Evangeline Machlin: A Remembrance
by Judi Lehrhaupt

It is strange to think that all this started 40 years ago this September. Memories: I remember walking into a bright room that stretched from the door to the windows and seeing an elegant, tall woman standing at the front wall. We sat in our oak chairs with desk arms and she introduced herself as Evangeline Machlin. Days later we were laying on the floor, breathing, marching around the room and breathing, reading poetry and breathing, reading soliloquies and BREATHING. I still have the notes from that first year and have used some of the exercises in my own classes. I remember I struggled to lose my New Jersey accent, support my words to the end of sentences, make the best SOUNDS I could and free my body to do all this. What now seems everyday seemed strange and uncomfortable, but not to Dr. Machlin. She took us through our paces three days a week with enthusiasm and energy. She was an incredible teacher. Dr. Machlin left an indelible mark inside me where the heart meets the mind. I will always be indebted to her for her inspiration, her kindness, her “putukuh” and much more.

I remained at Boston University School of Fine and Applied Arts for three years and finished my theatre degree at New York University. I know that my decision to get a Master’s Degree in Speech Pathology was partially motivated by the time I spent with Dr. Machlin.

There were many years of experiences and much water under the bridge when I began to hear about VASTA. Although I am not sure of the year, I finally decided to attend the conference that was held at Pace College in New York City. To my surprise, there was Dr. Machlin sitting in the top row of the tier. When I finally had the opportunity to speak with her we revisited the “old days”, talked about her life in New Hampshire, and I had the chance to thank her for her guidance those many years ago. I have not seen Dr. Machlin since that conference, but she is in my thoughts especially when I am doing voice and speech work.

As I allowed thought to wander around the stage along with sound on the final day of the conference in New York this year, I became aware that I was close to the age Dr. Machlin was when I first met her. I knew that I had to share this and I felt proud that I am continuing the work that she had inspired in me so many years ago. We pay a great tribute to those who inspire us through our work and by encouraging those who are new to the work.

One final thought: we learn and develop new ways to teach the techniques of our craft, building on the strong base of our mentors. Lest we forget.

Evangeline Machlin, author of SPEECH FOR THE STAGE and DIALECTS FOR THE STAGE, taught at The Neighborhood Playhouse School of Theatre, Columbia University, and spent many years at Boston University before her retirement. Dr. Machlin was a founding member of VASTA. She died in February 2003 at the age of ninety-five.