

Good evening,

I am Odile Hellier, the founder and the manager of the Village Voice Bookshop in Paris.

It's a great honor to speak tonight about Hazel Rowley, the friend who has deeply influenced my life.

Before I begin to evoke a few personal memories of Hazel, I would like to thank Della Rowley, Hazel's sister, for her determination and her continuing effort to ensure Hazel's literary legacy, and for making my trip to NY and my talk here tonight possible.

I'd also like to thank Jennifer Raab, President of Roosevelt House and Ambassador William vanden Heuvel, an invaluable friend of Hazel's in her last months, for hosting this first Hazel Rowley Memorial Lecture. Roosevelt House is a historical landmark in Hazel's dual biography of Franklin and Eleanor Roosevelt and it is where she had the privilege of launching her book in November 2010.

And I am most grateful to Pamela and Richard Stanley, Hazel's long time friends, for opening their NY home to me, helping to make this emotional journey to my friends' reunion.

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Exactly a year ago, almost to the day, in an email dated Monday February 7th 2011, Hazel wrote:

Dinner here last night with a friend, who is becoming close, Sophia . It is good to do some cooking in my little kitchen and to fill the place with food aromas. And I was playing music before she came, and the lamps made things very cozy. I am feeling calmer, happier' .

A year later, her friends from all over have gathered in New York, Hazel's last home, to remember and celebrate the scholar, the writer, the sister, the friend and the unique person she was.

Yesterday, as I was walking through Hazel's former neighborhood, it was like walking in a double dimension of real streets with the shops where Hazel used to buy delicacies, but their windows seemed to mirror back at me shadow streets with the both of us, Hazel and I, walking side by side, as we had done back in June 2010, both engaged in an animated discussion about her own life and her next project. Hazel was contemplating writing a book on The Hollywood Ten, and - all the while - shopping and deciding what food and which wine to buy for dinner .

That Summer of 2010 was fraught with anxiety over her private life but it was also filled with great expectations for the forthcoming release of her new book.

The first time I met Hazel was in Paris in the Village Voice Bookshop. A tall, thin, intense looking figure approached me.

She was looking for books on France during the Occupation and the Post-War years. She was writing about Simone de Beauvoir, she said -which immediately teased my curiosity. I had read Beauvoir in the late Fifties and Sixties , and her books had played an important part in my unflinching determination to be an independent, free woman.

Thus began our long ongoing conversation and our lasting friendship.

Hazel used to come often by the bookshop. She loved the place and on many occasions voiced her support for the Village Voice Bookshop, and even wrote a long and detailed article about it which was published in the *Australian Literary Review* and the *BookForum*. After a Guest Reading we would go for a drink and occasionally have dinner with the author featured that night.

The videotape of Hazel's own presentation of *Tête-à-Tête*, her biography of Beauvoir and Sartre's crossed lives, which you can view on our website, shows the sharp and lively Hazel we knew: her commanding presence, the scholar who knew how to tell a story and often with a zest of humor. But to hear her voice again with that slight intonation of hers is spine-shivering.

In Paris, Hazel had her own circle of French friends, writers and artists, who called her 'azelle la gazelle'.

And during those Bush years, she was also active in Democrats Abroad and Americans against the War.

Hazel and I happened to live in the same neighborhood, in the fourteenth arrondissement. I remember her apartment on the top floor of a small Parisian building a couple of streets away from mine. As you entered it, the first thing you saw was her large writing desk, made of a long varnished wooden table, with two perpendicular wings, one with her computer, the other one with her files. Everything neatly organized.

One thing about Hazel that was most impressive was how fast and efficient she was at both doing and processing research, each relevant piece of information correctly referenced and annotated. Her desk was a testimony to her discipline and organizational talent.

It was facing a window which opened onto a view of grey tin rooftops and chimneys standing out against the usual Parisian grey sky. Facing that window, Hazel could easily feel attuned to her subject: her view and her living accommodation were not so different from that of Beauvoir's in the late 40's.

Living so close to one another, we would often meet by chance on the main commercial avenue and, if we were going in the same direction, we would walk together covering much of Beauvoir's territory. A stone's throw from the famous, impassive Bronze Lion of the Place Denfert Rochereau and across Montparnasse Cemetery was Beauvoir's artist's studio, where Hazel – already inspired by Beauvoir -the writer and the person- had visited her in the early 80's. If we were heading in the direction of Montparnasse, we would pass by The Hotel Mistral where Beauvoir and Sartre had stayed during the war.

