



**Ronald Nelson '59**  
Senior Photo from  
WHS 1959 Yearbook

## Ronald R. Nelson

Washington High School Class of '59

Nov 11 1941 - May 09 2011

Ronald Roy Nelson, PhD, a native of Sioux Falls who lived in the Netherlands for much of his professional career, died on Monday, May 9, 2011 in the Hospice Center of the Royal C. Johnson Veterans Administration Hospital, Sioux Falls, SD. Dr. Nelson, a birding expert, returned to the United States following his retirement this past winter with the goal of identifying two hundred additional birds by traveling from Florida to California and on to Alaska which he referred to as a "Klondike" area of birding. He then intended to

return to South Dakota to reestablish his home in Sioux Falls. While visiting his Aunt Dolores Boysen in Burbank, CA he suffered a massive intracranial bleed leading to irreversible paralysis and loss of consciousness.

Dr. Nelson was born in Sioux Falls in 1941, grew up on a family farm east of town, attended Franklin Elementary School, Whittier Middle School and Washington High School. He achieved a distinguished record academically and in the ROTC at the University of South Dakota. He graduated in 1963 and won a distinguished Woodrow Wilson Fellowship to study history at Duke University from which he received his PhD in 1967.

After a tour of duty in Vietnam during which he was wounded and recovered, Dr. Nelson served as a Foreign Area Officer and in Tactical/Strategic Intelligence. After over seventeen years of service he retired from the United States Army Reserve in 1982. Later he served as a member of the staff of US Senator Larry Pressler. From 1985 to 1993, Dr. Nelson served in the Office of Defense assigned to the negotiations on chemical weapons control and took part in proceedings on nuclear weapons and outer space issues. Dr. Nelson attained the rank of Colonel.

Dr. Nelson then began a long association with the Chemical Weapons Convention and the Organization for the Prohibition of Chemical Weapons (OPCW) which included service as a member of the U.S. delegation at the negotiations on the Chemical Weapons Convention in Geneva and to the OPCW Preparatory Commission. He served as a staff member at the Provisional Technical Secretariat and Technical Secretariat between 1993 and 2002. After a brief retirement in Sioux Falls, he returned to the Technical Secretariat in August 2005 as Director of Administration, a position he held until his retirement in December 2010.

Early in his career he became a history professor at Western Carolina University. In South Dakota, Dr. Nelson continued his commitment to higher education by serving in advisory roles for the University of South Dakota and as a trustee of the USD Foundation. He was also a member of the National Advisory Council of the Center for Western Studies. In addition he shared his expertise in international politics as a guest lecturer at USD. Most recently he served in an advisory role for the USD Dean of Arts and Sciences.

Having grown up with a love of nature, Dr. Nelson developed an early interest in bird watching upon reading Roger Tory Peterson's Field Guide to Birds, a book which was in his suitcase at the time of his death. Dr. Nelson was highly travelled and a very accomplished student of birds. He had identified almost 80% of North American species and thousands of birds worldwide. In 2008 he edited a book, *Birds of the Great Plains: The Ornithological Writings of*



**Picture of Ron as a  
member of "Quill & Scroll".  
From 1959 WHS Yearbook**

Herbert Krause. Professor Krause and Dr. Nelson met in 1970 and became “birding” friends until Krause’s death in 1976. Dr. Nelson was a member of the South Dakota Nature Conservatory.

Dr. Nelson is preceded in death by an infant sister in 1952 and his parents Edna Olive Parry Nelson in 1989 and Roy John Nelson in 1992. Surviving Dr. Nelson are cousins from the Parry, Boysen and Howard families which are living across the nation. Although raised an only child, he valued his extended family and sought opportunities to share life with each and every family member. In addition, he was a deeply loyal friend who endeared himself to the people met wherever he was in the world. All who loved Ron will remember him for his often sharp wit that never betrayed his truly warm and generous spirit that connected a large circle of people with him at center.

Whether he was cooking, collecting art, or birding, Ron pursued his interests and hobbies with the same degree of perfection and enthusiasm that he did his career. Ron was migratory like the birds he so loved put planned to finally return to his place of origin.

A memorial service will be held in Sioux Falls on Friday, June 24, 2011 at the Augustana College Center for Western Studies beginning at 1 pm with the service at 1:30 followed by a reception. Instead of flowers, memorials can be made to the USD Foundation, Center for Western Studies or the South Dakota Nature Conservancy.

Please take a moment to share your thoughts and memories with the family in the online register book at [millerfh.com](http://millerfh.com).

**Miller Funeral Home 507 S. Main Ave. Sioux Falls, SD 57104 605-336-2640**

**Miller West 6200 W. 41st St. Sioux Falls, SD 57106 605-361-6394**

Thanks to Bob Bryant '59, for informing me of Ron’s passing and for submitting the following addendum to Ron’s obituary.

**Hi Jack,**

**Here’s the obit that is posted on the Miller Funeral Home site for Ron Nelson. It’s a good reflection of Ron’s life, work and interests. A couple of items not included in the obit that I think worth noting: Ron served for a period on the staff of the Senate Foreign Relations Committee, and also for a time as Deputy Ambassador to Austria.**

**Bob Bryant '59**



## **ORANGE & BLACK OBITUARY POLICY**

The obituary policy of the O&B is now, and has been for some time, to only publish a “Special Edition” for the obituary of a 1950 to 1959 WHS classmate when that Special Edition can be mailed prior to the date of the classmate’s funeral or memorial service. For those classmates where it is not possible to publish their obituary prior to their funeral or memorial service date, their name will be added to the “Master Deceased List” for each individual class and each of those ten class updated deceased lists will be published each Memorial Day and Christmas.

Jack M. Phillips, editor.