Farewell to my dear colleague and friend Flore Zephir

Good morning! I feel honored that Bambi has asked me to say a few words this morning. No person in my professional life and probably in the life of most of my colleagues in Romance Languages has had the positive impact Flore Zephir had.

Like most of us gathered here today, I met Flore at the University of Missouri. My husband and I joined MU in 1989, one year after Flore and Bambi had arrived. Her office was adjacent to mine on the 2nd floor of the Arts & Science building. We instantly became lifetime friends. Our friendship was consolidated through our children, Bambi and our son Nicholas. They were classmates for 10 years. Then they went their separate ways to college.

Flore was a rare gem with wisdom beyond her age and experience. With great sense of humor, she would call herself “a wise old owl”.

She had a uniquely deep understanding of the human condition and, regardless of differences, she was always willing to help her faculty, the students, and whomever needed assistance. Whenever she saw potential, she would foster its emergence. She encouraged and highlighted the best in each individual and genuinely celebrated everyone’s accomplishments and successes.

Flore quietly and humbly practiced the rare art of complete selflessness and transparency. She was a problem-solver who could diffuse all conflicts and would find Salomonic solutions to the most complicated of situations.

Flore created and nurtured a peaceful and safe work environment. It was a joy coming to work!

She touched so many lives. She projected a protective umbrella over family, friends and colleagues. Her departure leaves us with profound grief, a feeling of void, and an unsettling sense of orphanhood.

When my mother passed away some time ago, a friend shared a Japanese tradition with me, something I have never forgotten. I wish to share her wisdom with all of you, but especially you, Bambi. According to this Japanese tradition: no one is completely gone while there is someone who knew and remembers that person.

Flore was a tireless leader of the highest human quality and integrity. She possessed a sense of mission:

- in the midst of problems, she would bring solutions;
- in the midst of injustice, she would bring fairness;
- in the midst of chaos, she would bring order and calm;
- in the midst of disrespect, she would bring civility; and
- in the midst of suffering, she would bring compassion.

Wherever she appeared, a bright light of caring and decency emerged.

Flore came to this world to leave it a better place… and we know she did.

She leaves behind a legacy of generosity, inclusiveness, harmony, justice, and humanity. None of us will forget it. Personally when facing a difficult situation, I will ask myself--and I have already done it: “What would Flore have done here?”

19th century English writer Albert Pines must have anticipated our Flore when he wrote: “What we do for ourselves dies with us. What we do for others and the world remains and is immortal.”

My dear Flore, I am so grateful to have known you.
and to have been your friend.
I already miss you terribly … May you rest in peace.

Juanamaría Cordones-Cook
Columbia, Missouri, December 22, 2017