A View of Janet Mattei, from the Headquarters Staff

Katherine L. Davis
Kerriann H. Malatesta
Rebecca Turner
Sara J. Beck
Gamze Menali
Aaron Price
Michael Saladyga
Travis J. Searle
Sarah T. Sechelski
Matthew Templeton
Elizabeth O. Waagen
AAVSO Headquarters, 25 Birch Street, Cambridge, MA 02138

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Introduction

Every year, right before the Annual meeting, it never failed. Janet would eagerly suggest that the staff put on an "AAVSO office skit" as a source of meeting entertainment. She always thought it would be fun to show the members a typical, or rather, an atypical day at Headquarters and how crazy things could sometimes get. But just as predictable as Janet's request were the downcast eyes and stone-cold expressions from those of us who thought it might just be the most embarrassing idea ever. In honor of Janet, however, we will not relate a skit exactly, but we will rather provide a glimpse of what it was like to work in the office with Janet.

Janet as a high-energy object

Most of you probably already know that Janet was a very energetic person. This was true no matter the time of day, and the early workday morning was no exception. Every day, like clockwork, Janet would open the door to the office and would call out her energetic and resounding greeting, "Good Morning." No matter what was going on, and even if it hadn't been a great morning thus far, you were suddenly aware of the burst of positive energy that had just walked through the door. You didn't have to see her face to know that she was smiling, it just came through in her voice. If you had not made eye contact with Janet on her entrance, she was sure to wish you a personal "good morning" upon her initial contact with you for the day. This was always true for the staff partitioned off in the library, where her cheerful daily greeting could not be heard. Therefore, a special, "Good Morning, Ladies" was always bid to Kate and Gamze. After setting her things in her office and getting her cup for her morning tea, she would always proceed to ask

the general question, "How is everyone this morning?" as she crossed the office, genuinely concerned about everyone's well-being.

Janet's energy lasted throughout the day, and was evident through the distinct sound of her footsteps. Although Janet was small in stature, her fast and powerful footfalls always gave her away. They burst with energy, much like Janet herself. Mike and Sara, who work downstairs, say they always knew when Janet was walking about above them because her steps were unlike any others.

Janet was also known for working very late at the office, often times staying overnight to finish a project or prepare for a meeting. Her energetic dedication was unrivaled. She did whatever it took to get the job done. This devotion not only applied to Janet's in-office work ethic, but it applied outside as well—literally. One wintry night a terrible winter snow storm had been forecast. Worried about driving home, Janet decided to stay in a hotel near the office. The next morning when Matt arrived at work planning to do some snow removal, he was stunned to see that Janet had already made the trip back to the office and had shoveled the entire walkway out in front of Headquarters—of all 24 inches of snow!

Janet as the boss

If Janet didn't have a photographic memory, she had something that was very close to it. Give her the name of a variable star and she could tell you the specific date, author, and title of an article on a subject that you were just "wondering" about. Her internet-like memory was not limited to variable stars, but also encompassed information about AAVSO members and observers. For instance, there was one time when she was out of the office and called Headquarters to find out somebody's phone number. Travis read her the number, to which she replied, "No, that's not right, that's his old number." Travis, thinking to himself, "how could she possibly know if that is the wrong number with out dialing it, especially when she barely knows this person?" went to go find the updated number. Sure enough he found out that it was indeed the old number and when giving Janet the new one she said, "Yes, this is the right one."

Janet also had a terrific sense of humor that could often be seen through the unique twinkle in her eye and a great child-like grin. Once Travis leaned into her office and asked if she wanted anything from a local store for lunch. She told him that she would like "a salad from the salad bar." So Travis, feeling a bit overwhelmed by the fact that he had no idea what she liked on her salad, asked her if there was anything in particular she wanted. To this she replied, "oh anything," and as Travis turned to leave, she added, "and your job is riding on it." Janet was, of course, smiling like a Cheshire cat while saying this. Realizing that he had been the subject of some of Janet's light humor, Travis laughed—eventually.

With her charismatic personality, Janet had a way of pulling people in to listen to what she had to say. Often times, she would come out of her office into the "big room" and start talking about something to no one in particular, but by the end

of what she was saying, most people were engaged and it had transformed into an office-wide discussion. Perhaps it was an unusual method, but it was effective in getting a consensus on a matter, which is probably what she was trying to do anyway.

