OBITUARY OF DAVID A. WILSON (1926-2018)

Scholar of Thailand, UCLA Professor, University Leader During Turbulent Times

David Allen Wilson, 92, of San Rafael, CA, died May 2, 2018.

“Anyone with an interest in events should struggle to influence the direction things go.” That admonition in Professor David Wilson’s memoir Final Exam describes his extraordinary life. A leading scholar of Thailand, he expanded his pursuits to leadership and administration of the University of California where he influenced its direction. He cared deeply about universities and understood their centrality in American society, bringing to bear a gift for creativity and practical solutions. He shared his interests and commitments with his wife Belle Cole, to whom he was married for the last 30 years.

The struggle against McCarthyism and turbulence on campuses in the 1960s led David to move from a preeminent scholar of Thailand (his 1962 book Politics in Thailand remains the seminal work) to university leader, including Chair of the UCLA division of the Academic Senate, Chair of the University-wide Academic Council, and Executive Assistant to University of California President David Saxon.

David Allen Wilson was born on May 1, 1926 in Rockford, IL. He grew up in La Grange, IL and upstate New York before moving with his family to Toledo, OH. He graduated from the University of Toledo with a major in English and enlisted in the Navy, ending his WWII service at Naval Base Treasure Island.

He received a doctorate at Cornell University and in 1959 joined the Political Science Department at UCLA, where he remained until his retirement in 1992. As a leading scholar of Thailand, he traveled widely in Southeast Asia and served as a consultant to the RAND Corporation. His academic work contributed to the growth of foreign area studies. David wrote numerous books and articles about Thailand, Southeast Asia and higher education and introduced a course at UCLA on California politics. His memoir Final Exam captures his personal and professional life with wit and humor.

Following retirement, he was President and Chairman of the PMR Group Inc., a consulting firm that he and Belle Cole founded and ran for twelve years.

Professor Wilson is survived by his wife and two children, Stephen Wilson and Elizabeth Beener; daughter-in-law, Corinne Wong; grandchildren, Sean Beener, Rebecca Smith, Erika Watanabe Wilson, Olivia Wilson and Kyle Wilson; stepchildren, Adam Cole, Felicia Cole and Sarah Cole; and four step-grandchildren.

There will be a commemoration of his life and memorial service on June 17, 2018, from 4-7 pm at the Unitarian Universalist Congregation of Marin in San Rafael, CA. To leave an online condolence for the family, please visit our website at www.keatonsfuneral.com. To leave a charitable contribution in David Wilson’s memory please support the Russian Chamber Orchestra (http://www.russianchamberorch.org/about.php).