

IN MEMORIAM

Marian Brown St. Onge (1944-2021)



Marian Brown St. Onge, a long-time member of the Boston College community, passed away on August 18, 2021, at the age of 77 just two weeks after receiving a diagnosis of pancreatic cancer. She served in many different roles during her long BC tenure, including Coordinator of the French Language Program, director of the Womens Studies Program, and, most importantly, in 1991, founding Director of the Center for International Programs and Partnerships (now the Office of International Programs). She held that position until her retirement in 2006, and during her years as its director, she greatly extended the outreach of the CIPP through her indefatigable global travels and prolific partnership creation.

Marian did her undergraduate degree at the University of Colorado and, after a two-year residence in England, she came to BC where earned her M.A. (1975) and Ph.D. (1984) in French Literature. In addition to her administrative positions at BC, Marian also taught in the French graduate and undergraduate programs, as well as in the Capstone program (where she offered a popular course on travel literature for international students and seniors who had studied abroad).

Beyond Boston College, Marian was a former President of the Massachusetts Foreign Language Association and, as an active researcher and writer, was the recipient of several fellowships and awards. In Spring 2006, she served as Michael Dukakis Visiting Professor in International Affairs at the American College of Thessaloniki, Greece. St. Onge published travelers' guides, articles on twentieth-century women writers, cultural issues and topics in international education, as well as being a published poet in her own right. Before her death, she was finalizing the manuscript of a major historical project (for which she received a Norman Mailer Fellowship Award), a biography of the French World War II Resistance leader and Catholic priest, Louis Favre.

Marian is survived by two sons, Joseph (of Idaho) and Richard Anton (Andy, of Hawaii), and her companion, Marshall Smith of Truro. At her request, no memorial service will be held.

Tributes to Marian from Her Colleagues and Friends

"For me, Marian was already a BC institution when I arrived on the scene, a vital link between RLL and other parts of the university, connecting us all to France and countries around the globe with her energy and enthusiasm. Thanks to her, I once had the strange experience of escorting a group of business students around Paris to introduce them to its cultural delights ~including a walking tour of the city through history and an excursion to Chartres where the legendary Malcom Miller guided our view of the magnificent stained glass windows. Thank you, Marian! RIP."

*Matilda Bruckner
Professor of French Emerita, Boston College*

"It is with great sadness that I learned about the passing away of Marian St. Onge. We met almost 30 years ago for the first time at a conference on international education and became not only close friends but also our partnership resulted in an agreement for student and staff exchange between Boston College and the University of Amsterdam, when I was vice-president international at that university. That agreement is now over 25 years old and still flourishing.

When I had a sabbatical semester to edit a book for the OECD on the internationalization of higher education, she invited me as a visiting lecturer at the Sociology Department, sharing a room with late professor Seymour Leventman, who became also a close friend and a visiting scholar at the University of Amsterdam. Marian was also instrumental in connecting me in 1995 with professor Philip G. Altbach, who joined BC in 1995 as professor of international higher education and founded the Center for International Higher Education (CIHE) at BC that same year. That partnership has continued until now, including a Fulbright New Century Scholarship at BC for me for 3 months ten years later, in 2005.

I was honored to be a guest at her retirement in 2006. I continued my relationship with BC and CIHE after her retirement and was appointed director of CIHE and professor of the practice in international higher education in 2015, succeeding Philip Altbach, a position I have held until 1 November 2020. I am currently Professor Emeritus in International Higher Education at BC and Distinguished Fellow of CIHE.

This long and intensive relationship with BC has only been possible thanks to Marian St. Onge and I am grateful for our friendship and her influence on my career and relationship with BC. Our contacts faded gradually away after her retirement, but she has continued to be in my mind as someone who made things possible for me and for many other students and scholars at BC and around the globe."

*Hans de Wit
Distinguished Fellow, Center for International Higher Education; Professor Emeritus of the Practice, Lynch School of Education and Human Development, Boston College*

"Marian was great fun. Jeff and I shared much of it and will always remember her as a stunning, chic, witty and intelligent woman. She had "panache." Very French was she in those characteristics which can seem oxymoronic to some. Like those of us who were not native speakers of French, she became immersed in the linguistic and cultural experience of a country which became a part of herself.

In recent years she had continued the research begun by the History Department's late Fr. Frank Murphy of the identity of a French priest upon whom the priest in "Au revoir les enfants" was modeled. At the time of her death she was writing and researching the life of another Resistance priest Fr. Louis Favre who secreted Jews out of danger. She respected and admired Fr. Frank as she did another beloved presence in our department, Fr. Joseph Gauthier, S.J. They were there to welcome her when she arrived on the other side of this life.

