

Passings: Mark Smith

Emeritus English professor remembered

Wednesday, August 17, 2022



Mark Smith, professor emeritus of English, passed away on July 28, 2022. He was 86 years old.

Smith, an American novelist and poet, is best known for his third novel, "The Death of the Detective," a National Book Award finalist in 1975 and New York Times paperback best seller that many consider a masterpiece and the best crime novel ever written. His first novel, "Toyland" was the runner-up for the Faulkner Award in 1966. During the course of his career he received grants and fellowships from the Rockefeller, Guggenheim, Ingram Merrill and Fulbright Foundations and the National Endowment of the Arts. His publishers have been Little, Brown, Alfred Knopf, Harper & Row and William Morrow.

Smith was born in 1935 in Charlevoix, Michigan, the son of Marcus Grey Smith and Petranella (Nellie) Van Eeuwen. The Smiths were innkeepers and boat builders in Charlevoix; his mother's family were cattlemen in Grant, Michigan. His parents divorced early. He attended grade schools in Battle Creek, Maywood and Chicago where he graduated from Taft High School. He spent a semester at Western Michigan University, then took course work at the University of Chicago and Wright Junior College where he was encouraged by his English teacher,

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Robert Mueller, an editor of Poetry Magazine. He transferred to Northwestern University where he studied with the poet, John Crowe Ransom, and graduated with an A.B. with Honors in English in 1960. While in and out of college he worked as a tariff clerk for the Chicago, Burlington and Quincy Railroad, as a mucker extending the Chicago subway beneath the post office and the river, as a timekeeper on the foundation work for the Inland Steel Building and as a merchant seaman on the Great Lakes. After college he spent a year in Europe before moving to New England and Massachusetts where he lived on Boston's Beacon Hill before moving briefly to Manchester-by-the-Sea when he married his second wife. In 1963 he moved to an isolated mountain property in Northwood, New Hampshire, and in 1976 to York Harbor, Maine. After his second divorce, he moved to Portsmouth's Strawberry Banke in New Hampshire. At the same time he had residences in Albuquerque and later, the adobe casa of the poet, Robert Creely, in Placitas, New Mexico. He retired to a cottage on Lake Umbagog in East Winthrop, Maine. In addition, during his career, he traveled and resided for months at a time in Ireland, France, Portugal, Spain, Malta and Great Britain including the Channel Islands. Also, in California. He has been married three times, is twice divorced and has four daughters from his second marriage (Heidi, Matje, Maida, Gudrun) and five grandchildren (Sascha, Isek, Matilda, Ursula, Grey) and one great grandchild (Catalina). His wife of thirty years is Kathy Cone Smith, an editor and teacher of composition and film. His late brother Richard John Smith, also a Northwestern graduate, taught English as a second language, most often abroad. His mother was an officer of Harvard College.

Smith taught at the University of New Hampshire for thirty-three years teaching mainly fiction writing, introduction to fiction and the form and theory of fiction. He designed the department's M.A.-in-Writing program (now an M.F.A.), which was one of the earliest

and most successful programs in the country. His colleagues were the poet Charles Simic, the fiction writers Thomas Williams, John Yount and Theodore Weesner and the journalist and composition authority Donald M. Murray. Some thirty of Smith's students went on to publish their own work, including Alice McDermott (national book award). He has also been a visiting writer and professor in residence at Hollins College (twice), Lynchburg College (Thornton writer-in-residence), Wichita State University and the universities of Texas-Austin, Texas-El Paso, North Carolina-Greensboro, California State-Hayward, Idaho and Missouri-Columbia. He also served as a nominator and advisor to the Rockefeller, Lila Wallace, Mrs. Giles Whiting and McArthur Foundations and as the senior Fulbright lecturer to the former Yugoslavia (University of Belgrade) on a travel award for writers. He gave readings and lectures at some thirty universities, including the universities of Texas and Virginia and, in a summer program at Gonville and Caius College at Cambridge University, taught a course on American writers in Britain. When he directed his department's M.A.-in-Writing program, he served as an elected member of the board of the Associated Writing Programs (AWP). In college he was an editor and co-founder of the magazine Tri-Quarterly.

A memorial gathering of friends and family will be held in October, 2022. Details will be posted here when available.

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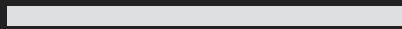
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