

## In memoriam: Sharon Carlson Wilsnack and Richard Wilsnack

**Kim Bloomfield, Kathryn Graham, Tonda L. Hughes, Florence Kerr-Corrêa, Adriana Marcassa Tucci, Maria Cristina Pereira Lima, Anne-Marie Laslett, Martha Romero Mendoza, Nancy Vogeltanz-Holm, Thomas Greenfield, Moira Plant, Julio Bejarano, Arlinda Kristjanson, Sandra Kuntsche, Maristela G. Monteiro, and Myriam Munné**

In early December 2025, members of the Kettil Bruun Society learned of the very sad news that our friend and colleague, Professor Sharon Wilsnack had passed away. Sharon was a longtime member of KBS and had a prominent role in the society beginning in 1993 when she started the KBS working group on alcohol and gender, the International Research Group on Gender and Alcohol (IRGGA). From this group grew other networks and multinational research projects, funded by the US National Institute on Alcohol and Alcohol Abuse (NIAAA), the European Commission, the World Health Organization (WHO), the Pan American Health Organization (PAHO) and various funding agencies from collaborating countries (<https://www.kettilbruun.org/projects/genacis/>). For over 30 years, Sharon helped to maintain a strong focus on women, gender and alcohol within our society and helped to make the KBS a truly international research society. As described in the tributes, she was also a dedicated mentor to many young researchers coming up within KBS.

The many posts on the KBS listserv following news of Sharon's death made it clear that members of KBS wished to share their sorrow and show their appreciation for Sharon's contributions both to the body of knowledge on women and alcohol and to the careers of so many people around the world. Accordingly, after consultation with the Editors of IJADR, we started to collect these tributes for publication in this, the KBS journal.

Then, very shortly before a memorial service was to be held for Sharon on 12 April 2026 in Minneapolis, MN, USA, we received the news that Professor Richard Wilsnack, Sharon's spouse of many decades, had passed away from a long illness. This was yet another blow to the IRGGA community and to KBS members generally, many of whom had also benefitted from Richard's leadership, advice and depth of knowledge. To have both members of this wonderful couple depart so soon after each other was heartbreaking, especially to the Wilsnack children and grandchildren.

Some who were part of the IRGGA community worked mainly with Sharon. However, others worked closely with Richard, too. Therefore, we and the editors decided to invite people to revise their tributes to include their memories and the accomplishments of both Richard and Sharon, if they wished.

What follows is a collection of tributes written by some of the many KBS researchers who were touched by both Sharon's and Richard's guidance, wisdom, support and collaboration. We hope that the reader will enjoy reminiscing and appreciating these very special lives.

Kim Bloomfield & Kate Graham



*Sharon and Richard, KBS dinner, Chiang Mai, Thailand, 2018 (Photo source: Kim Bloomfield)*



*KBS 2011 Melbourne, Australia (Photo source: Martha Romero Mendoza)*

**Sharon and Richard Wilsnack – Tireless Devotion to the Multicultural Study of Gender and Alcohol**

**Kate Graham**



*Nancy Vogeltanz, Deborah Dawson, Kate Graham, Paris, 2002 (Photo source: Kate Graham)*

I first met Sharon at the 1994 Kettil Bruun Society (KBS) conference in Rüşchlikon, Switzerland, where I joined IRGGA (International Research Group on Gender and Alcohol). Sharon had formed the group the year before at KBS in Krakow, Poland. Like others, I was committed to women's issues, but it was Sharon who took the initiative to start up IRGGA. It was that same initiative that led to larger projects that had a major impact on knowledge and policy relating to gender, culture and alcohol use as described in the following.

Back then, IRGGA was a group of about 8 to 10 women. From IRGGA, grew GENACIS (Gender, Alcohol and Culture: An International Study) and later GENAHTO (Gender and Alcohol's Harms to Others). I can't remember whether Richard was part of IRGGA (it was almost all women until we started up GENACIS) but he probably was, because he and I wrote a paper together (with Deborah Dawson and Nancy Vogeltanz) for the IRGGA group on whether measures of alcohol needed to be adjusted for gender which was published before GENACIS really got going (Graham et al., 1998). It was apparent early on that

Sharon and Richard were a very close and effective team, both as life partners and as partners in research. The song by country singer, Billy Joe Shaver, describes well what seemed to be their relationship – "I couldn't be me without you."

As others will write, Sharon and Richard did more than anyone to develop research capacity in low- and middle-income countries and to bring researchers from these and other countries into collaborations to create an international network of alcohol researchers. Through Sharon's efforts, the World Health Organization (WHO) and the Pan American Health Organization (PAHO) came on board to support research in countries all over the world. And the collaborations grew.

While others made substantial contributions to the collaboration, Sharon and Richard were always the clear leaders. Sharon, especially, did more than anyone to mentor researchers and support the development of excellent research teams in countries around the world. As it appeared to me, Sharon did the leading and used her interpersonal skills and contacts to build the network, while Richard attended to the mechanics in the background, doing whatever was needed to make sure it all happened.

Observing the growth and success of IRGGA, Sharon and Richard noted in an article published in 2002: "The evolution of international comparative alcohol research and gender-focused alcohol research converged in the organization of IRGGA in 1993. IRGGA's membership now includes more than 100 alcohol researchers from 35 countries."

