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MARIE-LOUISE (BÜHLER) STEELE (1943–2009)

Elizabeth Willes, friend, and Charles Steele, husband 6 October 2009

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MARIE-LOUISE (BÜHLER) STEELE (1943–2009)

On February 17, 2009, Marie-Louise (MarieLu) was diagnosed with metastatic breast cancer. This was a complete shock, since she had a clear mammogram just 18 months before, there is little cancer in the family, her father lived to 92, and her mother lived to 99. Her mother always told MarieLu that she would not live as long, because she used too much of her energy in each day. As many know, MarieLu did not spare effort in her projects and in helping friends and family. Below is a photograph taken at the beginning of radiotherapy; the one on the next page was taken just before the first chemotherapy session on April 15. Despite her good physical condition and very positive outlook, she reacted very poorly to the chemotherapy, entered the hospital intensive care on April 30, and died on May 14. Although she grew weaker by the day, she always had a smile to greet visitors.

When MarieLu received the health report on February 17, she said there should be no tears and quoted Edith Piaf: *Je ne regrette rien*. She and Charles had such good fortune in meeting each other and sharing life in journal work, morning workout followed by coffee latte in the hot tub, so much opportunity to travel and keep friends around the world, and healthy children and grandchildren.

Personal background

MarieLu was born in Heilbronn (Germany) in 1943 to Karl and Elise Bühler, and remembered well growing up in the aftermath of World War II, an experience that helped to form her lifelong dedication to conservation and hard work. Her father was a prisoner of war in Siberia, and was one of the few to return. After recuperation he became Burgermeister of Brackenheim, a small town about 30 miles from Stuttgart. She always remembered as a nine-year-old, looking up at the stars and vowing that she would



MarieLu with grandchildren (and granddog) on March 14, 2009.



MarieLu on a hike with the family at the Golden Gate Bridge, San Francisco on April 5, 2009.

see the world one day. She loved poring over maps and picked two places she had to visit. One was San Francisco and the other was Rio de Janeiro. As it transpired, she has lived at Stanford near San Francisco, and has spent four New Year's Eves on Copacabana, related to attending PACAM meetings with Charles.

The acceptable means for a young lady to escape to the large world was through language. So, after finishing the arbitur, MarieLu attended interpreter school in Stuttgart and then in Geneva. The international flavor was greatly to her liking, and she became fluent in French. However, her focus was English, and she decided that she must spend time in an English-speaking country to achieve proficiency. So she immigrated to the United States, which was relatively easy then for northern Europeans. In Geneva she worked part-time in an office of Hewlett-Packard. Apparently her skills were already developed at the age of 21, since a position was offered to her if she would come to Palo Alto, California. She first spent three months working for Siemens in the Empire State Building. The chaos of Manhattan, however, did not appeal to her, but she decided to give the US one more chance. In Geneva she had purchased a bus ticket: 100 days for 100 dollars. With her direct practical thinking, she took the bus nonstop from Manhattan to Palo Alto. After a few years in the international office of Hewlett-Packard, she decided to go to school full time, but then walked into the life of Charles Steele, a single father of three boys — Eric, Brett and Jay — and changed both of their lives forever. Thus began a 40-year love affair, enhanced by the arrival in 1971 of their son Ryan.

When Ryan was only one month old, the family packed up and traveled to Switzerland, where Charles was invited to teach for a year. MarieLu was not daunted by caring for a newborn and setting up a new household in a foreign country. She thrived on challenges and later completed the BS and MS degrees, made possible by organizing an equal distribution of household chores and cooking among all family members. Over the years, the family went on to spend sabbatical time in Taiwan, Sweden, Germany and South Africa.

MarieLu will be remembered by all for her bubbly personality, her passion for life and culture. After the boys were grown up and on their own, MarieLu and Charles continued to travel, and spent months at

a time in Italy, Spain, Germany, Thailand, and India. In recent years, they traveled with three computers, in order to combine work and pleasure. Around the globe, MarieLu won friends with her vivaciousness and zest for life.

MarieLu further will be remembered for her generous assistance to others less fortunate. She provided a home away from home for generations of foreign visitors and relatives, both distant and close. She gave to all she met, thrilled to be able to help in anyway she could. In 1993, she helped a Ukrainian friend start a dress shop in the Ukraine with second-hand wedding dresses collected in the United States. She sponsored two of her German nieces to come to school in the States and put two step-grandchildren through University. She helped each of her sons secure a home for their families, and often handled the home improvements herself. The examples of generosity and selflessness go on and on. She was tireless, and even while the cancer attacked her body, she worked on the journal, painted, cleaned, worked out at the YMCA, and played with her grandchildren.

