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## Ed Franquemont (February 17, 1945 - March 11, 2003)

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ED FRANQUEMONT (FEBRUARY 17, 1945 - MARCH 11, 2003)

ANN PETERS  
*Dumbarton Oaks*



*Chinchero, Peru, 1977. Ed Franquemont is second from the left. Chris Franquemont is the tall woman in the center of the photograph. Abby Franquemont stands in front of Chris, while Ed holds Molly Franquemont (photograph courtesy of Abby Franquemont).*

“After all, cloth is the imprint of Andean culture upon fiber; here we find the true treasure of Andean textile traditions, the weavers themselves.” Ed Franquemont, “The True Treasure of Andean Textiles” (1997).

In his writing, lectures, handwork, and, above all, in the way he chose to live his life, Ed Franquemont set high standards. He established central topics for contemporary study of Andean

textile production and the role of weaving in community life. At the same time, he was a successful builder and intelligent proponent of heritage conservation for the benefit of contemporary community life in the United States and in Peru. As a traveling lecturer, he educated museum audiences and hand-weavers across North America on the value and concepts embedded in Andean weaving, and taught Andean techniques to fiber artists and artisans.

While an undergraduate at Harvard, a fellow student of Andean archaeology, John Topic, was on the wrestling team with Ed. “He was captain of the team, and really good at it”, recalls John (personal communication, 26 November, 2006). “He was smart about wrestling, and could beat much heavier people” (*ibid*). Details of Ed’s college wrestling career can be found on the web in archived issues of *The Harvard Crimson* from 1965 and 1966. At the Peabody Museum, Ed studied the ceramic collection from Kidder’s 1939 work at the archaeological site of Pucara, summarized in his report on early sites north of Lake Titicaca (Kidder 1943). This incursion into archaeological analysis resulted in Ed’s 1967 senior honors thesis “The Ancient Pottery from Pucara, Peru”, reformulated in his 1986 essay in *Ñawpa Pacha*, where he defines ceramic styles that continue to be cited by archaeologists of the region.

In college, Ed was already in love with Christine Robinson. They went together to Cusco in 1967 and 1968. On graduating, Ed decided not to pursue an academic career. He was concerned that graduate studies in archaeology or anthropology would force him into a parasitic relationship with Andean communities. He and Chris married and started a family together in Massachusetts. Their daughter Abby says that Ed first began to weave at this time, and learned many other skills, “Living as we did then, on a farm during peak hippie years, there were many things done by hand.” Chris and Ed’s subsequent work is so interlaced, that a celebration of Ed’s life must refer constantly to the achievements of both of them.

Ed and Chris Franquemont returned to the Andes in the guise of young hippie travelers, to focus on learning from contemporary Andean communities. They went to Chinchero, like so many travelers to the Cusco region who admire the Inca site underlying the colonial church and contemporary homes of the Chincheros. Since early in the twentieth century, visitors to Chinchero have felt compelled to buy examples of the spectacular hand-woven ponchos, *llicllas* (shawls) and belts on display amid vegetables in the market.

Ed did something else. Nilda Callañaupa recalls, “I met Ed and his family about 1975, when I was a young girl. He offered to buy a belt from me, if I demonstrated how I weave it. Ed promised to finish it. . . It was a big surprise when they came back, and showed me the finished belt!” She had not expected a tourist—and a man at that—to go beyond simple curiosity and engage in the practice of weaving.

Ed, Chris, and their two young daughters settled in Chinchero in 1976 to study weaving and become members of the community. They split their time between life in New England, where Ed made a living in construction work, and life in Chinchero. According to Nilda, Ed’s incorporation into community life was unique: “He became a Kupir Ayllu *runa*, [a member of a kin group] with all obligations. His attitude endeared him to people. He valued our knowledge, shared in our activities, and worked hard to understand the process of weaving. He also shared his North American experiences with us.” Chris recalls how the knock would come on the door before dawn, calling Ed to go out to do his part in the potato fields and community labor obligations. “Come out!—or how is your family going to eat?”

Ed’s relationship to Chinchero was that of participant, without an academic obligation to record experience and write it up, and without a mandate to attempt to refrain from types of participation that would influence community life. He eventually took a leadership role in addressing public health concerns in Chinchero, when asked to teach techniques of latrine construction. He took part in the difficult negotiations with Peru’s National Institute of Culture, who forbade such “non-traditional” constructions in Chinchero, an archaeological and designated heritage site.

