

HISTORIC RED HOOK

Jeffrey Arnold Moss

1942 – 1998

St. John The Evangelist Cemetery, Barrytown

Tall, white tablet tombstone in the northeast corner of the cemetery uphill a bit near some benches.

We have many touchstones from our childhoods. Children raised during the *Sesame Street* era can thank composer, author, and lyricist Jeffrey Arnold Moss for many happy memories directly connected to such characters as Cookie Monster and Oscar the Grouch, both of which Moss created, and to Ernie's song "Rubber Duckie," which he wrote and which became a top 20 *Billboard* hit. The love engendered as a result of his creative spirit is re-sparked any time a child (or adult) is inspired by the creations of Moss's imagination. Due to his characters, songs, poems, and other work, Moss lives on in us.

Moss was born on January 19, 1942, in New York City to actor Arnold Moss and writer Stella Reynolds. He graduated from Princeton University in 1963; he was hired as a production assistant and then became one of the writers on CBS's *Captain Kangaroo* children's show. In 1969, he went on to help create and to write for *Sesame Street* with Muppets creator Jim Henson and musical director Joe Raposo. "If Henson gave the Muppets their form, and Franz Oz provided so many of their voices, Moss helped give them their souls," described Todd S. Purdum in a profile of Moss, listed as number 12 of the 25 Most Influential Princeton Alumni, published January 23, 2008, in *Princeton Alumni Weekly*. Along the way, Moss won 14 Emmys, was nominated for an Academy Award for "The Muppets Take Manhattan," wrote songs for four Grammy-winning records, and authored more than a dozen best-selling *Sesame Street* books, according to his obituary written by Douglas Martin in *The New York Times* on September 26, 1998, after Moss's death two days earlier in New York City due to colon cancer.

"In an interview in *The New York Times* five years ago," continued Martin, "Mr. Moss explained his approach. 'I look at kids as being us, but younger,' he said. 'What makes kids laugh is the same as what makes us laugh. And losing something or someone dear to you is universal. The key is to keep the vocabulary so children can understand it. That way you keep the kids watching and smiling, and it's something you watch yourself.'...It was this ability to strike resonant chords that those who knew Mr. Moss mentioned yesterday. His

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literary agent, Esther Newberg, remembered the awe with which children at the American Museum of Natural History regarded him when he read from his book about dinosaurs. A friend mentioned how today's Princeton students, all weaned on *Sesame Street*, would crowd around a piano and join him in belting out 'Rubber Duckie,'" Martin noted.

Moss was survived by his wife Anne W. Boylan, his son Alexander Boylan Moss, and his stepson Jonathan Smith. As his tombstone reminds us, "After the singer has gone/the song goes on."