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OBITUARY

James Flood, 62; professor at SDSU, wrote on literacy

By Michael Kinsman
STAFF WRITER

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Professor James Flood spent his life trying to get people talking.

Nothing delighted Mr. Flood more than to see his students engaged in a vigorous debate.

“He wanted a great debate,” said his colleague, Diane Lapp. “He wanted his students in a debate that was conversational and not confrontational.”

Mr. Flood, a San Diego State University education professor, believed in communication. He dedicated his career to helping teachers assist underprivileged children in exploring multicultural literature.

“He wanted kids to be able to express themselves, and he felt that they could find something to relate to in literature,” Lapp said. “Jim believed every person could make a difference if they found their voice.”

Mr. Flood, a resident of Del Cerro, died Sunday at Thornton Hospital in La Jolla after a three-year battle with myelodysplasia syndrome, a blood disease. He was 62.

Although he was a university professor, Mr. Flood kept in close contact with younger students. Before his illness, he spent two mornings each week at Rosa Parks Elementary School, Monroe Clark Middle School and Hoover High School.

“He worked with teachers so they could find ways of connecting with students,” Lapp said. “He believed they had to make a special effort to reach out to kids in poverty or they could be lost.”

When he first started his teaching career, he leaned on the classic literature of the Western world. He soon learned that in an increasingly multicultural society, teachers have to introduce students to authors from other cultures as well.

With Lapp, Mr. Flood co-wrote 30 textbooks and children's books as well as hundreds of articles on teaching literacy.

He served as president of the National Reading Conference and was a member of the board of directors of the International Reading Association. He also spent six years as co-editor of *The California Reader*, a literacy journal.

“Jim Flood was a gentle and kind soul who had a huge impact on children through the nation,” said Doug Manchester, a La Jolla developer and friend. “Jim made incredible contributions to literacy – tantamount to the Hall of Fame for literature – writing and publishing instructional books to assist teachers and better equip them to teach children.”

Mr. Flood was born Dec. 24, 1944, in Queens, N.Y. He attended Bishop Loughlin Memorial High School in Brooklyn, where his Jesuit teacher introduced him to the interplay of ideas.

“That really made him want to go out and teach others,” Lapp said.

In 1966, Mr. Flood received a bachelor's degree in English at Catholic

University and a master's degree in English education two years later at New York University. He earned a doctorate in language and literacy at Stanford University in 1975.

He began teaching at Boston University in 1976, where he met Lapp and began their 30-year collaboration.

Mr. Flood moved to San Diego in 1981 to join the faculty of SDSU.

Mr. Flood is survived by his wife, Sharon, a retired SDSU professor; daughter, Johanna Flood of San Diego; son, Bart Flood of Berkeley; sister, Margaret Kurmis of Daytona Beach, Fla.; and, brother, Frank Flood of Beaver Creek, Colo.

A celebration of life is planned for 10:30 a.m. July 30 at the Church of the Immaculata at the University of San Diego.

Mr. Flood's remains have been cremated.

The family suggests donations to Bishop Loughlin Memorial High School, 357 Clermont Ave., Brooklyn, NY 11238; or to the James Flood Reading Room at Health Sciences High and Middle College, 8888 Balboa Ave., No. 150, San Diego, CA 92123.

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