

MEMORIAL RESOLUTION
LYLE M. NELSON
(1918 - 1997)

Lyle M. Nelson, Thomas More Storke Professor of Communication Emeritus and Director Emeritus of the John S. Knight Fellowships for Professional Journalists, died of heart failure at his Stanford home on September 5, 1997, at the age of 79.

His contributions to Stanford were unusually wide-ranging – in teaching, in departmental and university administration, and in creation and directorship of professional journalism fellowships – for all of which he was honored at the 1984 commencement with the Kenneth M. Cuthbertson Award for Exceptional Service to Stanford.

Lyle took particular pride in the establishment of the mid-career sabbatical program for U.S. and international journalists, now known as the Knight Fellowships. He nurtured it, both programmatically and financially, and by the time of his retirement in 1985 had secured a permanent endowment for the program.

Lyle M. Nelson was born February 28, 1918, in Yamhill, Oregon. He received an A.B. degree in 1941 from the University of Oregon, where he edited the student newspaper and where he met Corrine Wignes, whom he married in October, 1941. He worked in university publications and as a reporter for the Oregon Journal in Portland. During World War II, he served as senior technical editor for the Army Ordnance Department in Washington, D.C., and then information officer for the Bureau of Reclamation in Washington and in Boise, Idaho.

In 1947, Lyle embarked on a nearly 40-year career in academia, when he became assistant to the president and associate professor of journalism at the University of Oregon. He left in 1953 to run the National Educational Television and Radio Center at the University of Michigan, the forerunner of today's Public Broadcasting Service. He went in 1955 to San Francisco State as assistant to the president, returned to Michigan in 1957 as vice president for university relations and professor of journalism, and arrived at Stanford in 1961.

At Stanford, Lyle continued his mix of administrative and academic service. Recruited by then president Wallace Sterling, Lyle came to the university as director of

university relations and served in that post for a decade. He gained fame as a master problem solver, often working behind the scenes and sharing the credit. He served as a strategist for several university presidents and was an unofficial but highly productive fund raiser during all his years at Stanford. Those who served with him in the early years recall his astuteness in dealing with political problems that plagued the university, his skill at enlisting allies to help accomplish a university goal, his wise advice to senior administration officials, his loyalty to those he served, his cheerfulness, and his generosity and thoughtfulness to his staff.

Upon his arrival, Lyle also began a longtime connection with the Department of Communication, serving first as lecturer and rising to professor of communication in 1969. He chaired the department in 1969-70 and again from 1972 to 1979. In 1973, he was appointed the first Thomas More Storke Professor of Communication.

His first love was bringing outstanding professional journalists to campus on fellowships. He took over the young program in 1969 and, with the assistance of managing director Harry Press, turned it into one of the premier journalism sabbatical programs in the nation.

Lyle believed strongly in the crucial role of journalism in society. He was convinced that by awarding accomplished journalists a year of Stanford study and reflection, free from deadline pressures, both they and the quality of journalism would be improved.

The professional journalism fellowships began in 1966 with a grant from the Ford Foundation, with selected U.S. print journalists coming to campus for one or two academic quarters. In 1973, Lyle secured funding for the program from the National Endowment for the Humanities. By then, the fellowships included broadcast journalists and journalists from other nations, and were expanded to a full academic year.

As the NEH support was coming to an end a decade later, Lyle obtained an endowment grant from the Knight Foundation, and the program was renamed in 1984 the John S. Knight Fellowships, after the late co-founder of the Knight (later Knight-Ridder) Newspapers.

The endowment covered only the 12 U.S. fellows, and in order to include half-dozen international journalists each year, Lyle nurtured relationships with the Reuter

Foundation of London (on whose board he served), the Asia Foundation, the Fulbright program, and others as supporters. This fit with his lifelong interest in international news media and freedom of information around the world.

With Stanford Professor Wilbur Schramm he had co-authored a study of the impact of television in American Samoa, he taught journalism as a visiting professor in Brazil and in Mexico, he chaired a United Nations study of television training in India, he consulted on the training of journalists in China and advised Beijing's English-language newspaper China Daily, and for three years he chaired the Fulbright program's Board of Foreign Scholarships.

After Lyle's retirement in 1986, he and Corrine continued their special interest in the international Knight Fellows, hosting them at their home and helping them make wise use of their Stanford year. In 1993, a group of former international fellows began a campaign to name one of the international fellowships for Lyle and Corrine. They raised seed money from international and U.S. alumni, and the Lyle and Corrine Nelson International Journalism Fellowship began in 1994. Since then the Knight Foundation and the Hewlett Foundation (on whose board Lyle served) have contributed generously to the Nelson fellowship, which to date has awarded fellowships to journalists from China, Hungary, Poland, and the Czech Republic.

Lyle was adamant in his beliefs concerning journalism standards and ethics and press freedom. "Journalism's practitioners must be imbued with the importance of social responsibility," he said in a 1975 speech. As director of university relations, he argued for full and honest reporting of events on campus, whether favorable to Stanford or not. He backed the Stanford Daily in its early 1970s resistance to a police raid on its photographic files.

Another lifelong interest was environmental conservation. Lyle was a longtime director of the California Nature Conservancy. He also served eight years on the national board of governors of The Nature Conservancy, and received the Conservancy's Oak Leaf Cluster, its highest national award, for outstanding service to conservation.

His many education-related posts included his appointment by President Johnson to serve as executive director of a White House Conference on Education in 1965. He received the Distinguished Service Award of the American College Public Relations

Association for his leadership of that conference. He'd received the same award in 1953 for successfully fighting imposition of loyalty oaths at Oregon colleges and universities.

Lyle received honorary doctorates from Linfield College in Oregon and from Mexico's Autonomous University of Guadalajara. His alma mater, the University of Oregon, honored him with its Distinguished Service Award.

"His attributes emerged in every field of endeavor," his longtime friend, Gordon Wright, emeritus professor of history, wrote in the program for Lyle's memorial service, held September 29, 1997, in Stanford Memorial Church. "Foremost was his abiding fairness, his readiness to challenge bigotry or the abuse of power in their various guises," Professor Wright wrote.

Tributes were delivered at the memorial service by Bob Beyers, former director of the Stanford News Service; James Bettinger, deputy director of the Knight Fellowships; former international Knight Fellows Celina Rodriguez of Mexico and Mariusz Ziomecki of Poland; Charles Walker, president emeritus of Linfield College; and Lyle's daughter, Dr. Lee Nelson of Seattle.

Lyle was famed for his wry humor, his penchant for poking fun at himself and others, and his bizarre sartorial sense. At a 1985 summer reunion of the Knight Fellowships program, held in conjunction with Lyle's retirement, scores of former fellows showed up to honor him. Rising from their seats in applause, they greeted him garbed in the flowered Hawaiian shirts and garish neckties that Lyle favored. Lyle was delighted.

His accomplishments and memory live on in the hearts and minds of some 600 former journalism fellows scattered around the world, his Stanford academic and administrative colleagues, and his family. The latter are: His wife of 55 years, Corrine Nelson of Stanford; two daughters, Dr. Lee Nelson of Seattle and Gayle Green of Portland; his sister, Leila Johnston of Norman, Okla.; and sons-in-law Joe Ryan of Seattle and Peter Green of Portland.

James V. Risser, Chair
Henry Breitrose