

Sue Taylor Parker, Ph.D.
(1939-2023)

Sue Taylor Parker passed away from Parkinson's disease at the age of 84 on August 26, 2023. Sue was a Biological Anthropologist who taught at Sonoma State University in Northern California until she retired in 2002 as Full Professor Emeritus. She was a notable scholar of comparative cognitive development and gained international recognition for her extensive theoretical publications in the field of comparative developmental evolutionary psychology. Sue was a superb thinker, a rigorous scholar, and a prolific writer, publishing articles, chapters, books, and co-edited research volumes often based on symposia and conferences she co-organized that today provide some of the best references on the development of cognitive abilities in non-human primates. She gained international recognition from her academic colleagues for her extensive publications that focused on the comparative study of the extent and pace of cognitive development in monkeys, apes, and humans. An early adopter of employing Piagetian theory for the comparative study of non-human Primates, Piaget's infant sensory motor series formed the core of her NSF funded study of the development of an infant macaque for her Ph.D. dissertation at the University of California Berkeley (1973). What followed was a long and distinguished career that fueled developments in the new field of comparative developmental evolutionary psychology; a field, based in a European natural history tradition rather than the learning-theory tradition of American psychology.

A series of papers Sue published with Kathleen R. Gibson on the evolutionary convergence of intelligence in Cebus monkeys and great apes (1977) and the evolution of intelligence in monkeys, apes, and early hominids as extractive foragers (1979), brought Sue to the attention of international scholars with an invitation to be a plenary speaker at the International Primate Behavior Society meeting in Florence (1980). This was followed by a Fulbright scholarship (1986) to study in Italy and Switzerland and lecture at the *Fondation Archives Jean Piaget*, Université de Genève. Sue was also one of the first scholars to employ Piagetian theory to further the understanding of cognition in early hominids. In their coauthored book, *Origins of Intelligence: The Evolution of Cognitive Development in Monkeys Apes and Humans*, she and Michael L. McKinney took a comparative view to reconstruct human intelligence, concluding that human cognitive development had occurred in part through

recapitulation and acceleration of the terminal stages of development in a series of ancestors accompanied by terminal addition of new stages. A keen historian of evolution, Sue grasped the significance of grounding efforts in the new field in sound theoretical and empirical work. The range and significance of Sue's contributions was formally recognized by her election as a Fellow of the California Academy of Sciences.

During her years at Sonoma State, Sue was active in the faculty union and faculty governance, serving on many committees including transportation, general education, educational policies, as chair of the Department of Anthropology, and as Chair of the Academic Senate (1997-1998). Sue mentored both students and faculty, selecting her replacement with care when she retired to ensure a continuance of the critical subjects she thought important and loved to teach. Although there was no graduate program that included Biological Anthropology at Sonoma State, two of Sue's students who went on to receive PhD's in biological anthropology became distinguished scholars (Tim Bromage and Sharon DeWitte). In her department, Sue was known as the most scholarly faculty of her peers. Using an evolutionary approach in the classroom, her seminar presentations were known for their meticulous recounting of the history of evolutionary biology. She was loved and greatly appreciated by students; her general education course on biological pressures on the life course earned the moniker, *Sex with Sue*. Sue regularly commuted with other social scientists from their home in Berkeley, CA to Sonoma State, 50 miles north. Their carpool conversations between a developmental psychologist, sociologist, gender studies scholar, and cultural anthropologist were lively and colorful, and formed the seed for a new undergraduate program, the Interdisciplinary Studies in Human Development which Sue formally initiated and for some years coordinated. It became one of the most popular majors on campus.

Sue is loved and intensely missed by her family and friends. Among her professional friends, Sue convened an interdisciplinary group of women scholars who met monthly over wine and cheese to share and discuss key articles in their respective fields. She is survived by her husband Andrew Wilson (Wulfson), three sisters Pamela Plumb, Robin Fay-McNair, and Barbara Jensen, a son Aron Branscomb, her step-sons Ian Wulfson and Mike Wilson, and by her grandchildren Claire Branscomb and Kai Wulfson. A memorial will be held in California in December.

