In Memoriam: Elaine Dates, 1972-2014

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Recommended Citation
Available at: https://crossworks.holycross.edu/necj/vol42/iss2/12

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Elaine Dates, or “Lainie” as many knew her, died on Nov. 18, 2014, aged 72, in Shelburne, Vermont. She graduated from the University of Vermont in 1964, went on to receive a Masters from Wayne State University, and taught at Burlington High School from 1972 until 1998. She taught Latin to a generation of students in Burlington, and did so with learning, sanity, imagination, and irreverence. Her classroom was filled with art and even Latin graffiti; as one former student put it, she was not afraid of the chaos of discovery. She was the colleague who could be counted on to take students to Italy, teach Advanced Placement as an overload, or help build a catapult.

She was active in the Vermont Classical Language Association, Vermont Council on the Humanities, Vermont Foreign Languages Association, Northeast Conference of Foreign Languages, the American Classical League, and served CANE in many capacities. She received the University of Vermont’s Outstanding Teacher Award, the American Association of University Women’s Vermont Teacher of the Year Award, and a Rockefeller Fellowship to study Etruscan Art in Italy. For many years, she and her husband Steve took groups of students to Italy—something she was comfortable doing, because along the way she had earned a masters degree in Italian from Middlebury and spent a year at the University of Florence.

In fact her interests and abilities were extraordinarily broad. One should note the fact that she and her partner were the nationally top-seeded debate team at the National Debate Tournament in 1964, and she was a successful debate coach at Burlington High for many years. But as stimulating as teaching was, she would not be limited by it. After thirty-four years in the classroom, she was one of a number of teachers who took sleeping bags to camp out at the school administration building in order to take advantage of an early retirement package. This meant, for her, being able to embark on a new set of interests. Four years of training led her to become a National Garden Club Accredited Judge. She served on the boards of trustees of various libraries in Vermont. And she continued to attend CANE and travel to Italy. All of this activity surely explains her success as a teacher: it is the ability to tap into what’s outside of the classroom that makes it interesting.

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