

A Tribute to Miss Eleanor Mumbauer, French Teacher at Liberty High School by Linda Faust Sharkey

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Eleanor Mumbauer was my French teacher for 3 years at Liberty High School. What I'd written in 1961 by her photo in our yearbook, "A hard marker, but I loved her." As I age, I appreciate her more and more.

Mademoiselle Mumbauer was shorter than most LHS adults, but she had quite a presence. On one occasion, my mother had a meeting with her in her classroom. When my mother came home, even she had noticed how Miss Mumbauer stood right up close to you, facing you, when you had something to say to her--as if she didn't want to miss one, little thing you said.

Yes, Mademoiselle taught us French, but not just the French language. She wanted us to get a feel for French culture and especially an appreciation of French artwork. When she showed us her copy of Daumier's "Third Class Carriage," she painted with words a picture of train travel in the 1860's. In that lesson she told us that the French loved garlic so much that some of the French ate garlic like we eat an apple. Viewing Daumier's painting, to this day, I swear, I smell garlic breath. Miss Mumbauer exposed us to classical French artists right on through the French impressionists. As a yearly culminating activity, she organized a Saturday trip to NYC starting at The Metropolitan Museum of Art. Being able to go on that trip meant my introduction to New York City and The Metropolitan. What an undertaking that was for a single, little French teacher as I don't remember any other chaperones on that trip. Could that have been possible?

What an eye opening day I had. One strong museum memory I have is approaching Rosa Bonheur's painting, "The Horse Fair." I was so shocked to be seeing how large and overwhelming this real painting is that out of my mouth came an audible "ooh." Even now when I come upon a Fragonard or certain Renoirs, I think of Miss Mumbauer. You cannot imagine my excitement when approaching Mont Saint Michel many years after her description of the experience--watching it grow in size. The tour guide was amazed that I even remembered the name of a well known restaurant there (now a tourist trap) known for its omelettes--now owned by the descendants of the original owner Mme. Poulard whose name I still remembered.

After enjoying The Metropolitan Museum, Mademoiselle took us to a French movie. (There were no subtitles either.) You can imagine my surprise when some New Yorkers in the audience lit up cigarettes—IN THE MOVIE HOUSE! That surely never happened at the Boyd or the Nile.

A lesson on French foods in Mademoiselle's classroom led to our making our dinner choices from an actual menu before our NY trip with her. We ate dinner in a French restaurant called, "Les Pyrenees" that night. Never since has Coquilles Saint Jacques tasted so good. Later in life when I made my own Coq au Vin Rouge, it tasted bland compared to the way it tasted at Les Pyrenees with Miss Mumbauer. I haven't forgotten the warm chestnut sundae either, but I've never ordered that since. (If it isn't chocolate, it's not worth it.)

It's amazing how teachers influence young people. When I was her student, I never dreamed that Eleanor Mumbauer would make such an indelible impression on me. I'm so glad she did.

Linda Faust Sharkey

Miss Mumbauer's Obituary

1910 – 1986 Eleanor Mumbauer taught French at Liberty High School for many years before retiring in 1971. She began teaching in the former Hellertown school system in 1932, After going to Bethlehem schools, she taught French to almost 4,000 students. Born in Bethlehem, Miss Mumbauer received her bachelor's degree from Moravian College and her master's degree from Lehigh University. There are no immediate survivors. Arrangements: Wallace M Long Funeral Home, Bethlehem.