

Celebrating Olive Lorsignol





Preface

How this document came to be

News of Olive's death, on March 29, 2017, seemed to come out of the blue for most of us. She knew her cancer had returned, and she was extremely discreet about it—allowing a very, very few people to know.

Thus, the fact of her passing was terrible and unthinkable in itself, and the suddenness of it was an additional shock.

After living in France for twenty years, my husband and I moved back to the US in 2000. Since then, we visit France often and have remained very attached to the people we know and love there—including, of course, Olive.

So there I was, in Seattle, Washington, stunned and trying to come to grips with this devastating news. With the exception of my husband who knew Olive well, I was alone in this grief and loss.

I realized that being with others in Paris who knew and loved Olive as I did would help to ease the pain.

Through email and telephone calls I learned that several of Olive's friends felt the same way—especially Berna Huebner who generously offered her apartment as a venue for a gathering to celebrate Olive.

Julia Fainsilber agreed to receive the RSVPs. With that, we set a date and put out the word inviting Olive's friends and colleagues to come together to share memories about Olive and to talk about how she had touched their lives.

On May 29, 2017, over forty people gathered, and it was glorious. Some were there through the Smith Club, others were from WICE, others from AAWE. A number of them spoke; some did not. Either way, each person contributed to our expanding appreciation of Olive.

That day, Berna's light-filled apartment brimmed over with warm memories and full hearts. Many of us felt as if Olive were very close by. Simply the fact that we were there together thinking and



Celebrating Olive at Berna's, May 29, 2017

talking about Olive was a source of comfort and a reminder of how many lives she touched in so many different ways.

About halfway into the evening, it was suggested that a good way to mark the occasion would be to set down in writing the remarks and memories that were shared.

This compilation represents the best efforts of Berna, Shana Henze, Josh O'Donovan and me to do just that.

Many tributes were submitted. Some are from those who weren't able to be at the May 29th gathering. Others are from friends of Olive who heard about this project later and wanted to contribute.

Photos and reproductions of other memorabilia are included too. We tried to collect as much material as we could. Shana and I worked as a team to organize all of this into a coherent whole. Olive was very much with us in spirit.

Many thanks to Julia Fainsilber and Ann Leprêtre. We all wish to acknowledge and thank Josh O'Donovan for her magical and marvelous mastery of computer software and her incredible patience.

Michael Adler

Tribute given by Sally Benoist at the memorial service for Olive, May 2, 2017

J'ai eu le très grand bonheur d'avoir Olivia Lorsignol comme amie pendant 50 ans.

Dans les années 60, aux Etats-Unis, quand Ruth Gibson m'a parlé de sa fille qui, comme moi, avait épousé un Français et habitait Paris, j'étais persuadée qu'il s'agissait de quelqu'un d'exceptionnel, et je ne me suis pas trompée.

Nous nous sommes rencontrées, avec nos maris français et nos enfants franco-américains, et nous ne nous sommes plus quittées.

C'est par Olive que j'ai connu la jeune association, AAWÉ, qui a tant compté dans sa vie et aussi dans la mienne. Cette association la pleure maintenant, et plus d'une cinquantaine de ses membres ont spontanément exprimé leur admiration et affection pour Olive. En voici quelques extraits :

- Olive was a pillar of our Franco-American community : a source of sage and measured advice ;
- She represented everything good about AAWÉ ;
- She was always the champion of new ideas and activities ;
- She was great fun to be with and to work with ;
- Her charm, warmth, vision, generosity and wisdom ;
- Always moving forward with ideas, energy, persistence and care ;
- She left this world her way – with great dignity and, as always, with concern for others.

Olive a également laissé sa trace au delà de AAWWE, en s'engageant avec WICE et AARO où les membres se tournaient spontanément vers elle, à la recherche de ses idées et ses sages conseils.

En 1997, elle a reçu le ACA Award, avec la mention suivante :

"We in the Paris area owe much to Olive, who with her good judgement, gentle persistence, intelligence and grace, is and has been a powerful catalyst for worthwhile change. She has spent a lifetime moving mountains – project by project – for the benefit of the American community in Paris and beyond it."

Elle a constamment cherché de nouvelles voies pour faciliter et enrichir nos vies, le fil conducteur de ses démarches étant la recherche du bien-être de son prochain. Ses démarches touchaient aussi bien les domaines de l'éducation que ceux des droits civiques, des problèmes propres aux personnes âgées et aux plus jeunes. Sa vision était large et sans restriction aucune.

Cette vie, tant consacrée aux autres, ne sera jamais oubliée. J'adresse à Eric et à ses enfants et petits-enfants au nom de AAWWE et de ma propre famille, toute notre affection et notre très grande sympathie.



What Olive Meant to Us

BERNA HUEBNER: It is an honor to pay tribute to our dear and devoted friend Olive Lorsignol. She played a big role in our project, a film entitled “I Remember Better When I Paint,” by organizing many screenings of the film and launching projects to reach out to American residents of the Paris area who are living with age-related dementia. In a press release she wrote, “The AAWE, in partnership with various American groups around Paris, is launching a pilot program to train art therapists and place them with American Alzheimer’s patients throughout Paris.

“The project is to actualize the film’s agenda: emphasizing the remarkable role that the arts can play in raising the standard of life for those living with Alzheimer’s.” She quoted from our film that “only 1 in 10 retirement homes in the US meets federal standards due to a lack of funding,” and she asked if the film’s premise — namely, that arts therapy should be used with Alzheimer’s patients — could ever be executed in the real world. She thought AAWE could help initiate this endeavor.

Under her guidance and wisdom Olive and I were able to help some people. We can count our blessings that Olive cared so much for all of us.

PAT TROCMÉ: Olive came into my life in many ways: AAWE, later the Seniors group, and sometimes sketching outings; and once when I had a horrible operation and asked to have no visitors, Olive, of course, came anyway with the most glorious hydrangea in a big pot! Also the Smith Club; and we both had married French Protestants and often went to the same church. When, after 60 years of marriage my husband died, I was grief-stricken. Wondering if I would ever have the courage to go out alone (this was a year before John G. Morris and I fell in love seven years ago!), and knowing that a very special production of Tristan and Isolde was coming to an end, I phoned the Opera Bastille and was told that there was ONE seat left, in the front row! During the first intermission I forlornly wandered around until I bumped into Olive and Eric who invited me to meet them for champagne in the next intermission! I did, and the joy of it started me on a new and wonderful life. I know that Olive's presence, like that of my late husband and all the many people I have loved in this long life (I am almost 92) will always be with me...with all of us who appreciated her unique qualities.