I will never forget the three weeks Jeff and I spent in Leuven with Marian, Frank Murphy, Carol Hurd Green, and Katharine Hastings on a BC Summer Program in which Jeff and I taught French to give students some experience in the language of the Francophone regions of Belgium which we were going to visit. We stayed in Leuven's Irish College where we joined forces with a group of bankers from Northern Ireland who were in fine form and voice. We sang many nights around a piano Irish and Irish-American 'tunes.'"

*Margaret Flagg
BC French Language Program faculty (retired)*

"Marian was a mentor to me and a friend. I will always be grateful to her for her support and encouragement. Because of Marian, I was able to take hundreds of students abroad over the course of 17 years. Their experiences changed them in significant ways; her impact had a ripple effect that influenced the trajectory of their lives in important ways."

*Andréa Javel
Distinguished Senior Lecturer in French; Coordinator, French Language Program*

"Marian and I had offices near each other for several years during our time at BC. I remember her high energy, enthusiasm, her beautiful smile, and her friendly relationship with both students and fellow faculty. She put a great deal of work into getting the Center for International Partnerships program up and running & its success [as the Office of International Programs] is a continued testament to her many contributions to Boston College. She left us too soon. BC - and all of us - miss her."

*Mary Ellen Kiddie
Coordinator, Spanish Language Program, Boston College (retired)*

"Marian was fun, frank, flirtatious as well as outgoing, caring, intelligent and chic. I have warm memories of her."

*Gene Kupferschmid
BC Spanish Language Program faculty (retired)*

"Marian St. Onge was a valued colleague in the field of International Education and we worked together on several projects when I was Director of the Office of International Programs at Brown University. I have the best of memories of being with her. She combined a keen intelligence, an empathetic nature, and an ability to get straight to the heart of the matter in making hard decisions about international programs. I valued her ideas and plans and am very sorry to learn of her untimely death. My best regards to her family and friends. Travel on in your usual fearless manner, Marian."

Kirstin Moritz

"Marian was *une force qui va*: dynamic, optimistic yet realistic, positive and grounded. She believed in possibility and inspired me to undertake challenges I might not otherwise have taken on. Comfortable in and with herself and others, Marian connected with people and knew them. She introduced me to my late husband Jim Vanecko, telling me he was a "perfect match;" she was right. I was taken aback and surprised at our wedding reception when she offered a toast and talked about how I inspired her. In many ways, we were a perfect match as friends, alike and different in complimentary ways.

Through the years and all of life's transitions, joys and losses, Marian and I shared many heart-to-hearts. She was a supportive presence in my life. Our August birthdays being a few days apart, we always celebrated even if it had to be months later, usually with Manhattans. As we all know, Marian was fun! It is one of her gifts for which I am the most grateful. We did have much fun and funny experiences. For example, when we decided to go on Match.com in the mid-nineties, we discovered that we were both contacted by and dating the same man. He was a painter and we wound up going to a gallery opening where we each bought one of his paintings.

Marian joins those I have lost who will always be part of me. When I think of her, the message that I associate with her is *Memento vivere*: Don't forget to live."

*Ellen Munley
Professor of French and Comparative Literature, Regis College
French Language Program faculty, Boston College*

"In 1994, Caterina Dacci and I approached Marian St. Onge, the recently appointed Director of BC's Center for International Partnerships and Programs, with a proposal for a new exchange program between Boston College and the University of Parma. We were hoping for a positive reception to the idea, but we were unprepared for the enthusiasm and passion that Marian showed for the proposal. She was on it. 'We could talk to this person! I'll set up a meeting!', 'We can publicize this way!', 'We can focus on this cultural aspect!' It was breathtaking to see her at work. Despite many obstacles, the first group of students from BC spent a rewarding semester in the city of Parma, and BC welcomed the first group of Italian students two years later. Her initial and continued support led to a successful program that is still very active today. Thank you, Marian. We will miss you."

*Brian O'Connor
Coordinator, Italian Language Program, Boston College*

"What I treasure most joyfully about the many years in which I worked together with Marian on various study-abroad initiatives in Germany and Austria is what we call in German her *Lebenslust* — her joie de vivre, her lust for life.

That — and her absolutely infectious smile and her bubbly enthusiasm for the projects we collaborated on — meant that I always felt happier just from having been in her company. I've missed those marvelous qualities in all the years she's been retired, and now, sadly and far too soon, we will all miss her."

*Michael Resler
Professor of German Studies, Boston College*

"Marian's photograph shows the affection and love she had for her friends. She in turn was adored by her friends, especially, in the RLL Dept, the late Professors Monique Fol and Betty Rahv. A genuine intellectual and an enthusiastic Francophile, she possessed true "joie de vivre." And, yes, she was very elegant; she also had a heart of gold."