In that humble-looking hotel, Sartre and Beauvoir had lived simply. But in her Memoirs Beauvoir was quick to remark that Sartre lived in an apartment above her, with all the advantages of a shared life, and none of its inconveniences. An arrangement made early in their lives and which they would maintain to the end.

It was fun to revisit those places with Hazel who had always new and often quixotic anecdotes to tell.

While it is certainly the most in-depth of all the published biographies of Beauvoir, *Tête à- Tête* was not well received in France. Unique in its approach- as Hazel had been able to consult unpublished letters which shed light on the inner dynamics of the couple and, more importantly, on their relationships with friends and students, Hazel's biography provoked the rage of a small clique of French intellectuals who did not want anyone, much less a foreigner, to scratch the varnish of their sacred icons.

The publication of the French translation was right from the beginning entrenched in controversy.

Here was the biography Hazel had the most enjoyed researching and writing and now it was literally trashed. Sartre's adopted daughter, and Claude Lanzman, a former lover of Beauvoir, threatened to sue the French publisher and succeeded in having the book pulped in its original form.

In an article entitled *French Censorship* published in the Winter issue 2009 of the American Scholar, Hazel tells the picturesque and picaresque story of her post-book experience in France: its publication, which had led her to participate in lively and stimulating radio and television talk shows, then the threat of a serious law suit which prompted the publisher to withdraw all the copies from the bookshops and pulp them, and the reprinting of an altered version which, in the end, no French reader was able to buy nor read, since even the censored reprint was not stocked again in French bookstores.

'What an irony, Hazel wrote, to think that Beauvoir and Sartre had neither of them ever destroyed any of their private correspondence and journals even when it did not make them look good, and had both said that "they would like the public to know the truth about their personal lives".'

It was a blow to Hazel the biographer, whose trademark was precisely to probe through the cracks of her characters' masks and social armours, their frailty, their complexities, their deeper selves, making them all the more human and their life stories all the more inspiring and gripping.

Strangely enough, the dumping in France of *Tête à Tête* did not deter Hazel from flirting with the idea of living again in France at some time in the future, an idea she spoke of again in our last telephone conversation, exactly a week before her fateful weekend.

Besides, her 9/11 experience with the failed promotion of her *Richard Wright's* biography, coupled with people's disinclination to buy books at such time, taught Hazel not to look in the rear-view mirror but to head forward and dive heart and mind into a new project.

And that new project was the biography of *Franklin and Eleanor. An Extraordinary Marriage*.

In June 2010, we spent a week in NY and in the Hudson Valley, visiting the FDR places where Hazel had done research for her book.

'My God, so many magical memories' she wrote in an email in which she recalled our visit to Hyde Park, 'the fun of our driving and the pleasure of getting lost on those moonlit Hudson roads! And the mists, and the deer on the doorstep of our B&B, the Bittersweet, or sitting by the Hudson River while we watched the sun set, ... coming away bursting with joy, and talk, talk, talk...'

The last day of my visit which, unbeknown to us, was to be our last day together, beautifully sums up who Hazel was, a unique mix of an exacting, most curious mind and of an artist's sensitivity:

She had wanted to share with me her deep interest in the rich multicultural fabric of Brooklyn, which she had, at one time, contemplated writing about... and for a full day we walked all over Brooklyn, going in the most obscure shops, just for the pleasure of looking at colorful stalls of exotic food and fabrics and of experiencing the music of so many different languages.

Early that evening, as the sun was beginning to set over Manhattan, we boarded a small yellow Audubon boat for a bird watching 'expedition' on the East River.

Riding the rough waters of the confluent tides, we strained to spot through binoculars those migrating birds which, in the middle of their long distance flight, had made a pause in the East River islands, some of which were disused and forlorn looking , others grown wild.

Later on, Hazel spoke with marvel and emotion about “ *the pure poetry of that birding trip up the East River*”

Such a talented biographer, with an acute consciousness of the world she lived in, Hazel wrote about people who, like herself, had been deeply involved in the realities and struggles of their time . But Hazel was also unusually sensitive to the invisible wonders that surround us and inform our lives.

My last glance of Hazel was from the taxi that was taking me to Penn station. She was standing on the very edge of the kerb, waving at me, an encouraging smile on her face.

In Montreal, my destination, an email was awaiting me :

‘ After you left I went for a walk in Riverside Park to the Eleanor Roosevelt statue.. then had breakfast at Georgia’s outside and wrote about our last week...’

‘... I miss you already. But how nice it is to feel so sad when a friend leaves.’

Tonight, a year after she left us, we all feel sad and will for a long time to come.

However, when Hazel’s silence becomes too oppressive, I turn to Vladimir Nabokov – The Enchanter- and make mine his incantation: *Speak Memory*.

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