SALLY BENOIST: Olive would call me and say, "Sally, listen..." and I knew she had come up with a new idea or project. Lois Beaudet told me that Olive also called her when she had a new project in mind. So we realized that Olive probably chose the person she considered best suited for the job, and would try to enroll her. In 1988 Olive had an operation. Before visiting her, I picked some flowers from my garden and made a bouquet for her. Olive then asked Eric to bring her set of watercolors to the hospital, and she did those lovely watercolors of my bouquet from her hospital bed. Later she sent me a pen and ink drawing of their house in the country, with a note on the back urging us to visit them again. She wrote, "To a friend's house, the road is never long."



Olive's sketch of her country home at Mas La Croix, in the Dordogne valley

BETTY ABUGHEIDA: Olive was very good at placing people where there was a need. She said to me, "I know you're a good cook. Please offer a Middle Eastern dinner for our auction." And then it was Olive who bought it! Eventually she suggested that the dinner be given in her home. Since it became too complicated to haul everything to her apartment, I left out one item on the menu. I still owe Olive my Stuffed Turkish Grape Leaves."



Art work by Olive

JANE KENDALL: I was excited to invite Olive, as an art historian, to attend an important private client viewing at a Gauguin retrospective in the early '90s. At one point Olive and I were together in a small room when she looked around and quietly marveled at being so intimately close and alone with three well known Gauguin paintings. It is such a charming "souvenir" for me, thinking of Olive's impish smile!

JULIA FAINSILBER: Olive always had a solution, in my case it was about a serious deficit at AAWF. She suggested an auction, which she then helped to organize...and then offered a painting of her country home.



HILARY KAISER: I remember attending some AAWE event in the 1970s and being asked by Olive if I could give her a ride—I had a car at the time—over to the Left Bank. She was very excited and told me she and some others were trying to create an English-speaking association of continuing education for women in Paris—a project that would later become WICE. That was Olive: always brimming over with enthusiasm about new projects and ideas.

GENEVIEVE ACKER: Olive was a warm and inspiring presence in my life from the day I joined AAWE in 1968. While I was a program director at the Fulbright office in Paris, Olive was very active in helping me to coordinate the AAWE scholarship competitions for Sweet Briar College, especially in interviewing and selecting candidates. Olive and I were part of the original Women's Task Force to create WICE, back in the '70s. She was always prolific with ideas for programs, one of the major motors behind it all. Until very recently she continued to give her excellent art history courses there, as well as at several American university study abroad groups in Paris. And in addition to all of her activities, Olive was always there with a comforting telephone call after the death of a loved one, or a professional setback. She was a generous, sensitive and exceptional person.

SANDY GOGEL: Olive was a woman of taste, of humor and had an eye for beauty. She always impressed me with her knowledge and dignity. Her love of beauty was astounding. Olive knew everyone and knew everyone's strengths. She was warm and loving and a good friend to so many. I still can picture her at the Bazaar coming toward me from the brocante table. She held a big painting and wanted to ask me the value as she also knew I was in the Antique Business. She made me feel special as she did everyone she knew. That's one of the reasons we all loved Olive and why we miss her so much.

SALLIE CHABALLIER: When I first arrived in Paris, she told me “You should get involved!” She was a one-woman think tank with friendships beyond all ages and boundaries. She had an aura about her, she inspired people to follow her and to create.

ALICE HOUSTON: Olive gave me two pieces of advice 5 years ago. “You went to Smith. You majored in Art History. You should join *les Amis du Louvre*. And you could do some volunteer work.” She was absolutely right. Olive was a person of great intellect, generosity, and kindness.

SARAH COLTON: I was newly arrived in Paris with two young children, and Olive encouraged me to develop their bilingualism using the AAWE recommended system of only speaking to them in English while my French husband only spoke to them in French (contrary to what my mother-in-law thought I should do). Olive, of course, was right and my now-grown children are proud to be bilingual. Olive also encouraged me to join the education committee, after which she encouraged me to become editor of the *AAWE News*...etc., etc., and on it goes. Where would we be without Olive?

JILL BOURDAIS: When I think of Olive, I mostly hear her voice in my head, and see her image – that of somebody very human, very measured, very warm and at the same time a true sage.

CAROLYN WHITE LESIEUR: You couldn't refuse Olive. When I was president, she once asked me, "Carolyn, do you think you could get College Night going again?" Olive had started it years ago and, of course, I did it for her! Olive reminded me of my mother. They were both Smith College graduates — cultivated, smart, practical— and she was just as warm and supportive. She later sent me a touching condolence letter when my mother died. It meant a lot to me that she had known my mother and so thoughtfully sent a comforting note.

LOIS GRJEBINE: Olive and I were roommates for two years at Smith, including our Junior Year Abroad when we both met our husbands-to-be within two weeks of one another. During our Junior year in Paris, Olive was elected to Phi Beta Kappa. She excelled not only because she was highly intelligent, but also because she was a scholarship student. Olive was always careful with money, in fact delighted when she discovered that she could take visitors all around Paris on just one bus ticket. I visited Olive right up to the end. She was really suffering and had trouble breathing, but she still found the energy to say how good my chicken soup was. And then she said to me, "I've been so lucky. I've led such a privileged life."



Olive painted this scene in different seasons. The subject is the view from her beloved country home, Mas La Croix.



Dear Michael and Berna,

Thank you both so much for yesterday evening, you, Michael, for the idea, and you, Berna, for welcoming us to your home. I was, as always, so pleased to see you, Michael, and to meet you, Berna. Olive had talked to me so often about your project for Alzheimer patients!

