Carole Holdsworth was a gentle soul. Shy yet fervent, quiet yet extraordinarily witty, understated in speech and demeanor, yet inordinately fond of designer scarves and handbags and fine jewelry, humble to a fault but astonishingly erudite in innumerable fields—not only her beloved Don Quijote and Medieval and Modern Spanish literature, but also Philosophy, Theology, World literature from Europe to Asia, Opera, Art History, and Music from Palestrina to Jacques Brel.

She was a person of deep faith and lived a simple, even monastic life. But that didn’t mean that she was a Puritan in any way. Carole loved fine food and wicked pastries. She favored elegant dining venues and experiences, like high tea at The Peninsula, or dinner in La Pergola, the 3-star Michelin Guide restaurant atop of the Cavalieri Hilton in Rome. Most notable, she loved to invite her friends, Olympia González, Mercedes Robles, Anne Callahan, Deni Heyck and me to join her for a sybaritic lunch of literary talk, movie star gossip, teaching tips, and a lazy Susan of cream puffs and Napoleons. When she decided in her late 50s to start her world travels, it was always deluxe: a Mercedes to meet her at the airport, a personal tour guide, usually an art historian, and five-star hotels.

When she returned, however, she resumed her ascetic existence: classes to prepare, papers to grade, and her beloved cats to spoil. She was known to lecture without a single pause, citing dates, works, authors, historical events in a seamless flow that seemed to her students to be an article ready for publication. She always had time to help her students with their papers or presentations, but even more striking, just to talk about the great books, or family and friends, or pets. How she loved to hear our animal stories!

Carole never married; yet she remembered the names of all of our significant others. Carole never had children, but she loved ours like her own. Every time I saw her she wanted to know how my
kids were doing. As many of her colleagues at Loyola noted, she never failed to send a Christmas card, nor to memorialize the birth of a child, a retirement, a new marriage. Despite her conscious decision to devote her life to scholarship and teaching, she had many “adopted children.” So much so that one Mother’s Day, I sent her a bouquet with the note, “If being a mother means to nurture the young, there can be no greater mother than you.”

We will miss her sweet smile, the light toss of her head when she entered a room—a sign of her innate shyness. We will miss her bountiful generosity. No more chocolates in the communal department bowl on Mondays. No more lavish birthday gifts to any and everyone who spent time with her. No more walking encyclopedia of Spanish culture and history along with her, “at the fingertips” knowledge of classical myth and tragedy, Shakespeare, Henry James, Balzac and Thomas Pynchon, no more sinful visits to the Four Seasons.

Carole would be delighted to see us here today in our finery; and I have no doubt that she’s watching us from Heaven, while debating with Dante whether Paolo and Francesca should have been doomed to eternal fire, or telling Graham Greene that his take on the Spanish hidalgo, Monsieur Quixote, was one of her favorite books.

We grieve yet rejoice at the same time because Carole has gone to her reward. May we all join her some day in that land where every tear is dried. And, if we believe Pope Francis about the afterlife of dogs, perhaps she is sitting there now under a tree, with Marmalade on her lap.

Susana Cavallo