

MEMORIES of Madame Pyrgos, by Ros Kellett

speech given at Reception following Memorial service Saturday October 25, 2014

Hello, my name is Rosalind Kellett (Grad of 1967) and I was a student in Madame Pyrgos' French classes at CHS in the 1960s.

I remember Madame Pyrgos most in my senior years at CHS.

As a classroom teacher, she was very good, very thorough in her explanations and drill practices and we learned well.

But she could also be quite strict. She insisted we practise speaking French regularly and with the proper accent each time.

She had a formidable way of getting our attention and checking our homework, even in our grade 12 year. I remember one French 12 period, early in the school year, when she chose to check that we had done our homework by walking around the room systematically and studying our open notebooks.

It happened that I had NOT finished my homework at that time, as I had a ton of other homework to do the night before. Madame Pyrgos noticed, stopped at my desk, stared at the incomplete work and gave me a fierce glare with her eyes. She never said a word!

But that finished me off, I felt so stressed out so I started weeping silently! The tears saved me from any further questions from her that period, but I learned -as did ALL my classmates - to **ALWAYS TO DO YOUR FRENCH HOMEWORK FIRST!**

I also learned as a teacher myself later, that simply showing one's concern for the state of a child's work could motivate the child just as easily as collecting the homework from each student and spending hours marking the work.

So the teaching technique I learned from her that day greatly assisted my working life as a teacher later on!

The HAPPIER memories I have of Mme Pyrgos were of her being a bit of a rebel and being quite fun-loving and musical.

We would look forward to Friday afternoon French classes and the school plays she helped produce.

Madame Pyrgos loved to read French novels to us – unfortunately, the French sentences of Victor Hugo's writings were too complex for many of us to understand so she would read a few sentences in French every now and then, and help us translate them, and then she would read huge swaths of the text in English so we could understand the story.

She read Voltaire and we learned about Social justice. She read and had us act out parts of Moliere's plays and introduced us to 17th century French writers and French history. We grew to love the same authors and playwrights that she did.

I can still remember her gentle but clear voice as she read these stories and we could all relax – yes, she allowed us to slink our heads down on top of the desks as it was Friday afternoon – and be inspired by the eloquence and humanity of the stories that she translated for us.

It certainly enhanced our love of French language and culture.

A highlight for me in my grade 12 year was acting in the play, Jeanne d'Arc, as a knight in the French court. It was fun dressing up and staying after school as Mme Pyrgos spent hours getting us to learn our lines and become the character we were supposed to portray.

She also insisted on real recordings of French music from the times to be used for the stage presentations. We all got SO involved – I was impressed with how we students actually got into our roles – and we really FELT the injustices that Joan of Ark stood for those many years ago and were moved to become like her.

My mother –Margery Kellett who will speak later– and I had a chance to visit Mme Pyrgos in her Seniors' residence a few years ago.

She had retained her smile but she was in her 90's and could not converse well as she did not seem to remember much. Yet she seemed happy enough with what memories she had.

Her death brings her a well deserved rest, she led a fulsome life and MAY her soul rest in peace.