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# Margo Wilson, 1942-2009

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## Martin Daly<sup>1</sup>

Margo Wilson had a remarkable childhood, which surely contributed to her remarkable breadth of interests. She was 6 years old when her mother, a nurse, accepted a position as the only medical practitioner in the indigenous Gwich'in community of Fort MacPherson, hundreds of kilometers north of the Arctic Circle. There Margo was the lone nonaboriginal pupil in a one-room primary school, where she helped trap muskrats to finance the school lunch program, traveled by dogsled, and learned what it's like to be the outsider, a lesson she never forgot.

To attend high school, Margo had to leave home and board with what was in effect a foster family, more than a thousand kilometers from home. She then studied psychology at the University of Alberta, with the initial aim of becoming a clinician, but a part-time job in an embryology lab turned her interests toward physiology. She pursued graduate studies in behavioral endocrinology at the University of California and at University College, London, where she earned her PhD in 1972 for work on the effects of gonadectomy and hormone replacement on sexual motivation and behavior in Rhesus monkeys housed at the original "Bedlam" (Bethlehem Royal Hospital). In 1975, Margo met Martin Daly, and the two became inseparable, moving to McMaster University in Hamilton, Ontario, in 1978, and collaborating on research on the psychology and behavior of both nonhuman animals and *Homo sapiens* until her death.

Margo thought outside the box about many things. One of her most fertile thoughts was that homicides provide a rich source of information on interpersonal conflict and thus, more generally, on human passions. This insight (whose virtues were not initially obvious to Martin) launched a 30-year research program of epidemiological analyses of who is likely to kill whom and under what circumstances; this became Wilson and Daly's best known work after the publication of an ambitiously wide-ranging book, simply entitled *Homicide*, in 1988. While working on that book, Margo became convinced that she needed to better understand legal responses to homicide, so she enrolled in the University of Toronto's Law School in 1986 and, after a year of intensive study, she became the first graduate of that institution's new MSL (Masters in Studies in

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<sup>1</sup>McMaster University, Hamilton, Ontario, Canada

### Corresponding Author:

Martin Daly, McMaster University, Hamilton, Hamilton, ON L8S 4K1, Canada  
Email: [daly@mcmaster.ca](mailto:daly@mcmaster.ca)

Law) degree program, publishing a highly original contribution to family law studies (Wilson, 1987) in the process.

In her homicide research, Margo pioneered the epidemiological analysis of spouse-killings, making such important contributions as the identification of several risk markers for lethal and nonlethal violence against wives (Wilson, Johnson, & Daly, 1995), the first quantification of the magnitude of elevated uxoricide risk after separation (Wilson & Daly, 1993), a demonstration that the sex ratio of spousal homicide in the United States is exceptional (Wilson & Daly, 1992), documentation of several peculiarities of familicidal massacres (Wilson, Daly, & Daniele, 1995), and the construction of a convincing case for the relevance of what she called “male sexual proprietariness” (Wilson & Daly, 1996). Her most frequently cited homicide papers, however, were not about marital or family violence at all; they were (a) a paper arguing that violence by young men is best understood as a manifestation of sexually selected competitive risk-taking (Wilson & Daly, 1985), and (b) an innovative demonstration that local life expectancy is a powerful predictor of homicides in general (Wilson & Daly, 1997).

A tireless, generous advocate of international, interdisciplinary collaboration, Margo spearheaded successful grant applications with colleagues from Canada, Brazil, Japan, Norway, the United Kingdom, and the United States, in psychology, biology, sociology, economics, criminology, anthropology, medicine, and law. She published her work in more than 60 different refereed journals representing all these fields and more. In 1997, she was elected president of the *Human Behavior & Evolution Society* (HBES), and in 1998, she was elected a Fellow of the *Royal Society of Canada*. She also found time to serve a 10-year term as co-editor-in-chief of *Evolution & Human Behavior*, the leading journal in that interdisciplinary field. At its annual meeting in 2009, HBES honored her (and Martin) with a Lifetime Achievement Award, but it was, alas, the first time that the society met without her.

Margo Wilson is sorely missed by many former students, colleagues, and friends.

Martin Daly, Dundas, Ontario, January 2012.

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