

Memorial minute for Prof. Malgorzata Pfabe, Professor Emeritus of Physics,
Written and read by Nalini Easwar, Professor Emeritus of Physics, Smith College.
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Malgorzata Pfabe was a dear friend and a close colleague of mine for the last 4 decades. I am honored to deliver this tribute in her memory. Malgorzata left us in December of 2022 following a brief period of illness. She retired from Smith in 2011 after 3 decades of dedicated service to her students, the physics department and Smith college. I will try my best to bring Malgorzata back to us in this short memorial.

Malgorzata completed her Ph.D. in 1969 at the Institute of Nuclear Research in Warsaw. From 1969 to 1978 she did post-doctoral work in Poland and Germany. She came to the US in 1978 as a visiting prof at RPI and then joined Smith College in 1982. Malgorzata brought with her the essential ingredients to build the core fabric of the department which stands to this day as a culture of camaraderie and collegiality among faculty and commitment to teaching and mentoring of our students. She also cared much about recruiting, training and retaining women in physics, where they continue to be underrepresented.

She loved the college, the physics department and above all her students. And they loved her back as a great teacher, mentor and much more. Students would spend unlimited hours in her office over physics problems. They knew that she cared and listened like she had all the time in the world for them. Of the many instances of generosity to students, I'll mention three here.

Once she walked home after handing over her car keys to a student who would have missed getting to the GRE test center on time. In another instance she willingly became the health care proxy for an international student who had a health emergency. Malgorzata visited her in the hospital every day for over a month with homemade soup and called the student's parents in Sri Lanka everyday with an update on their daughter. Malgorzata has used her personal funds in helping another international student tide over a family emergency to help her continue her

education at Smith. The list of her acts of generosity is so much longer. Messages received from her students on her passing referred to her as a brilliant physicist, teacher and an incredible human being with a gentle and kind heart. Did I miss noting that she was also an excellent teacher? Malgorzata won the faculty teaching award twice in 1985 and 2001 and the Maria Curie Science Award in 1995.

Incoming members of the department including myself recall the warm welcome extended by Malgorzata and her husband Jurek: with flowers waiting at the door and welcome dinners at their home. She was a mentor to all of us. She had the capacity to make you feel at ease, listen to you and give you thoughtful feedback. Once you share a problem with Malgorzata, it becomes hers! My colleague Doreen Weinberger and I cannot forget how she volunteered graciously to extend her chairship to allow us to concentrate on our work towards tenure. Imagine that!!

As a theoretical nuclear physicist, she worked on the properties of nuclear structure, nuclear fission and heavy ion collisions, authoring over 100 refereed papers and conference presentations with collaborators in the US, Europe and Australia. She was elected fellow of the American Physical Society in 1989 and received the honor of the Sophia Smith chair in 1992.

Her service record to the department, the college and the larger physics community is striking. She did many rotations and years as department chair, she was on the search committees for 2 presidents, the dean of religious life and the director of the engineering program. She served on the Tenure and Promotion committee, the curricular review panel for Science and Engineering, the steering committee for the 20/20 initiative and was Chair of the Faculty Council. She played a significant role in advocating for and establishing the Picker engineering program on campus.

In the symposium that the department held last month to celebrate Malgorzata, her daughter Renata described her mother's love as being 3-fold: physics, dancing and traveling. I am sure

many of you recall that Malgorzata and her husband Jurek were the first to get on the dance floor and the last ones to leave at the annual president's party. Besides, she was a great cook, loved entertaining, loved life. Has anyone heard anything but a cheery 'Wonderful' as her response to the question 'How are you'?"

At the symposium, Renate gave us a peek into her mother's childhood in Poland. Here are some excerpts from her speech. "My mom was born during the second world war into a working class, Jewish family in Poland. Her parents were both accountants. My mom's family pretended to be Catholic in order to survive the war." The next information she gave was profound and I paraphrase it here. Malgorzata was invited by RPI to work on a research project with a one-year appointment in 1978. One year turned to three. At that time, the political situation in Poland was dismal. A close colleague from Poland, here for a physics conference, visited Malgorzata in Troy. It was agreed that, upon her return to Poland she would send them a letter advising them of the situation in Poland. As the government censored all mail, the letter would be in black ink if the situation was OK. Red ink meant they should reconsider coming home. Several weeks later the letter arrived; it was in black ink. The letter meandered about various routine matters and concluded with a PS: **cannot buy red ink anywhere!** The United States had extended visas to all Polish citizens, due to martial law in Poland. Malgorzata applied for jobs in the U.S. and received an offer from Smith. Making the final and hard decision not to return to Poland, she accepted the offer. It was 1982 and the rest is Smith history.

She will be missed. We remember her today not only as a scholar, teacher and mentor but also as a gracious, gentle and generous soul. We love you, Malgorzata.