

John Hollin, as remembered by Áslaug Geirsdóttir, University of Iceland

I came to INSTAAR in 1983 to carry out my PhD, feeling extremely shy and actually scared to death. My English was broken and I was not used to being around so many confident and intellectual people who could talk so much and freely about their interest in Arctic research asking me questions as if I should know more than I really knew. In Iceland it was considered good manners to keep quiet and just listen to more knowledgeable people. In those days I walked along the walls in the hallways of the old INSTAAR building hoping nobody would see me or talk to me because I might not respond in the right way, even if I knew the answer. However, there was one person who was different from all the others who seemed to understand how I felt. He was himself very quiet, very polite and spoke with this very strong British accent, which sounded beautifully in my ears, having learned English from an English-born teacher. This was John Hollin.

John would pop into my office or stop me in the hallways almost daily with some news from Iceland. How he got those news I don't know because this was before the internet and we were just starting to use email.....Iceland is a small island and at that time there were fewer people in Iceland than in Boulder County, so we were not often in the news. John also showed me an old leaflet from the glorious days of "Loftleiðir" –the Icelandic airlines that offered, at that time the cheapest flights across the Atlantic (Loftleiðir simply means airways). I was never sure whether he had travelled himself with Loftleiðir or just kept the leaflet, but he seemed to keep and store everything he ever got. But that was exactly what I appreciated so much about John – not just me but also my fellow students at INSTAAR. John seemed to be at home with literally everything. He was like a whole library and whenever we needed a reference or a book, we could be sure that John would have a copy of that reference or at least tell us where to find it and tell us what that particular reference was all about. John also offered a short course in glaciology for us INSTAAR students, which I enjoyed very much. He was an enthusiastic teacher and managed to explain the most complicated things in a way that even with my limited knowledge of English, could understand.

I am very sorry that I will not be in Boulder at John Hollin's special day, December 1st. But I also consider myself extremely fortunate to have met John briefly during my last visit to INSTAAR last September. I want to thank him for making my many years, but especially my first year at INSTAAR, more comfortable than I expected.

Letter from Áslaug Geirsdóttir

Remembrance for John Hollin Memorial at INSTAAR on December 1, 2016