



Dr. Jeannette Brink Rigsby

FEB 26, 1925 - DEC 20, 2017



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Professor Emerita Jeanette B. Rigsby, Ph.D. was born in Bucharest, Romania on February 26, 1925, to a French mother and a Dutch father and, after 92 years of life, passed away peacefully in her home on December 20, 2017. The French influence became her passion in life leading to her studies to become a French teacher, professor, and a lifetime advocate of the languages and arts. All are welcome to attend a funeral mass at The Immaculata on Friday, March 23, 2018, at 10:00 a.m., with a reception to follow at approximately 11:00 a.m. on the East Lawn of the Immaculata (5998 Alcala Park, San Diego, CA). Jeannette was just 14 years old when World War II began. The Germans invaded and occupied Bulgaria, followed by the Soviet invasion and the looming Iron Curtain. With the help of her beloved brother, André Brink—who was a Dutch diplomat—and intervention from the Queen of Holland and the Dutch government, Jeannette was able to flee Bulgaria and eventually immigrate to Canada in the late 1950s with her sister, Vera. Jeannette began her long and prosperous career teaching French in Montreal, Canada at Sacred Heart. She moved to San Diego where she rose to become a most beloved and well-respected French Professor at the University of San Diego. The University was much more than her place of work, it was truly her home for almost 50 years. Many of her students simply and lovingly refer to her as “Madame.” She joined the faculty at the College for Women in 1959 and taught courses at USD in French and French literature, and founded the French Department. In 1990, she created the French Endowed Scholarship and was instrumental in establishing the study abroad program in Aix-en-Provence, France and encouraging her students to experience the sights, smells, and sounds of the country that she loved so much. Jeannette was a longtime and honorary president of L’Alliance Française de San Diego, and the French government twice recognized her for her significant contributions to the arts and literature, naming her a chevalier, or knight, to the Ordre des Palmes



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Académiques—an Order of Chivalry of France for academics and cultural and educational figures—and an officier in the Ordre des Arts et des Lettres. Although Jeannette retired from teaching in 1995, she continued to be a vibrant part of the USD campus community by participating in Bridges Academy lectures; frequenting Hoehn Gallery exhibitions, theatre productions and music concerts; bringing friends and family members to enjoy wine dinners at La Gran Terraza; and attending mass at both Founders Chapel and The Immaculata. As a way to support the department and her beloved colleagues, Jeannette established the Drs. George and Jeannette Rigsby Language and Culture Commons in 2013. From the many places she lived, San Diego is where she found happiness, not only with work, but in meeting her greatest treasure—her husband, George. They sailed together and were avid and active members of the San Diego Yacht Club, hosted get-togethers and social functions, traveled together, played tennis, and enjoyed lengthy, opinionated discussions on politics and the news of the day. They had over 40 years together, and after his passing, she missed him deeply every day of the rest of her life. “My husband was my life, my love, my everything. We were one heart. One soul.” For years, a larger-than-life poster-sized photo of a smiling George greeted everyone entering her home. Despite her age of 92, Jeannette lived independently and continued teaching French on a weekly basis to her private students. She also remained very social—two days before her passing, she hosted a Christmas dinner at the University for 17 people! And her last day on this earth was filled with her regular routine, ending with a candlelit dinner and a glass of French wine. She was truly an amazing woman who will be profoundly missed.



Memories only last if you share them

Join us in honoring Jeannette by contributing to a collection of shared memories.



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