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Preston taught at CSULB for more than 30 years

By Pamela Hale-Burns, Staff Writer
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LONG BEACH - Although Louis Preston Sr. was blind, he always saw the good in everyone.

"He was a peace maker. He always felt like every side could be happy and appeased, and that's what he always wanted to do," said his wife of 25 years Dr. Essie Preston, EDD. "He championed any cause that would make people better, and he manipulated across racial lines."

Louis Preston Sr. died Jan. 1. He was 74.

Known as an avid reader, Preston didn't let blindness stop him from doing what he loved.

"He loved books so much. He loved to read and although he was blind, we still got the Press-Telegram, Los Angeles Times and the Orange County Register and we probably get every magazine you could think of," said his wife.

He also listened to books on tape.

In 1990, Preston began to have visual problems, which was discovered to be uveitis, a rare eye disease which causes blindness.

For the Prestons, reading was a favorite family pastime.

"He loved bookstores. We always went to bookstores for Christmas and everybody got books. Our children read a lot. My daughter is an avid reader," Essie Preston said.

Today the Prestons' 22-year-old daughter Rachel has earned a master's degree in education from Hampton University in Virginia and is a teacher, and their 20-year-old son, Louis Jr. is a junior at Hampton.

"Their dad was very smart. He had two full scholarships to Texas Southern University in Houston, one in engineering and one in music, and he selected music," Essie Preston said.

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He was very respected and loved in his educational circle.

"He was the type of person who, when I'd come home, he'd have the whole Board of Trustees sitting up in the house, feet up on the table," said his wife. "I would try to put on a front, but for him, people were people, and he had that kind of comfort zone."

Preston was a busy man, before and after he lost his sight, which made it hard for his wife to recall exactly when he went completely blind.

"Even though he lost his sight, he was still active," said his wife.

"I truly admired how he handled his blindness. He was busier and more active than ever," said longtime friend Marilee Cofield. "His philosophy was 'the best protector a person can have is courage.'"



Louis Preston Sr.

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Preston was active in many organizations including the NAACP, the Braille Institute and Toastmasters. He was also a licensed family and marriage counselor.

"Louis Preston, (Sr.) and I have been close friends since 1973 when we were both students at USC," said Cofield. "As a classmate, he was witty, encouraging, challenging, and a problem solver. In adversarial situations, such as divorce or relationship conflicts, he handled things in such a way that a person's dignity was respected."

When he lost his sight, he continued to serve students and to affiliate with organizations that advocated for students and adults with disabilities.

"I hear stories all the time of students who say they would never have graduated from college if it wasn't for him," said his wife. "He gets calls today from former students in Africa and Japan."

"He was caring and is responsible for a lot of people graduating from Cal State Long Beach," she said. "He was a motivator, a good listener, and he believed that anybody could achieve their goals; all they needed was a motivator, someone to believe in them and to encourage them."

Preston was also very committed to his family.

"He was a dedicated family man. We did everything together," said his wife. "Since he was blind I had to take him to work, so we were always together. Whatever he was involved in we were involved in it."

Daughter Rachel said, "I received my love for music from my father. He loved all types of music, especially jazz and gospel. I see a lot of his great qualities in me and Louis, Jr."

Preston's kindness made it impossible for him to deny help to anyone.

"He was very unselfish and compassionate. People would have their hand out begging for something, I wouldn't give it to them, but he would," his wife said. "He was also very into his faith and had a strong religious faith."

He was a giant of a person with a modest demeanor, said his wife.

Preston is survived by his wife, Essie French-Preston; his daughter Rachel; son, Louis Jr.; his mother-in-law Dannie French of Prichard, Ala., his sister-in-law Claudie (Keith) Brewer and several other relatives and friends.

Funeral services are 10 a.m. Saturday at New Hope Baptist Church, 1160 New York St., Long Beach. Burial will be at Forest Lawn Cypress.

The Association of Multicultural Rehabilitation Concerns has set up a fund in Preston's name. In lieu of flowers, donations can be sent to: Louis A. Preston Scholarship Fund, c/o Wells Fargo Bank, 2096 N. Bellflower, Long Beach, CA 90815, Attn: Taz Business Specialist.

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