Above all, Janet had an incredible talent for making us all feel that we, and the work that we were doing, were truly valued. No matter how big or small the task, she always made sure to give her thanks upon completion of a given duty. Often times she'd suggest going out and having a celebratory dinner in honor of completing a special project. Although the celebrations didn't always happen because of busy schedules—Janet, Elizabeth, Margaret Mayall, and Charles Scovil never got around to the planned steak and champagne dinner celebrating completion of the *AAVSO Variable Star Atlas* (they ended up having crackers for dinner in the office as the last "day" of the project dragged on into the wee hours of the morning)—the fact that she had suggested a special event signified her deep gratitude. Janet's appreciation was also clearly evident come payday at the AAVSO. In most offices, paychecks often come from a "Human Resources" department and are distributed without much verbal exchange. At the AAVSO, however, they always came directly from Janet's hand, whereby she was sure to make distinct eye contact while offering a sincere "thank you."

Janet as a friend and mother figure

Janet was more than just a boss to us. Sometimes she was a friend and sometimes she was more of a mother figure. She always cared for each of us individually and no matter how crazy her schedule got, or what was going on in her life, Janet always took time to take a personal interest in our lives and our families.

Genuinely concerned about our well-being, Janet always had the uncanny ability to find a cure for whatever ailment we had. She knew of certain remedies and would dispense her knowledge like a sage. Always ready with a hefty supply of Vitamin C or Echinacea for anyone who suggested they might be getting sick, Janet also had a special fondness for one particular remedy called "Airborne." If you haven't heard of this stuff you might want to buy stock. Janet spread the good word about these immune boosting tablets that *prevent* one from getting sick which, as we all know, is much better than getting sick in the first place. Her conviction prompted a lot of us to go to our nearest drug store and buy out their supply (that is, if Janet hadn't already swiped the shelves clean). Kate admits to keeping two bottles of the stuff at home and wouldn't think of stepping foot on an airplane without some in her system.

If she could not fend off your ailment, Janet always had a backup plan. Another of her miracle cures was contained in a mysterious bottle labeled "China Oil" that resided in the medicine chest of the ladies room. On separate occasions and to different people Janet suggested using this stuff to gargle away a sore throat, to get rid of a cold sore, fight nasal congestion, banish a pimple, and to relieve

arthritic pain. The scary thing is that it actually worked for all these things! Yes, that is China Oil…don't know what it is, don't know why it is…just know that it works!

Janet not only thought about us when we were ailing, but when we were in good health as well. She was always excited about any special events happening in our lives. She would make a point of asking how a particular dinner may have gone, how your house guests were doing, and so on. She was always just as proud and as curious about our lives outside of the office. She would happily go to Rebecca and Sarah's plays, attend Elizabeth's and Sara's concerts, and whatever else she could do, in her limited spare time, to show her support. She was truly happy when good things happened for us, such as when Kerri told Janet that she was pregnant. Overcome with joy, Janet literally jumped out of her chair, clapped her hands, and exclaimed, "I'm so glad you did it!"

Birthdays were always important dates for Janet. Although we would have a little office celebration with cake and a gift for the staff birthday person, Janet would always pull you aside afterwards to give you a special gift that she had gotten for you personally. Tokens of her generosity are displayed throughout the office and throughout our homes, and hold a special place in our memories. Perhaps the most memorable birthday present of all was when Janet arranged for a belly dancer to show up at AAVSO volunteer Katherine Hazen's 80th birthday party at Headquarters. Aside from stopping passers-by in the window, it was a great surprise and delight. Janet certainly knew how to throw excitement into a party!

Beyond the personal relationships with the staff, Janet also forged bonds with our families. Although our loved ones may have never met Janet, they are well aware of her thoughtfulness through the sweets, flowers, cards, magazines, and more that she sent home with us. After hearing about how much Kate's family enjoyed a gift of Turkish Delight sent home with her during the holiday season, Janet made sure to stock Kate up with treats before leaving for her native Atlanta. Usually the gift was a box of Turkish Delight but sometimes it was fresh made Baklava, which Kate's mother loved. A testament to Janet's generosity occurred in December of 2003 when Janet was at the Spaulding Center for rehabilitation. While Kate was visiting, she told Kate to open up her cabinet and look on the third shelf. Sure enough, there was a box of Turkish Delight there ready for the trip to Atlanta for Christmas. In fact, there were boxes for all the staff members for the holidays! Kate's family came to know Janet through her gifts, and through correspondence, Janet and Kate's mom formed a relationship. But this is not a unique example. This was Janet's typical style— making friends and forging relationships with almost everyone that she encountered.

