

# ALUMNI UPDATE

*Jane Mary Trau (nee: Sutnick) passed away on 27 August 2008 after a long illness. She wrote the following, with the assistance of Frank Harrison, for this Newsletter.*



The University of Miami has been a dominant thread in my personal tapestry, for most of my life. Indeed, in many ways it has been “family.” For instance, growing up in Miami Beach, trips to the Lowe Art Museum were among the most popular family outings. There was, and is, always something magical about the campus which I felt the minute I stepped foot there.

The higher consciousness my three brothers and I experienced during those forays unto campus became a part of us. Indeed, between us, we have three bachelor’s degrees, two MBAs, one M.A., and a Ph.D. Indeed, I have a B.A., M.A. and Ph.D. (1986) all from the Department of Philosophy at the U! We have been through three campus presidents, multiple deans, and several football coaches. But, for all the changes, the U remains what it always has been, and that is an oasis of intellectual life, artistic performance, and medical aid for the community.

The U has always been a strong and engaged presence in major local businesses, arts, medicine, and general culture. This posture of community involvement has had a large influence on the way I do philosophy. What I have learned in the Department of Philosophy is always to be applied to improve the life of the individual and the community. If this is not done then we, as so-called “philosophers” are really only game-players. We, who are educated at the U, serve, and should serve, a very large presence in the community as a powerful resource. And by ‘community’ I do not mean only the greater Miami area, although I certainly do mean that. It would be natural for the community to turn to us when such difficult issues as stem cell research, abortion, same sex marriages, just war, and the like arise. It is equally the case that we should be able to offer guidance. Certainly it is not for us to tell anyone what is morally permissible, but rather to engage them in the intellectual process necessary to come to reasonable views in such matters. For instance, several years ago, the Friends of Philosophy hosted a public discussion of ‘just war theory.’ After a lively discussion we were able to ask if the current involvement in the mid-East fit any description of a ‘just war’.

I first entered the professional field of Philosophy, and higher education teaching and research, through a faculty position at Barry University where I happily served for six years. I was then, as I have always been, firmly committed to the ideal of applying philosophy both to the life of the individual and the community in helpful, but never dictatorial, ways. If we cannot help in making the individual and the community better, then what real worth do we have? If we cannot help the individual and the community, then why ought they to help us? I cannot stress such questions too much.

While at Barry, I completed a Master’s Degree in Catholic Moral theology (1990). I was, and remain, committed to applied philosophy. I affirm the firmest foundations possible, in metaphysics and epistemology with strong interests in ethics, both theoretical and applied, and both theology and philosophy of religion. I have published chapters in anthologies, book reviews, academic papers, and my book, *The Co-Existence of God and Evil* (Peter Lang, 1991). Further, I have also been active in presenting papers at various academic gatherings such as the prestigious Society for Philosophy of Religion. In my more formal academic life I have served as a member of the executive committee of the Society of Christian Philosophers, president of the Florida chapter of the American Catholic Philosophical Association, and president of the Society for Philosophy of Religion. I am also a member of Delta Epsilon Sigma National Scholastic Honor Society. Yet, through each of these academic paths, a major goal of mine was to help both the individual and the community through philosophy.

After several papers of mine were published in the field of medical ethics, and a few spots on local radio and TV, I was considered a medical ethicist. It was at this point in my career that I was recruited by a major health care system.

Given my vital interests in the interface between academic philosophy and the betterment of both the individual and the community, I accepted the position of Vice-President for Ethics, St. Joseph’s Health System of Atlanta. I worked closely not only with individual physicians in cases involving difficult ethical decisions, but

with nurses and lawyers as well. I served on the ethics board of the hospital where cases involving difficult ethical decisions were reviewed before action was taken in the hospital. I was able to do some graduate teaching for the chaplaincy program. I also met with families, at their loved one's bedside, as they tried to grapple — for the first time — with the questions I was asking them. It was a wonderful opportunity to do applied philosophy in the world outside the Academy. For this, I shall always be grateful.

After serving for two years in the St. Joseph Health System, I moved to the much larger Allegheny Health System. There I served as Vice President of Values Integration and Leadership Development. My duties and responsibilities were similar to those in the St. Joseph Health System. However, my field of influence was much wider.

Due to a long illness leading to the death of my first husband, and then remarriage, I retired from successful careers in both professional philosophy and the corporate world. Now, I do some part time teaching and lecturing. I do some writing and some guest lectures. But best of all, I am having fun with philosophy and its wonderful influence in helping the individual and the community to gain a clearer perspective on many important issues.

In retirement I have become very active in the U family serving in various ways at the level of the President, the Dean of the College of Arts and Sciences, and the Department of Philosophy. For instance, I have served as co-chair of the Executive Committee of the President's Council, am a founding member of Friends of Philosophy, a Grand Founder at the U, and a member of Iron Arrow Honor Society (the highest honor attained at the University of Miami). I have also been very active in the health system of the U and in particular cancer research. Thus, I have felt, first hand, the growth in our U family throughout the changes in leadership. The alacrity and agility with which we have made the transitions on the administrative levels are clearly in place. We have the most exciting roster of new faculty across campus and in our new health system. I have also reached out to a wider community. For example, I have served on the Executive Committee of the Greater Miami Jewish Foundation of Jewish Philanthropies and am a patron of the Metropolitan Opera of New York.

The U will continue to teach us, train us, and inspire us as we seek personal levels of excellence. The Department of Philosophy ought to be a key stone in this out reach activity. All too often those in academics become insular and, thus, ineffective and useless in the larger world. I hope that our department rises above this very strong temptation.

The lush beauty of our campus provides the ideal environment for us to learn, and return. We learn as students, and return as alumni, for our own purposes, or to seek opportunities. We return as patients, receiving top care right in our own 'backyard.' We also return to learn how to live a better life, and not merely a more materially comfortable life.

An academy in paradise ----- sounds like a good idea to me!