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# OBITUARIES

**Micheline Giroux 1928-2017**

## Teacher brought France to Melbourne for students

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If anyone was born to be a teacher, it was Micheline Giroux. She taught French at the University of Melbourne for almost 30 years, from 1960 to her retirement in 1989. She then, for more than 20 years, taught at the University of the Third Age.

Her pedagogical dynamism, fiery personality and academic rigour were legendary, and generations of students benefited from her knowledge, passion and style. She is deservedly remembered as one of the significant contributors to French studies in Melbourne.

Born in Orleans in France on August 2, 1928, Micheline Henriette Giroux was the daughter of a French army officer and his second wife, a schoolteacher. A happy childhood was ended by the outbreak of the Second World War and the Nazi occupation.

She continued her secondary schooling during this period, but was not spared the tragedy of war: one of her step-brothers, who had fought in the Resistance, died in a concentration camp in 1945, a loss

compounded in that same year by the death of her father from cancer and her other step-brother's fatal car accident. Despite these losses, Micheline persevered with her studies, following her vocation to become a teacher.

At the University of Rennes, she successfully completed her undergraduate studies in English. Continuing on to the University of Paris, she undertook the notoriously difficult state examinations to qualify for upper-level secondary teaching and secured a permanent position as an employee of the French Ministry of Education.

She also enrolled for a doctorate at the Sorbonne. This thesis would later be abandoned when Micheline decided to stay in Australia, but its topic – the subversive 17th century writer Marie Catherine d'Aulnoy – points to many of her own central qualities: rebellious, confident, adventurous and fiercely assertive of the independence of women.

Through the 1950s, Micheline pursued her career as an English teacher in French high schools. In 1960, she came to Australia under a scheme whereby teachers from the



French National Education System were "detached" from their positions to work for short periods in Australian university French departments as "native speakers". She was appointed as a lecturer, initially for two years, but with the possibility of a renewed contract.

She was the first female lecturer to join the French Department at the University of Melbourne, and may well have been the first woman to hold such a position in Australia. After four years, she resolved to remain in Melbourne, gaining permanent residency in 1966.

Micheline proved to be one of the most valued and celebrated members of the French

department. In 1973, she was promoted to senior lecturer, and Professor Jackson, in his letter of recommendation, emphasised her outstanding contribution to the teaching of French in Victoria, which included work at the Alliance Francaise and the development of an ABC program of French for schools.

Over the years, she taught a wide variety of courses, at all levels: classical and modern French language, and French literature and civilisation of the 17th, 19th and 20th centuries. Impeccably prepared lectures were enriched with pieces of cultural interest, peppered with extracts of speeches, poetry and music for added authenticity. She would not infrequently burst into song.

Drama, too, was a keen interest. As both inspiration and actor, she was instrumental in the creation of the Melbourne French Theatre, founded in 1977 and still vital today. When she retired in 1989, her departure from the university coincided with the French Government award of chevalier dans l'ordre de palmes

academiques for her distinguished service to the French language and culture.

A new phase awaited when she began teaching at the Stonnington U3A when it opened in the early 1990s. For more than 20 years, until the very end of her life, she ran a French history lecture series and French conversation classes. The lectures covered a range of time periods, from the classics of the 17th century to the 19th century and the Belle Epoque.

She taught in the same way she always had, with a vitality and enthusiasm unhindered by age or gradually increasing physical frailty. She lived for her teaching, and her classes at the U3A were the highlights of her week; they were also highlights for the students.

Micheline died on February 27, teaching almost until her last day. Through her lifelong cultivation of her own knowledge and her gift for sharing it, she opened the minds of a multitude of Australian students to the beauties, intricacies and challenges of another culture and another language. It is a life and a legacy worthy of celebration.