I was indeed surprised to learn so many things about Olive that I had not known. Unlike most of your guests, I knew her for a comparatively short time, when she took over as Chairwoman of the AAWE Senior Committee and "inherited" me as Senior Fund Treasurer! Working with her, I appreciated all of the qualities cited by her many friends and, just before her death, I had an additional example of her friendship and concern. Early in the week before her death, she asked her daughter to telephone me since she had heard that I was planning a trip to Sri Lanka and she had a book she thought I would enjoy reading. I was so touched that she, ill and hospitalized, thought of me that I wrote her a special thank you. I do hope she was able to read it and to know how much I appreciated her and her continual thoughtfulness for others. Olive was indeed a most unusual lady and the memories we all retain of her are truly testimonies to her, to her interest in and care for all of us.

Thank you for giving us the opportunity to spend a bit more time with Olive!

*All the best,
Lois Beaudet*

JANIS KAAS: Arriving back in Paris only in June, I regretfully cannot be there to remember Olive with you all on May 29. Olive has been much in my thoughts, and I know I am not alone in my feeling of suspended reality – how could the vibrancy that was Olive be gone?

I had the pleasure of being on the AAWWE Board with Olive for several years, and her inimitable way of showing approbation, of nodding and smiling with her eyes a-twinkle, was like a warm embrace. We were together again for a time as enthusiastic godmothers of the AAWWE Sketch Group, a wonderful initiative of Olive's, which brought together a convivial and devoted core group of sketchers in venues around town. They were happy times with Françoise, Dee, and Betty, among others. I have been searching (that is, scouring my PC) for photos of this group sketching and have come up dry. However, I did find these two pictures of Olive in front of her *trompe l'oeil* work at a 2011 AAWWE art show (which may have been her brainchild, too). I know Olive would be pleased that I am sharing them with you because this is what she wrote to me at the time:

*Your photos of the trompe l'oeil vernissage...
esp. photos of my work in any case, look
great... too bad I'm closing my eyes ... but very
good one of me & work with Sally & Michael.*

Not great images, alas, but they do reveal a little bit about Olive – her love of art, her gift for friendship, and her natural poise, just a fraction of what I admired in Olive and will miss.



CHRISTINE ROLLAND: It was a great shock to learn of Olive's passing, and I am really sorry that I probably won't be able to attend the gathering in her memory.

Upon reading the message from AAWE announcing her death, I was overwhelmed with a huge sense of loss and of having missed out on a budding friendship. I am not sure, but I may have met her at the very first bazaar I attended 32 years ago. Whether or not that was the case, for years, our paths crossed randomly and I always had the intention of taking the time so we could get to know each other better, especially as we both were in the same field. Had I lived in Paris, I would have from the beginning participated in her sketching outings. That never happened. When I finally finished my Ph.D., she sent me the most sensitive card of congratulations, which I still treasure. She really knew what that was about.



Attached is a photo of the last time I saw her – at a luncheon arranged for us by Cobi Camberlein. We were into “matching” that day. I matched the furniture. Olive matched dessert and the tablecloth... It was all pure coincidence, however the dessert photo shows just how spritely she was that day – and it is a wonderful last memory.

There was so much to treasure about her: finesse combined with modesty, her keen perception, and especially her warm supportive personality.

The occasions when we did connect remain engraved in my mind.

PAM PERRAUD: It is hard to know where to begin to talk about Olive and what she represented to her friends and to the American community in Paris. For me she was, like a lovely rare jewel, impossible to duplicate again. Like a jewel, she had many different facets that each contributed to, and enhanced, her inner beauty. She was dedicated to many different causes and different organizations and to each one she seemed to have given more than the full measure.

Bright, energetic, kind, classy and methodical, I met her first at WICE where she headed up the art department for many, many years. She handled the scheduling and recruiting of teachers for the studio art and art history classes as well as the art walks and member exhibitions. No task was too large or too small for her attention in the field of art, a subject which she loved so dearly.

I also came to know her at AAWE through her work on bilingualism, the College Days, FAWCO and the Seniors group. Her leadership and involvement in WICE, AAWE and so many other civic organizations is a tribute to her energy and her determination to contribute to the betterment of the American community.

All of us are richer today because we have had the privilege of knowing at least some of the many lovely facets of this most remarkable jewel. She was one in a million.

LINDA KOFMEHL: From the earliest days of WICE, I can see Olive entering a room to teach or to join a meeting, and the room brightened up. Olive brought sunshine to everything she was involved in. A lovely, elegant lady, warm and smart, Olive was loyal to WICE for so many years and brought her gifts to the enhancement of the organization.

CAROL ALLEN: I could say many complimentary things about Olive Lorsignol, but here is the one that stands out in my mind. It comes from the time I was president of the WICE Board of Directors. I never once knew Olive to react or respond to any situation from impulse or instinct. She wanted facts. If a question was raised, if action was to be taken, Olive demanded to know why, and what facts lead to a plausible decision. She kept me, and all of the board members, on our toes. Thank God for Olive. I fully recognize WICE was not the only place where Olive's influence was a driving force. As it was for us at WICE, it was for all the groups with which Olive involved herself. She was a compass; I suspect she kept all of her "groups" on course. It was my great pleasure to know her and have the opportunity to work with her. The "Olive's" of the world are rare. Those of us who had the opportunity to know her are blessed.

MARCIA GORDON: I have so many snippets of Olive in my memory but no real stories as we worked together at WICE. Always self-effacing and ladylike, she was a master of tact while being pretty demanding. I do remember being quite pleased with a modestly priced wine that I had found, and Olive shaking her head sweetly and letting me know that I really could do much better at that price. I think that only Olive could have done that so nicely and with such sincerity and with no motive other than honesty and an attachment to excellence. In any interaction I always felt only admiration and love for her. She always gave her best. And this was just one of many times that she demanded the best of those around her.

KATHRYN SERIS: When I first met Olive what struck me immediately was her regal presence and her beautiful voice. She was a lady to her finger tips. However, she was so much more than that. Like many I met at WICE she had a terrific education behind her, however this is not necessarily enough. It was because of her innate sensitivity to the riches of American and European cultures that she could understand and appreciate the nuances of both. She was a quiet but determined woman with a beautiful style of her own. For me, as for so many others I am sure, it was a privilege to have known her, a privilege to have worked with her. She was unique and will be sorely missed.