MarieLu loved all creatures of the world, and would even rescue spiders from the shower to liberate in the garden. She cherished her furry friends and the little birdies she fattened up with birdseed in the deluxe feeders and birdhouses she constructed in her garden. She often cared for her grandkitties and granddogs, spoiling them as only a grandmother can. Some recent fond memories are of her butterfly walks this past Easter with her young granddaughters at her beloved Sea Ranch in Sonoma County, California, where the family maintained a vacation home.

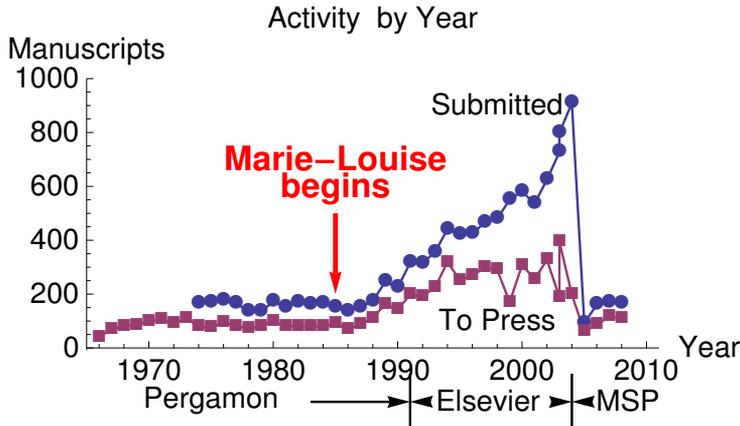
Journal work

In 1965, George Herrmann founded the *International Journal of Solids and Structures (IJSS)*, one of a number of journals launched by Pergamon Press around that time. In 1984, he retired, and Charles Steele agreed to succeed him as editor. Because of a previous change in staff, the editorial office was not in good order, with piles of manuscripts and cabinets full of unanswered correspondence, some more than a year old. MarieLu offered to help for a few days. However, she quickly proved to be indispensable and was appointed as Associate Editor. The few days turned into 20 years. She was well suited for this, since her great skill was bringing order to a chaotic situation, with her desire to help people and her interest in the international community. She grew to know thousands of authors and reviewers around the world. Correspondents were appreciative of her cheerfulness, efficiency and warmth—rarities when dealing with a technical journal! As the figure on the next page shows, *IJSS* was stable in the first 20 years of existence, with around 150 submissions per year. After MarieLu began work, the number of submissions increased exponentially to over 900 in 2004. This is despite the launching of a number of competing journals of mechanics during this time. Standards were not relaxed, with only about 60% of the submitted papers published all that time.

Unfortunately, in the hands of Elsevier, the price per page also increased substantially. The Cornell University Library includes *IJSS* among the four most outrageous examples of pricing for engineering journals:

http://engineering.library.cornell.edu/about/stickershock_4

Generally, the price per article (or per page) of technical journals from commercial publishers are many times those published by nonprofit organizations. Consequently in response to the international library crisis, Charles and MarieLu, with 21 of the 23 members of the Board of Editors, resigned from



Manuscripts submitted for publication and those accepted and sent to the publisher for publication, by year. Included are *IJSS*, from 1965 through 2004 under Pergamon and Elsevier, and *JoMMS* from 2005 through 2008 under MSP. After Marie-Louise Steele began with *IJSS* in 1985, the increase in activity is substantial. A new phase starts with the low-cost *JoMMS*.

IJSS to establish the *Journal of Mechanics of Materials and Structures (JoMMS)*. The publisher is the nonprofit Mathematical Sciences Publications (MSP). *JoMMS* has made a very good beginning, now with about 160 submissions per year. MarieLu's ambition was to see *JoMMS* catch up to *IJSS* in activity, but with the cost to libraries remaining low. The advantages of *JoMMS* for authors and libraries make this a possibility. In any case, the mechanics community will miss the contribution of Marie-Louise Steele. In the hospital, she was pleased and quite relieved to hear that Davide Bigoni, Iwona Jasiuk, and Yasuhide Shindo agreed to take over the responsibility for *JoMMS*, and joint Chief Editors. In their hands, her ambition for *JoMMS* will be fulfilled.

ELIZABETH WILLES, friend, and CHARLES STEELE, husband

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