Services for
Jonathan ‘Jackie’ Brown
8-1-2019

Grinnell resident and Professor of Biology at Grinnell College Jonathan “Jackie” Brown passed away on Thursday, July 25, 2019, following a car accident while conducting research in Hawaii Volcanoes National Park on the big island of Hawaii.

Jackie was a loving husband to his wife, Rebecca, and father to their children, Amelia and Adam. He is remembered as a respected teacher, mentor, friend, and colleague on campus.

Funeral services for Jackie will be held at 9:30 a.m. on Sunday, August 4, at the Conard Environmental Research Area (CERA), located at 11203 South 12th Avenue E, in Kellogg, Iowa. Those who wish to join the family at the graveside interment service will be guided to Westfield Cemetery, 1548 Jacob Avenue, Grinnell.

Following the service, at approximately 12:30 p.m., the Brown Loew family invites the community to join them at their home, 542 – 10th Avenue, Grinnell, for refreshments and to informally share remembrances of Jackie as they begin the sitting of shiva.

Those who attend the funeral are encouraged to carpool and arrive early to allow time for parking and walking to the CERA Center.

Grinnell College will hold a memorial service and celebration of Jackie and his work at a date to be announced during the fall semester.
By Ingrid Meulemans

On July 25, 2019, Jonathan "Jackie" Brown, a professor of biology, tragically died in a car accident on the campus while on his way to work. Jackie's untimely death left a profound impact on the academic community.

Jackie was known for his passion for science and his dedication to teaching. He was a mentor to many students, and his influence extended far beyond the classroom. His research in the field of biology was highly regarded, and he was a respected figure in the academic community.

In an interview with the campus newspaper, Jackie's colleagues and students spoke highly of his dedication and commitment to the university. "He was a true scholar," one colleague said. "He had a deep understanding of the field and was always eager to share his knowledge with others."

Jackie's legacy lives on through the many students he mentored and the research he conducted. His students continue to work on the projects he started, and his research continues to make contributions to the field of biology.

In memory of Jackie, the university has established the "Jackie Brown Endowed Fund," which will support students pursuing careers in science. The fund will provide scholarships and support for students who show promise in the field of biology.

The university community mourns the loss of a dedicated scholar and mentor, and we honor his legacy by continuing his work and his commitment to education.
Continued from Front Page
towards the environment that brought Idelle Cooper and Brown together. Although originally his student, Cooper later became close friends with Brown and his family and conducted research with him. As two biologists, the time they spent on the field together was sacred. "You might be on the Kaouai ridge, and it's raining, and it's super muddy, and there's a steep slope on both sides, and there's one hole for miles and miles," said Cooper. "And it was just us. We had each other. We were partners in the field. Fieldwork is such a sacred thing because it can be dangerous at times, but also it's incredibly beautiful and full of potential. So to watch how Jackie did that, and to be able to do it with him, was an extraordinary gift."

During their years working alongside Brown, Cooper became incredibly close with Brown's family, even living with them for a period while conducting research in Hawaii one summer. Due to his profound professional, educational, and personal influence on her, Cooper describes Brown as one of her key influences and inspirations. "Yes, he taught us about diversity of life on earth," Cooper said, "but it was really about how to live our lives and how to be curious and gregarious and understanding and loving.

Of all of his attributes, it is his kindness and good nature that Brown's wife, Rebecca Loew, remembers first. As undergraduates at Carleton College, Brown and Loew met during orientation through their shared interest in folk dancing, but they didn't start dating until the following winter. Brown and Loew continued to date throughout school and finally married two months after graduation. A week after they married, the couple moved to Europe for Brown's job as an English-language teacher. It was there, in Krems, Austria, on the shore of the Danube River, that they spent the first years of their marriage.

Brown and Loew moved frequently, following Brown's teaching career and Loew's job as a social worker. Due to their nomadic life and frequent moves, the couple didn't care much about material things. In fact, they didn't buy their first TV until moving to Grinnell in 1995.

