his Bachelor of Divinity in 1955, then went on to complete a Master's in theology in 1959. Eventually, he became convinced that his credibility and effectiveness as a professional would be greater if he achieved further degrees in Sociology. He returned to the University of Toronto and earned a Master of Arts in Sociology in 1961, followed by his Ph.D. in 1968.

By the time he had completed his doctorate, Stewart had joined his friend Dr. W. E. (" Ted ") Mann at a very new and young institution — Atkinson College of York University. Dr. Crysdale became a member of the full-time faculty at York on July 1, 1967, and retired on June 30th, 1980. His formal retirement from full-time status at York, however, did not slow him down, as he continued to be a productive scholar and teacher for many years beyond 1980.

Soon after his arrival as a full-time faculty member at Atkinson College, Prof. Crysdale was given the challenge and opportunity to build a substantial Department of Sociology at the College. Taking office as the Department Chair person, which was relinquished by Prof. Mann, Stewart recruited seven new professors to the Atkinson Department, which by the early 1970s was already a flourishing teaching and research enterprise. His leadership was crucial in achieving this growth; the breadth of his interests and his informal, thoughtful manner made the new department a lively and encouraging place to work.

On the research side, he was particularly interested in young people, both in regard to their participation in the life of the United Church and their experience gaining entry into Canada's labour force. For his important study of working-class young people attempting a successful transition from school to jobs, he obtained research grants from a great array of relevant bodies, including Canada's Department of Labour, the Economic Council of Ontario, the city of Toronto, the Ontario Ministry of Education, the Anglican Diocese of Toronto, as well as the Atkinson Charitable Foundation. Many publications resulted from his decades of studying these issues.

After his so-called "retirement", Dr. Crysdale remained amazingly healthy and active into his 80s. He served as head of the Canadian Sociology and Anthropology Association, meanwhile continuing his voluntary activities with the United Church and other religious bodies, as well as teaching and graduate supervision at York University. His listing of academic and community service activities several years after his retirement shows active involvement in the development of many young people and in helping communities cope with economic and other stresses.

Those of us who were privileged to know him personally and to work under his guidance, and then as colleagues in the Sociology department, appreciated not only his great experience and professionalism, but the elegant and uplifting manner with which he dealt with everyone. His influence, therefore, goes beyond what can be documented in regard to research, conferences, books and so on. He was central in creating the atmosphere which made the Atkinson Sociology department such a fine place to be, for decades. No one could or did replace him here at York, once he was gone.

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*I gratefully acknowledge the assistance of Professor Mark J. Goodman in the completion of this essay.

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January 2004

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