



**IN MEMORIAM**

**YEAR OF AWARD: 2002**

**Shirley Menaker**

Associate Provost  
for Academic Support

Years of service at UVA:  
1987-2004

**Shirley L. Menaker** came to the University of Virginia in 1987 and became Associate Provost for Academic Support, a position she held until shortly before her death in 2004 from opportunistic infections subsequent to cancer treatment. She was an early supporter of the Women's Center and was instrumental in the development of the Kluge-Ruhe Collection of

Aboriginal Art as an independent museum after John Kluge donated his collection to the University. Her husband, Michael Menaker, a renowned researcher in the field of circadian rhythms, had been recruited by UVA. Shirley Menaker also had a distinguished career as an academic and administrator at the University of Texas at Austin and University of Oregon, where she became Dean of the Graduate School. Because there was no

opportunity at the time to join the UVA faculty, she went to work in the Office of the Provost.

She held a PhD in clinical psychology from Boston University. Her undergraduate degree was from Swarthmore College.

Wynne Stuart, Associate Provost for Academic Support and Classroom Management, worked closely with Menaker and provided the following insights.

### WHY DID SHIRLEY MENAKER COME TO UVA?

Shirley got her PhD in the late '70s. She did it because she was capable and wanted to, not because it was a common thing to do. She was a very smart woman who wrote very, very well, but she was in Boston because of her husband's job. From there, she was a trailing spouse when they went to University of Texas – Austin. When he was recruited to Oregon, she was offered a job fitting her credentials.

When UVA recruited Michael Menaker, they planned to move together. She was again a trailing spouse. She was a professional woman with a PhD and a well-established academic and administrative record.

The Office of the Provost needed some specific work to be done the year they arrived. She met with the Provost who hired her for special projects – an on-job interview. She worked herself into a permanent position, becoming a very strong member of the Provost's senior staff.

I think UVA was less welcoming to women when she arrived, and she became the Women's Center's fairy godmother. She was instrumental in helping to get it started; identifying the money to fund it. Shirley was very astute in reading the political room and being able to propose projects and get money at the right time.

At the start, the Center staff was the Director and a support person. When she and Sharon Davie, the first Director, would truly see a moment to help move the Women's Center forward and get another position for it, Shirley would work on the financial and the persuasive sides. She is one of the women on whom rests the early days of the Women's Center.

She also was instrumental in developing the Kluge-Ruhe Aboriginal Collection as an independent collection.

### HOW HAS THE UNIVERSITY CHANGED SINCE THEN?

To state the obvious, UVA is much more welcoming to women and to many other people than it was when Shirley arrived. However, UVA still works a lot in its internal administration on the basis of good will. Shirley worked very well in that environment of developing collegial interactions. That was a strength of hers. I think that she was a leader in that approach.

### HOW DO YOU THINK DIFFERENT ASPECTS OF SHIRLEY'S IDENTITY, INCLUDING BEING A WOMAN, IMPACTED HOW PEOPLE RESPONDED TO HER IN HER POSITION?

It was clear that she was very capable as an academic administrator. She and Kathy Reed [Associate Provost for Management at the time] worked a lot together. They both could develop an idea, and they knew how to leverage situations to improve the status of women and improve programs for students. They were both very oriented towards those efforts.

Shirley was a woman of great vision. Until recently, UVA has looked much more at academics than everything else with regard to undergraduate students. With the Women's Center, Shirley was looking at the whole person.

continued

## In Memoriam | Shirley Menaker

And again, while developing the residential colleges, it was much more about supporting the whole person and an experience for the whole person.

### WHAT ADVICE WOULD SHE GIVE TO A WOMAN IN A SIMILAR POSITION TODAY?

Shirley did give advice to women. I think one of the important things was to pay attention. We talk a lot today about being mindful. There's renewed interest in focusing on what you're doing and not being too distracted. And she gave her work her focus, or she gave her children her focus, or she gave her grandchildren her focus.

And she could do all those things well.

What we call mindfulness today was, in her case, being balanced, which we have lost sometimes in working too much.

She could accomplish a lot because she was smart and quick-thinking. But she kept a hairbrush and lipstick in her desk: she would go to the ladies' room and 'fluff herself up' (her words), then go to whatever the event was that night. She would shed the seriousness of the day, take a few minutes to reset, and have a wonderful time.

Shirley was a very good conversationalist, and she could listen to people. That was one of the things to learn from her – to listen and pay attention to other people.

**Shirley commanded a lot of respect. Everybody knew she had good ideas and worked hard. But she taught us so much by the example of how she proceeded.**

### HOW WOULD SHE WANT TO BE REMEMBERED?

Shirley channeled her energies into what she could do to be effective at UVA. I think that she would have said the Women's Center and developing the Kluge-Ruhe Collection were at least two of her proudest accomplishments.

Certainly, she believed in advancing women. This was primarily a men's school until 1970, and Shirley had always been at coeducational institutions. There were still a fair number of faculty who opposed coeducation – they wouldn't really retire until later. So, she understood the need for the Women's Center at UVA.

The Kluge-Ruhe Aboriginal art collection was donated to UVA. Her title was Associate Provost for Academic Support. The Provost turned to her, saying "Can you manage integrating this into the University?" Again, it was a vision of what can this idea do, not necessarily just for UVA or at UVA, but in the world.

## WHAT LEADERSHIP QUALITIES DID SHE DISPLAY? WHAT DID SHE TEACH BY EXAMPLE ABOUT WOMEN'S LEADERSHIP?

Shirley could be subtle and indirect, waiting for an appropriate moment to develop a new idea. She could also be direct and efficient, depending on the circumstances. She was detail-oriented and a woman of vision who knows who led by example and worked collaboratively with many people.

She was also determined and exhibited great perseverance. During recovery from cancer treatment, she successfully worked at home in the early 2000s, before this was a common idea. She also displayed a strong sense of humor and was willing to listen to ideas others might have thought didn't have a chance.

Here's a memory which shows her: When I first started working for Shirley, she would have me go to meetings with her. She didn't need to take me, but she did. After six months or a year, I had her permission to speak for her to a certain degree and would attend some of the meetings alone. We developed a very close relationship. She led by training someone she knew could help her in her work: I understood what she wanted, and she trusted me.

Shirley commanded a lot of respect. Everybody knew she had good ideas and worked hard. But she taught us so much by the example of how she proceeded.

She always, whether it was I or whether whoever it was who had an idea, gave credit to the person. She did not take credit for anybody else's work or thoughts. And do you know the expression "throwing someone under the bus"? I never observed her to throw someone under the bus because, at UVA, administratively, horizontally, we work together. But she never stopped gently pushing towards her agenda.

Shirley taught those of us who were with her how to do things gently and thoroughly, and to do your research before you speak. She really taught us, not just me, but the women and the men who were paying attention, how to reach out and create collaborations.



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