From Paris, with Love

Professor Brings the French Language, Culture and Customs to Life at USD

Jeannette Brinks Rigsby, the daughter of a Dutch diplomat and Parisian homemaker, moved to Montreal in 1958, where she met a reverend mother at The Sacred Heart School of Montreal who convinced her that the Society of the Sacred Heart needed her to teach at the College for Women in San Diego.

It was a move that changed her life forever. “The Society of the Sacred Heart is French and she asked me, ‘How can we have a new school without teaching the students the French language and the French culture?’” Rigsby recalls. “You must go.”

Rigsby, who was a professor in the linguistics department at the University of Montreal in Canada, came to San Diego later that year and taught briefly at the Sacred Heart high school in El Cajon, Calif., before joining the faculty at the College for Women. She founded the French department and brought French culture to the students. She became known across campus simply as “Madame.”

“In my classes I spoke only French. I started a French Club and a French table where the students in the French program ate together. For three years in a row, I took students to Europe to visit Germany, Italy, Spain and of course France,” says Madame Rigsby, while sifting through a box of black-and-white photos of she and her students, dressed for dinner at the captain’s table, on a ship sailing to Montreal before heading to Europe. “I felt so at home. I loved my students. This was my life.”

Every Friday morning, she and her students would sing a French song from “South Pacific,” the 1949 Rodgers and Hammerstein musical that was made into a movie in 1958. Years later, at a Chinese New Year’s dinner, hosted on campus by music Professor Angela Yeung, Rigsby and her students reunited. She was moved when, right in the middle of dinner, they broke into song.

“Dites-moi / pourquoi / la vie est belle,” she sings, remembering her early days on campus. “I realized that this song tied them together. After all these years they might have forgotten their French, but they remembered the song.”

Madame Rigsby was recognized twice by the French government. She was named a chevalier, or knight, to the Ordre des Palmes Académiques, an Order of Chivalry of France for academics and cultural and educational figures. She was also named as an officier in the Ordre des Arts et des Lettres, another Order of France that recognizes significant contributions to the arts and literature. She worked at the University of San Diego until retiring in 1994, at which time she was named a professor emerita.

Always a professor at heart, Madame Rigsby continued to teach French, never forgetting

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Sell the Orchard Tax-Free and Keep the Apples

By John A. Phillips

Recently, two USD alumni said they faced huge tax payments of $80,000 to $250,000 from the sale of income property. It's painful to hear that because the tax can be avoided.

Years ago, as an upstart planning giving officer at San Diego's Mercy Hospital, I heard about a farmer who sold his highly appreciated apple orchard, kept the apples, and paid zero tax! Was this legal, I wondered? Wouldn't the farmer have a capital gains tax liability when the orchard is sold? The answers to these questions are simple; yes and no!

The farmer's orchard was worth $800,000. Thirty-eight years prior, he purchased it for only $100,000. If the farmer sold his property outright, he would have paid capital gains tax on the increased value of $700,000. Done today, this farmer's tax bill could have been 35 percent or more of the $700,000 gain — or about $245,000. That's what happened to the two USD alumni mentioned above.

So how did the farmer pay no taxes and keep the apples?

The farmer, working with his attorney and a planned giving officer at his favorite charity, created a tax-exempt trust into which he placed the orchard. Now his tax-exempt trust owned the orchard and any apples (or income) it produced. The farmer's trust sold the orchard and invested 100 percent of the cash proceeds. His trust distributed income to him and his wife each quarter for life.

Did he pay $245,000 in gains tax? No. Instead of apples, this farmer receives a check four times a year representing the earnings from the trust investments. Did I mention that he also received a charitable income tax deduction? These tax benefits are allowed because after he passed away in 2009 at the age of 94. The two were "critically important to learning languages and understanding cultures. A longtime and honorary president of Alliance Française de San Diego, Madame welcomed both former students and new scholars, from the local community as well as from France. She continued opening her home to them for impromptu concerts, gatherings and celebrations of French holidays, including La Fête Nationale, or Bastille Day, La Fête des Rois, celebrated globally as the Epiphany or Kings' Day, and La Chandeleur, Une Fête de la Lumière, the Catholic holiday of Candelmas. She is beloved by many in the community and on campus. She still remembers one morning in particular when she brought a friend to visit campus and a gardener on staff addressed her in French, as was their custom. He and the professor chatted often, but never ventured too far off topic since his French was limited to polite greetings and few phrases about the sun, the rain and the weather. "My friend was astonished," she says. "She couldn't believe that even the gardeners spoke French to me."

More commonly, this same technique is used by owners of highly appreciated income-producing real estate to achieve similar results. It even works with appreciated stock!

If you are an income property owner who is thinking of selling, I would be happy to meet with you to provide an illustration of how you can avoid tax on the same of your income property, reduce your current taxes, maintain an income stream for life, and create a legacy endowment at USD.

Contact me at (619) 260-4523 or email jphillips@sandiego.edu.

The Charitable IRA Rollover is Back Until Dec. 31!

The American Taxpayer Relief Act allows you to make tax-free gifts to the University of San Diego directly from your Individual Retirement Account (IRA). These gifts are limited annually to $100,000. You must be age 70½ when the gift is made. IRA gifts count toward your minimum required distribution. Call John Phillips at (619) 260-4813 for more information.

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lunches, homecoming festivities, Friends of the Library, the value of personal contact and connection, which is vital to learning languages and understanding cultures. A longtime and honorary president of Alliance Française de San Diego, Madame welcomed both former students and new scholars, from the local community as well as from France. She continued opening her home to them for impromptu concerts, gatherings and celebrations of French holidays, including La Fête Nationale, or Bastille Day, La Fête des Rois, celebrated globally as the Epiphany or Kings' Day, and La Chandeleur, Une Fête de la Lumière, the Catholic holiday of Candelmas. She is beloved by many in the community and on campus. She still remembers one morning in particular when she brought a friend to visit campus and a gardener on staff addressed her in French, as was their custom. He and the professor chatted often, but never ventured too far off topic since his French was limited to polite greetings and few phrases about the sun, the rain and the weather. "My friend was astonished," she says. "She couldn't believe that even the gardeners spoke French to me."

Her husband of 44 years, George Rigsby, a Cal Tech graduate in glaciology, who for a brief stint taught geology at the college, was just as well known at Alcalá Park before he passed away in 2009 at the age of 94. The two were often seen at concerts in the French Parlor, scholarship luncheons, homecoming festivities, Friends of the Library, functions, Invisible University events and Bridges Academy lectures. They helped establish the French Endowed Scholarship Fund, for French majors who study abroad in France. They also actively supported the university in many other areas, including the Society of the Sacred Heart, the music department, the tennis program and the Kyoto Laureate Symposium.

Their generosity continues with her recent bequest to establish the Drs. George and Jeannette Rigsby Language and Culture Commons. The center is located in Founders Hall, around the corner from Founders Chapel and just steps away from the French Parlor — places dear to Madame Rigsby. The commons gives students, faculty, staff and friends of the university a place to interact, speak, learn and study in many different languages. It's a dynamic and evolving space where people enjoy programs, lectures, films and intercultural encounters and study the world's many cultures, customs and artistic genres.

In the words of Madame Jeannette Rigsby, "Language is the philosophy of life." To her, teaching the love of languages, cultures and customs was her raison d'être — her reason for living, her purpose in life.

It is the legacy of the woman who brought the French language culture and customs to the university. But to her, it's a tribute to her husband.

"My husband was my life, my love, my everything," she says. "We were one heart. One soul."
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