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IN MEMORIAM...

RICHARD DUNCAN ELDER, PH.D.
DECEMBER 29, 1928 - DECEMBER 31, 1969

"That man is a success who has lived well, laughed often and loved much; who has gained the respect of intelligent men and the love of children; who has filled his niche and accomplished his task; who leaves the world better than he found it, whether by an improved poppy, a perfect poem or a rescued soul; who never lacked appreciation of earth's beauty or failed to express it; who gave the best he had . . ."

Robert Louis Stevenson

Michigan Educators who have been dedicated to the pursuit of improving standards of excellence in reading research and methodology have lost a scholarly colleague with the untimely death of Dick Elder at the age of 41.

All of us who were fortunate to have known Dick over the past twelve years during his tenure in Michigan at Oakland Schools and Eastern Michigan University before he left for Kent State University were shocked by the news of his death.

From all indications, Dick died of a heart and circulatory failure on the last day (Wednesday) of the year in his apartment at Kent, Ohio. His body was not found until Saturday. Such circumstances added to the sorrow of his good friends and former colleagues. A simple but beautiful memorial service was conducted at Kent on Thursday, January 8. Because next of kin could not be located easily, communications to friends on his passing proved difficult. Attending the memorial

service and representing Dick's Michigan friends in reading were Phil Hilaire, Gert Crampton, Jerry Breen and Tony Witham.

Dick had only recently (Thanksgiving) visited many of his friends in Michigan.

In reflecting on this man's professional life, Dick Elder was unique in many ways. His depth and breadth of knowledge in the field of reading was easily apparent to anyone who read or heard his well-prepared lectures. He was a giant man — physically and intellectually. He held strong convictions and views on all aspects of reading based on in-depth analytical thought and research findings. He was a perfectionist in the preparation of materials for his graduate courses. He set high standards of performance and excellence in graduate courses — causing many students looking for credits rather than knowledge to withdraw after the initial session. Those who remained never regretted the effort which Dick demanded during subse-

quent meetings and invariably came to respect a man who demanded much and gave much. As an administrator for the past seven years, countless teachers who had completed Dick's courses would invariably comment to me on how much they had learned from this scholar. And this, I believe, is the most important legacy Dick leaves behind him — the real impact he had on hundreds and perhaps thousands of teachers in respect to improving their instructional competencies.

As we visited with his office staff following the funeral service, one young teacher described in great detail the personal impact Dick had had on graduate students at Kent State. She was near tears when she spoke of her frustration and those of her class when they realized they would not have an opportunity to take an advanced course from Dr. Elder scheduled to begin on January 10. His reputation as a scholar and most able counselor to the aspiring educator was so evident in this young lady's comments.

Certainly Dick was often misunderstood by his superiors and colleagues. Some questioned his personal mannerisms — his intellectual jabs — his idiosyncrasies — his social skills. But surely no one can deny that this giant man never disappointed his students by exuding self-assurance based on knowledge, not opinion, and an intense commitment to scholarly research and study. His professional integrity was beyond question. He was no 9-4 man on

the campus. Study, writing, research and lecturing was an integral part of his everyday routine.

He was a faithful member and presentator of M.R.A. and never disappointed his audience. His transfer to Kent, Ohio did not deter him from traveling to Grand Rapids over the past several years — at his own expense. He was, in short, one of the finest young intellectuals the field of reading has had in Michigan. He had not yet reached his potential nationally — but that would have surely come. His secretary mentioned that she had only recently completed a manuscript to be published in a national educational journal.

A Memorial

Because Dick was so committed to research in finding new and better ways of teaching reading, I would like to propose memorial gifts in the form of reading research documents to be presented to Dr. William Emerson, Oakland Schools, and Dr. Harold Sponberg, Eastern Michigan University for their respective libraries.

His friends who may choose to contribute to such memorial gifts should make checks payable to: Richard D. Elder Memorial Fund. Contributors will be informed of the memorial gift to be announced at a later date. I will be happy to serve as coordinator of this project.

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