

Memorials

Evangeline Machlin

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by Mary K. Corrigan

It is a pleasure to honor Evangeline Machlin.

The first time I met Van was in the summer of 1974 at the Banff School of Fine Arts in the Canadian Rockies. Both Van and I were invited to spend six weeks teaching Voice for the Theatre Program. The Banff School provided a first rate six week Extensive and very Intensive Arts Program. Van was already well known and highly respected because of her distinguished teaching career. I felt honored to be teaching in her proximity. I soon learned that Van was an extremely generous colleague and an extraordinary mentor. It was an exciting time to be at Banff because Aaron Copland taught there that summer and the next summer the faculty included, among others, Svoboda, the noted Czech scenic designer, the Royal Danish Ballet, the Canadian Brass and the Sadler Wells Ballet. It was a summer feast of the arts.

Van represented one of those major treats! She taught the advanced voice classes which I had the pleasure to audit. I taught the junior classes. Van and I taught at Banff for the following summer as well and my undiminished respect for Van continued to grow with leaps and bounds. Van had a deep and abiding love of language and the care with which it should be spoken. Van had also the great capacity to teach and share her love of language with her students. She was an inspiring, albeit demanding teacher. No softy was Van. She was a kindly but stern taskmaster with enormously high standards regarding voice, speech and communication of the text. Her students loved her and their voices improved dramatically (even in those six weeks) as a result of her teaching methods. Van had previously taught at Banff years earlier so the Banff administrators were well aware of their good fortune in Van's availability during those summers. Van believed that every student could end up with a good voice and distinct speech. No one was ever hopeless in her book and the students always improved after her instruction.

One of the biggest treats of both summers was Van's very early morning mandatory warm-up class in a huge gymnasium for all the Performing Arts students. Many of the Fine Arts faculty also attended that 8 am warm-up session because it was a great way to begin the day. Van ran a superb warm-up. It was relaxed and thorough and she always ended the session with highly polished, crisp articulation exercises



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followed by an introduction to new and different texts each day. Van inspired all of us with her deep appreciation of language. She savored it! She also had a lusty sense of words. I can still remember her introduction of a highly sensuous text introduced while we were still relaxing in early stages of the warm-up. She elicited more than a few suppressed giggles as well as an initial sense of shock! Here was this rather severe looking Canadian woman (she actually looked more British than Canadian, thanks to her parental heritage), beautifully expressing a highly erotic text and giving all those vowels and consonants full expressive value!

Van felt a mission to bring the text's rich imagery to all those with whom she worked. I understand that she put together a series of stunning programs while teaching at Boston University. For one event in particular, she put together a program for African American students consisting of Langston Hughes and other outstanding African American poets. The program was an outstanding success and in addition, was something of a trailblazer for Boston University's Theatre Department at that time.

Van was a superb mentor. She was extremely supportive and generous to me. We ended up team teaching the second summer at Banff and I continued to learn even more from Van when I taught in collaboration with her. She had enormous respect for the profession of voice and speech training. One of her favorite expressions to young teachers was to "magnify your office:" treat your teaching skills with respect, for if you don't, others will not respect what you do. I had to remind myself of her words "magnify your office" many times in succeeding years.



Van also loved the outdoors and was an inveterate hiker. She loved to climb mountains and even that summer at Banff would take time off to go on extended solitary over night mountain hikes with a secure backpack and a weathered cane in her hand; I remember watching her trudge determinedly up the mountain. She returned from those trips with vivid breathless descriptions of waterfalls, sunsets and idyllic mountain streams.

Van taught several Master Classes at UC San Diego where again, she inspired students because of her response to language. As the years went by, Van's approach might have been called "old fashioned" nonetheless, she always awakened students to the underlying magic of the language and they always ended with a deep appreciation of her and her work.

In the late years Van lived in a house set up in the woods reasonably close to town, close to her beloved mountains. Her house contained tapes, records, countless poetry books and memories of her beloved engineer husband who helped her put together dialect tapes for her books.

The last time I saw Van was when she waved at me outside her shingled house there in the hills. The road was extremely rutted and it took a while to get down that road but Van stood out there waving until I lost sight of her at the foot of the hill. I did not know how to reach her during her final years. She was an inspiration and so many of us still miss her.