By the time this article was published, however, IRGGA had evolved into the GENACIS project which eventually involved over 40 countries and countless researchers. GENACIS brought gender-focused alcohol research to countries with little history of doing alcohol research, especially research on women, including countries where women had few rights. Eventually, the GENACIS project included a large database with measures of alcohol use, violence and mental health in countries with large variability in gender equity. Thus, the GENACIS research was able to highlight the role of societal gender inequality not only in

alcohol-related issues for women but also on gender-based violence and health generally. Thanks to GENACIS and the work of Sharon and Richard, the first KBS thematic meeting outside of Europe, North America and Oceania took place in Kampala, Uganda in 2010 –and then in 2013, KBS was held in Africa, the first time the annual KBS meeting was held outside of Europe or North America.

For me, the collaborative research was in itself wonderful. But even more wonderful was the network of people that came together from around the world, many of whom became good friends, including the Wilsnacks' wonderful colleagues from North Dakota, Nancy Volgeltanz-Holm and Arlinda Kristjanson. Through this collaboration, I, along with many others, formed lifelong friendships with people from diverse regions and cultures. This cross-national comparative research and these friendships could not have happened without Sharon's leadership and Richard's partnership roles.

Sharon worked tirelessly forming collaborations and helping to set up research initiatives, often travelling to other countries to help with the design and execution of the research. A critical component to the success of GENACIS was her collaboration with Kim Bloomfield, who obtained funding to lead a large European Union (EU) partnership with GENACIS. Everything seemed to grow so organically and easily that it is only in retrospect, I have come to recognize how much was due to the efforts of Sharon and Richard, including obtaining core funding and establishing key partnerships around the world.

GENACIS later grew into GENAHTO – alcohol's harms to others. Because in all societies men drank more than women, alcohol research had a long history of focusing primarily on men. Sharon and Richard helped to shift the focus to gender, and women in particular, by highlighting, for example, that the same amount of alcohol (in millilitres per litre of blood) causes more physical harm to women when they drink compared to the same amount consumed by men. The need for greater attention to alcohol's impact on women became even more apparent when research started to measure harms caused by other people's drinking. For example, although in many cultures, almost all alcohol is consumed by men, this does not mean that only men experience the harms from alcohol. Specifically, when men drink and become violent, it is often their female partner who suffers the harm from alcohol-related violence. In addition, in families or cultures where purchase of alcohol leads to economic hardship, such hardships typically affect families including women – especially in cultures where women's access to paid work or higher paying work, is limited. The Wilsnacks were able to mobilize huge multi-national networks to ensure that the important role of gender and culture could be applied to the study of alcohol's harms to others.

So far, I have described the massive scientific contributions from the collaborations led by Sharon and Richard. What is remarkable is that they were also wonderful human beings – kind, gentle people – always gracious, always welcoming. Bringing together and maintaining a collaboration of researchers is, to say the least, challenging. Researchers are not known for being socially adept. And it took patience, skill and backbone on Sharon's part to keep the collaboration

going for 25+ years. I'm not sure anyone else could have done it. Richard's role was more subtle but, don't be mistaken, he did a lot too – more on the sidelines and in one-on-one exchanges. He also did a lot of writing and statistics and helped keep the machine going.

I need to end so maybe I'll just end with one word that springs to mind for each of them. For Sharon, the word is "grace" – an easy, kind and gentle way of approaching leadership. For Richard, the word is "humour" – dry and quiet. It seems to me that grace and humour were pretty essential ingredients in the longevity and success of the IRGGA, GENACIS and GENHATO collaboration. I am truly grateful to have had the honour to work with Sharon and Richard and for the wonderful gift of being part of these collaborations.

*Kathryn Graham, Ph.D.*

*Centre for Addiction and Mental Health, and Dalla Lana School of Public Health, University of Toronto, Toronto, Canada.*



*First KBS conference in Africa – Kampala, Uganda, 2010  
(Photo source: Kate Graham)*

### **Sharon Wilsnack: A Quiet Strength**

**Kim Bloomfield**



*IRGGA pre-KBS meeting, Oslo 2000 (Photo source:  
Arlinda Kristjanson)*

I first met Sharon, or better said, encountered Sharon at the 1990 KBS meeting in Budapest. She and Richard were

presenting results from the 10-year collection mark of their longitudinal study of women and drinking. I do not believe that I spoke to her that year. This was before she had organized the IRGGA working group. The next time I remember seeing her was during the pre-KBS workshops in Krakow in 1993. I was participating in a pre-KBS meeting of our international study of AA which was located across the foyer from Sharon's group. It was not until 1994 when KBS met in Rüsçhlikon that Sharon approached me and invited me to join IRGGA. From that year on, I began to collaborate with Sharon and Richard.

My work with Sharon enriched my professional life immensely. She brought endless encouragement, support and guidance not only to me but to others in the group as we worked together to develop IRGGA and to work toward obtaining funding so that specific investigations could grow out of the group's collaborations. Such development occurred through my two EU-funded collaborative studies (upon which Sharon and IRGGA member Ronald Knibbe had given guidance in drafting the proposal) and Sharon's and Richard's NIAAA-funded developmental international study (R21) and later main projects (R01). Once IRGGA's work was funded and underway, Sharon and I had regular contact and communication. This lasted from the mid-1990s until around the outbreak of Covid. Her last R01 was a multi-principal investigator grant which Sharon, Tom Greenfield and I co-led.

I would not say that Sharon and I were close or best friends, yet we regularly told each other news about our families. From such exchanges I learned how important family was to Sharon. That was also evident by learning that the few holidays that she took most often involved her children and later also grandchildren.

