

By Vered Shemtov

When I went over the RSVP list for the annual Jewish Studies social gathering and Nelee's name was not there. Nelee was always there - she was part of almost every big lecture or event at the center for as far as I can remember.

I look now at the crowd here: friends and colleagues from DLCL, colleagues from the Language Center, friends of Jewish Studies - when I saw these groups of people together in the past - Nelee was always also there.

So her absence is already extremely present and this place feels somehow empty without her.

The Hebrew poet Yehuda Amichai wrote:

“Forgetting someone is like

forgetting to turn off the light in the yard,

it stays on all day:

And that means also remembering

By the light”

I met Nelee almost 20 years ago at Stanford, as a student in her intensive reading French class. Nelee was one of the most memorable teachers I had in grad school. She was one of those teachers that make you realize that good education is not necessarily about the latest technology, or a detailed syllabus. Sometimes, it is first and foremost about role models. Sometimes, there is nothing more important than the personality of the teacher.

Nelee had a brilliant, sharp mind and so her explanations were always clear and to the point. She was down to earth and focused on what really mattered. There was no hiding behind the bush with her. No nonsense. She listened to you attentively and generously in a way that made you feel you had to do your best to be worthy of her true interest in you. This combination of extreme kindness and yet high expectations (from herself and from others) made her students always want to excel.

Throughout the years, Nelee became not just a teacher but also a colleague (we taught together in the language center), she was a mentor for me and in the last few years also a loving friend. These same qualities: the deep interest in others, the curiosity, and positive thinking, the integrity and – the same wonderful smile - were part of each and every interaction with her.

But more than anything, Nelee taught me how NOT to forget. In the last few years I had the opportunity to work with her on finding funding for completing her movie about her Holocaust experience. I was astonished to see how it was not anger or revenge that motivated Nelee to tell her story but her enormous gratitude and love for the people who saved her and her sister Mina. This was her way of teaching us how not to forget darkness.

We will miss Nelee but she will continue to be a part of the Center for Jewish Studies and the French Language program. Following her wish, Stanford will have two Nelee Langumir awards: one for excellence in the study of French and the other for the study of Jewish history and the Holocaust. The first prize will be awarded on April 28th at a special screening of the movie in Wallenberg Hall.

I remember very clearly the last time I saw Nelee. I remember her holding my hand and saying goodbye. I remember looking at her and thinking how unbelievably... how incredibly pretty she was, just a truly beautiful person and a very rare light.

I want to add a few words for Debra and Jennifer: Thank you for giving the honor to speak here to day. You surrounded her with love, peace and constant care. You gave her a gift beyond words.

Nelee will be missed.