



## In Memoriam: longtime UCSC faculty member Noel King

**To:** UCSC Community

**From:** Georges Van Den Abbeele, UCSC Dean of Humanities

February 01, 2009

By [Public Information Office](#)

I am very saddened to communicate news that Professor Emeritus Noel King passed away this past Sunday after a lengthy illness. Many of us remember Noel's lively presence on campus and his commanding lecture style on the subject of his expertise: comparative religious studies.

Hired by the campus shortly after it opened in the 1960s, Noel was an extraordinarily popular teacher and widely respected scholar, continuing to publish extensively well after his retirement in 1991 as a professor of history and comparative religion.

For many years, Noel advocated for a range of courses for students interested in learning about religion in an academic setting. And, for those students who were pursuing a religious studies major, Noel provided foundation classes with an emphasis on a comparative approach to the subject.

Information about a memorial service will be posted on a site the family is creating at: [nqking.wordpress.com/](http://nqking.wordpress.com/). Visitors to that site may also leave comments and remembrances.

His family has begun preparing Noel's obituary, which includes information about a memorial fund in his honor. By Monday, his wife, Laurie King, had written the following about her late husband. The completed family obituary will be posted on this web site later this week.

Noel Q. King died Sunday at his home in the Santa Cruz mountains after a long illness. Noel was an Anglo-Indian, born in Rawalpindi in 1922, educated in Simla, Oxford, and Nottingham. He served in the British Army during the second world war, mostly dropping air supplies over Burma, then went to St. Peter's in Oxford to study history and theology. After his D. Phil and ordination, he was hired by first Ghana and then Uganda, to help set up departments of religious studies in the new universities of Accra and Makerere. He came to the new University of California campus in Santa Cruz in 1967, with the same purpose.

Noel taught at UCSC until his retirement in 1991, in religious studies and history. After he retired, he remained active in the community of the world's religions, particularly among the Sikhs.

He is survived by his wife, Laurie; six children scattered from Santa Cruz to England and Australia; eleven grandchildren; and 4 great-grandchildren. He is also remembered by the generations of students around the world whose lives he touched.

Memorials to his life will be held in Santa Cruz and Oxford. If you wish to make a donation in Noel's name, we suggest the Noel Q. King Memorial Fund at UCSC, dedicated to the study of the world's religions. Send checks made to UCSC Foundation (with Noel's name as the memo) to: Liz Sandoval, Humanities Dean's Office, 1156 High Street, Santa Cruz, CA, 95064.

# Longtime UCSC religion professor Noel King dies at 86

*By J.M. BROWN*

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SANTA CRUZ -- Noel Q. King, a Pakistani-born professor emeritus of history and comparative religion at UC Santa Cruz, died Sunday after a battle with stomach cancer. He was 86.

King, the husband of mystery writer Laurie R. King, died at the couple's home in the south county area of the Santa Cruz Mountains. Memorial services are pending.

King, who joined what was then a relatively new campus in 1968, "was an extraordinarily popular teacher and widely respected scholar," Georges Van Den Abbeele, dean of humanities at UCSC, said in a statement. "Many of us remember Noel's lively presence on campus and his commanding lecture style on the subject of his expertise: comparative religious studies."

Van Den Abbeele said King, who retired from UCSC in 1991, encouraged the campus to expand the number of courses for students interested in studying religions, like the woman who would later become his wife of 31 years.

Laurie King, the best-selling author of "The Game" and others in her Mary Russell series, said she took at least six courses from her future husband before graduating from UCSC with a bachelor's degree in religious studies. The two were reintroduced later and began dating.

"His enormous strength was understanding the commonality of religion -- how different

religions can share attitudes and rich heritage and learn from each other," she said in an interview Tuesday with the Sentinel.

Carolyn Martin Shaw, a professor of anthropology at UCSC, wrote on the King family's memorial Web site, "We used to talk about Africa and share stories about life there. I will miss his warmth and his embrace of humanity. Noel King will live on in stories told about the great figures of UCSC."

Forty-year UCSC veteran Edmund "Terry" Burke III, director of the Center for World History on campus, said his friend King's classes were "so popular that they broke the all-time record for enrollment." Burke said King's History of World Religions class listed 922 students in the spring of 1987.

"He wore his learning so lightly that some people thought he didn't have any, though he was the author of six books and countless articles," Burke said. "He spanned the world and the mentalities, and God knows we had more than enough to go round in those days."

Born in Rawalpindi, Pakistan, King grew up in Northern India and was educated in England. He served in the British Army during World War II before attending St. Peter's College at the University of Oxford, and later establishing departments of religious studies in Ghana and Uganda, his wife said. An ordained Episcopal priest, King would fill in at St. John the Baptist Church in Capitola.

King is survived by his wife; children Zoe Elkaim and Nathan King, both of Santa Cruz County, Francis King of Oxford, Clare Claydon of Australia, and Naomi Iliff and Jeremy King, both of London; 11 grandchildren; and four great-grandchildren.