Sharon worked in a very precise and organized manner. I learned so much about writing grant proposals by seeing her and Richard in action. In the early phase of a proposal, I would contribute text to a NIAAA grant application and by the time the final product was ready, I could hardly recognize those sections that I had written. Sharon had edited them so professionally that, although the content remained, the form and style of the text had been much improved.

Sharon was a wonderful role model. She exhibited all the qualities that made for a good researcher: intelligence and knowledge, of course, but also reliability, promptness, and good analytical skills, especially with regard to forming a successful application. Her example made working on what would otherwise be a threatening and tedious technical application into an enjoyable experience. We always worked as a team and found consensus on our approach to any project proposal.

When IRGGA or GENACIS met, Sharon was welcoming of all members, including potential new members to the group. She was incredibly observant and sensitive to all in the room and would make sure that everyone felt comfortable to express their ideas. Along with this ability, she was an expert networker. On several occasions Sharon met community leaders, stakeholders and local politicians so that some of the work of the group could indeed influence alcohol policy in particular regions (e.g., Obot & Room, 2006). Whenever our

group held meetings in a new part of the world, Sharon was often asked to speak to local groups.

Sharon and I were different in many ways. For example, she might not have liked to hang out at the social dinners in the evenings, which in the early years I was interested in and still had the energy for. But during our meetings, Sharon could chat and engage with all sorts of people and knew how to make the new members feel comfortable and welcome. That was her true quiet strength and how she was able to grow IRGGA into the successful GENACIS and later GENAHTO projects.



*Kim and Sharon, Stavanger, Norway, 2012 (Photo source: Kate Graham)*

Sadly, with Richard's recent passing, it is important for me to acknowledge here the likewise quiet support and work that he contributed to the projects that Sharon led. Richard often offered his viewpoints and theories to further strengthen new research questions that were being investigated. He also proposed approaches for analyses that might be more parsimonious for a particular investigation. He wholeheartedly supported Sharon in her daily work, especially during travelling when Sharon experienced additional physical and logistical challenges.

I know that I will always have a role model to inspire me when I find the need for that quiet strength and equanimity to get through certain challenging moments in life. In addition to being a successful researcher and beloved mother, grandmother and life partner, Sharon was kind, generous, and understanding. It might be said that she strove to practice her personal faith in all areas of her life, private and professional.

*Kim Bloomfield, Dr.P.H.,  
Centre for Alcohol and Drug Research, Aarhus University,  
Copenhagen, Denmark.*

#### **A Legacy of Generativity: Honoring Dr. Sharon Wilsnack's Transformative Mentorship**

**Tonda Hughes**

Dr. Sharon Wilsnack was the Chester Fritz Distinguished Professor Emerita at the University of North Dakota School of Medicine and Health Sciences, Department of Psychiatry and Behavioral Science. Her distinguished career spanned roles as a substance abuse therapist, treatment program director, and internationally recognized pioneering researcher on women's use of alcohol. She earned her undergraduate degree from Kansas State University in 1965,

studied as a Fulbright Fellow at the University of Freiburg in the Federal Republic of Germany, and completed her MA (1968) and PhD (1972) in clinical psychology at Harvard University. She joined the University of North Dakota faculty in 1978 as an associate professor of psychiatry. Earlier in her career, she served as a supervising psychologist at Massachusetts Mental Health Center in Boston and as director of the regional alcoholism rehabilitation program at South Central Community Mental Health Center in Bloomington, Indiana.

For 35 years, Dr. Wilsnack led National Institutes of Health (NIH)-funded research, including a landmark 20-year longitudinal study of U.S. women's drinking behavior conducted with her husband and collaborator, sociologist Richard W. Wilsnack. She also coordinated a major international collaborative research initiative (GENACIS) on gender and alcohol, engaging investigators from more than 40 countries. Her work fundamentally shaped contemporary understanding of women's drinking patterns, gender differences in alcohol use, and the cultural contexts that influence alcohol-related risk.

I first met Dr. Sharon Wilsnack at a conference on women and alcohol in the early 1990s, when I was a newly appointed assistant professor facing a pivotal career decision. I was torn between pursuing research on substance use and health among sexual minority women—an understudied and often stigmatized population lacking scientific legitimacy at the time—or continuing with more conventional, and arguably “safer,” research on substance use in less controversial populations. While the latter path promised fewer professional risks, it held far less intellectual and personal meaning for me.

Well-meaning senior colleagues cautioned against my choosing to focus my work on sexual minority women's alcohol use, worrying among other things that it was not a “fundable” area of inquiry. Sharon's presentation at the women and alcohol conference solidified my decision. She spoke candidly about the profound gaps in knowledge regarding women's drinking: far less was known about women than men, even less about Black and Hispanic women, and virtually nothing about lesbian women. Hearing this assessment from a leading authority validated what I had observed in the literature and crystallized my sense of purpose. Gathering my courage, I approached Sharon and asked whether she might consider co-authoring a review article on the almost nonexistent research on alcohol use among lesbian women.

To say “the rest is history” would vastly understate the magnitude of Sharon's influence. Sharon's reputation, intellectual curiosity, and extraordinary generosity were foundational to our collaborative work and my development as a researcher in alcohol use among sexual minority women. She invited me to the University of North Dakota to work with her and her team on developing my first NIH grant application beyond my pre- and postdoctoral fellowships. What followed exceeded all expectations. Rather than offering only brief consultation, Sharon, Richard, and their team devoted themselves fully to helping me craft a competitive K01 Research Career Development Award application.

