

**Memorial Minute for Iole Fiorillo Magri**, written by Giovanna Bellesia and Victoria Poletto  
**Read by Giovanna Bellesia at the December 13, 2017 Faculty Meeting**

Iole Fiorillo was born in a small southern Italian village in 1920. Two years after the devastation of World War I, and two years before Mussolini's rise to power. She grew up during the Fascist Dictatorship, a regime that subjugated the private lives of citizens to the demands of the State, and valued women exclusively as wives and mothers. Iole defied these stereotypes: she did not marry young, continued to study and in 1947, three years after the end of World War II, received a Doctorate in Modern Languages and Literatures from the prestigious Catholic University of Milan. In 1953, she won a Fulbright Scholarship – one of the first women to do so - to study at Mount Holyoke College where she completed a Master's degree in 1955.

When she arrived in South Hadley, she was interviewed by the local television station. Mario Magri, the son of Italian immigrants who lived in Holyoke, was so impressed with the interview that apparently, he announced "that is the woman I want to marry," and he did. Iole felt at home having married into the Magri family, though she missed her family in Italy with whom she kept close ties and visited as often as possible. She went on to teach Italian at Mt. Holyoke for ten years before coming to Smith in 1965 where she remained until she retired in 1990. She also taught several times at the Middlebury Summer School.

She was a true pioneer, filled with courage, curiosity, and a passion to learn and teach. She had a particular gift for directing and motivating students to learn and to appreciate Italian language and culture. Iole inspired not only Smith students, but also those from area colleges. At her memorial service on October 21st, a former student from Amherst College spoke in glowing terms of her lifelong influence both on him and other students.

Not only was Iole's influence felt in the classroom but also outside of it. Invited to her home on Henshaw Avenue, students learned to appreciate and prepare Italian dishes with beautiful operatic melodies in the background. She directed the Smith JYA program in Florence many times and was instrumental in encouraging students to experience all aspects of Italian life and culture, and to instill in them a lasting love of Italy.

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Her interest in the younger generations saw her mentoring junior faculty members decades before mentoring became an official College policy. She also became the resident nonna for all of the children in the Italian Department.

She focused her scholarly work on studying and helping to disseminate the works of many Italian XX century writers. She periodically contributed appraisals of Italian contemporary novels and biographies for the Atlantic Monthly Press in Boston and translated widely. She published books, articles, and interviewed many important writers including Ungaretti, Montale, and – her favorite - Sicilian author Leonardo Sciascia.

Iole admired how Sciascia sought to reveal the intrinsic relation between literature and politics and how he embodied the idea that an artist is both a cultural product and a formulator of culture, that literature releases and stimulates dynamic forces in society. Iole treasured the tradition of political activism of our Italian Department started by Professor Michele Cantarella who, in the 1930s and '40s actively fought Fascist propaganda in the US from our campus.

Her last years were spent between her home in Rome and the one in NYC. In both places she continued to teach, translate, and enjoy life to the fullest while encouraging her daughter, Pina, in her pursuit of her career as a singer and a teacher.

For all the years that she lived here in America and in spite of the great love she bore this country, Iole always remained profoundly Italian. She resembled actress Giulietta Masina, Federico Fellini's wife, and like a character out of a Fellini movie, we will always remember her diminutive figure hurrying across campus, smiling at colleagues and dispensing advice to the inevitable student following in her tracks.

So, with fond memories we say: *arrivederci Iole e grazie!* We will miss you