MARY ANDERSON: It was my privilege to know Olive Lorsignol and to work with her at the Women's Institute for Continuing Education in the early 1980's. She was an intelligent, strong woman who had very good judgment about people and high standards for everything she did. My special memories are of her work with the history of art programs. She found the experts and invited them to speak and she interviewed and worked with emerging, young art historians, bringing them to the attention of the members and the public.

SUSAN MEAD: I have such happy memories of elegant Olive – always to the point, thoughtful, and generous. Olive was certainly the long-standing cheerleader for the arts and for everything WICE stood for – women's excellence, education, professional development, and voices.

MARYLEA VAN DAALLEN: Olive was such a dear friend and certainly the one who got me involved in WICE. We were all lucky to know Olive. I often think of her and of Pat Painton, who both so influenced my life.

LAURA DONDEY: Olive and I met 55 years ago. From the beginning, I was proud to be her friend and proud to have loved her as I did and still do.

It is impossible to capture in words everything that Olive meant to me. There were so many experiences that brought us together, that kept us laughing, that deepened our friendship through the years – so many wonderful dinners, family get-togethers, operas, art exhibits, trips – so many rich memories.

Sometimes I think of Olive and want to weep with joy at having known her.



Laura and Olive, October 2016

DEE BOXER GOLDBERG: I joined AAWÉ on the suggestion of Joan Muller, whose son was in class with one of my daughters. Olive invited me to a "new member tea" at her home.. somewhere between 1965 and 1970. We rapidly discovered that we shared a love of art, and the making of it. Over the years I joined many of the projects she initiated, including participating in an exhibit she organized at WICE in 1998. Visiting museums, joining the sketch groups in parks and exhibits, I followed her when I could, delighted by her warm friendship, our shared enthusiasms.... We even got Eric involved once in tracking down the eventual value of a Japanese print someone had donated to Rummage!

And personally more precious to me, we had a sporadic correspondence over the years about exhibits and places we especially loved. More frequent recently. Top on her list was the Abbaye at Conques with its marvelous stained glass windows by Soulages. But we compared impressions among others of Hubert Robert, Fantin-Latour, Cy Twombly, the Custodia drawings etc...

Just recently she sent me a card she had made of her grandson Max's lovely drawing. I wrote back looking forward to her response; her last letter is dated February 17, 2017.

I had no idea that she was ill and learned only later that she had had a malaise at the opening of my exhibit at the Institut de France in the fall of 2016. But then she came back to see the show...I was so happy to see her there, and very touched that she made that effort.

Olive was many things to many people. Those of us who had the good fortune to know her, will treasure warm memories of a truly exceptional person.

BERNICE DUBOIS: I have a very dear friend in Australia who was very close to Olive. In fact, Olive got the two of us to speak at AAWE on "Women and Peace" once, and it was very successful. After that, our friend, Françoise Téclémarion a Baha'ie, both intelligent and lucid, moved to Australia to be near one of her 2 daughters. We correspond by email, and she would have loved to be at that memorial meeting for Olive.

DEBORAH LILLIAN: Long and lanky, positive and prepossessing, Olive embodied the spirit of AAWE. Like many, I wanted to be just like her as I grew into what I considered "real" adulthood. Who wouldn't? Olive was a stunning productivity machine, generating ideas and executing them with elegance and actions. Obstacles simply didn't exist for her. She made things happen, she inspired us to do more, and she infused everything she did with her refined aesthetic and down-to-earth practicality. It was a winning combination, and we were lucky to *profiter* from her expansive, generous spirit. Personally, her warmth and support meant much to me, and I have missed her greatly since that sad day in March. She left many of us bereft, and that void will be impossible to fill. She would have loved this gathering – thank you, Berna and Michael, for this opportunity to honor and remember our friend.



Olive was president of AAWF 1976-1977

MICHAEL ADLER: Olive has always been in my life. At least that is how I feel. Actually I have known and loved Olive since we met 38 years ago, but it seems like I've known her forever. Olive was my friend and my colleague. We served together for many years on the boards of both AAWE and WICE. Even though Olive is now no longer with us physically, I continue to feel her quiet and gracious presence, and that is a source of strength and delight for me.

When I think of Olive, I immediately see her beaming smile which made her eyes crinkle and almost close. I hear her kind, soft voice. I remember her openness, and how easy it was to be with her.

Olive moved through life with great physical and mental energy. She was full of ideas—big and small—and she was ingenious and generous in finding ways to carry them out. She was great at enlisting people to help, and she often pitched in herself. When AAWE needed to raise a certain sum of money quickly, Olive suggested holding a silent auction and co-chaired the event.

In the 1970's, as President of AAWE, she personally interviewed administrators at a number of US colleges and universities to find out how Americans overseas could most effectively apply for admission. At the time, this was uncharted territory.

She was also a visionary. An early supporter of WICE, she was a board member for many years and was always ready to step into various administrative positions when needed. As I view it, she saw WICE as an important educational institution for the whole English-speaking community in Paris. Specifically Olive understood the value of supporting high quality studio arts courses. She was the mainstay of the Studio Arts Program. As far as I am concerned she WAS the Program.

Without those courses, I never would have picked up a camera, a paintbrush, or a sketchpad. My watercolor painting is indeed a work in (slow) progress. But my enjoyment of it is immense. Being able to try my hand in making art, led me to better appreciate art itself. Through the years several hundreds of WICE members took these courses and, I'm sure, benefitted from them.

Olive always acted with honesty, generosity and integrity. It was never about her. It was always about contributing to others in meaningful and positive ways.

She was a talented artist in her own right. I cherish the two watercolors Olive painted of the Dordogne Valley landscape she saw from her country home, Mas La Croix (see p. 13).

I often feel that Olive is with me. I feel her grace, her humanity, her warmth. Her message, as I interpret it, is "Be true to your values and persist in making them manifest in the world."

During the course of our friendship Olive made me feel special. I thought this was unique. That is, until the gathering on May 29th, when I found out that Olive had made pretty much everyone in the room feel special and unique. We know, of course, who was the truly special and unique one.

I am deeply grateful that she was in my life.



At AAWE AGM, May 21, 2015

ISABELLE MICHEL: Olive has always told me it was thanks to me that she first heard about AAWE. It happened in a rather unusual way, but then this was how things came about in the “early days”.

