

The Christopher H. Smith Memorial Scholarship

for students pursuing studies in the natural sciences

By Karyn-Gaye Barnett

Chris, affectionately known to his family as Kit, grew up in Apple Valley, California. From an early age, he loved nature. Throughout his life his favorite thing to do was observing nature, in minuscule detail.

Chris attended UC Riverside and UC San Diego before receiving a bachelor's degree from the UC Berkeley in biological sciences, with an emphasis in botany. He was a career park ranger for Anza-Borrego Desert State Park. He was stationed in the southern end of the park, living in Canebrake Canyon for nearly 25 years. Where others did not want to be stationed in such a remote location, Chris invited the isolation and thrived in absorbing himself in its quiet, peace-filled appeal.

Chris shared his passion of nature with others, giving campfire programs and many interpretive walks; one of his favorite hikes to lead was in Rainbow Canyon. His passion was contagious. To this day, people approach me sharing memories of hikes together with him.

Chris was intrigued by geology and loved studying rocks. Most of all he enjoyed propagating and raising plants. I have a crucifixion thorn growing in my yard in Canebrake. I remember the day we planted it from seed together after visiting the only place nearby where it grows in a preserve.

Chris appreciated foreign cultures and traveled extensively to many countries, including his favorite two: Africa and Baja. When he retired, he traveled several times to Africa. He was not the type of person to sign up for a tour. He created his own adventures, his own tours, his own way.



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From his lifelong friend Morgan Taylor, retired attorney in California, to BASIC Scholars:

As you begin your educational journey, think of Chris. Before he started college, he hiked the John Muir Trail. When he landed at UC Riverside, he met many people who shared his passion. Even a casual walk with him was rewarded with his great knowledge of plants and animals and their habitats. How many people his age knew the Latin names for things!? He and his friends camped in the desert, exploring old mines, meteor craters and caves. At school he talked with friends about politics, environmentalism, and the social issues of the day.

There is no way you could ever know Chris as his friends knew him, but those of us who are still here, feel that those days, were 'just yesterday'. Keep that in mind as you pursue your studies and live your life with great passion, interest and perhaps a wanderlust that Chris did, and you will be richly rewarded. Someday, after many years, you may be amused to find that it was still 'just yesterday' to you too.