

Mohan N. Shrestha
Pioneer Nepalese American Professor

Mohan N. Shrestha, 68, professor emeritus of Geography at Bowling Green State University, and one of the first Nepalese to travel to the United States in pursuit of a PhD, died on September 14th, at St. Luke Hospital after a lengthy illness.

Born in Kathmandu, Nepal in 1939, Dr. Shrestha was a modest man of few words but much heart. He distinguished himself as an excellent student early in his life, graduating from high school at the age of 13, and earning Bachelor of Arts and Bachelor of Education degrees at 17. By the time he was 18 he was supporting his extended family, which included his paternal grandmother, both his parents and his sister, on his lecturer's salary. Within four years, this family would grow to include a young wife, a son and then a daughter. In each of the degrees he received in Nepal, he earned the position of 1st Class, First, these unequaled educational achievements earned him, in addition to his diplomas, three gold medals personally awarded to him by the King of Nepal.

In 1964, Mohan won a prestigious Fulbright Scholarship and which allowed him to pursue a PhD in the United States. His first stop was Texas, where despite being a foreign student, he was required to take one year of a "foreign" language. He chose French. When he made a comment to his faculty advisor about having a bit of difficulty with the Texas accent, he was told that there was an easy remedy for that, and the next thing he knew, he was being transferred to a university in the Midwest! So when his wife and young children joined him the following year, it was on the campus of the University of Iowa in Iowa City that they made their home.

In 1967, while still in the process of finishing his dissertation, Mohan accepted a teaching position at Bowling Green State University. A year and a half later, in 1969, he was awarded a Doctorate in Geography from the University of Iowa, and with his family, he returned to Kathmandu, Nepal to teach at Tribhuvan University, his graduate school alma mater. In 1971 he was back in Bowling Green as an assistant professor at BGSU where he would spend his entire professional career before retiring in 2004 after 35 years of service. As professor, he taught graduate and undergraduate students, and his research focused on Computer Mapping, Weather and Climate, and Population Migration. He also authored numerous articles, acted as editor of many journals, and contributed chapters to textbooks. As one of the first geographers studying the impact of deforestation and development in Nepal, he traveled widely and was a strong voice for sustainable development practices.

In addition to his work at the University, Dr. Shrestha was active in the Nepalese community, serving in different capacities in the Nepa Pasa Pucha, the Association of Nepalis in Midwest America, the Association of Nepalis in the Americas, and the Nepalese Americas Council. He was also a member of the Association of American Geographers, the Regional Science Association and the American Geological Society.

Those who knew Dr. Shrestha will remember him as a natural teacher and well read

scholar whose favorite TV show was the original Star Trek series. A good friend recently recalled her children saying he was a cross between Elvis and the Buddha. This insightful observation not only described his physical aspect, with his perfectly groomed black hair, coupled with youthful good looks and a serenity of expression, but also his intellectual breadth as a man who was able to bridge eastern and western worldviews. He reveled in science, calling mathematics the "truest international language" while at the same time drawing upon the wisdom of his own philosophical tradition and all the world's religions to not only inform the unfolding of his own life but to also pass on this knowledge to his children. However, all the infusion of philosophy did not diminish his genuine enjoyment of all life had to offer, like the companionship of good friends, spirited philosophical debate, the unconditional love of his grandchildren, world travel and of course, ice cream!

He touched the lives of all those around him - his friends who span the globe, his students who went on to become teachers, doctors, statesmen and ambassadors, and of course his family, for whom he was a shining example of dharma in action - a man who sought nothing more in life than to follow his path, to spread his knowledge with an open heart, and to provide for the well being and security of his family.

Dr. Shrestha is survived by his wife of 48 years, Vijaya Laxmi Malla Shrestha; his sister Sharada Raj Bhandari (Kathmandu, Nepal); son, Dr. Mahesh Shrestha, daughter-in-law Dr. Nancy Rose Orendain, and their children, Ganesh (15), Reeta (11) and Ramesh (7) all of Gladwynne, PA; his daughter Deepika Shrestha Ross and her daughter Mayadevi (13) of Santa Cruz, CA.

Friends are welcome to visit the family before the service at home, any evening after 7:30 pm.

Following Nepalese tradition, a memorial service will be performed after twelve days of formal mourning, on September 26, 2007, at 6:30pm at the Simpson Building, 1291 Conneaut Avenue, Bowling Green, OH 43402 (tel: 419.352.4611)

In honor of Dr. Shrestha's memory, his family asks that you consider making a donation to either of the two funds established in his name:

1) Mohan Narayan Shrestha Memorial Fund that will be used to further educational opportunities for Nepalese children. Please make your check payable to The Mohan Narayan Shrestha Memorial Fund and mail it to Ms. Bishnu Thapa, Treasurer, Nepal Americas Council, 6316 Pioneer Drive, Springfield, Virginia 22150

2) Mohan Shrestha Memorial Scholarship Fund, Bowling Green State University, which will provide scholarships to students within the Department of Geography. Please make your check payable to the Mohan Shrestha Memorial Scholarship Fund - BGSU, and mail it to the Department of Geography, 305 Hanna Hall, Bowling Green State University, Bowling Green, OH 43403.