Olive was staying with friends in l'Yonne who told her she must go visit a lovely 12th-century priory in the region. She set off, possibly with Eric, in any case with the children, and was given a private visit of the site. It was time for baby Daniel's next meal and Olive asked the owners if she could heat up his bottle. No problem, and during the ensuing conversation, the lady said: “you know my sister married an American and I'm sure her daughter would love to meet you”.

That was me. We immediately got together, and discovered we knew each other from Smith, Olive being one year ahead of me. Of course I told her she must join up with the group for American women living in Paris with French husbands!

Naturally Olive with her dynamic personality, multiple interests and many contacts all over would have been “discovered” as a potential asset to AAWE – which is of course what she became.

I really regret not being with you at Berna's, but that's the way things are for me at the moment. Do say hello to everyone, and know that I'll be thinking of you this evening.



*Olive at AAWE Seniors' Lunch,
March 2016*

MEREDITH FRAPIER: It was with much sadness that I learned of Olive's death. She was in a class at Smith several years before mine ('58), but ever since we met in Paris at an alumnae meeting many, many years ago, we shared a warm friendship based on our Junior Year experiences, along with similar professional activities relating to Franco/American Impressionist artists.

Our Junior year in Paris memories (from the fifties) focused on our mutual exceptional professor, Max-Pol Fouchet, who taught art history : "David à nos jours" (at that time basically ending with "Picasso") – and classes took place both at the Louvre and Reid Hall. For Olive and myself "Max-Pol" represented the very finest one could profess in both scholarship and manner. In particular I always remained so grateful to Olive for organizing a lunch years later, honoring such a beloved professor, which was attended by about a dozen other Junior Year alumnae who also had the privilege of attending his classes. I do not remember where this lunch in Paris took place, (?) but I do remember that all of us signed the menu card which Olive presented to Max-Pol after the meal, who was visibly extremely touched by this group Smith student friendship gesture.

My other binding attachment with Olive was our particular interest and research concerning the american artists who gravitated to Giverny under Monet's presence (some welcomed like Theodore Robinson, and Lilla Cabot Perry, some exiled like John Breck – who paid too much attention to one of Monet's stepdaughters). And I was very grateful for Olive's personal appreciation for the documentary film I co-directed, "Memories of Monet" (programmed for PBS television, along with multiple museum showings both in France and the USA).

It is therefore with much sadness that I am unable to attend this moving memorial for Olive.

JOSH O'DONOVAN: My family and I had the wonderful good fortune to spend a week at Mas La Croix, with Olive and Eric, after our bid at the AAWE Auction in 2015. These morning mist pictures are some I took while there.

Here is Olive sharing her homegrown organic figs with my daughter. Such happy memories of a magical trip...





Funny how a question in passing has the possibility of leading to something...
 To Read first... Phyllis' words written down in 1976... condensing 15 years of a crusade to amend clauses in the I&N act affecting -- our children! (none in any care!) 1976!

Much has happened since then, and we seem to count on the fact that there won't ever be a problem again about citizenship laws.

Phyllis is now 86 years old... and we want to record her talking about what was her life's work... recorded by the following generation, Michael Adler (a woman - by the way!) and Kathleen de Caruccio, (currently President of AARO), both AAWF members who worked constantly with Phyllis over the years ^{gather}.

We want to start video footage that could be part of a documentary for the 50th anniv. of AAWF.

I'll call as soon as I find a camera!! a bientot -

Olive Lornquist

Olive was a moving force behind recording interviews with founding members of AAWF. In this portion of a note she wrote to Patty Chainon, in March, 2009, she discusses possibly filming a Citizenship program to be held on April 8 that year.

PATTY CHAINON: Olive, you gave three of us on an advance run to Chartres before a Senior visit our own tour using illustrations but mostly your knowledge and passion for the period. We advanced serenely after a long "regard" at the tympanums and their iconography – movies for the Middle Ages, archaic medieval sculptures for eternity. On the southern facade of the cathedral, we looked down on the Plaine de Beauce that has hosted hundreds of thousands. That day we too were pilgrims with a leader.

Alone with you on the train back to Paris, I listened to your description of another time and place—the Chesapeake Bay with your siblings, all of you very young, discovering tide pools and sleeping on a low porch on the hot nights. That spirit of discovery remained with you always.

Not only were you ever curious, even relentless, and strictly disciplined about what you cared for, you were also able to marshal others to help those causes you found worthy and necessary.

Your missions were many but you and Eric also had time for us in the Vexin then in Vetheuil, Monet's first home in Normandy. During a walk on the banks of the Seine you showed us illustrations of the "Debacle" when the Seine froze over as well as a picture of Monet's daughter on the front steps of the small house his family occupied prior to the time he had patrons. You pointed at the hills which used to be covered with vineyards, and, with another sweep of the hand, you showed us the home of Joan Mitchell right above. Her paintings, since shown in a retrospective exhibit at Beaubourg, brought up your regret at not having made the effort to buy one.

Never mind, you had another painting prospect that you mentioned that day—spending the summer in the south scraping a household of shutters

to ready them for your brushwork.

Yes, Joan Mitchell's blues and greens would have been dynamic in your salon, that very special room looking over the Square Louvois, "the most Parisian" of Squares. It would have shared wall-space with the large and wonderful Japanese tapestry already there.

You said it had been a gift to your mother around the turn of the century (the 20th not the 21st) from a grateful Japanese woman who wanted to thank your mother for her service as a civic leader in New York.

That was her legacy to you hanging on your wall—the legacy of beauty and service—as is yours to us. Thank you, Olive. It is very humbling that you shared your "overfull" life.

Thank you also for sharing your curiosity, relentlessness, and strictness with self (an intrinsic sense of duty) and wrapping these personal attributes in a cloak of gracious ease and kindness to others.

Olive was a teacher whose accomplishments demonstrated the fallacy of George Bernard Shaw's quip: "Those who can, do. Those who can't, teach." Sorry, Mr. Shaw, if you are generous and clear you do both because you have something to share and the ability to do so.

ROSE MARIE BURKE: This is a kind and friendly note on a card that Olive sent me in the year 2000 that I rediscovered recently. From what I understand, it was the kind of thing that Olive did. What beautiful handwriting ... what a beautiful lady.



