

Brother 'a gentleman'

AN EXTRAORDINARY LIFE

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By Denise M. Baran-Unland Special to the Herald News

Conjure up in your mind a traditional religious brother. Chances are it will not be lawyer and Lewis University English professor Brother Owen Meegan, a man with a kaleidoscope of interests and a knack for sharing them with other people.

"He had a real nose for the strange and the exotic and the idiosyncratic and the unusual," said Lewis University English professor Michael Cunningham. "I've known him for 35 years and he was very much a fun person to be with. He always wanted to look on the lighter side and was a very good storyteller; he had a good eye for detail. He enjoyed high culture -- he was a big fan of the opera -- but he also enjoyed going to baseball games and boxing matches. He was not stuffy.

"I think he was probably not the saintliest person in the traditional sense of the word, but he was a very moral person, a very conscientious person and a very responsible person that took a real delight in the world. He was a very curious guy -- a perpetual student -- and always seemed to be in the learning mode."

Owen was 65 when he died of cancer Dec. 29.

Although Owen grew up in a large, traditional Catholic family -- he was the second of six children -- he did not have any particular aspirations to religious life at that time said Owen's brother, Gene Meegan of Montana.

"My father went to Mass everyday from the time he was in sixth grade," Gene said. "Owen was a character, very witty, very brash; he kept you on your toes. But he went to De La Salle Institute in Chicago -- where my father had gone -- and became very inspired by the community. He liked the brothers and figured he'd give this a try."

Religious life apparently suited Owen. He was a De La Salle Christian Brother for 48 years. He entered the Novitiate of the Christian Brothers in 1959 and later studied at the University of Vienna, where he also taught. He enjoyed traveling, spoke fluent German, French and Italian and was a storehouse of information on art, history and architecture.

"He had a very different view of art," Gene said. "Certainly for me, an art museum was a place to be kind of quiet and reverent. Owen would say, 'Look at that piece of art. That guy painted it just to make some money, because that was popular.'"

Owen held a bachelor's and master's degrees from Saint Mary's College (now University) in Minnesota, a master's degree from the University of Detroit, a doctorate from Idaho State University and a Juris Doctorate from Loyola University in Chicago. Owen taught in Indiana and New York. He joined Lewis University in 1970 and was most recently a professor of English there, very dedicated to his students.

"He loved kids," Gene said. "He loved planting seeds in them and watching them bloom. He never raised his voice, was very animated in class and loved to tease. He never went to law school until he was close to 50, but he missed teaching and was able to get back into that and still practice law. He was a gentleman, very elegant, classy and polite. With his command of the English language, he could say so much and use very few words."

"He made every person feel special," said Gene's wife Marianne. "You could tell when he talked to you that he cared about you. He never demanded anything. He was not preachy, but his example was godlike."

If you would like to see someone featured in "An Extraordinary Life," contact Denise M. Baran-Unland at (815) 467-5249 or artemis279@aol.com.