

***Remembering Deborah***  
***Deborah A. Martinsen, in Memoriam***

Our beloved colleague and friend, Deborah Martinsen, passed away on Sunday, November 28, 2021.

Deborah served the International Dostoevsky Society for many years, including as our President and Executive Secretary, on the Dostoevsky Studies Editorial Board, as one of the organizers of the 1998 IDS Symposium in New York and an integral partner in subsequent Symposia. Her intelligence, lively sense of humor, and sociability won her the respect and friendship of our diverse membership, as did her tireless efforts and unfailing diplomacy. Few of us will forget how she spontaneously broke into a happy dance as she turned over the presidency at the Moscow Symposium. Deborah began attending our Symposia as a precocious graduate student in 1983 at Cerisy-la-Salle, and she figured in them regularly, contributing deeply insightful papers on the narrative structure, rhetoric, and pragmatics of Dostoevsky's work. Within a very short time she became an irreplaceable partner and aide for Bob Belknap and Nadine Natov in the North American and International Dostoevsky Societies. She always knew not only what had to be done, and how it was to be done, but also what should not be done; she was able to inspire everyone to work for the common goal. Her role in the life of the IDS is enormous.

Deborah was the author and editor of groundbreaking books on Dostoevsky, including *Dostoevsky in Context* and *Surprised by Shame*; and numerous seminal articles. She continued to work on two new books on Dostoevsky over this past year, and we look forward to seeing them in print. Deborah also edited *Teaching Nineteenth-Century Russian Literature* – the tribute to her teacher Robert Belknap; and *Literary Journals in Imperial Russia* – the best overview of Russian journalism from eighteenth to early twentieth century. It is rare that such an original scholar is also such an incisive and generous editor.

Deborah was a devoted teacher to her students at Columbia University, advising undergraduate and graduate students on senior theses and dissertations and teaching courses on Dostoevsky and Nabokov. For many years she taught Literature Humanities, one of the signature Columbia College Core courses. Hundreds of CC graduates remember her gratefully. And scores of Columbia graduate students have been influenced by her Core teaching. Generous scholar and teacher that she was, she shared her teaching notes liberally with graduate students and new teachers in the Core. She was always open for a

dialog about teaching any passage. While her lectures on teaching *Crime and Punishment* were legend, Deborah shared insights into any text in the Core and beyond. As Associate Dean of Alumni Education, Deborah continued to teach Literature Humanities to Columbia alumni around the world.

She supported the scholarship of others in so many quiet but invaluable ways over the years, not only as a gifted editor, but also as a caring, thorough, and candid peer reviewer of numerous book and journal manuscripts as well as Ph.D. theses. She had an extraordinary talent for making everyone's work better. She was happy to lend a helping hand to her colleagues both at home and abroad, inspiring them intellectually and emotionally, contributing significantly to their personal and professional development.

Deborah excelled in bringing people together, and forging connections between departments, institutions, and cultures was her great joy. She tirelessly organized panels, entire conferences, and academic programs, all in aid of enriching the work of Slavists worldwide. She brought junior scholars into conversation with senior ones, ensuring cross-fertilization between new work and classic studies. She understood from her earliest days as a Slavist that true scholarship is always inclusive.

Her power in every aspect of life came from her inexhaustible spiritual and practical energy and from the special talent she possessed, which allowed her to look in depth at both ideas and the people around her. Her psychological insight into the human soul became an inspirational source through which she could analyze literary characters in a highly sophisticated manner and create close, living human relationships. Deborah understood that "everything, like the ocean, flows and comes into contact with everything else. Touch it in one place and it reverberates at the other end of the world" (*The Brothers Karamazov*). She 'touched' the world in so many places and these reverberations will remain with us for ever.

Deborah Martinsen has left us. In this uniquely Dostoevskian year even this terrible loss takes on its own unique flavor, which does not comfort us, but inspires us to seek a higher symbolism, and together with it, a certain meaning. Otherwise, in the circumstances we find ourselves in, the meaning is invisible, and it seems bitter, harsh, and unjust. Deborah was the first woman to serve as IDS President, and she was a brilliant president; she created an entire new epoch, enriching our Society with new values and a positive, cooperative atmosphere. It was soothing to work with her: she was meticulous, wise, nimble and attentive. And she also knew how to be a kind, even passionate friend.

Deborah was respected and loved all around the world. She was not just a brilliant scholar, but she elevated friendship to an art form. We will miss her

bright spirit, her gentle humor, her powerful intellect, and the love she shared with everyone around her.

Eternal memory, dearest Deborah.

*Stefano Aloe*  
*Carol Apollonio*  
*Karin Beck*  
*Katalin Kroó*  
*Robin Feuer Miller*  
*Marcia Morris*  
*Irina Reyfman*  
*Amy Ronner*  
*William Mills Todd III*  
*Vladimir Zakharov*

More tributes to Deborah A. Martinsen in the Memorial page:  
<https://dostoevsky.org/about/in-memoriam/in-memoriam-deborah-a-martinsen/>



*III. 1*

*Deborah Martinsen with Tetsuo Mochizuki, Naples 2010  
(Photo Graf Aloysky – From the Archive of Stefano Aloe)*



*III. 2*

*Deborah in Moscow, 2013*

*(Photo Graf Aloysky – From the Archive of Stefano Aloe)*



*III. 3*

*Deborah Martinsen with Benamí Barros, Granada 2016  
(Photo Graf Aloysky – Archive of Stefano Aloe)*



*III. 4*

*Deborah Martinsen in Granada, 2016*

*(Photo Graf Aloysky – Archive of Stefano Aloe)*