Dear Rose
 Friday, Dec 15th
 It was good to pass such a moment
 together Wednesday am. This superb
 page by Ingres came to mind as Jonathan
 was talking about your days. Notice
 here the spaces between - just as
 wonderful as forms & volumes themselves!
 And then this morning I found this
 card! - so here it comes to wish you
 a merry Christmas, great 2001!
 The still life in the cover of the
 WIFE catalog came out beautifully.
 Can't wait to see the original in
 the show!
 Eric & I will be heading
 down to Martha Creek next
 Thursday - returning to
 Paris. January 5th.
 I am thinking of signing
 up for Independent Projects
 à bientôt j'espère. Alice

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CAROL ALLEN: Olive Lorsignol was named co-winner of the ACA (American Citizens Abroad) 1997 Eugene Abrams Award for outstanding volunteer work by a senior citizen living abroad. Olive has devoted more than 34 years to voluntary service, mostly in the field of education. All of you fortunate enough to have worked with Olive know that a good part of those years have been dedicated to WICE activities, and she's still going strong!

From Friends of WICE newsletter, January 1998

Shana, Ulla, Olive, Carol, Kathryn & Lisbeth, 1997



Olive at WICE

"Anything is Possible"

by Shana Henze

My introduction to WICE in 1989 was an arts committee meeting chaired by Olive Lorsignol. It wasn't just her lyrical name that drew me in. She was warm, wise, and clever too. What follows is her story covering the years that we worked together until 2001. It is but a single chapter in her more than 20-year history at WICE.

It must have been a special occasion in the early '90s when she invited a small group of us for lunch at her home overlooking the Square Louvois. I remember her cozy living room and the perfect meal she prepared. Mostly I remember feeling honored to discover where Olive lived. She had recently started a course in *trompe l'oeil* and was obviously eager to share her new passion with us. We saw two of her small creations, little knowing where that would lead...

Betty Abugheida recalls sitting in the WICE patio one day when Olive decided it would be more welcoming to have something nice to look at rather than a blank wall. It wasn't long before she volunteered to paint the entire wall, its central



Trompe l'Oeil Mural
by Olive Lorsignol

arch and four adjoining niches. That was in the spring of 1996. Olive and another volunteer enlarged the space with her grand vista lined with trees. In the foreground she added an obelisk, two lion statues and a cherub fountain spilling into a very realistic bassin d'eau. It was a monumental effort that took her weeks to complete. Jill Bourdais, who remembers seeing her on the job with paint brush in hand, called it, "A true labor of love. It was such an original idea and just like Olive to make an unappealing courtyard into



Adding the finishing touches to her mural in Pam Perraud's kitchen

something special."

After seeing the courtyard mural and the one Olive did in her own dining room, Pam Perraud commissioned a *trompe-l'oeil* scene for a wall in her kitchen. Olive decided on an ambitious nook with recessed shelves that she lined with an array of Iznik ceramics, each piece a work of art in itself. The exuberant ivy plant was Olive's *joie de vivre*. She told Pam that she went to the Louvre and to the Arab Center specifically to copy some of the plates. "That was typical Olive, total attention to detail and commitment to getting things 'just right'. What was great about the mural was her choice of all the lovely detailed plates, vases, etc. Each was really complex... That was over 15 years ago, and it is still as beautiful today as it was when she painted it."



Olive once remarked, "We old-timers know it only takes one person truly committed to a project to galvanize people behind her." When she discovered that we shared the same *alma mater*, she was positively gleeful. Surely I could be galvanized! At the time she was director of a combined Arts and Humanities Department. For years she was a mainstay on the Board of Directors, and when no one else came forward, Olive was the one who volunteered to fill in "temporarily" either as VP of Programs or even as Director of Admin. Most often she ended up managing the studio arts courses: interviewing instructors, writing up course descriptions, tracking participants, filling out evaluations and providing financial data. She said to me once that she loathed the administrative side of the job, but still she wrote out all the forms in her distinctive hand — and then with typical modesty she actually apologized. "I'm no good at all of this." Over the years

Initial sketch for the
"Lorsignol kitchen mural"



and almost single-handedly she must have recruited dozens of instructors and overseen hundreds of classes.

Shortly after Olive determined that I should be VP of Programs in 1990, she came up with the brilliant idea of a year-long class we called "A Walk Through the Grand Louvre". It was a seven-part series with both day and evening sessions that continued in various formats over many years. A few months later she helped me organize drawing and painting classes for our Summer Youth Programs.

When I suggested taking advantage of the Lacoste School of the Arts facilities during their off-season in 1992, she worked her magic to promote "A Week in Provence"—and then off she went as a fellow student with Sally Benoist, Mimi and Paul Horne, Laura Dondey and Peggy Paul-Cavallier.

In the idyllic Provencal setting of a medieval hillside village, the Lacoste School of the Arts is offering WICE exclusive use of its facilities for a week of workshops in Watercolor and Photography...

The following year, as a money-making project, she designed a beautiful Paris art calendar with photographs from Pat Bognar's classes.

In the fall of 1994 she led not one, but two, day-long lecture excursions: "Monet in Rouen" and "Monet in Giverny and Vétheuil". She managed to get our group inside the Edwin Lutyens house after a tour of the gardens near Dieppe. All of this was after her 3-day trip to Amsterdam on the centenary of Van Gogh's death. As Patty Chainon said, "Olive always pushed herself to show us doubly what was scheduled".

At the WICE 20th anniversary Presidents'



"Place des Vosges" by Olive from her WICE Calendar 1993-1994

Roundtable in March 1998, Olive inspired us with her indomitable spirit: "Sometimes when you wonder whether you're going to get through the year or what's going to happen, the amazing thing is, as soon as someone comes up with a wonderful idea, to be sure somehow it can happen. The Writer's Workshop can happen. An interest in art history can happen. Anything truly is possible if the energy, the vision and the interest to do it is there, and if the audience is out there. It is a possibility as long as there is *enthusiasm*..."

