

*„Und meine Seele spannte weit ihre Flügel aus,
flog durch die stillen Lande
als flöge sie nach Haus.....“*

(Joseph von Eichendorff)

In Memoriam



Virginia Claire Larsen aka Ginnie
18.3.1937 -5.5.2018

12th American St. Olaf guest teacher at Martin-Luther-School (1959)
Coordinator of the St. Olaf-Rimbach connection
Friend, supporter, “Ourewellerin”



Martin-Luther-Schule
Gymnasium des Kreises Bergstrasse



Höhere Schule Rimbach
seit 1887

Schule mit Schwerpunkt
Musik

Martin-Luther-Schule, Staatsstraße 6, 64668 Rimbach



Liebe Freundinnen und Freunde der Martin-Luther-Schule,
liebe Schulgemeinde,

on behalf of the community of the Martin-Luther-School I pay my greatest respect, most sincere gratitude and heartfelt appreciation to a woman who was the soul of our partnership between St. Olaf College and Martin-Luther-School. We will hold our Ginnie in loving remembrance – she will always have her place in our community.

After her graduation from St. Olaf College in Northfield Minnesota in 1959 with majors in German and French, Ginnie came to Martin-Luther-Schule Rimbach as the 12th American guest teacher to support the „local“ English department and teach English for one year. Martin-Luther-Schule at that time was still a private school (a Gymnasium teaching children from 10 to 19 years where the oldest students can graduate with the Abitur) run by the Protestant church.

Ginnie really „fitted“ in and enjoyed the Odenwald while teaching her students good and correct English and introducing them to the „American way(s) of life“ along with the other teachers of that time with whom she soon became friends. She also found a very good friend in the school secretary of that time, Emma Bickel, who took her „under her wing“. She

also had lots of connections with people in Rimbach outside the MLS-community and with her landlord and- lady and learned to speak perfect „Ourewellerisch“. Outstanding was her farewell speech after a year in Rimbach which she delivered in perfect Odenwald dialect to the astonishment of colleagues, students and parents. Nobody, who listened to it, would have doubted that Ginnie was not a „dyed in the wool“ Oureweller.

Ginnie never cut ties with the MLS and the Odenwald; and so she came back to Rimbach after a stay in Paris and working as a teacher in the US to support the MLS foreign language department for some time in 1970 happy to be in Rimbach again and to see some of her former colleagues and friends.

In 2000 Jim Anderson, former assistant to Professor Howard Hong, came – during a visit to Germany – to Rimbach to renew the ties between Rimbach and St.Olaf-College and invited the former deputy principal and his wife (Willi and Dorothea Jakob), who still knew Ginnie from her year in Germany, along with the then principal, Hans-Jürgen Schmidt, to a reunion at St. Olaf College in Northfield, Minnesota with Professor Howard Hong, the American „father“ of the MLS-St. Olaf-connection. Many of the former Rimbach guest teachers accepted the invitation, too, and came to the meeting at their „alma mater“, among them Ginnie, who – having retired from teaching a few years earlier - spontaneously accepted the task of coordinator, secretary, motor, in short the „good spirit“ behind the revived St.-Olaf-MLS guest teacher program called the „Rimbach teacher award“ from then on. She and Jim Anderson found supporters in Professors Karl Fink and Charles (Chuck) Huff on the American side and the two principals of the MLS, Hans-Jürgen Schmidt, and his successor, Beate Wilhelm, on the MLS side together with various other Oles in the US and Germany and teachers in the Odenwald.

So Erin Birch was chosen as the first St Olaf guest teacher to come to Rimbach in 2002 when Ginnie along with some other Oles came to the commencement ceremony in the Aula of the Martin-Luther-Schule. All the American guests donned their academic robes and mortar boards.

Thanks to Ginnie’s never-failing commitment and interest in the program all the people involved received nearly monthly updates on new developments. She also shared news, comments and photos from some of the Oles with all the community. Every May she went to St.Olaf-college to greet and congratulate the new Rimbach guest teacher and welcome her/him into the Ole-Rimbach community. She also shared her experience and some good advice with them although the times (steamers, „Leiterwagen“ and letters had been substituted by planes, cars and e-mails) had changed „a little“.

Ginnie visited Germany and especially her second home Rimbach and the MLS on various occasions also with her wife Kirsten Lindbloom to show it to her and to look after the program. Besides, she had become good friends with the new generation of MLS-teachers.

After nearly 15 years Ginnie retired from being the coordinator of the St.-Olaf-Rimbach connection. She wanted some younger people from the „second generation“ to take over.

It was during one of those visits that she discovered her talent as a writer / an author when she was given a book of stories about Nazi-Germany, „Schattenzeit“, by former MLS-teacher Lilo Beil which Ginnie read on the plane on her way home. Lilo and Ginnie had never met as teachers at the MLS but Lilo knew about Ginnie through their mutual friend, school secretary Emma Bickel. Ginnie was so fascinated by the stories that she decided to get in touch with Lilo Beil and ask if she was allowed to translate them. So she published the book „Shadow Time“ in 2016 and visited Rimbach with her wife Kirsten for a last time as travelling had become more and more difficult because of her declining state of health. Here she met Lilo (for the first time in person) for the launch of „their“ book.

Ginnie had discovered her talent as a writer and two more books about her experiences with animals and her travels around the world (Rimbach was maybe her greatest, but not her only „love“ ☺) „The Story of Lurch“ and „Saving Grace“. One book of memoirs seems to be „in the pipeline“.

Virginia Claire Larsen passed away, „leaving herself with grace and dignity“ (her own words). She will be fondly remembered by all who knew her.

Rimbach, May 2018

Beate Wilhelm, Schulleiterin der Martin-Luther-Schule Rimbach

(I would like to express my thanks to Jutta Meyer and Helmut Hartmann who supported me in writing this obituary.)