

Memorial Minute for Erna Kelley

Read by Charles Cutler, Faculty Meeting September 2010

Hello. My name is Charles Cutler, long-time friend and colleague of Erna Kelley in the Spanish and Portuguese Department, as was Alice Clemente, a collaborator for this memorial minute. Erna Berndt Kelly, Professor in the Spanish and Portuguese Department at the College from 1959 to 1995, passed away in California on December 31, 2009 after a fall from which she never recovered. All who knew Erna are familiar with her fine mind and big heart, her love for literature and art and her commitment to instilling that love in her students; for her passion concerning all things Spanish and her fascination in general with the power and expressive of language. In this regard, she was completely at home in Spanish, English, Italian, and the German of her ancestors. Her French was also decent as was her Portuguese, which she once taught briefly.

When one thinks of Erna's life prior to Smith, you have to marvel at the extent to which she was a self-made woman. Born in Argentina to a Lutheran pastor, she was the oldest daughter in a family of ten children. She served as a second mother to many of her siblings until the family moved to the US for a time. When her father decided to return to Argentina, Erna, now nineteen, declared what was perhaps her first act of independence: she remained in Wisconsin and, completely on her own now, worked her way through the undergraduate and graduate years at the University of Wisconsin at Madison. If her first act of independence was staying on in America, her second came during her early career years: this daughter of a Lutheran minister and sister to two more Lutheran pastors, went home to Argentina to inform her family – with some trepidation – that she was engaged to marry a man by the name of Tom Kelley, an Irish Catholic from Boston.

After completing her PhD at Wisconsin, Erna came to Smith in 1959 and with the exception of two years spent in Madrid as director of the College's JYA program there, she lived in the Northampton area until, after retiring, she and Tom moved to Texas to be closer to their son Chris and his family.

During her career at Smith, Erna moved through the ranks to become Full Professor in 1975. She taught over twenty different courses during her tenure, often carrying heavy teaching loads: everything from elementary language to advanced seminars on her special areas of interest and expertise, Medieval and Golden Age Spanish Literature. On occasion she taught advanced courses in her field at Boston University. All the while, through her scholarship, Erna developed a reputation as one of the leading experts worldwide in Medieval and Golden Age Studies. Her seminal book on *La Celestina: AMOR, MUERTE, Y FORTUNA IN LA CELESTINA*, the dozens of articles on the same subject, and her prolific and varied writing on Cervantes' *DON QUIJOTE* are as highly regarded today as they were when first published.

Her service record at the College was long and varied also. She served as Chair of her department for three stints, she was a member of the Board of Admissions, the Board of Pre-Major Advisors, the Committee on Comparative Literature, the Committee on foreign Students, Director of JYA, member of the Committee on Study Abroad, various Five-College committees,

PhD examination committees at Harvard and Boston University, and the PRESHCO consortium committee for JYA in Cordoba. She was a key force in the development of Portuguese and Brazilian Studies at Smith, a part of the Spanish and Portuguese Department curriculum that is currently flourishing. Erna was also a caring and effective mentor to many new junior faculty members long before mentorship became institutionalized. Finally, but the least of Erna's contributions to the College and the larger Smith/Northampton community were her and Tom's wonderful social gatherings and parties at their home a few blocks from here. There we were treated to her splendid cooking and warm hospitality. Except for the Friday night "mixers" at the Faculty Club, the Kelley parties were among the best opportunities for both new and old faculty members to meet people outside their department and outside the College in general.

In looking back on my friendship with Erna, I can come up with many reasons for missing her, several of them very personal. Among these was our shared love for Western Mass. Landscape, particularly the hill towns where I live, and for the New England countryside in general. We also shared an affection for animals, animals of all kinds: she loved to hear about my menagerie of donkeys, goats, geese, chickens, cats and dogs, and didn't think it a bit odd or eccentric that a college teacher would have another life such as this. She loved the way I doted on her various dogs over the years, shelter dogs, orphans, which she transformed into lovable companions, conveying instant social and cultural pedigree by naming them after famous Medieval and Renaissance literary characters. Finally, in connection with her prowess in the kitchen, hugely missed will be her legendary guacamole, stupefyingly good – almost a religious epiphany. In this regard Erna, wherever you are out there, we hope that you are working on a fresh, colossal batch of the cosmic green stuff for when we next sit down together somewhere down the road. Bless you!

Charles Cutler, Professor Emeritus, Spanish and Portuguese