

GRACE ELIZABETH RUSSO, 76, UN STATISTICIAN, LOVER OF CATS

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Grace Elizabeth Russo, a UN statistician and cat lover, died of a pulmonary embolism Wednesday aboard a flight from Rome to Boston. She was 76.

Miss Russo worked in Rome for the Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations, publishing annual accounts of food supplies.

Before working for the FAO, she was the executive assistant to John Kenneth Galbraith, an economist at Harvard University, said her family.

Born in Boston, Miss Russo attended Girls Latin School from the seventh to the 12th grade.

She enrolled in Boston University in 1943, where she studied economics and statistics. She graduated in 1947.

The daughter of Italian immigrants, Miss Russo found her place in life during a trip to Italy in 1952.

"I have had a revelation," Edith Smolens, a close friend who accompanied Miss Russo to Italy, recalls her saying, "I can't go home with you.

"I have to stay here. I feel this is my real home."

It was not until the early 1960s, when Miss Russo found a permanent job in Italy, that she could claim the country as her home.

While in Rome, Miss Russo loved to feed and take care of cats, many not her own.

"I respected what she did," said Smolens, despite her own dislike of cats. "To her, they were her children.

Miss Russo was also active in Italian feminist groups, and spoke English, Italian, and French fluently.

She took up skiing at age 62, according to her nephew, Thomas Russo, continuing until her doctor made her stop after she broke a leg.

In addition to her nephew, of Hanson,

Miss Russo leaves another nephew, Gene Mason of Marietta, Ga.; and two nieces, Mary Ann Sandberg of Mashpee and Judy Binder of Pembroke.

A funeral Mass will be said at 9 a.m. Monday at Saint Francis of Assisi Church in Braintree.

Burial will be in Saint Michael's Cemetery, Boston.