Dear faithful, phenomenal Olive! She was not only versatile, prolific, and generous. She was, in fact, omnipresent. Often we would hear her mutter, "I really shouldn't get so involved." And yet onward she went, only retiring from WICE in 2001. By then she had been named (the one and only) Honorary Board Member.

Usually when we gathered for a meeting or reunion outside of WICE, Olive would order a glass

of beer—not tea, not wine. It always made me smile. I can picture her sitting with us, serene and attentive, her mind probably teeming with ideas. Just a year ago, she sent us a message in response to an informal e-mail “discussion” on the role of women today:

I haven't been joining in but I am delighted to be included in such a wonderful exchange of views. Keep it up and I'll be sure not to miss a single "mail"! ... or the next lunch on the horizon.

Bravo all,

Olive

PS AAWE Seniors had a strong program on "Women and Peace"... but no activity evolved from it ... probably due to lack of initiative of the Seniors chair = me.

I have a favorite image of her gliding toward me at the American Cathedral just before a concert not so long ago. She had a twinkle in her eye and that beatific smile on her face. I'd like to say the Fauré “Cantique de Jean Racine” was on the program that day because such glorious music reminds me of her and of the joy she brought to others.



AAWE Auction 2009



MY FAVORITE -- Olive and Eric



Olive with the auctioneer



Olive - Queen of the Auction!



Sallie and Francois-Marc Chaballier with Olive

DORCY ERLANDSON: At the 2011 AAWE Auction Olive offered to lead an excursion: A Day in the Footsteps of Monet. Sallie and François-Marc Chaballier and I were the highest bidders. The morning was spent in Vétheuil, where Monet lived in the early years. We picnicked on the banks of the Seine while looking across to views that Monet had often painted. We then went on to Giverny where we spent the afternoon. Olive shared throughout the day her enthusiasm and her amazing knowledge of Monet's life and his painting.

Olive was knowledgeable about art, but even more than that, she was full of knowledge about people. She remembered details and was always thinking of ways of getting people together. She was a wonderful spinner of webs of relationships that I hope we will all try to honor in her memory.



A Selection of Messages from AAWE Members published in May/June 2017 AAWE News



Tuesday, February 3, 1976

SALLY: I know this will come as a shock to many of you; a few already know, but if you're like me it will take a while before you can accept this terrible truth. Olive gone: that can't be, I tell myself. She didn't want to "linger on" and she knew that her cancer was spreading. It was "for the best", we're told. She left us in beauty and in dignity: this doesn't surprise us.

ANN: I have taken my time joining the conversation because Olive's pluckiness, vision and determined dedication will be missed and I needed to pause, grieve and come to terms with this loss. She represented so many values to so many different women in our multi-generational group. "AAWE-some" Olive!! Olive invented the Bazaar in order to get AAWE out of debt, debt incurred while fighting for nationality rights or voting rights in Congress if memory serves.

JUDITH: My parents had met Olive on the France during their transatlantic crossing many years ago and Olive told my mom about AAWE. My mother was thrilled and couldn't wait to tell me about the wonderful woman she had met on the boat and the association that I could join which would help me feel less lonely in a foreign country.

IRENE: Yes, this is devastating news. I'm so shocked. I wasn't aware that she had been so sick, but knowing Olive, she kept the worst to herself. Not only have we lost a good friend, AAWWE has lost one of its remarkable members, a President, and extraordinary organizer of events relating to education, cultural activities, overseas voter rights, WICE, and of course the Seniors' Committee. Surely she had many other interests. In any case, she had a full plate, her organizational skills were outstanding. I feel so terribly sad.

KERRY: Oh no! Olive was the woman I think we all aspire to be.

JILL: Olive was truly a pillar of our Franco-American community, always cheerful even when things were tough for her, always ready to help concretely or with ideas, a source of sage and measured advice, loyal to whatever person or endeavor in which she chose to invest – an amazing person all around. It's comforting that she died in her sleep and not after a painful or debilitating illness.

MARY-ELLEN: I will miss her amazing positive outlook. I believe the last time I spoke to her she was telling me how much she loved her apartment and her neighborhood. She said, "Aren't I the luckiest girl in the world?"

MICHELLE: Olive was one of the women that made me so proud to be part of AAWWE! She was an amazing woman with a wonderful outlook and can-do attitude!

FRANCES: For many senior members, losing first Phyllis and now Olive brings back so many memories of early AAWWE days. I joined in 1966 and know how much Olive did and has done to bring our association to where it is today while always holding fast to the reason AAWWE began in 1961. Keep the torch brightly lit and held high, dear members.

Olive, Phyllis, Gertrude and all our departed members will be looking for that torch.

JANE: Olive touched me too. I interviewed her in late 2014 for an article which appeared in the Jan-Feb 2015 *News*. I had several hours with her at her home, including a very healthy lunch, and fell under the spell of Olive's charm, warmth, vision, generosity, and wisdom. And also, her humility, and that she didn't take herself too seriously.

VIRGINIA: It is a great loss to AAWE, and a personal one to me and to many of us. When I think of Olive sitting next to me at the Café de Commerce Senior Lunch recently, and in Julia Fainsilber's car going to Malmaison which seems just a few days ago, and Eric was also there, she was her cheerful self.

KAREN: Olive was an amazing woman who I had the pleasure of walking with for 5 kilometers a couple of years ago. I couldn't believe how fit she was. She was truly someone to look up to.

JULIA: If Olive saw a need she looked for a way to meet that need and then she did it. It was that direct and simple. She was generous and she was kind. She was also great fun to be with and to work with. We can count our blessings that Olive was one of us and cared so much for us.

SARAH: Meeting Olive was the reason I joined AAWE so many years ago, and she remained a wonderful and important friend and role model for me ever since. I know I speak for many in AAWE in saying this.

HELEN: Olive was a truly exceptional person who inspired everyone who knew her. I used to say that "I want to grow up and be like Olive." She was a woman of the world (and "both worlds"!), a woman of heart and conviction, a woman with great

foresight and wisdom. She left this world her way – with great dignity and as always, with concern for others.

KRISTINA: Olive represented everything good about AAWE. While she appreciated the more “social aspects”, she never lost sight of “the cause” behind it all...and she did so over the decades in various roles within the organization. She also continued to continually “think out of the box”. When she got involved in something, you just knew the bar would be raised, intellectually and energy-wise.

