

Jean Westerman Gregg, My Memories of Jean
By: Martha Randall

It is a privilege to be here today, in the very church where Jean served for so many years, to honor her long, rich life, and to acknowledge her many, many contributions to the art and science of singing. I am representing NATS (the National Association of Teachers of Singing) and AATS (the American Academy of Teachers of Singing), but I met her at the Voice Foundation Symposium on the Care of the Professional Voice in about 1978. Her work was multi-disciplinary and intersected a number of fields and organizations in addition to NATS and AATS: The Voice Foundation, where she was on the Science Advisory Board, and the American Speech-Language-Hearing Association, or ASHA, in addition to teaching singing and rehabilitating voices. In NATS, she was an icon, an active member for over 40 years; she served as Regional governor, chair of two national workshops, chair of the Boston National Convention, national treasurer, and National President, TWICE. NATS was founded in 1944, and the first woman President was not until 1972 (Jean Ludman), and it was another twenty years before the second woman became President, and that was Jean. She must have convinced the membership that a woman could do the job, as Jane Dillard took the office in 2004 and I followed her in 2006. The current President, Kathryn Proctor-Duax is enroute to Australia today, or she would be here. Jean was a trailblazer for NATS; she added the internet, was instrumental in establishing the Intern Program for training young voice teachers, and in the first International Congress of Voice Teachers (ICVT); she appointed an Ethics Committee, appointed a committee on the mission statement, and created an investment advisory board. In addition, she traveled the world, from Greece to Brazil to Switzerland to New Zealand.

NATS members have sent remembrances for Tim and other family members, and you have them in your bulletin, so I will highlight just a few for you today.

Leslie Holmes is in Switzerland today or she would be here.

Leslie wrote:

Your Mother WAS NATS for many years. She embodied a dedication to and an effort for, NATS, that is beyond description. She was smart, circumspect, unpretentious, and an extremely valuable asset to NATS. She always said, "Yes, I will." I admired her enormously. I send my deepest sympathy and love.

An example of Jean's "Yes, I will," is this book she compiled {I had the copy to show}, **NATS History in Brief**. She volunteered to do it and it includes the terms of all the Presidents, a list of their accomplishments, Convention dates, places and cities, history of the competitions, membership requirements through the years, Journal history, Art Song competitions, workshops, Intern Program and Master Teachers, and the NATS Foundation. Her last submission was 2006. It may be "in brief," but the effort that went into it was prodigious, another example of her unselfish service to NATS.

Jean also had a keen sense of humor and enjoyed a good laugh. Christine Thomas-O'Meally wrote: Jean was the woman who said that the diaphragm "separated the vitals from the vittles" (e.g., the respiratory system from the digestive system). A phrase I used for YEARS. R.I.P. to a great pedagogue.

Jean was inducted into the American Academy of Teachers of Singing the same year she became NATS President, 1994. The Academy or AATS was founded in 1922 by a group of fifteen professional teachers of voice. Membership is limited to 40 and

is by invitation from the Academy. The Academy was instrumental in the formation of NATS in 1944—if NATS is the working arm of the profession, AATS is the think tank that supports it. The Academy speaks with one voice in its opinion papers, but often there is a principal writer who provides the scaffolding for the other members to augment, and Jean was active both as a principal writer and always as an astute commentator on the work of others.

I met Jean years ago at the Voice Foundation Symposium, when I got up the courage to ask her a question. She leaned toward me and said, “Yes, dear,” in such a kind way that all my nervousness disappeared. Jean was on the NATS Board when I was a Regional Governor and when she was President, I was so impressed with how smart she was, how astute in financial matters, and how unfailingly fair she was. She was a mentor to so many of us! Roy Delp wrote that “Jean Gregg was my mentor before and during my time as NATS President and her influence assisted me greatly in carrying out my duties. Most of all, however, she was a friend and cared about me and my wife....Thank you, Jean, for everything.”

I have my “Jean file” {a purple file of letters that I took with me} and I can give some examples of her mentorship. 2003: “Have been wanting to write and tell you what a great job you are doing in your Vice Presidency. ...I do see, however, some problems with the new format for regional governors... Would suggest that you incorporate into your code....” She always had positive things to say and concrete suggestions. Then later that year regarding the Board meeting: “I realized that I miss attending, although it is a relief not to have to do all that is involved. I know Roy is having a tough time, as I did, in having to go back into the presidency once you thought you had finished with it.” I wrote her that she was one of my heroes and the gold standard we all aspired to meet.

When Jean was President, the terms were three years. Tragically, her successor, Jim McKinney, died a few months

into his presidency and she became president pro-tem for the remainder of his term. Roy Delp had to do the same upon the death of Bill McIver, hence the reference in her letter.

Jean was unflappable, a very strong woman. At the business meeting in Toronto in 1998, a resolution was put forth before the members thanking her for her service “at great personal sacrifice” and when everyone stood up as one applauding their vote, she had to step back from the podium for a moment. Well, Jean, the ovation is still going on. Thank you and God bless.