A tribute to beloved colleagues: Suzan, Gachi and Esmat

AIIC pays tribute to the colleagues who lost their lives on Ethiopian Airlines Flight ET302

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In March 2019 AIIC and the interpreter community were shocked to hear about a tragic airline crash in Addis Ababa, taking the lives of three beloved AIIC members, and the daughter of another. On 18 March AIIC members, friends and colleagues around the world wore flowers in remembrance, and services were held to celebrate their lives and remember their professional and personal contributions.

The AIIC Executive Committee invited colleagues to write these personal tributes, on behalf of the Association, to Suzan Abul Farag, Graziella de Luis and Esmat Orensa, the AIIC interpreters who lost their lives in the Ethiopian Airlines disaster.

Dearest Suzan, Gachi, Esmat and Pilar, may you rest in peace.

Suzan Farag

We can never get over the shock of her loss but our only comfort is that, all those who ever knew or worked with Suzan Abul Farag, Suzy to all, will miss her dearly, not only as an excellent interpreter, and most cooperative booth mate, but primarily as a true and sincere friend.

Upon her graduation from Ein Shams University she joined City Bank where she soon became a distinguished banker. But still she felt that this was not her passion, and as she mastered the English language she took several interpretation courses at the American University in Cairo and a few years later she had proven herself as a talented interpreter and joined AIIC.

Suzy is an unforgettable charitable person, a devoted wife and loving mother and grandmother. We shall always cherish the memories of our numerous joyful days together. She will always be in our hearts. May God bless her forever.

Khadiga Barrada, former Council member (2003-2008) and Dalia Kashmiry (AB representative for Arab Countries).

Graziella "Gachi" de Luis
We are so lucky that Hurricane Gachi passed through our lives.


The inescapable metaphor of a comet burning brightly across the sky and then falling to the ground.

Homage at UN Geneva. The flag at half mast at FAO. The cousins in Merida all in white. The pictures in the booth in Nairobi. The colleagues all over the world wearing flowers in the booth last Monday. Bouquets in front of the door in via delle Fratte di Trastevere.

The most vibrant of personalities. The passion for persons, places, and things. The most loyal friend that ever was, and a fairly implacable foe as well. The generosity, the organization of lunches on the terrace, of birthday parties, of excursions on mission, of trips to unlikely places.

And always the pursuit of delicious food, the cooking of, the eating of, the finding of, the collection of books about. The fridge bursting with ingredients, plus the odd bit of santería.

The having of time for everyone, the laughter heard a long way down the corridor.

The inimitable phrases: ‘se cree el último cocacola en el desierto,’ ‘el countryside donde los pollos corren crudos,’ the hairdressers’ forever after known as el GRULAC because all the staff came from different Latin American countries.

The passion for her causes. Interpreting itself of course, at home and abroad, including much volunteer work. Seeing justice done, in our little world and elsewhere. Supporting young colleagues. Being there for anyone who needed her, sometimes in the unlikeliest and most rocambolesque of ways. Immortalizing moments great and small on the omnipresent i Pad.

Her family. Her partner Phil, her father in Spain, her brother in Boston and his family, her sister Isabel who is also our colleague in Geneva, her many cousins in Mexico and Spain and the United States and elsewhere. But also a vast and far-flung web of colleagues and friends and acquaintances around the world who are bereft and grieving today.

Ideas and language. Fluency in cubano and yucateco and porteño and peninsular. Practicing interpreting with idiotic telenovelas while on holiday in Bahia. Translating her friends' books. And always the very great funniness, the recounting of shared sufferings at ESIT, or the hatred of the service provider of the moment, or Athenian coffee coming in micro, canónico, and megalo.

Visual things, too. Gachi studied fine arts, cared deeply about esthetics, brought beautiful and quirky things back from her travels, gave her own beautiful sketches to her friends.

And the books and the movies and the music. The Cuban ear that balanced the Mexican stomach.

Gachi had not always a happy nature, she had dark moments and could be intense and brooding. Her particular genius for life was to understand that happiness was something to fight for, that the world is an infinitely interesting place and that the time is now.

Among much else, she had the sharpest radar ever for identifying interesting and worthwhile people, and those of us who knew and loved her need never be at a loss for company almost anywhere in the world we may find ourselves, because we inherit her wide and affectionate family of friends.

And this is Gachi's legacy to us. It is up to us to go on reflecting her bright light. And on days when that seems too difficult, to hear her voice saying "Dejen de joder y vuelvan a la cabina."

Tom Afton
Esmat ORENSA

Esmat Orensa was a graceful and charming lady, a wife, mother and grandmother, who dealt with the harshest issues with grace. She did not have an easy life, but she always managed to lead it with style and glamour.

Esmat worked in UNNY from the 1980s for years and subsequently as a freelancer until her demise, famous throughout international and continental organizations for her smile and charm. Being such a stylish lady, her nickname was the "Countess" among colleagues. When discussions became tough during one of the sensitive events, we asked Esmat to take over and her calm and reassuring voice defused the tense environment.

I first worked with her in a NOAL Summit in Nicosia in 1988, and was surprised by her ability to take things easy, despite the work pressure and the diplomatic tension in sessions. She worked her sessions flawlessly, then hurried to finish her shopping. It was strange for me, still the engineer, coming from the rough construction sites, to comprehend such behavior, but strangely we became good friends.

I will miss our conversations about her grandchildren, her hardworking architect and musician son, and her beloved husband eternally enamoured of Alexandria.

I count on meeting you, Esmat, in the better afterlife.

Hasta luego!!!

Rest in peace, "Countess".

Youssef Mokhtar
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- [In Memoriam — colleagues lost on 10 March 2019](#)
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