Peter Lancaster (University of Calgary)

Richard K. Guy 30 September 1916- 9 March 2020

Richard K. Guy and I were friends and colleagues for about sixty-three years. For the last fity-five of these years we have been faculty members (or emeriti) at the University of Calgary. We first met in 1957 as colleagues in (what was then) the University of Malaya – and is now the University of Singapore.

Richard was an extraordinary character – with an extraordinary career. He was born in 1916 and died on March 9th, 2019. He attended Cambridge University from 1935 to 1938, taught at a secondary school from 1938 to 1940 and married in 1940. He and his charming, indefatigable wife, Louise, had three children in the early 1940's. After his wartime service with the RAF – as a meteorologist, he spent two years (1945-1947) teaching in a secondary school, and his academic career got under way in the late 1940's. For most of the 1950's he was a faculty member of the University of Malaya and, in addition to his research career, devoted time and energy to the teaching profession, pedagogy, and development of the Malayan Mathematical Society and its Bulletin.

Then, in 1961, he took the founding chair of mathematics at the new IIT, New Delhi. However, as a result of health problems, he left in 1965 and went to Calgary accompanied by Louise (who passed away in 2010).

He soon became a tower of strength in his department at the University of Calgary, with extraordinary contributions in terms of service and scholarship – including a term as department head. For example, his broad perspective admitted the development of expertise at the U of C in computer science – which was in its infancy in the 1960's – leading to the creation of the university's first department of computer science in 1975. His commitment to excellence and incredible capacity for work earned the respect of colleagues across the university, as well as the international mathematics community, which led to the award of a University of Calgary Honorary Doctorate. But in terms of service, perhaps his unfailing interest in – and enthusiasm for – the coaching and stimulation of talented school-age students was also remarkable. This included coaching teenage students in preparation for the international Putnam competitions.

His scholarly contributions include collaborations with world-renowned mathematicians whose periodic visits to the University of Calgary have helped to put us "on the map". His own publications were prolific and are largely in areas of mathematics with some popular appeal: game theory, the theory of numbers, graph theory, for example. Problems in these areas are easily posed but they have a correspondingly long, deep history and, being popular, it is difficult to say anything new. But R.K.G. along with young collaborators and eminent scholars, succeeded in doing this and, at the same time, stimulating others – worldwide – to get involved.

I would like to mention another of his passions (which we shared) – the mountains. He was an enthusiastic member of the Alpine Club of Canada as long as he was in Canada. In this context too, he was deeply committed and supportive. For example, he and Louise attended many ACC summer camps, and provided funds for construction of the "Guy Hut" on the Wapta Icefield. Also, their famous annual ascents of the Calgary Tower have provided extraordinary stimulus for the Alberta Wilderness Association.