



IN MEMORIAM

Merton C. Flom
Professor of Optometry and Vision Science
UC Berkeley
1926 – 2010

Merton Clyde Flom, 83, of Tucson, Arizona, passed away February 14, 2010, of heart failure. Born August 19, 1926, in Pittsburgh, Pennsylvania, to Samuel Jacob and Marie Flom, Mert moved to the west coast with his family when he was 10. He graduated from Los Angeles High School, served in the Navy in World War II (in Guam), and attended the University of California, Los Angeles, and the University of California, Berkeley, ultimately receiving an optometry degree and both an M.S. and Ph.D. degree in vision science.

At Berkeley, Mert received support from an Ezell Fellowship and a grant from the American Academy of Optometry. The first faculty member in optometry at UC Berkeley to receive funding from the National Institutes of Health (NIH), he continued to receive NIH support for 25 years, primarily for his research on binocular vision, strabismus, and amblyopia. He was at Berkeley as a clinical instructor from 1951 to 1957, and as a faculty member (professorial series) from 1958 to 1982. During his 31 years of teaching at Berkeley (1951-1982), Mert indulged his passion for teaching as an instructor for vision science and clinical optometry courses. Known as a superb educator and mentor of graduate students, Mert also cared for patients in teaching clinics and private practice. He was chief of the Binocular Vision Clinic from 1951 to 1980, chaired the Ph.D. program in physiological optics from 1967 to 1971, and was assistant dean of the School of Optometry from 1969 to 1972. After he left Berkeley, a teaching award was established in his name. In 1982, he accepted an opportunity at the University of Houston to develop the graduate program at their College of Optometry, where he served both as associate dean (1982-1990) and as dean (1990-1991).

In 2006, Mert was elected to optometry's national hall of fame, at which time he noted, "being elected to the National Optometry Hall of Fame has a deep meaning to me. Virtually my entire adult life has been dedicated to optometry. My teaching, my research, my administrative efforts, my professional accomplishments, my optometric practice, my political activities — all have been driven by a quest to improve the quality of our profession and the care we provide our patients."

Leadership studies and the application of leadership were a focus of Mert's academic life. Active as a fellow of the American Academy of Optometry, Mert was editor of the academy's journal and chair of that journal's editorial council; he also served on the academy's executive council for 16 years and as president for two years. Mert's consuming interest in developing new leaders led to the academy's Leadership InSight program. In 2010, the American Academy of Optometry renamed the program, in his honor, as the "Merton C. Flom Leadership InSight Program".

Recognitions from the American Academy of Optometry included fellowship; honorary diplomate of the Section on Binocular Vision, Perception, and Pediatric Optometry; Eminent Service Award; Prentice Medal for distinguished research in vision science; and life membership. Mert received an honorary doctorate from

the State University of New York; the Glenn Fry Medal from the Ohio State University; and Alumnus of the Year and the inaugural Mert Flom Teaching Award from the UC Berkeley Optometry Alumni Association. He was also inducted into Berkeley Optometry's Hall of Fame. The Merton Flom Ezell Fellowship Fund was established in his honor by the American Optometric Foundation to support training in vision science and leadership,

After retiring to Tucson in 2002, Mert enjoyed presenting occasional lectures, publishing his research, and viewing the Catalina Mountains outside his window.

Qualities that epitomized Mert were his ability to engage instantly with new people, his insatiable curiosity, and his energy for investigating and exploring ideas with colleagues, family, and almost everyone he met. He is remembered for his love of food, jazz, and animals, his keen focus, his championing of "underdogs," his commitment to social justice, his generosity in teaching and mentoring, and his ultimate optimism.

Mert is survived by wife Penelope Kegel Flom; sister Patricia; son Walter Flom of Phoenix, Arizona; daughter Roanne Flom of Columbus, Ohio; daughter Caitlin Flom of Berkeley, California; daughter Megan Flom of Lewisville, Texas; and grandchildren Zachary Flom, Hannah Fadenrecht, and Alexa Raasch.

Anthony J. Adams
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