In the 1970s, Ed and Chris also worked on textile production in the context of social change in Lircay, Huancavelica, writing a report for a Peruvian mining company (Franquemont and Franquemont 1978). They built a strong relationship with Cultural Survival during this period, and it continued with their later work. Ed and Chris

developed a passionate dialogue with Andeanist anthropologists and weaving enthusiasts who came through Chinchero, and through them a growing relationship with a series of North American museums. Out of this came the 1979 project to bring Nilda, then 16 years old, to the United States to participate in an exchange with Hopi weavers and conduct a series of museum-based weaving demonstrations. This experience was a turning point for Nilda, who cites Ed's encouragement in her decision to attend the Universidad Nacional de San Antonio Abad in Cusco in 1980, paying her way by selling her weavings.

Ed and Chris worked with Chinchero leaders to found the first community museum, the Chinchero Center for Traditional Culture (Franquemont 1982). That museum was lost in the civil conflict initiated by the *Sendero Luminoso* uprising in the 1980s, but ten years later it was re-established with a new collection and continues today. Nilda returned to the United States to study English and attend art school in Berkeley. At that time, Nilda undertook a second tour of museum demonstrations coordinated by Ed and built a professional network that took on renewed importance in 1997 when, with key support from Ed and Chris, Nilda founded the Center for Traditional Textiles in Cusco.

Ed's research on weaving focused on the practice of textile construction. His earlier writings, produced for textile journals and distributed in talks and workshops for practicing spinners and weavers, focused on teaching Andean textile techniques (1985). For a more academic audience, he developed a study of textile production rates among backstrap weavers, but used the occasion to point out the importance of the phenomenon, since called "multi-tasking", for understanding the nature of efficiency in Andean textile production (Franquemont 1986b). At the same time, Chris focused on understanding Chincheros' ways of thinking about their world (C. Franquemont 1983).

Ed's most famous essay was written with Chris on "Learning to Weave in Chinchero" (1987).

They analyze the finished product as a result of practices requiring dexterity and complex mathematical sequences, rather than simply as a compilation of techniques, motifs, and design principles. Young children learn to spin and weave not by lessons, but through endless practice with older children out on the hillsides as they pasture the animals. They trace the teenage inspirations for excellence in weaving, linked to social maturity, courtship, and display before peers, and outlined the return to weaving and new levels of mastery in middle age, when older children assume parts of the complex tasks of household maintenance and a woman can return to weaving. Here and in other essays, they carefully observe the way knowledge is transferred through practice—unweaving a child's mistake, or warping together with a skilled elder (Franquemont and Franquemont 1986). These insights came not only from Ed's process of learning to weave, but also from his own and Chris' close relationships with Nilda and her family and the experiences of their daughters Abby and Molly, who spent much of their early childhood in Chinchero.

This work has provided an inspiration and rich context for the contemporary research of a generation of North American scholars whose studies of contemporary Andean weaving have been rooted in practice and embedded in community obligations, among them Elayne Zorn, Gail Silverman, Lynn Meisch, Mary Anne Medlin, and Andrea Heckman. Ed's inspirational role was recently celebrated in a session at the Biennial Symposium of the Textile Society of America at Toronto during 2006 (publication forthcoming), where Elayne, Lynn, and Andrea presented recent work in the form of their imagined dialogues with Ed, with commentaries by Chris and Nilda.

Meanwhile, in 1985, Ed, Chris, and their daughters had moved from Vermont to Ithaca, New York. Chris began graduate study at Cornell University, where she and Ed had built a strong working relationship with Billie Jean Isbell. Together, the three wrote their famous article about the "*awaq ñawim*," the "weaver's eye," on the creation and combination of warp-patterned

motifs (Franquemont, *et al.* 1992). Though Ed had no formal relationship with Cornell University, he recruited and advised engineering student John Ochsendorf on his senior thesis, “Inca Suspension Bridges”, an analysis of construction practice, design, and load-bearing capacity. Ochsendorf, now a professor of architecture at MIT, credits Ed for inspiring his interests and achievements. “Ed changed my life. He selflessly shared his knowledge of the Andean world, and inspired me to pursue research between archaeology and engineering. I am still trying to answer many of the questions that he posed for me” (personal communication 6 December 2006).

While Chris wrote her dissertation on the philosophy embedded in vocabulary and discourse on agriculture and the natural world in Chinchero (Franquemont 1988), they also supported the community in its long struggle against the project of a new Cusco airport—to be built on the gently rolling fields of the Chinchero *ayllus*, some of the finest agricultural land in the region. Just as Chris’ work was embedded in that of Ed, so his contributions were linked to hers. They are both key contributors to a broad interdisciplinary study of Chinchero ethnobotany (Franquemont *et al.* 1990). This research also led to a new consciousness of the value of traditional agricultural knowledge among Chinchero farmers, turned to new use as community members today prepare packets of crop samples to sell to tourists.