The application proposed building on Sharon's landmark National Study of Health and Life Experiences of Women (NSHLEW) by developing a parallel study of alcohol use among lesbian and bisexual women, largely replicating the national design with a Chicago-based sample. The K01 was funded in 1999. In 2000, Sharon and her team collected the fifth wave of NSHLEW data as we launched baseline data collection for what became the Chicago Health and Life Experiences of Women (CHLEW) study. Both studies incorporated innovative measures of sexual identity, expanding beyond traditional categories (i.e., lesbian, bisexual, heterosexual) to include “mostly lesbian” and “mostly heterosexual” response options. This methodological advance enabled novel analyses comparing demographically similar sexual minority and heterosexual women and revealed important variations in substance use risk associated with how sexual identity is measured. We showed that substance use outcomes vary significantly depending on the response options offered to participants—for example, that bisexual women appear at highest risk when only lesbian, bisexual, and heterosexual identity categories are available, whereas “mostly heterosexual” women show the highest risk when more nuanced options are included.

Replicating a national study within a community sample of sexual minority women also allowed other critical methodological contributions to the field. For example, we demonstrated that so-called “convenience” samples possess substantial scientific value, challenging the rigid assumption that only probability samples yield reliable results. These contributions have had lasting implications for research design and interpretation in studies of sexual minority health and women's health more broadly.

Because of Sharon's experience and deep appreciation for the power of longitudinal research, as well as her unwavering conviction that studying sexual minority women deserved the same scientific rigor afforded to other populations, we designed CHLEW from its inception with longitudinal follow-up in mind. In 2024, we celebrated CHLEW's 25th anniversary and the completion of five waves of data collection; today, CHLEW stands as the longest-running and most comprehensive study of alcohol use among sexual minority women. Findings from the study have been reported in more than 80 publications, many co-authored with Sharon, and presented at local, national, and international scientific meetings. This work not only established my scientific career but also significantly advanced understanding of sexual identity, gender, and alcohol use—powerfully illustrating the transformative impact of exceptional mentorship.

Sharon was an exceptional writer, and although I considered myself a strong writer, she unfailingly—and diplomatically—identified places where my arguments lacked sufficient evidence or could be expressed more clearly and persuasively. Given our mutual interest in the impact of victimization and trauma, she was particularly attentive to language that could be misinterpreted as victim-blaming or could inadvertently reinforce stigmatizing narratives about sexual minority women's mental health. Because of her gentle yet consistent guidance, I became a more rigorous, precise, and ethically sensitive writer.

Sharon also encouraged my interest in conducting international research on sexual minority health. With her encouragement, I attended my first Kettil Bruun Society (KBS) conference in the mid-1990s.

An eloquent comment Sharon wrote in a letter supporting my nomination for an earlier international award, applies to Sharon herself: “One of Professor Hughes’ many outstanding personal qualities is her spirit of generativity (in Erik Erikson’s sense), her commitment to sharing her time, knowledge, and skills with future generations of scholars and researchers.” Sharon exemplified generativity—through her scientific contributions and through the care she devoted to mentoring students and early-career investigators. Those she mentored have, in turn, carried forward her values and approach, mentoring others and contributing immeasurably to the advancement of research on women and alcohol. My success, and those of my mentees, stands as a testament to the enduring value of her mentorship in both scientific progress and personal growth.

Sharon’s passing marks an unwanted milestone in my life and career. I regularly emailed Sharon to share news of an award or a new publication; now, when I think of sending her a message about some accomplishment, I am reminded she is no longer here, and I feel an overwhelming sense of loss. Yet alongside the sadness is deep gratitude. I think of the years we worked together, all that we accomplished, and I smile—knowing how proud she was and would be.

Sharon’s influence extended far beyond the individuals she mentored. Her work reshaped how the field understands culture, gender, alcohol use, and the social contexts that shape women’s drinking. The methodological innovations she championed, the international collaborations she nurtured, and the generations of scholars she supported continue to guide alcohol research today. For those of us working to advance equity, rigor, and inclusivity in the study of alcohol use, Sharon’s legacy remains both a foundation and an inspiration. The research field of alcohol use among sexual minority women is stronger, more expansive, and more humane because of her.

*Tonda L. Hughes, PhD, RN, FAAN.  
Center for Sexual and Gender Minority Health Research,  
Columbia University, New York City, USA.*

**Sharon Wilsnack: Guided Women’s Mental Health  
Scientists in Brazil with Kindness**

**Florence Kerr-Corrêa, Adriana Marcassa Tucci,  
Maria Cristina Pereira Lima**

Professor Sharon Wilsnack passed away in December 2025. Her academic legacy is extensive and represents a landmark in gender and alcohol research worldwide. As is widely known, during her doctoral studies, in the early 1970s, she noted the scarcity of research investigating alcohol use by women. Since then, the topic has gained increasing prominence and relevance in academia, largely due to her influence. Countless students and professors were influenced by her, leading to her globally recognized contributions as a researcher. What we would like to highlight in this statement, however, is her generosity and kindness towards scholars around the world, especially in the Global South. On more than one occasion, we had the

privilege of the inspiring company we received from Professor Sharon and her late husband Richard, among other researchers who were members of the Kettil Bruun Society. In such challenging times globally, the ability to bring people together and inspire them as Professor Sharon Wilsnack did so well has never been more precious. She will be greatly missed.

Our condolences to her family and friends.

*Florence Kerr-Corrêa, M.D., Ph.D.; Adriana Marcassa Tucci, Psychologist, Ph.D.; Maria Cristina Pereira Lima, M.D., Ph.D.  
Botucatu Medical School, São Paulo State University, São Paulo, Brazil.*

**Sharon and Richard Wilsnack: A Huge Loss for the  
Global Alcohol Research Community**

**Anne-Marie Laslett**

Sharon and Richard Wilsnack were such a wonderful couple, contributing so much together and individually, and both so supportive of each other and us all.

