

On December 14, 2013, as she celebrated her 75th birthday, Jean (Mitchell) Foss passed away, and the Academy, her family, and friends lost a truly exceptional friend and colleague. Born in Providence, Rhode Island, Jean graduated Magna Cum Laude from the University of Rhode Island, and later received her M.Ed. from the University of Vermont. Jean is fondly remembered for her love of people, her warm and generous spirit, and her dedication to standards of excellence.

In 1968, Jean joined Pine Ridge School in Williston, Vermont as an Orton-Gillingham tutor. While excited at the prospect, she was also terrified that she would not be able to provide her students with what they needed. From then on she was hooked and became devoted to trying to determine exactly what each learner needed in order to be successful. Jean dedicated her life to helping these learners recognize that while they might have academic difficulties, the difficulties did not define who they were. Every day her passion was evident in her classroom. Eventually, her primary interest and research became that of nonverbal learning disabilities. After serving in a variety of leadership roles at the school, Jean was appointed Director of Clinical Teaching and Research. Thomas Needham, Head of School, quipped that Jean was now "DOCTR." At her memorial service in December, a former Pine Ridge trustee lamented that Jean should have been Head of the school.

Among Jean's many talents and passions, three stand out: her deep devotion to her family, her strong dedication to ensuring that teachers were trained to the highest standards, and her generous spirit and zest for life. Clearly, her top priority was her enormous love and pride in the many accomplishments of her family: her son David, her daughter Wendy Foss Canning, her granddaughter, Shannon Sweeney, and her son-in-law, Josh Canning. A particular source of pleasure and pride was Wendy's dedication to following in her mother's footsteps. Both Fellows of the Academy, Jean and Wendy were colleagues for 30 years.

Deeply committed to establishing strong professional collaborations among those who shared her passions, Jean was a leader. Actively involved in the International Dyslexia Association, she served the organization in many capacities at both the national and regional levels. Jean served on many national committees, was a frequent presenter at IDA National Conferences, and was president of the then New England Branch of the then Orton Dyslexia Society. Most notable was Jean's invaluable leadership as a Founding Fellow of the Academy of Orton-Gillingham Practitioners and Educators. As Academy organizing committees worked to create the original standards and practice, Jean's wisdom, judgment, and gift for language became increasingly apparent. Invariably, she would peer over the top of her glasses and craft the perfect wording. Her use of humor to diffuse tense moments was legendary. As first vice president, as chair of the Accreditation Committee, and as an active member of the Standards and IOC committees, Jean's dedication and contributions were enormous. Colleagues respected that she did not make decisions rashly without thought. After Pine Ridge School closed, Jean collaborated with colleagues at the Stern Center to provide Orton-Gillingham training to many public school teachers throughout the state of Vermont. Jean had a love of people and an infectious chuckle that she shared freely. As Rosalie Davis wrote: "Jean was an extraordinary lady with a most generous spirit."

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