

Éloge for Donna F. Ryan

Donna F. Ryan, professor of History at Gallaudet University, Washington, DC, passed away on July 16, 2012, after a year-long battle with cancer. Professor Ryan had a long, productive career at Gallaudet and in French History. A native of Boston, and a graduate of Wheaton College in Norton, Massachusetts, Professor Ryan received her Ph.D. with distinction from Georgetown University in 1984 with a specialization in Modern European and French History. She joined the History Department at Gallaudet University in 1984, and was promoted to full professor in 1993. She is survived by her spouse, partner and companion of over 25 years, Vicki Ferguson.

Professor Ryan was well-known and respected among historians for her research on Vichy France, published in her book *The Holocaust and the Jews of Marseille* (University of Illinois Press, 1996). This research also led to a significant contribution to a special exhibit at the U.S. Holocaust Memorial Museum, “Varian Fry and the Emergency Rescue Committee in Marseille.” She engaged in important new research with Professor John Schuchman of Gallaudet University to preserve and present the experiences of Deaf people during the Holocaust, resulting in “Deaf People in Hitler’s Europe,” an international conference co-sponsored by Gallaudet and the U.S. Holocaust Memorial Museum in June, 1998. That conference led to an important collection of some of the papers presented there, published as *Deaf People in Hitler’s Europe* by Gallaudet University Press and the U.S. Holocaust Memorial Museum in 2002. Professor Ryan continued to expand her research and interests in Deaf and Disability History, and served on the editorial board of Gallaudet University Press. She was elected to two terms on the Governing Council of the Western Society for French History, an organization in which she was very active for her entire career, and for which she held a special affection, attending almost every annual meeting from the mid-1980s until 2011. From 2008 to 2011 she served as co-editor of the *Proceedings of the Western Society for French History*. She was also the author of numerous conference papers, encyclopedia entries, book reviews and review essays, and a regular reviewer for H-France.

In her 28 years as a professor of History at Gallaudet, Professor Ryan taught a substantial proportion of the History courses in the curriculum, ranging over a vast expanse of geography, eras, and subjects. She helped to develop the post-baccalaureate Certificate in Deaf History program, for which she served as director from 1998 to 2002. She also helped to create the Women’s Studies Minor, and taught the introductory and capstone courses in that subject, and served as its director from 2003 to 2012. Professor Ryan was one of the department’s best teachers, well known among students for her demanding standards, as well as her openness to student ideas and her desire to help them grow intellectually and personally. She organized and led study programs for students to Canada, France, Italy, Costa Rica, and Eastern Europe. She was a mentor and advisor to countless undergraduates. Professor Ryan was also a major contributor to the University community, and was particularly active in promoting women’s, diversity, and LGBT issues at Gallaudet.

Professor Ryan was also a respected colleague, mentor and friend to many at Gallaudet

University and in French History, in Washington, France, and beyond. As much as for her professional accomplishments, she will be remembered for her quiet brilliance, her biting sense of humor, her love of good food and wine, her remarkable cooking, her wide-ranging and adventurous travels, her love of dogs, and her boundless generosity. Underlying all this was a profound compassion for her fellow human beings, reflected in her embrace of intellectual and human causes in which she had no personal stake. She gave freely of herself to all those in need of support, help, or advice, and those who received her gifts will never forget that magnanimous largesse.

Donations in Donna's memory may be made to the Foundation for Women's Cancer:

Foundation for Women's Cancer
230 W. Monroe, Suite 2528
Chicago, Il. 60606-4703
<http://www.wcn.org/about/donate.html>

This éloge submitted by:
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