

Donald A. Sears

1923 - 1994

PROFESSOR OF ENGLISH LANGUAGE AND LITERATURE, EMERITUS

B.A. Bowdoin College; M.A., Ph.D., English Language and Literature,
Harvard University, June, 1952
California State University, Fullerton From September 1, 1967 To June 6, 1986
Birth: May 25, 1923; Death: May 8, 1994

When Donald Sears received his Ph.D. in English Language and Literature from Harvard University in 1952, he began the sort of academic career many plan but few bring to fulfillment. By the time of his death in 1994, he had taught at nine colleges and universities, chaired three departments, published eight books and over eighty articles and review essays, along with hundreds of poems.

By the time he had received the doctoral degree, Don had lectured at the University of Massachusetts, University of Virginia, George Washington University, and Dartmouth College, with a three-year stint, during World War II, teaching at the U. S. Air Force Bombsight School in Colorado. After receiving the degree, he taught for ten years at Upsala College moving on to become Chair and Professor of English at Skidmore College from 1962 to 1964.

When he had worked in Washington, D. C., with the Commission on Plans and Objectives for Higher Education (during the Kennedy and Johnson administrations) Don taught at Howard University, Ahmadu Bello University (Nigeria), and finally California State University, Fullerton, where he remained for the last twenty-seven years of his life. Among other offices he held while at CSUF, he was Executive Director of the College English Association, Editor of the *CEA Critic*, Chair of the Faculty Council, Chair of the Department of Linguistics, and Advisory Editor of *South Coast Poetry Journal*. In 1981 he received the Outstanding Professor Award at CSUF. He never chose a simple path in the academic subjects he offered: Milton, Structure of the English Language, American Dialects, Frontier Literature, Language and Linguistics. Nevertheless, he approached all of these subjects with his usual verve and enthusiasm, instilling in his students the same care and love for his subjects that he maintained.

Don was a native of Portland, Maine, retaining all his life the unhurried and rounded speech patterns of his birthplace, though his spirit searched farther fields. He was highly respected by many for his wide-ranging knowledge in linguistics and literature, and for his carefully considered opinions. He was particularly helpful with junior colleagues in guiding them through the rigors of academia. Friends and acquaintances invariably associated Don with his ever-present pipe, elegant clothes, distinguished bearing and cheerful demeanor. Many of us wondered what Don would wear next, his clothing ranging from tweeds through safari khakis to the dandiest form of linen and spectator shoes. It was as if his clothing reflected his many

interests and the light-hearted, often sardonic, approach he took to subjects ranging from university politics to poetics.

Don was both patron and practitioner of the arts. He was an advocate of excellence in a culture that is comfortable with mediocrity. He was also a proponent of equal rights for women, and minorities, though he was too busy putting his beliefs into action to advertise his admirability. He relished his role as a director of various arcane topics in independent studies.

Ten years of relative calm and academic growth were shattered when Don's second wife Oretta, died in 1980. The loss affected him deeply. He recovered from it gradually, as one recovers from radical surgery: first the convalescence, then the escalating exercises, then the new way of living. As part of the healing process, he wrote a body of poetry about his experiences. He came to colleagues' classes to read his poems, giving students a close-up view of the creative process and of the author of what many believed existed only in books.

Before his move to South Laguna, Don gave most of his extensive library to CSUF. Earlier, drawing upon contacts he had made as expert witness in many court cases involving pornographic literature, he had arranged for the donation of one of the largest collections of erotica in the U. S. to the Special Collections portion of the library.

In 1989 he married Joanne Lewis (also a Professor of English at CSUF), and the two of them took up residence in South Laguna at their hilltop home overlooking miles of pacific coastline. They traveled extensively in France and were happy to share new experiences, places, and foods with friends. Don took pride in his wine cellar and his kitchen. He was a good cook, never happier than when exploring the foods of his beloved Italy. The couple were much sought after as gracious party guests, and they, in their turn, were equally gracious as hosts.

When Don suffered a heart attack in 1989, part of his therapy was to become a gardening enthusiast. Within a year the Sears' hillside took on the appearance of the gardens at a European villa which has been tended lovingly for generations. Don loved the pleasure, the beauty, and the harmony that a well appointed home (with its combination of New England and Africa) brought. He was a part of all that he had met.

In late 1993, Don bought a home in Montecito, California, and in early 1994 he and Joanne moved to that seaside village near Santa Barbara. His health was now extremely fragile. He died in the new home two weeks after the move, tranquil in the knowledge that Joanne was now near her adult daughter Katy. He is survived by three daughters, Jennifer Talbot, and Jeanne Prince, both of Maine, and Elizabeth Farley of San Mateo; one son, Dr. Stephen Sears of Maine; and eight grandchildren.

Submitted by
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(est.) August 1, 1994