Sharon, you were a wise and kind mentor, a gentle and large inspiration for the work we do. Leading new thinking on women’s drinking, highlighting a research world that omitted a focus on women, arguing for inclusion of gender and separate analyses by gender in alcohol research, for mixed methods, for epidemiological methods and comparative analyses that are strong and avant-garde. You supported so many researchers across the world, often in low and middle-income countries. You wrangled grants and built data systems upon which teams you supported analysed countless alcohol related conditions and harms in context. You brought people together to undertake multi-national projects. Leading analyses and publications you supported countless co-authors, students and early career researchers.

Thank you for teaching and shepherding and caring for us, for leaving behind a generation of researchers that seek to emulate your intelligence, writing and way of supporting others to do all that they can. Thank you also for your sense of fun and camaraderie, for the countless personalised GENACIS newsletters and the dinners you organised for us all, with careful instructions so that we could not get lost.



*Anne Marie Laslett and Richard, May 31, 2019 (Photo source: Reg Quinton)*

And Richard, you supported Sharon at every KBS and GENACIS or GENAHTO meeting I ever attended and were

also a measured and powerful force in alcohol and social research.

We miss you Sharon and Richard very much and send your dear family our condolences, love and support,

*Anne-Marie Laslett, Ph.D.*

*Centre for Alcohol Policy Research, La Trobe University, Melbourne, Australia.*

**Sharon Wilsnack: Wise and Humble Woman**

**Martha Romero Mendoza**



*KBS Stockholm, Sweden, 2016 (Photo source: Martha Romero Mendoza)*

I met Dr. Wilsnack when I was invited to participate from Mexico in the GENACIS project. For me, joining this venture and having the privilege of knowing her was the gateway to a wonderful interdisciplinary and multicultural group in which gender ceased to be a theoretical category and became a way of working and being in the world.

Sharon Wilsnack, besides being a very high-level researcher, exercised strong leadership and at the same time was a supportive, respectful, patient and above all generous person, friendly with those researchers whose expertise on the subject was not yet consolidated like me. As a woman, I always admired her great sense of humor, her values, integrity and ability to adapt to sometimes difficult environments while maintaining the healthy balance between putting order and finding joy in working groups.

To the wise and humble woman, my gratitude for her teachings, her company, and her friendship. With love and respect, farewell, Sharon!

*Martha Romero Mendoza Ph.D.*

*National Institute of Psychiatry, Mexican Researchers National System, San Lorenzo Huipulco, Tlalpan, México*

**Memories of Sharon and Richard**

**Nancy Vogeltanz**

**Memories of Sharon**

I was so sad to learn of Sharon's passing, it's been hard to accept she is gone. My feelings for Sharon are deeply personal, and words don't do justice to how much she means to me. But nonetheless I want to share a few thoughts about this remarkable person to whom I owe so much.



*University of North Dakota, Grand Forks, ND, 1994  
(Photo source: Nancy Vogeltanz)*

Sharon hired me for my first academic job following grad school and internship—what an extraordinarily lucky break for me. We were both clinical psychologists and focused on women's health—she and Richard of course were at the very top of their field but so down to earth and willing to take me under their wings. I got a world-class education in complex survey research and the culture and politics of global alcohol research. No one could have been a better mentor, colleague, and friend than Sharon. Everything I've achieved professionally is based on the great start I had working with Sharon. We shared tears, fears, and joys and bonded over our mutual love of family and progressive values. She was a role model who taught me to lead with kindness and courage. I will miss her deeply but I am comforted by my belief that we will someday see each other again and perhaps toast to our friendship with a glass of Vinho Verdi—just like we did during my first KBS meeting in Porto, 1995.

In gratitude and love to you Sharon. Nancy



*Nancy Vogeltanz-Holm, Jeff Holm, and Richard (Photo source: Kate Graham)*

**Memories of Richard**

In December, we learned about the passing of our dear colleague and friend Sharon Wilsnack. And now we learn that her life partner Richard Wilsnack passed away a few days ago. I can only imagine what their family must be going

through. Wanted to share a few thoughts about my friend and colleague of thirty years

We all know that Richard was a devoted family man, an excellent social scientist and a statistical whiz. Sharon and Richard’s enormous body of work is the result of their equality of ideas and tireless efforts. Beyond Richard’s lifetime work with Sharon in the alcohol field, he had a rich life full of pursuits that were uniquely his own. Richard would gladly share his passion for a variety of topics. I am thankful that he introduced me to his love of and now my love of the great Maria Callas. From topics as diverse as space travel to history, he just about knew everything and made everyone around him smarter. Richard was a legendary teacher and would spend days preparing for class—no medical student ever came away from one his lectures without their hair blown back. Richard was a true humanist and championed equal rights for all people. Although he was mild mannered in most respects, Richard could be fierce when it came to standing up for those without a voice. Richard’s death so soon after Sharon’s passing is such a profound loss. But my faith tells me that the two of them are together and happy to be scoping out a good project for their heavenly days.

