

In Memoriam

Munir Sendich (1932 – 2004)

George Kostich

Professor Munir Sendich died on June 2, 2004 of Parkinson's disease at the age of 71, and the field of Russian Language and Literature studies lost a distinguished scholar, dedicated teacher and an eminent Editor of the Russian Language Journal.

Professor Sendich was born in Gradacac, near Sarajevo in Bosnia. He was educated in the former Yugoslavia, Germany and the USA. After earning a bachelor degree in Germanic Studies (1959) from the University of Sarajevo, he left for Germany where he earned a Diploma in German Language and Literature from the University of Heidelberg (1961). During his years in Heidelberg, motivated by his intellectual curiosity, he attended lectures and seminars at the Slavic Institute of the University, the root of his lifelong fascination with Russian literature. He moved to the US in 1961 and began his studies at the Russian Language and Literature Department of the New York University, while supporting himself by selling Persian carpets and teaching German. He earned M.A. in Russian Language and Literature (1963) and Ph.D. in Russian Literature (1968). He wrote his doctoral dissertation on "The Life and Works of Karolina Pavlova." under the guidance of Boris. O. Unbegaun, a world-renowned scholar in the field of Russian studies, his advisor and mentor.

Professor Sendich began his academic career at the University of Connecticut teaching various German and Russian language courses, and his first three major courses in Russian Literature, Survey of Russian Literature, Classics of Russian Drama and the 19th Century Russian Poetry. From 1973 until his retirement in 2002, he worked at the University of Michigan teaching advanced undergraduate and graduate courses in Russian language and literature, and offered seminars in some of the major Russian writers. A man of inexhaustible energy and intellectual stamina he also served on a number of department and college committees.

Professor Sendich's scholarly output is impressive: he published five books and edited five, wrote fifty articles, edited forty six volumes of the Russian Language Journal, and organized or helped organizing, several professional conferences. He was an active and prominent member of the major professional organizations in the country. and presented numerous

papers at national and international conferences. As the RLJ Editor for almost thirty-five years, he was known for his integrity, high standards, and astute judgment. From 1989 to 1992, serving as a Director of the MSU Russian and East European Studies Center, he brought a number of important professional conferences to Michigan State University. His work achieved national and international reputation and he will be remembered for his selfless dedication to the Journal, to the field of Slavic languages and literatures, and countless specialists around the world.

For his contribution to the field of Russian studies, he was rewarded with various honors, awards, scholarships and grants.

Professor Sendich was an intellectual in the real meaning of that word. Besides his mother tongue Russian and native Serbo-Croatian, he spoke faultless English and German, and was able to communicate in French, Italian, Bulgarian and Czech. His field of specialization and research was in the realm of Russian literature: Tolstoy, Pasternak, Chekhov, Gogol, Turgenev, Nagibin, Karolina Pavlova, Russian theater and poetry, and he was known for his quips and quotes taken from works of these authors.

As he loved to entertain, he and his wife Danka would invite up to 30 guests, students and colleagues, to his home for food, music and conversation. While enjoying the masterpieces of Danka's culinary art (whoever was privileged with trying her zeljanica, a spinach pie, won't ever forget it), Munir would, after warming them up with the best Sljivovica one can buy, amuse them with humorous quotes from Dostoyevsky, Chekhov or Gogol. In a way he was a contradiction - handsome, tall, with piercing eyes, black hair, without a wrinkle on his face (the characteristic he preserved up to his last days), and with dynamic body language (he was an avid tennis player and jogger), he was also unassuming, often quietly and discreetly watching, listening to and enjoying people around him. He loved debates and was known as a person of poise and strong opinions, but ready to adjust his views under the force of a well-founded and well thought argument.

During the war in Bosnia (1992-1995), Munir was profoundly troubled about the fate of his brother and other relatives living in Bosnia. It was the time when the Yugoslav community in the US fell apart separated by the conflict into fiercely hostile to each other ethnic groups - Serbs, Croats, Bosnians, Slovenes, Macedonians and Montenegrins. This writer remembers numerous conversations we, he, a practicing Muslim, and I, a Serb, had over the telephone, discussing that war, suffering the pain people there had to go through, almost crying aloud, but never ending our friendship.

Professor Sendich died in a convalescent home in Lansing, Michigan. He was survived by Danka, his wife of thirty-five years and devoted collaborator, their two children, Larysa and Marko, as well as the two children from his previous marriage, daughter Emina and son Sadik.

His unfinished book on Karolina Pavlova, his sixth, will be completed by a selected specialist on the subject and published in the near future.