

RENATA BRIGGS; AT 72; TAUGHT GERMAN AT MIT AND WELLESLEY

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A service will be held tomorrow for Renata Hofmann Briggs, a teacher of German at the Massachusetts Institute of Technology and Wellesley College, who died of cancer July 27 in her Marion home. She was 72.

During her 21-year teaching career, she tried to change the way language was taught by including lessons in conversational German and German etiquette and culture, her family said.

"She was sort of a renegade, bringing wine into class," said her son Wyman, of Cape Elizabeth, Maine, "to give people a better appreciation for the culture, and not just the language."

In 1960, MIT student Warren Briggs sought out her class. During the semester, rumors flew that there was something going on between them, but they were quieted when she flunked him. The following year, the two were married.

"She was just a sparkling, charming lady with high standards," her husband said yesterday.

Mrs. Briggs was born and raised in Wiesbaden, Germany.

In 1945, as World War II was drawing to an end, her house was bombed and her family moved in with friends. Wyman Briggs remembers her stories of having to stay in the basement for days during air raids, and later digging people out of the rubble.

Occasions for these stories were rare, however, because Mrs. Briggs rarely chose to speak to her children about the war.

"It was almost never discussed," said another of her sons, Rolf, of Holliston. "Certainly never at the dinner table. Certainly never in a group format."

The loneliness of post-war Germany, paired with the family tension resulting from the disappearance of her brother on the Russian front, made life in Germany unbearable, her family said. Mrs. Briggs moved to Boston in 1958, and began teaching at MIT the following year.

Later in life, one of her greatest passions was travel, and she was always up for an adventure. Her family delights in recalling the time she used her language skills to keep border guards in Greece from swindling the family, or the night they spent in Tel Aviv during a rocket attack.

She was fluent in French, Italian, and Latin, as well as German and English.

Mrs. Briggs was a hospice volunteer and a member of the Marion Womens Club and the Marion Garden Discussion Group.

Besides her sons and husband, Mrs. Briggs leaves a daughter, Monica, of Boston; and three grandchildren.

The service will be held at 2 p.m. in First Congregational Church in Marion.