### Fond Memories of Sharon and Richard

Tom Greenfield



*Kampala Conference Center before the safari, Kampala 2010 (Photo source: Tom Greenfield)*

At the first Kampala KBS Thematic organized by Nazarius Tumwesigye and his Makerere team in 2010, I have such fond memories of Sharon, who shared in its success by having so much to do with supporting international participation in KBS over so many years, with Richard always by her side—together such a loss to our field. I am sure most people found the conference, held at such a fine international conference facility, a splendid success—the first KBS Thematic in Africa. Afterwards, Sharon, Richard, Moira, Jason and I had booked a four day, three night safari with driver cum guide to the Murchison Falls National Park, a great adventure we shared. On the way we detoured to a walking visit with a white rhino family at a Rhino Preserve, led by a ranger who was certainly a rhino whisperer. We were only a 100 feet or so from the rhino family, dad, mum and calf. so exhilarating and what a chance to get up close to these marvelous creatures!



*Nancy, Richard & Sharon at KBS Conference, Edinburgh 1996 (Photo source: Nancy Vogeltanz-Holm)*

With love and gratitude to you Richard and Sharon.

*Nancy Vogeltanz-Holm, Ph.D.  
University of North Dakota School of Medicine & Health Sciences, Grand Forks, North Dakota, USA.*



*Richard and Sharon with our driver guide at the Rhino Park and the rhinos only feet away! (Photo source: Tom Greenfield)*



*Kim Bloomfield, Gerhard, Sharon, Sandra Kuntsche and Richard – Lake District, UK, 2008 (Photo source: Kate Graham)*

The detour to visit the rhinos meant our arrival at the Murchison Falls Lodge via the Paara ferry was after dark, which only added to the experience. I must say the lodge was a delight, with excellent accommodations and enjoyable group meals, especially considering the individual layout for the total safari was a mere US \$750 each in total.



*(Photo source: Tom Greenfield)*



*(Photo source: Tom Greenfield)*

Our driver/guide was very knowledgeable about the ways of the wildlife, and we had a day or two on ‘game drives’ starting early. The Murchison Falls Game Reserve was teeming with giraffe, buffalo and many other beasts with excellent close-up views from our vehicle.



*...of course, followed by relaxing evening dinners at the lodge overlooking the Nile. (Photo source: Tom Greenfield)*

After that we took a boat trip up the river to the Murchison Falls where we discovered the Myriam Munné was also staying elsewhere at the game reserve. There were huge crocodiles, innumerable kingfishers and bee-eaters, elephants and more Cape buffalo on the banks, and so many hippo. We turned back below the falls, surrounded by foam.



*(Photo source: Tom Greenfield)*

The next day we went to the top of the Murchison Falls—an expedition via a bush trail. Myriam and friend were enjoying themselves in dangerous ways! The energy was powerful and views spectacular. No kidding about the Beware of Crocodiles sign. The very next year a Zimbabwean kayak group guide on the same river was capsized and eaten by a crocodile.



*(Photo source: Tom Greenfield)*



*(Photo source: Tom Greenfield)*



(Photo source: Tom Greenfield)

Wonderful memories of Sharon and Richard in this wilderness, and many shared projects, most recently GENAHTO. How deeply I miss them both, but cherish these memories.

*Thomas K. Greenfield, Ph.D.  
Alcohol Research Group, Public Health Institute,  
Emeryville, CA, USA.*

### Sharon and Richard Wilsnack Tribute

#### Moira Plant

Sharon was a very special person. In fact, she was unique. Her ability to bring people together, *hold* them together, and yet never lose sight of everyone as an individual was a rare skill.



*Moira Plant and Sharon, Uganda (Photo source: Tom Greenfield)*

Sharon was a pioneer in the field of women and alcohol.

I first met her at the birth of the Gender and Alcohol: An International Study (GENACIS) project which brought her fully onto the international stage. GENACIS was a pioneering endeavour and would not have been as successful or had the impact it did if it hadn't been for Sharon's vision and her ability to build bridges between people from different countries and different professional backgrounds.

I remember the first GENACIS meeting at a Kettil Bruun Society affair – I think it was in Florence. I don't think any of us there realised what a landmark meeting that was. There were only 8 or 9 people in that small room but for me, and many others, it was the beginning of a milestone project and friendships that would last for most of our working lives and into retirement. At that time, even when large scale surveys

were carried out, data were rarely broken down by gender. Knowledge of the problems caused by alcohol focussed mainly on men's drinking – women were understudied and underserved. Sharon wanted to change that - although she was actually a little tentative when she introduced her ideas to us!

She held GENACIS together throughout - supporting many of the researchers from countries that did not have histories of epidemiological research. Her vision led to an amazing amount of information on both women and men being gathered from across the world. These data are now used regularly by individual countries as well as organisations such as WHO, EU, PAHO etc.

This was no easy feat. For example, significant care was required when developing the original questionnaires - translating and back-translating from the agreed first draft to enable the communication of the *concept* rather than the words. Sharon oversaw this with her characteristic sensitivity and meticulousness. I will always remember a discussion on the variable "drunk in charge of a car" and how, over several discussions, it became a different vehicle for individual countries where cars were not so common or useful. "Drunk in charge of a skidoo" was not a variable any of us expected to include at the outset! Sharon's wealth of knowledge was invaluable in the lengthy discussions necessary just to agree on an internationally comparable measure of an alcoholic drink.

Sharon was also mindful of the difference in circumstances between women and girls who might be the same age but live in vastly different circumstances and countries. The Western assumption of what the life of a 14-year-old girl looked like was very different from the life of a 14-year-old girl in some European and African countries. Social norms and legal systems all differed. Sharon's skill at making people feel comfortable enough to explain their countries' cultures was vital in developing a variable of "life stage" rather than chronological age. Her dedication ensured that everyone felt their contributions, and their cultures, were understood and respected enough to make the findings both valid and useful.