In Ithaca, Ed co-founded a small construction company, “Natural Bone Builders”, and in the latter 1980s and 1990s trained a generation of young carpenters. Ed’s fame for organizational skills and knowledge of architectural history led to a prominent community role as Executive Director of Historic Ithaca, a not-for-profit organization that owned and managed an increasing number of historic properties. Under Ed’s direction, Historic Ithaca took on its present form and organizational mission. He founded “Significant Elements” a storefront that accepts donations of high quality used architectural elements and sells them to builders and renovators. In 1998, Historic Ithaca negotiated purchase and initiated urgent repairs

on the magnificent 1928 State Theater, one of the few grand stages left in upstate New York, and a venue for productions ranging from classics like Ithaca Ballet’s “Nutcracker” to traveling Big Band jazz and the latest in World Music. Ed was a prominent spokesman for historic preservation statewide, and a member of the board of directors of the New York Folklore Society.

Ed and Chris left Ithaca in 1999 for New Haven, Connecticut. Ed was hired as Director of the New Haven Preservation Trust. In the challenging environment of New Haven, Ed continued to advocate for the recycling of valuable architectural components, preservation of historic buildings, and strengthening of community-building events and institutions.

During this period, Ed never tired of lecturing on Andean textiles. He constantly received invitations to speak in museums and weavers’ guilds, and more North American weavers learned spinning, sling braiding techniques, and *pallay* finger-picked patterns from Ed. He participated in several important exhibits of Andean textiles, writing for the catalogue of *Traditional Textiles of the Andes: Life and Cloth in the Highlands* (1997) and lecturing for the Textile Museum’s 2002 exhibit on “Hidden Threads of Peru: Q’ero Textiles”. Ed lectured on occasion to audiences further afield, as in his June 1999 talk on “Genius and Tradition: Change in Folk Textile Traditions of the Andes” at the Pitt Rivers Museum in Oxford, England. Ed’s inspiring talks have helped build international financial backing for the Center for Traditional Textiles in Cusco, and he acted as its international treasurer, establishing NGO status in the United States and receiving donations for the Center. His outreach work also has built support for other important centers such as ASUR, founded by Verónica Cereceda in Sucre, Bolivia.

Ed’s lectures were appreciated by those concerned with Andean technologies of production and ways of thought. He was a visiting lecturer at the Integrated Studies Program at MIT. Ed’s textile work was recognized as important for

archaeological research on Andean fiber arts, mathematics, and forms of knowledge: he contributed a discussion of “Andean Slings: Process and Patterns” to the Dumbarton Oaks 2001 Roundtable “Can We Decode Tocapu?” organized by Catherine Allen and Mary Frame. His 2004 article, written with Chris, on “Tanka, Chongo, Kutij: Symmetry of the World through Cloth” has been praised as “anthropology for mathematicians” (Hayes 2005). Ed sowed the passion for Andean textiles and forms of knowledge that eventually led hand-weaver and mathematician Carrie Brezine to leave Oregon to take up a vital role developing the database for the Harvard Khipu project.

Many of us last saw Ed at the Northeast Conference on Andean Archaeology and Ethnohistory, held at Harvard in November 2003. He knew then that he had an untreatable form of cancer, but characteristically did not let it be evident, spending his time making personal contact with everyone present and offering generous and thoughtful feedback on our recent work and future plans. Two months later, he and Chris were scheduled to lead their second Textile Association of America tour to the Andes—the tour had to be cancelled, and he passed away a few weeks later on March 11, 2004. The first of Ed’s admirers to write in his memory and honor were the spinners and hand-weavers. In 2004, essays appeared in *Handwoven Magazine* (Frame 2004), in *Spin-off*, (Watson 2004) and in *Shuttle, Spindle and Dyepot* (Anon 2004).

Ed Franquemont’s analysis and personal practice has had a defining impact on contemporary research on Andean textile production, the roles of textiles in personal identities and community life, and the philosophy and practice of fieldwork—despite, or perhaps because of, Ed’s decision not to be an academic researcher. By becoming part of the community of Chinchero—as he also did in Vermont and in Ithaca—Ed could work with others to build strategies that value heritage within changing social and economic realities, with a respect for hard work and an eye on the future of the community. Ed played a key

role in working with a new generation of Andean weavers and activists. Partly because of his willingness to support Nilda Callañaupa’s initiative in taking up a non-traditional path as researcher and organizer, fine textile production in the Cusco region has survived the social upheaval of the late twentieth century to emerge with renewed vitality in changed social contexts. With Ed, we can hope that the wealth of knowledge of Andean women and men may sustain their lives and enrich their future.

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