

**MARGO WILSON**  
**(1942–2009)**

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Margo Ings Wilson, one of the founders of evolutionary psychology, died on 24 September 2009, a week shy of her 67<sup>th</sup> birthday. Readers of this journal will be familiar with her scholarship. She led an extraordinary life. Born in Winnipeg, she moved to the Canadian North at the age of six. There, living with her mother, Edith Ings, and her stepfather, Jack Wilson, Margo trapped muskrats, attended a tiny primary school, and used a team of retired sled dogs and cocker spaniels as transportation. Margo pursued the remainder of her education outside of the North, attending high school in Victoria (British Columbia) and obtaining an undergraduate psychology degree at the University of Alberta before completing her postgraduate studies in behavioural endocrinology at the University of California, Davis and University College London. In 1987, she earned yet another degree, as the first graduate of the Masters in Studies in Law at the University of Toronto.

Margo found employment as a visiting assistant professor at the University of Toronto from 1972 until 1975, where she met Martin Daly, her future husband and research collaborator. They joined the University of California, Riverside, where they attended a reading group whose sole focus was E.O. Wilson's *Sociobiology: The New Synthesis*, shortly after its publication. Pleased with the book overall, they were dissatisfied with its final chapter, on the evolution of human sociality. It seemed there were many hypotheses about the functional aspects of human psychology, but little data had been marshalled to test them. As Wilson and Daly (and

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Daly and Wilson), the pair spent the majority of the next thirty years rectifying this problem.

In 1978, Margo and Martin published the first edition of *Sex, Evolution and Behaviour*—still used in some classes, we are told, though it is many years out of print—and moved to McMaster University in Hamilton, Ontario, where they made a permanent home. It was also in 1978 that Margo had what can only be described as a brilliant idea: to make use of the data available on patterns of homicide as a window onto the design features of human motivational systems. It was her notion that an ‘epidemiological’ analysis of violent conflict could shed considerable light on the evolved social appetites of *Homo sapiens* as parents, mates, and neighbours. This program of research has culminated in a spectacular number of scientific articles and two exceptional books: *Homicide*, arguably *the* classic study of human behaviour from an evolutionary perspective; and *The Truth About Cinderella*, a candid and popular account of their work on discriminative parental solicitude.

Margo and Martin’s body of work is characterised by exceptionally clear writing and equally clear results. Model scientists through and through, they actively sought and tested every conceivable alternative hypothesis, and insisted on letting the data speak for themselves rather than sensationalizing or overstating their results (as some citing them have occasionally done). In the later years, they continued to make new and astounding discoveries, about the effects of income inequality and future discounting on cooperative decision-making, mate choice, and reproductive schedules.

In addition to producing some of the most fruitful and important scientific discoveries in what has come to be known as ‘evolutionary psychology,’ their contribution to the behavioural sciences extends far beyond the boundaries of a small (albeit growing) group of psychologists: their work is routinely cited by like-minded anthropologists, biologists, criminologists, economists, and sociologists. In a climate in which the application of evolution-minded thinking to human behaviour remains oddly controversial, many citations by sceptics are nonetheless favourable, perhaps because Margo and Martin unearthed effect sizes rarely found by epidemiologists (save those studying the link between cigarette smoking and lung cancer). Indeed, numerous critics have failed to obtain results qualitatively different from those reported by Margo and Martin, despite (i) being armed with the intention of discrediting their work and (ii) employing demonstrably shoddy methods to this end. Margo and Martin’s results—and their cautious interpretations thereof—have done much to increase other disciplines’ respect for evolutionary psychology.

Margo devoted much of her time to the Human Behavior and Evolution Society (HBES), the first international, interdisciplinary organization devoted to the evolution-minded study of human behaviour. A founding member (and attendee of every meeting except the last), Margo served HBES as President for a term and as a firebrand since the society’s inception. Other conference attendees were drawn to her, but Margo rarely spoke of herself; rather, she wanted to know what everyone else thought. She was determined to help give those on the outside a voice, consoli-

dating evolutionists from around the globe and introducing them to other HBES members with unflagging enthusiasm. Important research from Japan, Turkey, and Brazil would likely be unknown to many of us without her help. In perhaps their most pivotal contribution to HBES, however, Margo and Martin were the tireless editors of *Evolution and Human Behavior* for its first decade. It now stands as a testament to the high standards to which they and other members of HBES aspired, its success in no small part responsible for the flourishing of other, related journals and societies. HBES recognized Margo and Martin's contributions by awarding them the prestigious Lifetime Achievement Award in 2009.

In spite of her worldwide renown as a scientist, Margo only found a paid faculty position at McMaster University in 1998, twenty years after her arrival there. At the time of Martin's employment, the university had an effective ban on spousal hires. Margo taught courses regularly and carried on with her research for years after this ban had been lifted, without making so much as a complaint to the administration. The contract eventually came when Margo and Martin were elected to the Royal Society of Canada, and the university's administration realized—and remedied—the error. With her position came a new responsibility: to conduct a study of the undergraduate psychology program. In keeping with the rest of her work, Margo's findings have had a dramatic effect on the structure of undergraduate education at McMaster.

We knew Margo as a postgraduate advisor and, like many others, as a friend. It was a regular occurrence to witness Margo burst into the lab with a wild idea to improve or extend our work, her voice running quickly, the excitement impossible to contain. Yet, despite one insightful contribution after another, she never added her name to any of our papers, demanding that we take ownership of our work. She provided tremendous encouragement and, when needed, the occasional push in the right direction (to collect more data, always). None of this came at the expense of her interest in our personal lives: in a lab that studies topics as diverse as sperm competition in rodents and the effects of self-resemblance on cooperation among humans, we felt like we were among family. We would sit around and chat, often over a meal, as families have done for millennia. Margo would enquire about our research progress, of course, but would also want to know the happenings in our lives. She and Martin wanted to meet our partners, parents, and friends. They welcomed us into their home. They were a part of our lives, and when we were fledged and left the nest, we never left them.

Margo Wilson was a remarkable person. She was a thoughtful scientist, a terrifically enthusiastic colleague, and a dear friend. It is difficult to express how much we miss her, but her memory will continue to inspire us in our work and in our lives. She has left us with an extraordinary legacy.