

**Memorial Minute for Lois Jean Cohen, written by Peter Pufall
Read by Lauren Duncan at the February 24, 2016 Faculty Meeting**

Jean, as she preferred to be called, majored in psychology at the University of Michigan, earning her BA in 1944. After a year employed as a statistician at the National Research Council, Jean began her graduate studies at the University of Iowa as a student within The Child Welfare Research Station. This center was among the first to view child study as a field based on “the best scientific methods.”

In her first year Jean was an Assistant Teacher in the Station’s Pre-school; in the next three years she was a Research Assistant. Jean thrived there, co-authoring a research paper in 1946 on anthropometry, or the scientific study of the measurements and proportions of the human body. She earned her PhD in 1948. Although the focus of her research shifted from anthropometry to children’s language learning and development, her commitment to the Station’s mission to foster the systematic, experimental study of children never changed.

Jean joined the Smith College faculty as an Instructor in the Psychology Department in 1949. The next year she was promoted to Assistant Professor, a position she held until 1957.

Jean married H. George Cohen, a member of the Art Department at Smith, in 1952. She and George had two daughters, Martha Jean and Sarah Rachel Jean. Jean became full-time mother while temporarily limiting her academic career to part time teaching at Smith and the University of Massachusetts.

In the mid 1960s Jean revived her research career, collaborating with Barbara Musgrave, Professor of Psychology at Smith. As a Research Associate in the Department, she and Barbara carried out research funded by U.S. Public Health Service and the National Science Foundation. Their work reflected a theoretical revolution in our conceptualization of

the psychology of language, moving from understanding simple word association pairs to linguistic structures. Specifically they explored how children construed words and ideas embodied in text and how that was affected by writing style.

As Jean revived her research career she accepted the position of Class Dean, her first the class of 1970. Pete knew Jean better as Dean Cohen than as a colleague in the Psychology Department. In their conversations about students, Jean searched for ways a student could finish her course work without sacrificing academic standards or the integrity of the student's education.

Jean retired from the college in 1981, and subsequently moved from the edge of campus to Lathrop Manor in Easthampton. However, Jean was never far from Smith. She continued to participate in the intellectual and social life of the college, regularly attending lunchtime meetings of Sigma-Xi and OBND, a gathering of retired faculty and administrators who are "Out But Not Down." Even after a stroke severely affected her mobility, Jean would greet friends with a bright smile and never fail to ask about family, travels, professional projects or positions on current political issues. She could be counted on to ask questions of luncheon speakers; she would often ask the first question. When Pete spoke at one of these gatherings Jean challenged a key point in his talk, smiling all the while. She loved intellectual life; to her, engagement meant challenge.

Jean Carl Cohen died August 5, 2015 at the age of 91 having been a valuable part of the Northampton and Smith College communities for almost 70 years.