

Rena Anna Lamparska Funeral Mass, October 23, 2018

My dear friend Rena was a woman whose life spanned 3 countries, 3 cultures, was rich and various enough to have filled 3 lives.

She grew up in Poland, and lived through the second world war, the German occupation, the siege of Warsaw. Those events affected her family profoundly – her brother went into exile and her father died as a result of these hardships. She grew up in a Stalinist state. And yet she persisted.

She got a law degree from the University of Wroclaw, and she would later return often to Poland to give talks as a visiting scholar. She married, had her dear son John, made a career, which was difficult if you refused, as she and her husband both did, to join the Communist party. One day her husband came home from work after having been threatened with trumped up charges. He told her, “We have no future here.” She, like her brother, was forced to go into exile. She and John found their way to Italy.

There, she learned the language, made life-long friendships, came to love and identify with the Italian language and culture. After several years in Italy, she and John left for the United States, where her brother had already settled. She and John eventually moved to Alliance College in Pennsylvania, where she entered her second career as an academic librarian. Her love for academic study, for Italian language and literature, pushed her to apply in her 40s to a doctoral program in Italian languages and literatures at Harvard University, where she excelled and thrived. Yet again, she persisted.

I remember her sitting one Sunday afternoon in the lounge of our dormitory, reading a book for her 18th century Italian literature class. She was curled in an easy chair, with a reading lamp above her, her reading glasses on, a glass of hot tea next to her and a piece of bread with cheese and avocado in her hand. She sighed, looked at me and said, “Life is beautiful!” And so it was.

Her dissertation, on Vico and Stanislaw Brzozowski, allowed her to bring her two cultures together in a major study later published as a monograph.

When she graduated with her Ph.D., she was offered a faculty position at Boston College, where she made her career. She was a wonderful teacher both at Harvard and at Boston College. I remember her once at a literature conference in Boston sitting at lunch surrounded by her students. Her joy and theirs at being in each others' company was visible from across the dining room.

Her books, conference papers, the major international conference she organized on Pirandello all made her a significant figure in the field of Italian Studies and made major contributions to Italian culture. For her work she was recognized by the Italian government with the honor of Stella della Solidarieta` Italiana.

I share constantly with others Rena's "Book of Wisdom," gleaned from a life richly engaged and explored.

Once when I asked her why someone was acting so strangely with me, she looked at me, sighed, and said, "Oh, Christine, we never have enough information to know why anyone does anything." It's a mantra I repeat and accept now.

This is Rena. Her life was not always easy. She was sensitive, could be buffeted, but could never be broken. In her frame there was steel. She was able to live between 3 countries and 3 cultures, and ended up with 3 homelands, each of which she loved. In the final accounting, her life was always rich and full of event, change, movement.

She persisted, and with grace, charm, beauty.