GENACIS was more than a research project. Sharon called GENACIS a family – in the best sense of 'family' where people can grow and develop, make mistakes, and be supported through them. She was right. Introducing epidemiology to countries where it was not an established tradition and tirelessly supporting the early-stage researchers in those countries meant Sharon contributed to the development of a skilled, global group of individuals producing world-class health research. She was the best role model these young researchers could ask for. I know she continued to support many of them even when they moved on into other fields.

Along with Sharon's – truly global - contribution to alcohol research, many of us are lucky to hold more personal memories of her. A trip to go whale watching off Iceland in what turned out to be a ferocious gale stands out for me. Sharon had had a hip operation a few weeks before yet would not be left behind. We didn't learn until we returned to harbour - shivering and soaked, that no other boats had been stupid enough to venture out that day! Sharon knew how to

enjoy the fun things as well as the work and she took time to do so.

As I have already said: GENACIS was a family. Sharon's loss is profound for all of us who were part of it.

I completed the above tribute to Sharon a few weeks ago. I am finding it hard to believe that now both Sharon and Richard are gone. Together they supported and encouraged growth in those new to the alcohol field. Richard was an ardent proponent of encouraging students from all over the world to develop their careers and grow. He was particularly enthusiastic about working with researchers from countries where epidemiology was an unknown way of exploring important issues and, like Sharon, he tirelessly supported and encouraged them.

Richard's interest in alcohol from the point of view of a social scientist was clear to us all. Between them Sharon and Richard made a mark on the international alcohol knowledge-base which will have continuing influence in the field. As a team, they were a wonderful match – between them, they moved us all forward. They supported and, where necessary, questioned and challenged, but always in a way which made it possible for even those newest to the field to hear and use the gentle critique to develop their own practice.

Richard never ceased to amaze me with the breadth of his knowledge. I still can't understand where he found the time to read and digest all different areas he was interested in. These were not superficial interests but in-depth explorations of widely diverse topics.

For many years Richard and I would sit together at the annual KBS dinner to share our love of books. He read across so many fields, from archaeology to new discoveries in the history of human migration across the centuries. He had a sense of fun which came out when he was relaxed. He would ask me what he called trick questions about movies. Occasionally I got the right answer, more by chance than knowledge but he enjoyed it, and when he laughed the whole room heard it. I still remember with warmth and excitement his ideas of other worlds, not in a science fiction way, but in a logical well thought out process of "how can we be the only living beings in the universe?"

Richard made my life richer through knowing him, and his energy and curiosity will always live with me.

Needless to say, Sharon and Richard had a more important family than the GENACIS one. My thoughts are with their children and grandchildren.

Having said all that I am left with a few heartfelt words

They were my friends. I miss them both.

*Moirá Plant, Ph.D.*

*University of the West of England, Bristol, United Kingdom.*

## Tribute to Professor Sharon Wlsnack

**Julio Bejarano**



*1st Pan American Conference on Alcohol Policies, Brazil, 2005, (Photo source: Julio Bejarano)*

Professor Sharon Wlsnack will always be remembered for her intellect and brilliant career in the field of psychology and international gender research, as well as for her passion, mentorship, and ability to guide and lead the study of complex problems among researchers and colleagues worldwide. In Costa Rica, her guidance had a significant impact on the development of public policies stemming from the various publications and advocacy work carried out over the years by the local GENACIS Project team and the numerous collaborations with other project researchers that Sharon facilitated. Her legacy will be indelible.

*Julio Bejarano, M.Sc.*

*National Institute of Drug Abuse and Alcoholism, Costa Rica.*

## Sharon's Dream

**Arlinda Kristjanson**



*GENACIS pre-KBS meeting, Melbourne, Australia 2011 (Photo source: Arlinda Kristjanson)*

Sharon Wlsnack had a dream. It was to bring experts in the field of alcohol research together to conduct an international, collaborative study of alcohol use and abuse of men and women. When she first suggested the study at a KBS meeting, there were those who told her it was impossible. They said it had been tried before but always failed. But Sharon's dream became reality. It was called GENACIS.

Sharon led the GENACIS group's meeting each year at KBS, but she saw everyone as an equal shareholder in the project. She had a talent for listening to and valuing everyone's ideas. She could help bring consensus to any discussion. The GENACIS members became a family that enjoyed working together.



*Richard, Arlinda and Sharon, Victoria BC, Canada, 2008  
(Photo source: Kate Graham)*

Sharon Wilsnack was my boss, my mentor, and my friend. I had the privilege of working with Sharon and Richard Wilsnack for 20 years as project manager for their NIH grant.

*Arlinda Kristjanson, Ph.D.  
University of North Dakota, School of Medicine and Health Sciences, Grand Forks, North Dakota, USA.*

#### **In Gratitude: Honouring Sharon and Richard Wilsnack**

##### **Sandra Kuntsche**

It is with deep gratitude that I recognise two remarkable researchers whose contributions extend far beyond their scholarly work. Sharon and Richard's generosity of knowledge, time and dedication has shaped not only the field but the careers of those fortunate enough to meet them and work alongside them. I was a young graduate when I first met them and will never forget their warm welcome into their long-established group of highly renowned researchers, nor the spirit of openness and generosity with which they embraced us fledglings.

With their work on GENACIS and later GENATO, they have built bridges and forged connections across the globe, creating a community that reflects their enduring commitment to the next generation of researchers. For those of us early in our journeys, they have been a true beacon — offering guidance, warmth, and unwavering support. Their influence will be carried forward in the work of all those they have so generously mentored, and Sharon and Richard will forever hold a cherished place in my heart.