"Those kinds of fancy things just weren't what we spent our money on," said Loew. "The quality of our life was more important to us than having lots of expensive things" instead, the couple preferred to travel.

"That was one of the things he really loved about [her]," said Professor of Biology Elizabeth Quevillon. "For their anniversary he wouldn't have to reserve the fanciest restaurant in Des Moines, he'd take [her] out to dinner. She would just want to go have a picnic at CERCA.

After moving to Grinnell in 1997, Brown reserved tenure, and Loew focused on her art, mostly plant-based textiles. It was here, in Grinnell, where Loew and Brown raised their two kids, Adam and Amelia Loew.

When asked about the early years of their marriage, Loew distinctly remembers a family gathering a few days prior to the wedding. "We are both from pretty musical families," said Loew. "I remember very well—a few days before our wedding—my father playing the piano and Jackie's father singing and then somebody else starting to play the banjo. We all hit it off right away."

Coming back to Grinnell College this fall, it is the small moments where Brown's presence is most heavily missed.

"We certainly miss him in department meetings," said Professor Elissa, "but especially in this hallway, I could always go and ask Jackie any question I had about statistics or biology... And we knew that Jackie would tell you what's right. But he didn't do it in a way that made you feel like you didn't know something."

Brown's death certainly leaves a hole in the Grinnell community. But despite (or perhaps in addition to) all of his academic success, it seems that Brown was happiest, and the most himself, in the field and around the ones he loved.

"There are so many funny stories about him doing fieldwork, about him making jokes and slipping and falling in the water, but also him just being patient and looking at nature and pointing out to me the things that he was seeing," said Cooper. "And we would learn from each other how to see the world better. How to take note of patterns and how to try to make sense of them.

There's no making sense of this, admits Cooper. But there is something to being kind to the world, and living life as Brown did.
Jonathan (Jackie) Brown

August 1, 1961 – July 25, 2019

Saturday, September 21, 2019
2:00 P.M.
Herrick Chapel
Grinnell College
Jonathan “Jackie” Brown, Professor of Biology

Jonathan “Jackie” Brown, professor of biology, died July 25, 2019, at the age of 57, following a car accident. He’d been conducting research in Hawaii Volcanoes National Park on the Big Island of Hawai’i.

After joining the biology department at Grinnell College in 1995, Jackie rose quickly to the rank of full professor. He regularly taught Tutorial; Introduction to Biological Inquiry; Organisms, Evolution, and Ecology; Animal Behavior; History of Biological Thought; and Mechanisms of Evolution. Jackie whole-heartedly embraced the liberal arts. He loved not only biology, but also literature, theatre, art, and foreign languages. He was pivotal in the transformation of the biology department’s first-year teaching into a model where students learn to ask questions, develop answers, and then communicate those answers in the way that biologists do, and his deep belief in the active nature of practicing biology was reflected in every aspect of his teaching.

Jackie was admired and loved by his students and colleagues for inspirational teaching, supportive mentoring of student researchers, and dedicated service. His research in evolutionary biology generated dozens of scholarly publications, earned generous support from the National Science Foundation, and left a legacy of numerous former students who themselves became professional scientists.

Jackie spent countless hours at the Conard Environmental Research Area (CERA), where he served as director and often taught. He integrated long-term research on fire effects in prairie and woodland ecosystems into his biology classes. He also skied at CERA, hunted deer there with friends, and simply enjoyed long walks on the prairie. He was dedicated to helping students find joy in nature and the study of it.

Jackie attended Carleton College in Northfield, Minnesota, where he met his wife Rebecca Loew. He completed his doctorate in zoology at Michigan State University’s Kellogg Biological Station in 1989. He then took post-doctoral positions at Cornell University in Ithaca, New York, and Bucknell University in Pennsylvania, where he also served as a visiting assistant professor.

He is survived by his wife Rebecca Loew and his two children, Amelia Loew and Adam Loew.

Donations may be directed to the Nature Conservancy, Hawaii chapter, Kā‘u Preserve; the Jackie Brown memorial scholarship; or CERA.