

ELLEN LANGAN October 25, 1926 – October 26, 2018

Now more than ever,
WORDS MATTER!

Words have power.
No one understood that more than Ellen Langan
Power to hurt or power to heal
Power to tear down or power to lift up
Power to spread lies or power to speak truth
Power to inflict pain and spread fear
Or...
Power to spread peace, joy, beauty & love

Ellen once said her life's mission was "to find and effectively communicate the truth and beauty in every endeavor."
She truly lived this philosophy.

Discovering her love of the performing arts in dance class as a young child growing up in the small rural town of Carthage Tennessee, she then continued on stage throughout high school and college, both acting and competing in public speaking events. She learned stage directing as a graduate student at Catholic University in Washington DC. This is where she met Jim Langan Sr. a charismatic actor and member of their National Shakespeare Touring Company. They married and moved to New York City to pursue careers in the theater. When their first child, Read, was born they had to face economic realities and move to Dad's hometown of Scranton. New York's loss became Scranton's gain. Ellen and James collaborated on many theatrical productions including directing the University Players at the University of Scranton and producing shows at the Scranton Jewish Community Center in the 1950s and 60s. They also collaborated on two more children, Betsy and Jim junior. Years later, Jim junior had the honor and privilege to work with both parents when they directed and acted in many productions with long-time friends Bob Shlesinger, Agnes Cummings, Tony Santaniello, Gail Piasecki, Pulitzer Prize winning Playwright and actor Jason Miller and many, many other talented friends at Scranton Public Theatre and The Pennsylvania Summer Theatre Festival.

Some of you might remember Ellen's hilarious sold out performances with Gene Malone in several Neil Simon comedies or her unforgettably touching performance in On Golden Pond where she played the role of a woman whose husband is nearing death. She played that role one week after she lost her husband Jim to cancer. She said "Jim would want me to go on." And that's true. He would tell all the nurses how proud he was of her acting. She was excellent.

As unforgettable as her performances were, Ellen Langan is most remembered for her vocation...teaching High School for 30 years and coaching competitive High School speech and debate for half a century.

In nineteen sixty three Ellen Langan went to work to help support our family, first at North Scranton and then at Scranton Central High School teaching drama, speech, English and American Literature and... directing plays. She directed some of our city's brightest and most talented students. She collaborated with gifted teachers, including Patrick Marcinko, Lois Dreater and Jane Krupa, and was championed by supportive administrators like Principal Albert Karam and the ever helpful women in the front office and the Ad building.

For many years Central High's productions set the bar for other schools.

She was very proud of some of her original productions at Central including a musical version of The Devil And Daniel Webster written by then student and later life long friend Richard Wargo. Other highlights include a musical based on The Beatles Sgt. Peppers Lonely Hearts Club Band and another using pop music of the 70's and 80's. These shows were ahead of their time, before the current Broadway trend of Jukebox Musicals. She also produced and directed the first production of The Nutcracker in our area, using dancers from the major local dance studios. The following year her friend Constance Reynolds began producing Ballet Theatre of Scranton's annual holiday program.

Ellen began coaching speech, drama and debate in nineteen sixty six. Mrs. L., as she is affectionately known by hundreds of former students, built a statewide and national reputation for excellence in High School Forensics for fifty years, leaving a legacy of literally thousands of young people whose lives were changed for the better. Many students from other schools that she competed against tell how she would compliment and encourage them when she would stop them in the halls between rounds.

Highlights of her speech teams' achievements include 12 State Championship plays, 60 All State actors, 39 State Champion debaters and speakers, 15 State Sweepstakes Awards, and numerous National finalists including 3 NFL top 10 finishers and 3 CFL National Champions.

Her program at Central High School earned a Pennsylvania Lighthouse School in Speech Education designation from 1968 through 1971.

In 1976 she was named a Northwestern University National Speech Fellow.

She was a founding member and past president of the Pennsylvania Speech and Debate Association

She was Inducted into the Pennsylvania High School Speech League Coaches' Hall of Fame in 1987.

Ellen was honored by the Pennsylvania Film Festival with the Ralph Lomma Award for Lifetime Achievement in 2001.

In 2013 The Broadway Theatre League of Northeastern Pennsylvania awarded Ellen the Sam and Jane Cali Star Award for Arts in Education.

Also in 2013 the American Speech and Debate Association honored Ellen on her attainment of a 4th Diamond Key Award.

She served 20 years as a Scranton Catholic Forensic League Speech Coordinator.

She served 20 years on the Valley Forge National Forensic League District Committee.

Ellen also served 24 years as a member of the Pennsylvania High School Speech League Board of Directors.

The National Federation of High School Associations awarded Eleanor Langan the two thousand sixteen Speech, Debate, and Theatre Association Outstanding Educator Award.

To honor her late husband she established and hosted the James M. Langan Memorial Speech Tournament for 30 years. Her great friend and associate Ellen Boyer continues to host the Langan Tournament at Shikellamy High School.

Mayor James P. Connors proclaimed July 20th 1991 Eleanor R. Langan Day in honor of years of dedication, service and inspiration to the people of Scranton.

The Scranton High Team held the state record for most overall Speech and Debate wins in Pennsylvania and Ellen is known and respected around the nation.

If any High School football coach in our area had Ellen Langan's record of State Championships much less the national champions, just imagine how big the statue on Courthouse Square would be.

But there is no statue and the many trophies and plaques are no longer displayed at Scranton High. And the newspaper articles and photos grow yellow with age...such is life.

Ellen once said to an interviewer sitting in her living room where she coached hundreds of students for 50 years, it wasn't just about winning. She said, with her southern accent that never quite faded and was often imitated, "I love to sit here and coach... the moments, the hours, the years of coaching and directing, those are the jewels of my life. My Crown Jewels. Trophies, forget about it, People are my trophies".

That's the real legacy that lives on ... the many lives that were touched. The students whose lives were changed, some, like Pulitzer Prize recipient and Tony Award winner Stephen Karam went on to great success in the theatre. Others became lawyers, doctors, coaches, journalists and teachers. Ask anyone of them, the Wilsons, the Cusicks, the Simrells, Powells, Es Gros, the Fishers, the Wahls, too many to list ... They'll tell you, Mrs. L changed their lives. She gave them confidence; she gave them a safe place to learn, to grow, to find within themselves... greatness. So many will say they would not be where they are today without her support and guidance. And as these former students go on sharing what they learned they pay forward a lasting legacy that will not rot or rust or yellow with age, but will burn brightly, forever.

Undeniably a great teacher, coach, mentor, director and actor, but also incredibly generous and loving to her husband, children, grandchildren. And just days before her passing, she became a great grandmother.

A great friend and inspiration to so many, Eleanor Jordan, Ellen Langan, Mrs. L was truly a woman for all seasons.

Thank you to all the friends, relatives, colleagues, and especially former students that shared your love in her final days. Please excuse the omission of some names but there are so many. Special thanks to Dr. Anees Fogley, Karen, Rachel, all her doctors, Patty and the wonderful care givers and nurses on the 9th floor of Regional Hospital and the angels at Sacred Heart Hospice. Thank you, thank you, thank you.

WORDS

Words have power.

Power to heal

Power to lift up

Power to communicate truth and beauty

To quote Mrs L in her final moments

" hope... mercy... Love, Love, Love...".

GOD BLESS