

Memorial Minute for Patricia Weed
Read by Martine Gantrel, Faculty Meeting February 20, 2013

Patricia Weed, Professor Emerita of French Language and Literature, died after a very brief illness on January 2nd, 2013. A Smith alum, class of 1953, Trish held a Masters Degree from Middlebury and a Ph.D. from Yale University. She started her teaching career at Wellesley College where she stayed for three years, then came to Smith in 1962. She retired from the Smith faculty in 1997 after 35 years.

A specialist in seventeenth-century French literature, Trish wrote on authors such as La Fontaine, Mme de Sévigné and the Duke of Saint-Simon. She had an intimate knowledge not only of the period but of its language. As her older colleagues in the FRN department fondly remember, Trish was known for being an ebullient speaker who took great pleasure in using in her speech old words or phrases of the kind that one could only imagine was last heard at the court of Louis the fourteenth! Her love of France, of its language and its culture was infectious. Her contributions to the diffusion and transmission of French culture both as a teacher and as an individual (one year, she participated in the restoration of Notre-Dame cathedral in Paris) were officially recognized in 1981 when the French government bestowed on her the *Palmes Académiques*.

As a teacher, Trish is remembered for her lively personality, her sense of humor and her love of her subject. She taught both language and literature, and devoted a good part of each day to preparing meticulously for her classes. One still remembers how expertly Trish used to organize the many color-coded grammar and phonetics exercise sheets that were used in beginning French—in those days the course met six times a week, Monday through Friday and twice on Wednesdays! Trish also loved to teach the senior seminar that served as a capstone for the French majors, especially when she was just back from directing the Smith JYA program in Paris and could continue to see the progress her students had made while overseas.

The Paris program held a very special place in her heart. As she writes in her Alumnae profile, “Smith Junior Year in France played a major role in my life.” In part, it was because as a student she too had gone to Paris on the Smith program. But, more significantly, Trish recognized and cherished the special bond that taking a group of twenty-one year olds to a foreign country and seeing them grow and blossom in their new environment inevitably creates between a director and her students. In the same profile, she writes: “Junior year directors have an often close relationship with members of the group. We see them on excursions, in their host families as well as in the office; many of us invite them to dinner at home. This often creates friendships which last, sustained by letters, meals in New York or Paris, and class reunions in Northampton. It has been wonderful to follow the careers of many ‘anciennes de Paris’!”

While at Smith, Trish directed the Paris program eight times, first in 1965-66 and last just before her retirement in 1996-97. It is actually on one of these occasions that I met Trish for the first time. I was a candidate for the position of the *École Normale Supérieure* lecturer in the French department and Trish, who was the director of the Paris program that year, was to interview me. We met over dinner. The fare was simple and the conversation pleasant and casual. Then Trish

Memorial Minute for Patricia Weed
Read by Martine Gantrel, Faculty Meeting February 20, 2013

rose from her chair and, to my surprise, bade me good-bye. The French in me had not realized that the dinner *was* the interview!

Besides her role in the department of French Language and Literature, Trish also served the College in many important administrative functions: she sat on numerous committees, was Chair of her department and served as secretary of the Faculty. After her retirement, she became very active in the Northampton community where she devoted herself to the Pioneer Valley chapter of Habitat for Humanity and the Northampton Survival Center.

Trish loved the opera and was a regular at the Met in New York. In fact, she was there at the end of December, only a few days before her death. She loved Scotch, chocolate, BLT sandwiches and... whistling! She loved fixing things, especially buildings. And she loved arguing with her colleague Jo Ott, who was a Wellesley alum, about whether the Smith or the Wellesley campus was more beautiful. Bad weather in particular was a great motivator for Trish. On campus, she particularly enjoyed the days when the snow was falling very hard. And in France, Trish was known for lecturing enthusiastically about classical architecture and seventeenth-century garden design, and *never, never* allowing the cold or the rain to interfere with her lesson plan.

Trish also loved poetry and, as the campus is covered with snow, I would like to conclude by quoting one of her all-time favorites, the French poet and Nobel prize Saint-John Perse, whose poem, "Snows" (in the plural) was published in 1944:

"And it was at morning, beneath the gray salt of dawn, a little before the sixth hour, like in a fortuitous haven, a place of grace and of mercy for releasing the swarms of the great ode of silence" (tr. Denis Devlin)

[*"Et ce fut au matin, sous le gel gris de l'aube, un peu avant la sixième heure, comme en un havre de fortune, un lieu de grâce et de merci où licencier l'essaim des grandes odes du silence."*]

Martine Gantrel
for the Department of French Studies