

Barbara Regine Freyer Stowasser 1935-2012

BARBARA REGINE FREYER STOWASSER, A LEADING SCHOLAR IN THE FIELD of women in Islam and former president of MESA, passed away in Washington, D.C. on May 13, 2012. She was born on May 22, 1935, in Leipzig Germany to Hans and Kaethe Freyer and studied at the University of Muenster, Germany under Hans Wehr, received her M.A. in 1959 from UCLA under a Fulbright Fellowship, and her Ph.D. (*magna cum laude*) in 1961 from the University of Muenster, Germany. Dr. Stowasser was a member of the faculty at Georgetown University from 1966 to the present, where she was also holder of the Sultanate of Oman Chair in Arabic and Islamic Literature, a core member of the faculty of Center for Contemporary Arab Studies (CCAS) and thrice director of the Center. Two of her most prized accomplishments were the academic keynote address to the Turkish National Assembly Celebration of National Sovereignty at the invitation of the President of the Turkish National Assembly in 1988 and the receipt of the Doctor of Humane Letter *honoris causa* awarded to her by Georgetown University in 1991. She has numerous publications to her credit, most notably, *Women in the Qur'an, Traditions and Interpretation* (1994), *Islamic Law and the Challenges of Modernity* (2004) and *The Islamic Impulse* (1987). In the many comments on her CCAS obituary notice, her former colleagues and students repeatedly noted both her warmth and intellect. A brief commemoration of her life and work was held at the CCAS at Georgetown University on 24 May and a larger memorial service was held in Dahlgren Chapel at Georgetown on 29 September 2012.

I write this *in memoriam* notice from both a personal and professional point of view. I was Barbara's teaching assistant for Arabic in 1972-73, forty years ago. I don't remember much about that time but I know it was fun as well as instructive for me as we made our way through EMSA (Elementary Modern Standard Arabic), otherwise known as "the big orange book." Barbara had a gift for making a community out of a class and creating a sense both of excitement and confidence about learning Arabic. She knew how to balance a demand for linguistic accuracy with encouragement for communicative progress. Far from being a mother hen to her students, Barbara was a mother eagle, teaching them how to fly and fend for themselves, to soar and explore, to tackle and master challenges.

At the time we were both big tennis players, although Barbara was better by far than I. We used to play on the courts down near McDonough Gymnasium

(long since gone), and I still retain the image of her smashing tennis balls across the net, and looking good doing it.

We became closer friends during our work at the State Department in the 1980s. Barbara was a lecturer in both the Arabic and Turkish area studies programs at the Foreign Service Institute (FSI); and I was head of Arabic language training. A concerted effort was initiated at FSI to “integrate” language and area studies in effective pedagogical ways, and Barbara and I decided to collaborate on a project that would blend together the topics she presented in area studies with Arabic language learning—a very early experiment in what is now referred to as “Content Based Instruction”—a type of meaning-focused instruction in which academic subjects are taught in the target language.

Barbara provided Arabic texts related to the area studies topics and I worked each text into a lesson format focusing not only on the topic but also on key points of vocabulary and grammar. Together we created a year-long course with written texts that were also recorded by one of the Arabic instructors, and a set of lively and interesting classroom applications. Due to its success, we were invited to give a talk on this topic in 1988 or 1989 at a major national conference on foreign language teaching, either American Council on the Teaching of Foreign Languages (ACTFL) or Northeast Conference on the Teaching of Foreign Languages (NECTFL), and we prepared a joint presentation on the concept, design, and results of the project: Content-Based Instruction in Arabic. When we arrived at the conference and inspected the room we had been assigned for our presentation we discovered that it was big. It was a ballroom, filled with about 400 chairs. That was intimidating but we figured we might be able to fill one or two rows of seats if we were lucky. We weren’t lucky.

It was the nightmare we all dread. Nobody came. Except Jim Alatis (former Dean of the School of Languages and Linguistics at Georgetown University), bless his heart, who came and shook our hands and consoled us with the knowledge that we were simply ahead of our time. Arabic language and culture were on few academic agendas in the 1980s. Fortunately, our work on writing up the project paid off as we were later invited to submit it as a chapter in a book introducing the concept of Content Based Instruction.¹ But the experience bonded us, since our shared disappointment made a good story that we laughed about for years.

Many people knew Barbara as a fine scholar and relentless advocate of Arabic and Islamic Studies, as an administrator, and director of the CCAS for many years; she was also a role model, mentor, and supportive colleague. Her research and writing were of the highest quality, almost flawless in their

conception and execution; penetrating and even brilliant in their analyses, creative in their approach, characterized by her profound understanding of Arabic textual analysis and Islamic culture. Through all of this, these forty years or so, Barbara remained a friend and a joy to know. In Washington, a town where self-interest and egotism are king, she remained wonderfully herself, working hard on behalf of her profession, her school, her university, and her colleagues. Her laughter and sense of fun lighted up our lives and lifted our spirits, and still does.

She is survived by her sons, Andy Stowasser and his wife, Teresa and their children, Franciska and Margaret, of Roanoke, Virginia; Mike Stowasser and his wife, Jill and their children, Leanna and David, of Manhattan, Montana; her sisters, Ursula Freyer Hauck and her husband, Günther and their children, Thomas and Barbara, of Muenster, Germany, and Brigitte Freyer Schauenburg and her son, Philipp, of Kiel, Germany. ✨

Karin Christina Ryding
Georgetown University

End Note

¹“Text Development for Content-Based Instruction in Arabic,” in *Content-Based Instruction in Foreign Language Education: Models and Methods*, Stephen B. Stryker and Betty Lou Leaver, editors. Washington, D.C.: Georgetown University Press, 1997.

Louise E. Sweet 1916-2012

LOUISE E. SWEET PASSED AWAY PEACEFULLY AT THE AGE OF 96 on May 5, 2012 in Selkirk, Manitoba, Canada. Well-known over her academic career for solid and perceptive Middle East ethnography, her later passion was to challenge students and colleagues to read and think critically through stimulating discussion of leftist literature and critique, and also to give attention to the ethnographic richness of their surroundings in the Province of Manitoba.

Born on 1 October 1916 in Ypsilanti, Michigan, Louise received her Ph.D. in 1957 in Anthropology and Near Eastern Studies at the University of Michigan, where she was strongly influenced by Leslie White. She conducted