EMMA: Olive had offered to host an event on April 20th, a talk by Sarah Valinsky who specializes in African-American studies!!! And the talk was her idea!!! Truly amazing. I would never have guessed that she was so sick. What courage and generosity.

KATHLEEN: It can't be! Such a *force de la nature*, always moving forward, with ideas, energy, persistence and care. In that sense, she never changed—the same when I met her and 40 years later. Since she stayed young it was easy to think she would always be there



President Lorsignol at AAWE Tea, April 13, 1976

The Mixed-Up Files of Mrs. Eric Lorsignol

AAWE News

interview by Jane
Mobbille, Jan/Feb
2015

In E.L. Konigsburg's Newberry prize-winning novel, Mrs. Basil E. Frankweiler gave 12-year-old Claudia one hour to find the document which would let her know whether a mysterious angel statue was sculpted by Michelangelo. Claudia found it in the nick of time, and if memory serves me, under a file labeled Bologna.

One of the first things long-time member Olive Lorsignol showed me when I arrived at her apartment for this interview was her bookcase full of files, which she said, "are a mess". Yet, and unlike Mrs. Frankweiler,

Olive handed me a file about the history of our Club. And unlike Claudia, I knew who had sculpted AAWE: Phyllis Michaux, our founder, who led the charge to change citizenship laws for our children. But I didn't know "how" she did it. I opened the file, and my eyes fell upon a 1961 article from *The Evening Star*, entitled "Our 'Wasted Ambassadors', American Wives Abroad Have a Remedy for It", with a large photo of a professional and classy-looking Mrs. Raoul Michaux at a typewriter.

"I am one of Phyllis' disciples," said Olive, "and these are photocopies from Phyllis' scrapbook."

Olive Gibson Lorsignol was born in 1930 and raised just outside of Washington, DC. She attended Smith College and spent her Junior Year Abroad in Paris. "When I wrote my mother to say that I had fallen in love with a Frenchman and that we were planning to get married, my mother wasn't sure what to think! When she asked a psychiatrist friend what he thought, he replied, 'Do you trust your daughter's judgment?' What could she say to that?" Olive laughed.



"I feel blessed. It is not right for some people to be so lucky and others not. If you are lucky enough to be in the favored few, you must go after all that comes your way." Olive has been married to Eric for 61 years. They have three children – Christine, Marc and Daniel – and five grandchildren.

"I arrived in Paris in 1960 with three small children. I hadn't seen Phyllis' ad in the *Tribune*, but Isabelle Michel, a Smith friend, alerted me to a talk on bilingualism for AAWWE by Ruth Metraux. Marc was deaf in one ear. His nursery school, the pediatrician, the family, all told me not to speak English to him. So I was on a mission to find out about bilingualism. I joined AAWWE and worked on bilingualism for years. AAWWE has played its part in completely reversing attitudes toward bilingualism and in establishing guidelines for our Franco-American families."

"One of AAWWE's first concerns was also to open the way for our kids to attend college in the States. These students have moved from 'the dilemma of the dual-national student' in the 1960s to being prized as bilingual and bi-national applicants now!" Olive conceived and

organized the first College Night in Paris. Besides her continuing interest in Bilingualism, (now Bilingualism in Aging), Olive served as president of AAWWE in the bi-centennial year 1976 and in 1977, and started the Bazaar to cover the deficit caused by the big Citizenship Conference AAWWE hosted in 1977.

One of Olive's junior year professors, Max-Pol Fouchet, was a charismatic writer and poet teaching 19th and 20th century art. "He was an inspiration, as were trips to Vézelay, Chartres, and Reims, and I developed a passion for art, especially Romanesque sculpture, and late illuminated manuscripts of the 11th and 12th centuries. My graduate studies at Harvard with a Teaching Fellowship preceded wonderful teaching opportunities in Paris with Columbia University and Otis/Parson's School of Design."

WICE was founded in 1978 and Olive was invited to join its first Board. "Most satisfying for me was my work on the arts programs. A really fun time was teaching Medieval Art and Architecture with Danielle Johnson. In 2001 I passed on my responsibilities at WICE and became more active in AAWWE again. I dreamed of the Se-



niors creating our own PARC: a 'Paris-American Retirement Community'! Well, Phyllis had that in mind before we did, and it still hasn't happened ... but a lot else has!"

That first summer of 1961, Phyllis was walking along the avenue Franklin Roosevelt and noticed the name France-Amérique on an imposing building. She walked in, talked to the director, and France-Amérique became AAWE's address. "There was something special about those monthly meetings at France-Amérique in the early days. We had extraordinary speakers, French or English-speaking writers, actors, our Ambassadors ... look up the list! I remember Sim Copens introducing us to the Protest Music of the 60s; I heard Bob Dylan for the first time! You have to realize – many of us missed out on America in the 60s. The world was not interconnected. Those monthly meetings meant so much; we found each other and talked. It was elegant yet still affordable. It wasn't as if we wore white gloves – but practically."

At home late that evening, I looked at the file Olive had given me, including:

- 2010 *AARO News* article "AARO's First Outstanding Service Award Goes to

Founder Phyllis Michaux," by Lynn Green-Rutanen;

- 1996 *USA Today* article "Founding mother of citizens' rights abroad," a review of *The Unknown Ambassadors: A Saga of Citizenship*, Phyllis Michaux's book;

- Letter dated May 25, 1961 outlining the goals of a new club for American women married to Frenchmen;

- 1970 *International Herald Tribune* article "The Legal Case of Dual Nationality," written by Betty Werther;

- Phyllis's write-up of what she said on April 27, 1961 to those who attended the first meeting at the American Church. It starts, "As most of you probably know President Kennedy has asked people to write in with suggestions and ideas....";

- Phyllis Michaux's Curriculum Vitae from 1996 in support of her candidacy for the Abrams Award;

- 1971 *Time* magazine article "Downgrading Citizens," with photo caption "Carolyn & Phyllis Michaux. Baffled and angry".

Olive Lorsignol carries within her the history of AAWE, and she transmits it with intelligence and care. Her files may be a mess, but there is nothing mixed-up about her!

Jane Mobbille





Morning mist at Mas La Croix