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The Art of Listening

01.04.2013 | Faculty

Not every college professor ends up in the Hall of Fame of the International Listening Association, but Florence Wolff, who died today in Littleton, Colo., at the age of 93, was not your typical professor.

For openers, she spoke at a rapid clip but was *the* authority on listening. She wrote the landmark text, *Perceptive Listening*, and led training sessions throughout the region for CEOs, Air Force generals and college presidents. A diminutive woman, she could command the attention of giants

in the field.

"As a senior faculty member, Dr. Wolff was respected and admired by faculty and students alike," remembered colleague Tom Skill, whose faculty office was next door to Wolff. "She was a very demanding teacher who impacted her students far beyond her classes. She held everyone to the highest standards, yet managed to become one of the most beloved teachers on the UD faculty. Whenever I encounter alumni, they almost always ask about her. Dr. Wolff stories are everywhere. She was a most unique and fascinating person."

Larry Lain, professor emeritus of communication, said Wolff drove around town in a car sporting the license plate "Prof 1" and wouldn't allow students in her listening class to take notes. "They had to listen," he said with a laugh.

"She could be intimidating because she was so precise in whatever she did, but she was supportive of every member of the faculty and went out of her way to help people in any way," he remembered. "More than anything, Florence was a very kind person."

Just ask Vicki Giambone, vice president for marketing and external affairs at Children's Medical Center. Diagnosed with Hodgkin's disease in her first semester at the University of Dayton, Giambone didn't want to drop out. Wolff was her adviser.

As Giambone lay in the hospital, Wolff showed up with a plan. She gathered Giambone's work and made arrangements for her to take her finals; classmates came to study with her; and when Giambone came back to campus, Wolff and dean of students Margaret Holland arranged the accommodations Giambone needed — a parking space and a room with a bath.

Despite a relapse, Giambone did something even healthy students seldom achieve: She graduated early. "I told Dr. Wolff, 'I can't thank you enough,'" Giambone said. "She told me, 'This is UD. This is what we do.'"

Wolff, who taught speech, listening, interpersonal communication, voice and diction, served full time on the faculty at the University of Dayton from 1969-1989, before being named professor emeritus of communication. Later, she worked as a seminar director in the School of Business Administration's Management Development Center.

Her honors are numerous. In 1985, she was recognized by the Speech Communication Association of Ohio as its Outstanding College/University Teacher, and she was honored with the International Listening Association Research Award for her textbook, *Perceptive Listening*. In 1986, she won the University's Alumni Award in Teaching and was Ohio's Professor of the Year. Wolff was a national finalist in the Carnegie Foundation's Professor of the Year competition and is noted in *Who's Who of American Women*, *The Directory of American Scholars* and *The National Register of Prominent Americans and International Notables*.

Every year, the University of Dayton awards an exceptional student the Dr. Florence I. Wolff Achievement Award for Outstanding Contributions in Academic, Extracurricular and Community Service Activities.

Wolff was elected to councilor, executive secretary and president of the Religious Speech Communication Association, and she was a founder and life member of the International Listening Association. A corporate consultant and seminar director in listening communication, she also was director of WITS (Wolff Innovative Training Systems).

Wolff earned a bachelor's degree from Temple University, a master's degree from Duquesne University, and a doctorate from the University of Pittsburgh. She was the first woman to teach at the all-boys Central District Catholic High School; later she taught at the Allegheny Community College in Pittsburgh.

She is preceded in death by her husband, John M. Wolff, retired captain in the United States Navy Reserve; oldest son, John Shanor; infant daughter, Marla LaVern; and daughter-in-law, Katherine L. (Reinstedler) Wolff. She is survived by daughters F. Joy and son-in-law Stanley Koplinski of Pittsburgh; M. Nadine Wolff and son-in-law Jan Alan Dickover of Denver; Celeste and son-in-law Chris Collier of Indianapolis; sons J. Blaner and daughter-in-law Chun Paz Wolff of Atlanta and J. Craig of Oxford, N.C.; one nephew, David McLaughlin of North Grafton, Mass.; and five grandchildren, Emma Denise Wolff, Leah Diane Wolff, John M. Wolff, Marissa Collier and Dean Collier.

Services, which will be in Pittsburgh, have not been set. The family asks that in lieu of flowers, contributions be made to the Florence I. Wolff Scholarship at the University of Dayton, 300 College Park, Dayton, OH 45469-2961.

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