

'Camp David of the West'

# Professor finds harmony at La Casa

By SUSAN BERRYHILL

A professor who has achieved national attention for helping students understand America's unfinished Vietnam War also played a vital role at Montecito's "Camp David of the West."

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impact; more than 900 students enroll each year. It has drawn national media attention for several years and is scheduled to be featured on CBS' "60 Minutes" program this fall.

Capps joined UCSB's faculty 23 years ago at the time when the country was bitterly divided over the Vietnam conflict. While "doves and hawks" debated the morality of American intervention in Southeast Asia, religious leaders were questioning their own relevance.

La Casa de Maria, Montecito's Catholic training center was no exception. "I think I was drawn to La Casa because I knew there was a story there," said Capps of his attraction to La Casa de Maria in the mid-'60s.

The story centered around a controversial move on the part of the Catholic nuns. Affected by the counterculture of the times, the sisters were looking for ways to become more involved in the world.

Led by Anita Caspary, they decided to break away from the tradition of nuns in habits serving primarily as teachers and nurses.

Their idea was vehemently opposed, however, by the archbishop in Los Angeles. So the sisters formed a lay group and developed a center open to all religions at La Casa. And Walter Capps served as the first "non-nun" on the governing board in 1969.

The ecumenical nature of the facility closely fit Capps' own religious philosophy. Describing UCSB's hospitable intellectual climate, Capps said, "The contact between Eastern and Western religions is a reality here. We don't hear about a Buddhist as somebody who is far, far away. Muslims, too. Other religious traditions are very much in evidence here."

The lack of bias at both institutions also appealed to Capps. "I wanted to be able to speak in a place where people wouldn't be able to stereotype you, saying that because you were one religion or one ethnic background, you think one particular way."

La Casa was a special place for him, Capps said. "It was a place where I could go with my family and talk with people who had interests like mine in religion and the vitality of our social life."

He saw it as "kind of a magnet for folks who were thinking about how the counterculture was affecting sensibilities on college campuses." Capps often spent evenings at the retreat conversing with guests such as psychologist Erik Erikson, Daniel and Philip Berrigan, Trappist monk Thomas Merton and artist Carrita Kent.

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"This made all kinds of sense," Capps said, recalling a conversation he had had with former President Jimmy Carter. Referring to the Mideast peace accords reached at Camp David during his



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term in office, Carter told Capps why he selected that location:

"He said he deliberately and consciously wanted to tap the resources of that monastic environment because he knew the religious traditions represented there meant a great deal to the three principal negotiators. Carter recognized the Islamic tradition meant as much to Sadat as Christianity meant to him and as Judaism meant to Begin. So he

thought if he could get those three people in a place where they could draw on the resources of the environment, the peace process would be aided.

"Carter even ventured that perhaps the agreement would not have been reached had the meeting not been held at Camp David."

Although there have been no celebrated international peace negotiations at La Casa, a lot of people have found peace there, Capps said.

"It's a place out of place," he said. "And it creates a perspective that becomes more and more necessary."

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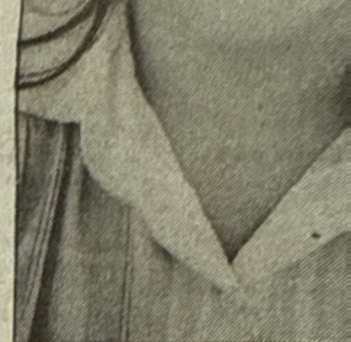




Sowande Lawson, Main School fourth-grader: "I went to New York and New Jersey, and I was going to go to Washington, D.C. I visited my godfather, my grandmother and my aunts."



James Casvant, Montecito Union third-grader: "Nothing really. I used to live in Maine and I took a trip in a motor home from Main to California. It took five days, but it went by real fast."



Sara Cordero, M fourth-grader: "I we sha, Wisconsin. I cousins and my gran aunts. I also got my t

## CAPPS FROM PAGE 3

### Vietnam Course

Perspective is a key ingredient in Capps' Vietnam course.

Beginning as a history class with 40 students, the class has become almost a UCSB ritual, according to campus spokeswoman Joan Magruder. Combat veterans are the backbone of the class, she says; they sit often in uniform on the stage and engage in dialogue with the audience.

"Even with a thousand students, the class has an intimate, small class feeling," Magruder said. "Capps has an amazing ability to provide structure and at the same time he keeps it fluid." War correspondents, nurses, and boat people have all contributed to the class.

Calling it living history, Magruder says things happen unexpectedly, like when CBS journalist Ed Bradley came to cover the class for "60 Minutes" and wound up sharing his own Vietnam experiences.

This year, Capps plans to focus

on the Vietnamese people themselves and what's happened to them since the war. He also plans to have women who are involved in putting together a women's Vietnam memorial come and speak to the class. Capps has also invited the producer and cast from a new CBS program, "Tour of Duty," to share their thoughts about how being involved in the show has affected them.

Capps is serving as a consultant to the Vietnam equivalent of "Mash," which is scheduled to air this fall.

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