

Dear EFL Colleagues:

Please accept this heartfelt tribute to our late colleague, Dr. Stanley Cook. Some of you worked with Stan, and some of the “new generation” faculty, about whom I hear such wonderful things, joined the department too recently to have had the pleasure.

Stan served Cal Poly from 1969-1998. He was extremely well thought of by his students. He chaired the Academic Senate, was one of the first to pioneer computer technology in the department, contributed to the union, hosted conferences, and published several books. During the last years, he served as Director of Academic Programs.

Stan taught linguistics, as did I, so we worked closely together. For the first 10 years or so, I knew Stan as an academically very well-prepared, pleasant, nice colleague. It was not until we decided to write a book together, for McGraw-Hill, that I realized the depth of Stan’s “niceness.” As many of you know, the co-author relationship can by its very nature be stressful: there are frequent deadlines to meet, quality standards to uphold, and continual joint feedback, one author to the other, usually occurring near a deadline, when the authors are feeling most tired. Some editors have told me that a large portion of their time can be spent just mitigating fights between co-authors. If Mother Teresa and Mister Rogers had co-authored a book, I suspect their editor might have received a call or two.

Do you know how many of these phone calls our editor received, in the year and a half Stan and I labored on that book? Zero. And Stan gets 100% of the credit for that, as I know I can be excitable. Throughout the project, even when tired, even when frustrated, Stan’s judgement remained perfect, and his manner remained thoughtful, considerate, supportive, sensitive, and steady.

One reason Stan was so great to work with was because he never saw the world as being about him. I believe that is the reason he seldom talked about himself. We had worked together for 20 years when one day, sitting in his office, wearing his professorial jacket, holding his pipe, and studiously considering some problem in linguistics, he casually mentioned that he had commanded a tank in the Marine Corps. In disbelief, I protested, saying, “No, you are too academic. Besides, they would not allow you to smoke your pipe in a military tank. It would make the tank an unsafe workplace.” Stan laughed, and I thought I’d hear more, but I never did. His family later confirmed the fact. It was not that Stan was unusually private; rather, he was just unusually humble. Even with his outstanding academic credentials, plus the respect he received from his colleagues, and the appreciation he continually received from his students, Stan remained, above all, extraordinarily humble. A few years ago, my wife, Carol, came home from work holding color photocopies of two beautiful paintings that she had found on the Internet. She said, “Aren’t these great? And look who the artist is.” It was the humble one, Dr. Stanley Cook. Nobody we knew thought Stan was even interested in art.

Yet Stan’s humility never caused him to be withdrawn. It never deterred Stan from helping other people. More than one person has told me that, during a time of personal crisis, Stan’s calm support and counsel saved the day for them. In retirement, Stan was very active, contributing his time and talent to important community causes. He also enjoyed his family. Just now I almost wrote “wonderful family,” but that expression is overworked, and it does not do them justice. I’ve met many of them, and they are terrific. Those of you who had the honor and pleasure to work with Stan are familiar with the things I’ve been describing. Those of you who arrived to EFL a bit too recently—well, you are inheriting a great tradition.

Peace to all, Richard Suter.