

From Bill Broyles, 28 Oct 2015

Bunny Fontana

If you mention the name “Bunny” among Southwest historians and scholars, they know you mean none other than Bernard L. Fontana. It is the name he uses and the icon he signs to his emails:

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Although Bunny was trained as an anthropologist, he became much more: a historian, respected mentor, well-published author, advocate, and friend to many.

He walks comfortably among three cultures. He lives among the Tohono O’odham and has written several books about them and other tribes of the Southwest. He testified for Southwest tribes in the Native Land Claims litigation.

He has traveled extensively in Mexico, and has closely studied the Spanish Entrada, historic figures, and missions.

He is most at home sitting in a Sonoran café eating

enchiladas and visiting with the locals. His VW bus was well known throughout Sonora and Baja California. The Sonoran mission tours were a favorite way to share his love of Mexico.

He capably navigated the campus of a US university, classrooms, and celebrations, where he inspired students, faculty, and public alike.

He made the University of Arizona his home base, but never saw it as an ivory tower. His best days were spent digging for relicts at Johnny Ward's Ranch or climbing to the belfry at San Xavier Mission or leaning his elbows on a kitchen table in Magdalena.

At the university he found a perfect job – field historian, one created for him by Lawrence Clark Powell, director of the library, and John Schaeffer, president of the university. He was given an office and told to find history and bring it to campus. It was a job with no job description.

Along the way, he and President Schaeffer had many

successes. Bunny wrote well-received books on the Tarahumara and O'odham, with Dr. Schaeffer providing the photographs. Then they were inspired to propose a center for regional studies, and created the Southwest Center, which today specializes in research and publications about the borderlands. The Center's *Journal of the Southwest* will feature a special Next Gen issue in _____ .

While at the university, where he worked from 1960 to 1992, he also wrote a number of papers for journals, as well as frequent book reviews for Southwest Missions Research Center. He compiled a massive and thorough bibliography of all things O'odham, and in 2004 he passed that torch to the National Park Service at Tumacacori Mission, and it is now a standard reference and available on the internet for scholars around the world as well as students in village schoolhouses. And this year he finished an annotated transcription of Father Bonaventure Oblasser's diary of his decades among the Tohono O'odham.

A favorite among his books is *Trails to Tiburón: the 1894 and 1895 Field Diaries of W J McGee*, which he wrote with his wife Hazel, a guiding force in his life. He said that she ran the household, repairing everything from the roof to the septic tank, so that he could write books and pursue ideas. She was an artist and scholar in her own right.

His crowning book is the sumptuously illustrated and historically authoritative book *A Gift of Angels: The Art of Mission San Xavier del Bac*. The nearly 9-pound book brims with the best color photos of the Mission ever taken, and overflows with scholarship and love. This may be the weightiest book ever about a mission, but Bunny also wrote what is one of the smallest books about a mission, with the postage-stamp-sized *A Miniature History of Mission San José y San Miguel de Aguayo*.

Once a friend asked Bunny if he'd have time to talk to a couple of tourists from Norway and New York about the mission.

He said, sure. “And would you like a behind-the-scenes tour?”

“Of course, but who do we call to make arrangements?”

He winked and said, “Me. I have a set of keys.” And away they went.

In 2008 he received the Neuerburg Award for his California missions studies, and in 2015 he was honored with a Legacy Award from the university library. He also received the Arizona Culturekeepers award by the Sharlott Hall Museum and the Emil Haury Award for research in national parks.

Other awards and career-long praises have been heaped upon him, but he remains humble and open. Researchers from around the world still call him for information, and he is ever quick with a story or citation.

He dearly wished to be here with you today, but travel is not as easy for him as it once was. When notified of the NextGen award, he wrote:

Dear Ben,

I'm deeply flattered to be mentioned in the same breath with your other three honorees – although I know perhaps better than anyone how undeserving I am of the recognition.

I'm sorry to say that I no longer travel. Breathing has increasingly become more of a chore, and I venture out only on very short trips (an occasional lunch, lecture, or day trip sitting in a car or SUV or truck while someone else drives).

On the other hand, you can reward me by using the money you would be saving (transportation, lodging, food, etc.) had I been able to accept the invitation by using it to help with expenses for Next Generation members who otherwise would find it difficult to attend. If not that, then for some other worthy N-Gen purpose.

Please extend to all those who attend my very best wishes, and my deep admiration and gratitude for the efforts in which all of you are engaged. I will be with you in spirit.

Warmest regards,

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