

The
Century Yearbook
2014



THE CENTURY ASSOCIATION
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Around its heart,
Jasmine in your hands
To bless the gods,
Penitence in your soul,
From me apart.

Now I walk again
To seek your shadow,
Calling your name aloud
In silent shrines.
The portal held you then
But now is void.
The frame of life will lead
To death's confines. (2003)

Alexandra Walcott

LUISE CLAYBORN KAISH

1925-2013

Luise came out of Atlanta, New Orleans, and Cripple Creek from a long line of techies that included a grandfather who had worked out a way to get coal barges down the Ohio River and a dad who invented a World War II device to eject wounded Air Force pilots from their doomed planes.

When Schuyler Chapin, then Dean of the School of the Arts, invited her to chair the Graduate Division of Painting and Sculpture at Columbia University, the office came with a single IBM typewriter, which had to be locked away each night for safekeeping, coveted as it was by the Music Department. By the time

she retired as Professor Emerita, things had changed. Resistance notwithstanding, she had brought the digital age to that bustling, no longer technologically challenged office at Dodge Hall.

Of recent years, with the encouragement of daughter Melissa, mastery of the Mac and iPhone had become her mini-projects. We kept her phone charged for months after losing her—messages continuing to pour in from across the planet. Appropriately, her site of choice remained NASA.gov, for—ever creative—it was her wish that her ashes travel into space. Not simply into orbit, nor to the moon. But into deep space. The realm of infinity.

Google, of course, fascinated her. She loved its “just the facts” approach to matters great and small, while I’ve always been frustrated by its omissions, the absence of nuance.

For example: a Google search won’t tell you where or how or when we first met.

Answer: It was upstate New York. Syracuse. Ice-skating. The stars were out. The night sky purple. I thought her beautiful beyond compare. We were eighteen years old.

Google will speak of achievements: Luise’s Guggenheim Foundation and Rome Prize awards, probably her Tiffany Foundation Grant, along with the years of service as trustee on the American Academy in Rome and the Augustus Saint-Gaudens boards.

But I doubt there’s mention anywhere of her yearlong graduate fellowship in Mexico. Or that she worked with Rivera and Siqueiros and O’Higgins at the Taller de Gráfica. That she auditioned for conductor Carlos Chávez and sang with the Coro Nacional de México.

Or that she jumped horses with the Mexican Olympic riding

team.

Google mention is made that while a graduate student at Syracuse, studying with Ivan Mestrovic, she created the *Saltine Warrior* sculpture that was to become the (eventually controversial) campus symbol of the university.

Very few will know of her quest for a Native American model to pose for the over-lifesize work. That it led her to the son of a chief of the Onondaga Nation. Or how, on completion, she was honored at the ceremony of the Green Corn in the reservation's longhouse.

Or how she danced that night to the beat of the tom-toms.

We will know that she's received the George Arents Pioneer Medal, Syracuse University's highest honor.

No mention that she has a drawer filled with swimming medals.

Google speaks at length of her career as sculptor and painter, the gallery shows, the museum collections of the Met, the Whitney, the Smithsonian, the corporate collections. Tells us of the commissions here and abroad. Of the *Great Ark of Revelation* created for Congregation B'rith Kodesh in Rochester, New York. And the monumental *Christ in Glory* installation at the Holy Trinity Mission Church, Silver Spring, Maryland.

No mention, though, of the vast skylit MacDougal Street studio where those works of soaring spirituality were created. At the teeming epicenter of the 1960s art world. Down the block from the Cedar Bar and Hans Hoffman's school. Around the corner from Larry Rivers's studio. Atop the Rienzi coffee shop, where Ginsberg read his poetry. And where Melissa was born.

Nor word of the inspirational sources of those works, the

years abroad, the passionate pilgrimages. Of the love affair with the Romanesque, the journeys to the churches of Verona and Autun and Hildesheim. Of missing the last bus out of Vézelay on a darkening 1950s winter night.

It's unlikely to mention that she was her high school's cheerleader. Chief cheerleader. And that she was our cheerleader. In reality, our North Star.

Come back to summertime in the 1980s. We've been invited for a semester as artists-in-residence at Washington University in Seattle. It's been a long, demanding summer. Melissa and I are looking forward to our trip east. Home. Luise is studying a map. And deciding that since we are in Seattle—why not Alaska?

Fast forward to arrival at the airport in Sitka. Melissa and I are longing for a nap. Luise is in discussion with a lounging youth. Dark glasses. He looks to be maybe fifteen years old, says he's a pilot. It's about hiring his plane for a flight over the glaciers.

I'm sure things are very different today. The plane seats four and has a makeshift look about it. A collage of spare parts that sits casually on the dirt runway. The fifteen-year-old pauses to consult his instruction manual, and we're off.

Clearing the runway, we lift up and over and between mountains that reach for our wingtips. Glaciers unfold—gleaming, almost within reach. We swoop for eye contact with the seals on the ice below. Then climb to meet the Arctic sun. Engine sputtering, the plane vibrates uneasily. Luise and the pilot chat. They point and nod and exclaim in shared camaraderie.

Melissa and I breathe in, breathe out, hunker deeper into our seats, and double tug at the frayed safety belts. And suddenly, we're back. Shaken, stirred. Intact. Energized. Recharged and

refreshed. Renewed. Mission accomplished. Enthusiasm reigns.

As we touch down, Melissa says, "You know, Mom is really amazing. Without her, we'd probably be just a couple of clods."

And, of course, she's right. Luise was amazing, and—we are now without her. But we've promised to do our best.

Morton Kaish