Janet's Turklish

As you all know, Janet was born and raised in Turkey. She came to the U.S. in 1962, and moved here permanently around 1969. She was fluent in both Turkish

and English, but because she knew these two languages so well sometimes certain phrases would come out in—well, not exactly English, and not exactly Turkish, but something that we fondly referred to as *Turklish*. Here are some of our favorite expressions that Janet would sometimes use:

Instead of saying, "That would be like opening a can of worms" Janet would say, "That would be like opening a bag of worms," which we all agree is a bit more disturbing and graphic than a can, so probably a better expression anyway.

Instead of saying, "thinking out loud," Janet would sometimes say "talking out loud," which at last check is really the only way to talk.

Instead of saying "in the ballpark" she would say, "in the ballpoint"—probably a smaller area than she had in mind, but you get the picture.

Instead of saying, "out of the pan and into the fire" she would say, "out of the fire and into the pan," which could be a worse situation….

Instead of saying, "burning the midnight oil," which she often did herself, she would say "burning the midnight candle." This is a splice of " burning the midnight oil" with "burning the candle at both ends."

Another favorite was when instead of saying, "the squeaky wheel gets the grease" she would say, "squeaky grease!" and she would say it emphatically as in "the nerve of that squeaky grease!!"

A last and perhaps most humorous example of Janet's Turklish, was when, instead of inviting a visiting Post doc candidate to go into the library, take off his coat, and relax until she could be with him, she actually said, "go to the library, sit down, take your shirt off." She quickly realized her mistake and burst into a big smile. Luckily the post doc had a good sense of humor and we all laughed, but what an ice-breaker!

Aside from the Turklish, Janet was certainly very well spoken, well traveled, and a truly internationally-minded person. There was no name, be it French, Japanese, or Russian, that she could not pronounce. However for some reason there was one that she never was able to get quite right. You could tell that it was coming up in a sentence (usually at an AAVSO meeting) when her normally steadily paced speech would slow down to a halt as she said, for example, "and our next observer award goes to...." She would peer out with a sheepish grin as she said, "Gerry" very slowly and then paused. Invariably a resounding "SAMOLYK" would be heard from most of the smiling audience. Of course all of this would be followed up not just with a certificate and a handshake, but with Janet's trademark heartfelt hug. We all know it was the hug that counted.

Janet as a force to be reckoned with

Although memories of Janet often involve her beaming smile and cheerful enthusiasm, she could also get down to business and be quite intimidating when she needed to.

Once when she and Gamze were walking back to Janet's car after a lunch out

of the office, they noticed a tow truck picking up a car that looked a lot like Janet's. As they realized that it was indeed her car, Janet took off yelling at the tow truck driver demanding that he lower her vehicle. After several minutes of demonstrative gesturing and debate, the car was lowered and the ladies were on their way.

Imagine the surprise of a would-be thief when caught in Janet's hotel room by her while she was attending a meeting in Paris. While most victims would turn the other way and go for help, Janet approached the perpetrator herself and proceeded to chase the villain—Janet wearing high heels, mind you—down the hall until the pursuit ended when the door to the thief's sure-fire get away turned out to be a closet.

Dabbling in high-speed, high-heeled chases on foot were not the only civic duties Janet participated in. One night when she, Gamze, and Kerri returned from a working dinner, they noticed a car parked adjacent to AAVSO Headquarters with the trunk slightly ajar and keys dangling from its lock. Janet, acting as a sleuth, opened the trunk and investigated for any suspicious activity. Satisfied that no foul play had taken place, Janet shut the trunk and took the keys for safe keeping. Instead of notifying the police, Janet left a note on the car stating that the owner should contact her if they wanted the keys to be returned. Working late that night, Janet bravely answered the call to return the keys to their rightful owner. As it turned out, the scene was not a CSI Cambridge mystery, but rather just a simple case of someone forgetting their keys.

Janet as mentor

So far, we have mentioned several funny anecdotes that make us smile when we remember what a lively, fun, and caring person Janet was. But her influence runs much deeper than that. She enriched our lives as a leader, a teacher, and a mentor.

Janet Mattei served as an important mentor to many staff members. She treated us all with the same respect she treated her professional colleagues and was always available to answer questions and give advice, even when working late. Many AAVSO staff members or volunteers have gone on to become very successful astronomers.

Janet always had a way of looking at the bright side of things. When seemingly difficult times would be upon us, she would often say, "this, too, shall pass." Unfortunately, Janet, our sadness will not pass, but since you would advise us to look on the bright side, we are all better people for having had you, your kindness, your wisdom, and your influence in our lives. Thank you, Janet!