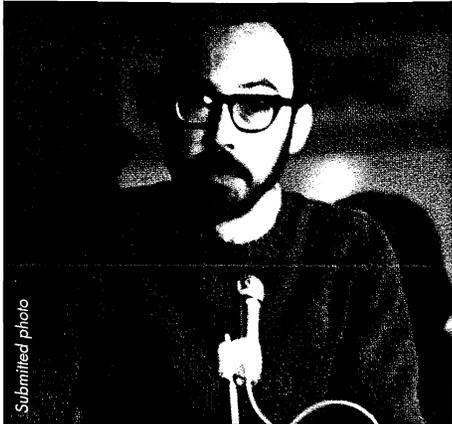




GOING FORWARD



Submitted photo

A new endowment honors the late Jim Goff's unstoppable drive.

He rode to the fields on his bicycle while others drove cars. He took pictures with a poor box camera. But lack of money couldn't stop Jim Goff from doing what he needed to do as a graduate student: complete his research in geography.

Goff eventually earned his doctorate in geography from the University of Illinois and served as a professor of geography at Minnesota State University, Mankato for thirty-six years. He retired in 2000, and he died in 2006. Today, in order to prevent another graduate student from struggling financially the way Jim did, his widow, Betty Goff, is donating \$100,000 to create the James F. Goff Geography Graduate Research Endowment.

The endowment honors a distinctive professor whose legacy lives in the memories of colleagues and former students alike.

In his uniform of jeans, a two-pocket shirt for his cigars and a cardigan, Goff taught a variety of classes, from urban geography to regional geomorphology. Former colleagues recall his distinctive forthrightness and dry humor. Bill Webster, a former dean of the College of Social and Behavioral Sciences, says, "I define a university professor as someone who thought otherwise. You could count on Jim to think otherwise."

It was thinking otherwise that allowed Goff to teach and inspire others despite his blindness, a result of the diabetes he'd battled since age fourteen. By thirty-

five, Goff had lost his sight completely. He eventually co-founded and led the regional Riverbend chapter of the National Federation of the Blind, and he refused to define or restrict himself as a result of his blindness. George Stoops, a former colleague, recalls that Goff "handled himself so well in the classroom that a student asked me after class, 'Is he really blind?'"

Goff regarded his disabilities as mere inconveniences, and he expected the same kind of drive and optimism from his students.

Lee Sampson, a work-study student who assisted Goff in the early 1980s, says, "when (Goff) found a student who had potential, he really wanted that student to live up to his abilities. He would make the extra effort of offering mentorship and assistance, sometimes to help the student define, or hone, what their goals should be."

Betty recalls the philosophy she and Jim shared. "Everybody deserves a little bit of a whimper," she says, "but after that, you have to make yourself go forward."

Goff did move forward, and in addition to his service as a teacher and mentor, he was nationally respected as a military geographer. He was also interested in war game design and incorporated it into his classroom teaching in order to help students think about tactics, maneuvering and strategy.

Branko Colakovic, professor of geography, says Goff "earned his sound reputation by excellent performance in the classroom and by doing research and other scholarly work." He adds that Goff

was capable and creative, and generated "ideas and solutions to deal with various educational and organizational issues."

Until his retirement in 2000, Goff also served the University as a member of boards and committees and served as chair of the Department of Geography for two terms. He was Geography Graduate Coordinator, an Arts and Science Task Force member, and a Section 504 Advisory Committee member.

Betty, a retired Minnesota State Mankato art professor, says she wanted to be sure the gift would help graduate students. They have less opportunity for financial help than undergraduates, she says, and they embody a certain focused drive and "fire in the belly."

Betty delights in telling about her husband's character and accomplishments. She also speaks of their travel, his love of animals, his phenomenal memory, camping and canoeing, and, of course, teaching. "Jim loved being a professor," she says. "He loved everything about it. It was just a way of life for him." The endowment will ensure that his passion and drive benefit students for generations to come. ♪

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