*Sandra Kuntsche, Ph.D.  
Family Therapy & Systemic Research, The Bouverie Centre,  
La Trobe University, Melbourne, Australia.*

#### **Sharon, GENACIS and PAHO**

##### **Maristela Monteiro**



*1st. PanAmerican Conference on Alcohol Policies, Brasil, 2005, (Photo source: Julio Bejarano)*



*Maristela, Sharon, Kate Graham, Myriam Munné at the launch of the book "Unhappy Hours: Alcohol and Physical Partner Aggression in the Americas." PAHO, Washington DC, 2008 (Photo source: Maristela G. Monteiro)*

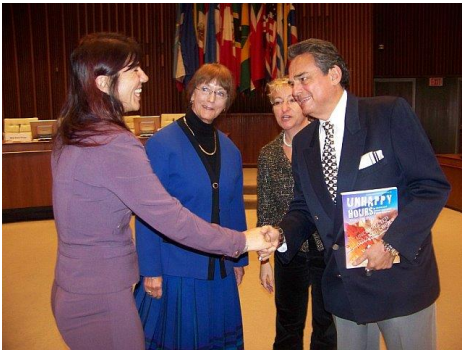
Sharon was not only one of the kindest people I have met but also was a champion of gender issues related to alcohol, convincing me (without much effort) to support the collaborative international group on women and alcohol that led to the GENACIS project. The seed support from WHO to low- and middle-income countries (LMIC) was effective due to her immense dedication and efforts to coordinate all sites, train people and lead the study with her US funds.



*Maristela and Leonardo, Berlin 2002 (Photo source: Maristela G. Monteiro)*

My personal contribution was to give the acronym to the project! Gender, Alcohol and Culture: An International Study – GENACIS. We needed a short name and I sat down, playing with key words until that emerged (I love making up acronyms), and she found it catchy and the other collaborators liked it too! Being a homonym of genesis, it also captured the feeling of the project being a new beginning. That was in Berlin, and I was with my first child, Leonardo, only a few months old, maybe my energy came from that joy of being a mother for the first time! He is 23 now!

The second phase was named GENAHTO, this time related to harms to others. That acronym came from someone else, I think. As I recall, the usual acronym, H2O (harm to others), was simpler but missed the link to GENACIS.



*Myriam Munné, Sharon and Maristela with Jose Jose, Washington DC 2008 (Photo source: Maristela G. Monteiro)*

Her support and collaboration with the WHO project continued and extended to more countries when I moved to PAHO and was instrumental to the region, leading to the book *Unhappy Hours* as well as advocacy events at PAHO – which included a singer from Costa Rica, José José. José José was a recovering alcoholic who had been violent to women when he was drinking; he managed to use his music to reverse not only his own behavior but also to promote gender equality and respect for women. He attended the launch of the PAHO book, “*Unhappy Hours: Alcohol and Physical Partner Aggression in the Americas*” (the brief title “*Unhappy Hours*” was also my idea!) when it was held in Washington, DC. Sharon and Kate Graham were senior editors, along with Myriam Munné and Sharon Bernards, of the book which included data analyses from the ten countries in the region that had implemented the GENACIS protocol (Graham et al., 2008). Sharon’s leadership and support also contributed to other policy and research activities in dozens of countries and a better understanding of gender, culture and alcohol. There was also a separate PAHO report, a publication of *Unhappy Hours* in Spanish (“*El Brindis Infeliz*”), and dozens of scientific publications on the topic using data from LMIC.

I’ll be forever grateful for her support and friendship.

*Maristela G. Monteiro, M.D., Ph.D.  
Pan American Health Organization (retired in Dec 2022).*

## **In loving memory of Sharon Wilsnack**

### **Myriam Munné**

With deep sorrow I received the news that Sharon passed away. She was not only an excellent researcher and made substantial contributions in the alcohol field but also one of the warmest and kindest persons I met through Kettil Bruun Society.

Although I started to participate in KBS meetings in 1995, it was not until 2002 that I had the opportunity to interact with Sharon in the GENACIS Project. She was very supportive with many of us coming from different countries that usually didn’t participate in KBS meetings. Through several years we met in different places and had wonderful and lively discussions about cultural differences, focusing on improving the questionnaire and adapting it to different countries.

By those years, I was also a consultant with PAHO and trained local teams in different South and Central American countries for the GENACIS Project. Sharon was also involved in some of these meetings. We lived through a wide range of experiences including the proximity of a hurricane in Nicaragua. We all managed to leave safely.

I also had the honour to be co-editor with Sharon and Kate Graham of the book “*Unhappy Hours: Alcohol and Partner Aggression in the Americas*” published by PAHO.

I will miss Sharon and will always remember her with her beautiful smile.

*Myriam Munné, M.A.  
P.I. GENACIS, Buenos Aires, Argentina.*



*Last GENACIS meeting that Sharon attended in Utrecht in 2019*

## GENACIS/GENAHTO



*Some of the very large GENACIS family! Pre-KBS meeting, Riverside, California, USA, 2005  
(Photo source: Kate Graham)*



*Pre\_KBS GENACIS. GENAHTO, IGSAHO Workshop in Sheffield, UK; 2017  
(Photo source: Anne-Marie Laslett)*



*GENACIS people hard at work, Berlin, 2003 (Photo source: Kate Graham)*



*Sharon receiving a gift at GENAHTO pre-KBS meeting in Chiang Mai, Thailand, 2018  
(Photo source: Kim Bloomfield)*

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