



JOEL L. SHINER
1919–1988

Joel L. Shiner, professor emeritus of anthropology at Southern Methodist University, died on November 16, 1988, while scuba diving on the Great Barrier Reef off the northeast coast of Australia. Joel had been on the faculty at SMU since 1964, when the university initiated its anthropology program, and was thus a key participant in the rapid growth of the department.

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Joel was born on July 11, 1919, in Frio County, Texas. He completed his secondary education in Laredo and attended Texas A&M University until enlisting in the U.S. Army Air Corps in 1942. As an officer and pilot, he flew supplies over “the hump” from India to China.

After the war, Joel began his long career in archaeology. He received a B.A. (with honors) in anthropology from the University of California, Los Angeles, in 1948, and received the Ph.D. from the University of Arizona in 1955, where he was under the strong influence of Emil Haury. In the interim, he served as acting field director with the River Basin Surveys of the Smithsonian Institution in the Pacific Northwest. Following receipt of his Ph.D., Joel continued his interest in historical archaeology by joining the National Park Service, under whose aegis he excavated colonial sites at Jamestown and Fort Frederica and conducted ruin stabilization in the Southwest.

Joel left the Park Service in 1960 to join the staff at the Museum of New Mexico in Santa Fe. Here he acquired experience in highway salvage archaeology, excavating pueblo sites from Grants to Gallup, often just ahead of waiting bulldozers. This was the era that initiated the salvage concept in archaeology, and Joel became an early supporter. Here he also established what was to be a lifelong friendship with Fred Wendorf.

Joining Wendorf’s Combined Prehistoric Expedition to North Africa, Joel continued his efforts in salvage archaeology by supervising field operations in the Sudanese portion of the Aswan Reservoir, near Wadi Halfa. When this was completed he led the team that surveyed the Upper Nile in 1967—at Ed Debba, near Dongola, and at Khashm el Girba, on the upper Atbara.

Two major transitions occurred during this period of Joel’s life: First, in 1964 when Wendorf joined the faculty at Southern Methodist University, he brought the Combined Prehistoric Expedition with him, and Joel began his teaching career. Joel came to love transmitting the knowledge he gained in the field and laboratory to graduate and undergraduate students, and his enthusiasm was indeed contagious.

Second, shortly after Joel’s return to SMU after the 1967 season, he suffered a near-fatal heart attack, which ended his African research. He turned instead to Texas archaeology, and particularly to the growing organization of amateur archaeologists. He met with local organizations and encouraged the development of professional standards. He became editor of the *Bulletin of the Texas Archaeological Society* and during his five-year editorship raised it to a high level of professionalism, establishing a regular and timely publication schedule.

Joel, throughout his career, was an inveterate worker committed to detailed and meticulous scientific analysis, and after his illness began he was intent to continue the pursuit of archaeological research and hands-on teaching in an active way. He began to swim daily for physical therapy. This led to scuba diving and yet a new career focus for Joel: In 1973 he was certified as a marine survey archaeologist by the Society of Professional Archaeologists. By 1977 he had become a certified scuba instructor, teaching YMCA classes as well as an academic course in underwater archaeology for graduate and undergraduate students at SMU. He served as national chairman of the Archaeology Certification Committee for both the YMCA and PADI (Professional Association of Diving Instructors). In 1980 he was certified as a commercial surface air supply diver (hard hat). As one of the few archaeologists with such a rating, Joel began doing contract work in underwater archaeology, and participated in several offshore projects, including investigation of Spanish shipwrecks off the Texas coast.

However, his most notable achievement in this new interest was his work from 1979 until shortly before his death at Aquarena Springs in San Marcos, south of Austin, Texas. Here he conducted intensive and painstaking excavations of a submerged site whose stratified deposits spanned the Paleoindian and Archaic periods. It was here that his students learned the wide range of techniques necessary to overcome some of the limitations of excavating underwater.

Joel’s spirits never flagged. He suffered several more heart attacks and fought two types of cancer, but as long as he was ambulatory, he was on site, in his lab, or off scuba diving at exotic places. After his retirement to emeritus status in 1985, he continued to frequent his laboratory in the department, working on the Aquarena materials. His colleagues on that project will complete it and publish its results.

His wife, Maxine, was both companion and colleague—managing the field headquarters in the

North African expeditions, assisting in the laboratory, helping with editorial duties on the *Bulletin*. She was scuba diving with him off Australia when he died. He—they—were doing what gave them pleasure. Few of us could devise, had we the power, a more fitting conclusion to our own careers.

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