

In Memoriam

Ursula Williams



Ursula Williams, IALLT's President-Elect and Associate Director of the Center for Creative Computing at Notre Dame University, passed away on March 17th, 2004 after a long struggle with cancer. The entire IALLT community is deeply saddened by her death, and expressions of gratitude and sympathy from her friends around the world have been posted to a Weblog (<http://blogs.brown.edu/user/ursula/>). Please consider adding your fond memories of Ursula, or simply reading a few thoughts on the life of a dear friend and colleague.

The IALLT Board and Council kept in touch with Ursula's family to the extent possible during her final illness, and thought that we should share her final communication with all of the IALLT family. She is, as always, utterly, wonderfully the Ursula we have known and loved – witty, irreverent and deeply wise.

Dear IALLT family,

I was talking with Reverend Doyle the other day, and shared with him that I was looking for the one word that would explain the universe, being that I'm looking for big answers these days. After considerable contemplation, I had managed to come up with a single word; Whump! Father Doyle thought carefully and said, "Well, I don't know." After thinking a little myself, I had to allow as how this was not sufficient. Although it was monosyllabically tempting. The search is on again, but in the meantime, I'm working on identifying the primary driving force of the universe. So far I've settled on irony.

Think about it: the Great Communicator has Alzheimer's. I'm no great communicator, but I thought I had arrived at a point where my communication skills and other abilities had brought me to the culmination of my career. Fitting, I thought to be named Associate

Director of the Center for Creative Computing and be elected IALLT president with about six years to go until retirement. Plus, I had all that luscious hair.

I had many ambitions. One, for example, was to get IALLT to sponsor an initiative to put American Sign Language on the curriculum of every university in the country (and Canada). Foolish, perhaps, to think I could wield so much influence. I none the less planned. There was more. Cancer robs me now of my ability to take care of myself and I feel the beginnings of a loss of ability to think clear thoughts. I get crazy ideas. If I could get up off this bed, have my hair back, and live with an elephant who plays chimes in Thailand, would I do it? YES! Please know that I have loved you and that I would give anything to be able to fulfill the duties you had in mind when you elected me. It is not to be and that is ironic, don't you think?

Other forces in the universe deserve mention, like benevolence and grace (look for this one, there is a lot more grace in the world than you might think). I am stunned by your contributions to the blog, which I have had occasion to read. I don't deserve your words of praise, but I accept them with gratitude and affection. I'll soon be going through a different door. Frankly, I can't wait to see what is on the other side.

There's one more small irony connected with this story, but I'm taking it with me.

Mother thought long and hard about what she wanted to say to you in her last correspondence. You are all so important to her, and she is a perfectionist after all. She was not able to complete this letter; her last additions were dictated on Saturday February 28.

Lara Williams

Ursula Williams was director of the Language Resource Center at Notre Dame University, where she had worked since 1984, first as a German instructor and then as a specialist in using technology to teach foreign languages. Ursula hosted IALL '95 at her university, and was a regular participant and inveterate social convener at MWALLT and IALLT conferences for over a decade. She was also active in university committees and even found time to host a radio

Ursula Williams

show, "The World of Operetta" for WSND radio and serve as a classical music announcer for both WSND and public radio station WVPE.

Ursula was a graduate of SUNY-Oswego, and earned her master's degree in German literature from Ohio University. She is survived by her three children. ♦