*Nelly Rosenberg
BC French Language Program faculty (retired)*

"I met Marian by chance just before Christmas last year, and she was as vibrant and stylish as ever. Because we did not have time to chat, I sent her a card when I got home. In response Marian sent me a postcard with a drawing of a hunched-over old lady, all in grey, and on the reverse side a wish that we might both enjoy our wrinkles and grandchildren and laughter. I am so sad that she

did not have more time for all those things. Marian was always quick to appreciate the moment, and to make the most of it with her intelligence, wit, energy and style. She had an adventurous spirit, always searching out the cutting edge of whatever interested her; she lived her life as an adventure. Marian brought her love of French literature and life, her verve and charm to all that she did."

Laurie Shepard

Associate Professor of Italian, Boston College

"Needless to say, I am extraordinarily sad to hear that Marian St. Onge has died. We were professional colleagues and I enjoyed a most unique friendship with her. We met and instantly bonded in the Social Work intensive class Market and Nonmarket Economies circa 1984. This class involved biweekly class meetings and an intensive 2-week stay in CUBA. The adventure began on *Calle Ocho* in Miami followed by 2 weeks together seeing the "ins and outs" – clinics, factories, schools, day-care centers, The Chicken Farm, and more in Havana and Santiago de Cuba. Marian had a knack for finding the fun places – *La Bodeguita del Medio*, the *Tropicana*, and the dance floor on the top of the Hyatt – and interesting people – a reporter from Moscow that she had seen on television the week before we left and spotted at a bus stop in Havana. That reporter welcomed the opportunity to speak with Americans and Marian amused him with her wit and charm! After Cuba we spent many summer days at the beach and many noon times at lunch. Our paths frequently crossed at Boston College, but mostly we enjoyed friendship on social terms. *Chi, chi*, dear Marian, and rest in peace."

Rachel E. Spector

Boston College Capstone Faculty

"Marian and I have known one another for almost fifty years, dating back to when she began her graduate work at Boston College. Over the years we became very good friends. It was, therefore, a very sad moment when Marian phoned me from the Beth Israel Hospital on August 10 to say that she had been diagnosed with stage four pancreatic cancer. The prognosis was dire. Just ten days earlier she had been enjoying a wonderful reunion on the Cape with her children and grandchildren. Now she was being transferred to a hospice for palliative care. A week later she passed away. It all happened so very quickly....

Marian was truly a unique person. For the French, she was *raffinée* and *chaleureuse*, classy and refined with a warm heart. She was intellectually curious, always eager to discover and explore new areas, other cultures, and then sharing her enthusiasm with students and colleagues. She was kind and generous. I already miss her tremendously."

Rebecca Valette

Professor of French Emerita, Boston College

All Those Kisses

By Marian Brown Sr. Onge

Mafia kisses
Political kisses
All those phony collegial kisses
Received and given

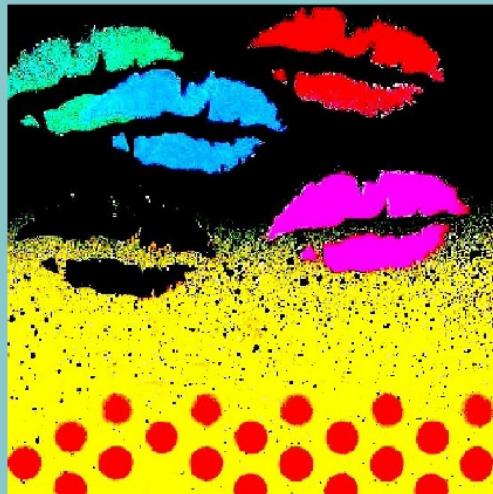
My shy father's tender kisses
To the top of my head
While I watched
The television

Hershey's kisses
Unforgettable movie kisses
Infinite numbers of songs and paintings
Of kisses

My first French kiss
On the front lawn
When I'd just turned
Fourteen years-old

My dying mother's smiling kisses
Her lovely mouth
Held up to mine
To ease my sorrow

The memory of my children's kisses
In from play pungent
As mushrooms
Better yes than lovers'



Artwork by Fabio Sassi

5 Weird Kisses

([from the online journal, Imitation Fruit](#))

Leaving Sarajevo (June, 1996)

On the road to Zagreb,
across blown-up bridges with new iron braces,
women saunter along in bright summer dresses.

Overhead,
I catch sight of a bird in flight
—still as a star.

But the man beside me in the bus
is weeping.

I've been remembering a soft-eyed Sarajevo scholar,
who said of the future
—*I am tragically optimistic.*

in memory of Kemal Bakarsic

([from the online journal, Raving Dove](#))



Marian in her office at the CIPP, 1997
(photo: Lee Pellegrini, BC Office of Communications)