



Moon recalled as healthy fisherman

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BARRYTOWN — When Sun Myung Moon, founder of the Unification Church, died in South Korea early Monday, the religion's main international seminary in Red Hook lost a leader.

The Unification Theological Seminary in Barrytown was founded in 1975 by Moon, who died from complications from pneumonia in Gapyeong at age 92. The seminary's campus, which has an extension in midtown Manhattan, rests on 250 rural acres not far from Bard College.

Keisuke Noda, a philosophy professor at the Barrytown seminary who spent much time with Moon, said that despite the leader's age, news of his death came as a shock.

"His health was really good and he had incredible stamina," Noda, a Germantown resident, said over the phone Monday. "I thought he would make 100 years old, 120 even, that was my feeling."

Noda said he joined the Unification Church movement when he was a freshman in college in Japan in 1970. Five years later, Noda married his wife Chiyo in an arranged mass wedding of about 1,800 couples in Seoul, South Korea. Noda said Moon personally arranged the wedding of the couple — still married 32 years later. "It worked out very well," Noda said. Moon, he added, had very good judgment.

Over the years, Noda spent many days fishing with the leader of his religion, which has beliefs based on the Bible and is known for its mass weddings and business deals.

Noda said he and Moon often fished New York Harbor and the Hudson River for striped bass when the leader was in the U.S.

"He doesn't speak at all on the boat," Noda said. "It's more like meditation time ... It's not a party kind of feeling. He meditates on the boat for hours and hours." The world-famous religious leader, who made friends with U.S. presidents, was also set apart as a fisherman, Noda said, because he would fish regardless of terrible weather conditions.

The seminary professor called Moon a father figure regarded nearly as a disciple by his followers. He was quiet, but "built the church on his charisma."

As surprising as the death was, Noda said, Moon's followers see his passing not as a tragedy.

"It's not a sad thing, it's kind of a rebirth from our point of view," he said. "We see a kind of perfection or maturity of human life, a natural process — going to the spirit world is another birth."

Funerals in the Unification Church, Noda said, are celebratory, focused on "delightful holy songs" rather than wearing black and mourning.

Perhaps one of the things Noda will remember most about the leader who blessed his wedding and became a fishing buddy is the way Moon spoke to regular people exactly the same way as he spoke to dignitaries.

"That's an amazing thing," Noda said. "He never changes his attitudes and his stance. The man remains the same."