

C. Elmer Schneider
1908–1995

PROFESSOR OF ENGLISH LANGUAGE AND LITERATURE, EMERITUS

B.A., Iowa State Teachers College; M.A., University of Iowa; Ph.D., English, University
of Southern California, January 3, 1957
California State University, Fullerton From September 1, 1962 To June 8, 1977
Birth: December 24, 1908; Death: January 13, 1995

Elmer Schneider came to CSUF with just the right professional qualifications at just the right time. In the early 1960's hundreds of students came wanting to earn teaching credentials for high schools and junior colleges, and he was uniquely fitted to help them achieve their goals. He was once a man of great learning, broad professional experience, and profound humanity.

Elmer was born in the Heartland of America, State Center, Iowa, on December 24, 1908. It was propitious time, when the conversion of the United States from primarily farming and small towns serving farms to primarily industrial-commercial urban centers was at full tide. Iowa and the other Midwestern states provided New York, Chicago, and in Elmer's case, California with thousands of bright, ambitious young professionals. His career included experiencing some of the greatest social upheavals in human history. He sought his first positions during the most severe of World Depressions and within a decade was serving in a war that involved most of a whole generation of young men. His character was early tested in the crucible of the 20th Century American history. However, to his lifelong joy and satisfaction, during these early turbulent years he found his beloved wife, Myrtle, and locked her to his soul as the emotional center of his existence.

After the war Elmer came to Fullerton College to teach English and to work on his Ph.D. At the time it was an exciting place to be. One major role was to provide the first two years of undergraduate education for hundreds of transfers to the University of California campuses, primarily Berkeley and UCLA. I saw in the late 1950's a study of the upper-division records comparing those who had done the first two years at Berkeley and several hundred Fullerton College transfers. The Fullerton students had outperformed the "native" students by a considerable margin. Elmer soon became the Humanities Division Chairman, where his broad interest, his patience, and his life-long habit of working hard served him well.

My counselees at CSUF characterized Elmer as outstanding. They reported that his criticisms, though kindly, were forceful and logical, leading students to improve by providing both motivation and method. He inspired pride and self-confidence. He was, they said, well-organized, thorough, helpful, and always concerned about the individual. Many wrote back after graduation and some time on the firing line, citing his great influence on their professional careers.

Colleagues also enjoyed working with Elmer. He was a cooperative and hard-working committee member on a variety of assignments: curriculum design, personnel matters, and all-university policy committees. He was a scholar-gentleman of the old school—expert in his specialties, comfortable with faculty democratic processes, yet

forceful and strong-willed where he felt important principles were involved, as during the student riots.

His book, *Syntax and Style*, (1972) blended two of his main scholarly interests, grammar and writing. One of the several articles he published, "Socio-drama and Writing" (1974), illustrates his interest in combining various aspects of the Humanities in the production of enhanced communication.

Elmer's experience in a wide variety of teaching environments made him especially valuable to the department as a teacher-trainer. In Iowa he had taught in high schools of several sizes and in a junior college. In 1974 he taught a year at Washington State University and then came to Fullerton College. Elmer's scholarship was concentrated largely in American Literature and grammar. His Ph.D. thesis was on the 19th Century novelist William Dean Howells.

The richness of Elmer Schneider's life is further illuminated by his more personal interests. He valued wife and family as the core of human experience. To his great joy, for example, in his last days he got to know his first great-grandchild, a girl whose arrival he wished to experience before his death. He cherished Myrtle and their children, Penny and Tom, with equal elation and gratitude. Elmer loved music, particularly his large collection of Beethoven and Schubert, conducted by many of the century's great symphonists. He enjoyed people and sought them out deliberately in his travels in Europe and the U.S. He relished experiencing other art forms and cultures. At family gatherings Elmer would read aloud classical and humorous things to the delight of all ages. Upon retirement he turned to walking, gardening, genealogy, and continued his lifelong journal where he reflected on the significance of passing events.

He enjoyed rural American folklore. Myrtle recounts how in one of their early vegetable gardens when she was pregnant with Penny, he had her walk on his potato patch, which folk-legend said produced a bountiful crop. Whatever he met in life, he turned into an interesting experience and savored. He was a living example of what a full life can be: an adventure of the mind, the senses, the emotions, and the spirit, using the whole human capacity to live well and fully.

Submitted by
Orrington Ramsay
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