Carolyn Ruth Swift, 85

PROVIDENCE – Professor Carolyn Ruth Swift, Professor Emerita of English and Women's Studies at Rhode Island College, died November 17 at Home and Hospice Care of Rhode Island. She obtained her undergraduate degree in 1948 from the University of Chicago. She earned her M.A. at Columbia University in English Literature in 1950 and taught high school at Rosemary Hall in Greenwich, Conn., Prospect Hill School in New Haven, and the public schools of Swansea, Mass., and Cranston before joining the faculty of Rhode Island College, after receiving her doctorate in English at Brown University in 1973.

She retired from teaching at Rhode Island College in 1995, but she continued teaching and studying at the Cambridge Adult Education Center, Harvard Institute for Learning in Retirement, and the Brown Community for Learning in Retirement.

A political activist who, throughout her life, sought to increase the civil rights of minority groups, Dr. Swift was a founder and twice chairperson of the Rhode Island Affiliate of the American Civil Liberties Union and a member of its board. She was a member of the Rhode Island Congress of Racial Equality. A member of Senior Action in a Gay Environment, she worked for the civil rights of lesbians and gays.As a member of the Gray Panthers, the Rhode Island Senior Agenda, and the Massachusetts Senior Action Council, she also frequently lobbied at the Rhode Island and Massachusetts State Houses for the passage of laws that would procure health care and housing for the elderly.

She was a member of Temple Emanu-El of Providence, the Rhode Island Historical Society, the Jewish Historical Society of Rhode Island, the Jewish Community Center of Rhode Island, the Modern Language Association, the Shakespeare Association of America, the Rhode Island Recorder Society, the Fox Point Citizen's Association, and the Rhode Island Women's Journal Writing Collective with which she had shared her journal writing since 1980. Her journals are now part of the Schlesinger Library collection at Harvard University.

Professor Swift grew up in Bloomfield, N.J., the daughter of the late Max and Gertrude Bovit Swift and currently resided in Providence. She was the sister of the late Richard N. Swift. Her marriage of 28 years to John W. Lenz ended in 1979. She is survived by her life partner of 31 years, Edith A. Kur, her son Dr. Peter S. Lenz and his wife Carol Ann of Salt Lake City, Utah and her son Thomas M. Lenz of Weston, Mass. She is also survived by her stepchildren, Richard Gurspan and Deborah Petrarca, Nina Carmel, Paul Gurspan, Deb Korzec, and Pamela Ewings, and by three grandchildren, David O. Lenz and Meredith J. Lenz, both of Salt Lake City, and Ruby Carmel of Lincoln, Mass.

Contributions may be made to the American Civil Liberties Union Foundation of Rhode Island, 128 Dorrance St., Providence, RI 02903.