

## **Elizabeth Anne Wolfe Garber (1939 – 2020)**

Elizabeth Garber, Professor of History emerita at Stony Brook University, died at home from the complications of Alzheimer's Disease on 1 July 2020.

Liz grew up in London and graduated from Bedford College, University of London, with a degree in physics. She came to the US to continue her studies at the Case Institute of Technology (now Case Western Reserve University), moving into the History of Science program from which she completed a PhD in 1966. While studying and living in Cleveland she met and married Don Garber, who was working on a PhD in physics. They married as she began writing her dissertation and Don's wedding present to her was a 3-month typewriter rental. So, as she said, she just had to get it done on time. This idea that you meet—or exceed—such expectations was typical of Liz's approach to work.

In the late 1960s Don joined the Brookhaven National Laboratory and they moved to Long Island, New York. Liz began teaching at SUNY-Stony Brook (now Stony Brook University) first as an adjunct and later as a full faculty member. Her interest in the history of the physical sciences was considered a benefit to Stony Brook's strong programs in the sciences and engineering. When she came up for tenure one of the referees noted that she knew "a lot about physics for an historian." Later interests in the history of mathematics and mathematical physics led her to expand her research areas into early modern European history. An early and rather unusual research field was the history of meteorology; tenure referees was impressed by this and found her work a font of information.

Liz was considered a demanding teacher but one of those about whom few students complained – her own commitment to the material she presented gave a sense that "if she can do it, ... I guess I can as well." She would often announce to her graduate classes that she would leave discussion to them ... and then talk for the full three hours without notes and few pauses. You learned quickly that there were no cigarette breaks in Liz's classes.

As a member of the Stony Brook faculty Liz taught an undergraduate survey of the history of science and technology, and more advanced undergraduate courses on the history of the physical sciences and the social history of science. A fair amount of the syllabus really tilted toward the history of science as a branch of intellectual history. She served as director of graduate studies and was the principal advisor to several Ph.Ds.

Despite the role she cultivated as the crabby and frank semi-outsider on many issues she was always a helpful and supportive colleague, especially to the younger faculty hired during her long watch. Liz was respected by her graduate students and history of science colleagues as a no-nonsense and insightful editor. She had famously stubborn attitudes toward technology—refusing for example to memorize her social security number and writing early drafts longhand (the better to cut and paste) but submitting what were essentially typeset manuscripts to her publisher using a very early versions of LaTeX. The un-ergonomic characteristics of the stairs to the History Department were another regular complaint.

Liz was as serious about her hobbies as she was about her work. She sewed and knit many of her own clothes, the more complicated the better, and especially ones that required mathematics to work out patterning. She and Don were serious gardeners and constantly improving their house in East Setauket. After Don retired from Brookhaven, he and Liz became very active in community projects such as greening the Stony Brook campus and worrying about new uses for ageing strip malls. They were among the few members of the History Department who always went to the classical music performances at the Staller Center and much of their social and community life was with non-academic friends. Trips into New York for lectures, concerts, museum visits or meals—especially meals—were regular before Liz’s retirement and became more so after that.

*This material was assembled by Sarah Lowengard and Joel Rosenthal.  
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