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Alan Stephens, Renowned Poet and Scholar, Dies in Santa Barbara

Alan Archer Stephens, 83, a renowned poet and founding faculty member of UC Santa Barbara's College of Creative Studies (CCS), died July 21 after a long illness, according to an announcement from his family.

Stephens, an emeritus professor who began teaching at UCSB in 1959, directed the literature program in the College of Creative Studies from 1967 until his retirement from the university in 1989. During that time, he influenced hundreds of the most promising literary talents on the campus.

Stephens was the author of several volumes of poetry, including "The Sum," "Between Matter and Principle," "The Heat Lightning," "Tree Meditation and Others," "White River Poems," "In Plain Air: Selected Poems," "Stubble Burning," "Goodbye Matilija," "The White Boat," and "Away From the Road." His work is also featured in a variety of poetry anthologies, such as "A Western Sampler: Nine Contemporary Poets," and "Three Dimensions of Poetry."

"Alan Stephens was a widely recognized poet of the American west, whose words evoked 'a clear, dry-air vision of the ordinary,' " said Bruce Tiffney, dean of the College of Creative Studies. "He was also a reverentially remembered instructor in CCS and in the Department of English. Fortunately, his many students had the opportunity to celebrate his influence and his life at a special event held in his honor in March 2006. While he is gone, his spirit will live on in the words and imaginations

of those whom he taught, and who in turn will inspire generations into the future."

Stephens was recalled by former colleague John Ridland, a poet and emeritus professor of English at UCSB, as "unique in every way -- as a colleague, as a writer, and as a teacher. From 1967 to his retirement, he was the mainstay of the Literature program, teaching not only Renaissance poets like Ben Jonson, Shakespeare, George Herbert, Robert Herrick, and John Milton, but modern writers, such as Thomas Hardy, Wallace Stevens, and Ernest Hemingway."

Said John Wilson, also an emeritus professor of English at UCSB: "He is the poet who has given distinction to our place and the people in it. He has written of our creeks, streets, houses, beaches, mountains, schools, parks, trees, flowers, birds and beasts, and people. Not just Santa Barbara but the entire Western landscape has meant a great deal to him as a man and as a writer."

Born December 19, 1925, in Greeley, Colo., Stephens grew up on his family's farm, where he plowed the fields behind a team of horses, milked cows by hand, and helped raise chickens during the Dust Bowl and Great Depression. After graduating from high school, he served in the U.S. Army Air Corps until his discharge in 1946. He earned his bachelor's degree from the University of Colorado in 1950, and his master's degree from Denver University in 1951. At Denver University he worked with poet Alan Swallow who, in addition to writing and teaching poetry, oversaw Denver University Press. He later founded Swallow Press, which was Stephens's publisher for 25 years. From Denver University, Stephens went on to the University of Missouri, where he completed his Ph.D. in 1954.

Before joining the faculty at UCSB, Stephens was an assistant professor of English at Arizona State University. During that time, he received a Stegner Fellowship in Creative Writing to study for a year with the poet and literary critic Yvor Winters at Stanford University.

Stephens is survived by his wife of 60 years, Frances Stephens; by their sons, Alan, Daniel, and Timothy Stephens; by six grandchildren and one great-grandson; and by his brother, David, of Greeley, Colo. Memorial services will be private.

About UC Santa Barbara

The University of California, Santa Barbara is a leading research institution that also provides a comprehensive liberal arts learning experience. Our academic community of faculty, students, and staff is characterized by a culture of interdisciplinary collaboration that is responsive to the needs of our multicultural and global society. All of this takes place within a living and learning environment like no other, as we draw inspiration from the beauty and resources of our extraordinary location at the edge of the Pacific Ocean.