



## Anita Rozlapa

February 15, 1939 - March 20, 2024

Anita Rozlapa, longtime Bloomington resident and business owner of the à propos gifts and jewelry store for decades, died at the IU Health Bloomington Hospital on Wednesday, March 20, 2024, due to complications from a recent stroke.

Anita was born in Latvia on February 15, 1939, as the only child of Peteris and Vilma Rozlapa. After World War II the family decided to emigrate to Chicago to make a new life for themselves. However, they were only able to do so after living in a displaced persons camp in Germany. Anita's time in the camp, from the age of five to eleven, was an experience that remained with her for the rest of her life.

According to a 2007 article in Bloom magazine (including this photo of her in the store), Anita attributed her lifelong love of art, music and literature to her parents. Her father had been a stage designer for the Latvian National Opera in Riga who continued to paint and create sculptures; and her mother was, to use Anita's words, "musical." The Rozlapa family remained close knit and together throughout their lives, making a home together in Bloomington.

In its June 16, 1961 issue, Time magazine profiled Anita as one of the top dozen graduates from prestigious schools in the US. A Fulbright fellowship to study in Madrid, Spain followed. In that article she explained that she fell in

love with the Spanish language at LaGrange High School in Illinois. That passion for language led to a George M. Pullman Scholarship that took her to the University of Chicago where she earned her B.A., M.A. and Ph.D. in Romance Languages with a dissertation entitled "La estética de vanguardia en España (1915-1936)." She initially came to Bloomington to teach in IU's Department of Spanish and Portuguese where she became known and appreciated for rigorous graduate and undergraduate courses on 20th century Hispanic poetry and theater and for her involvement in planning and creating the J.M. Hill prize, one of the oldest and most prestigious prizes offered to graduate students in that department for an outstanding research paper.

Despite her talents in the classroom, Anita lost interest in the publishing demands of university teaching and, changing career directions entirely, decided to create a unique gift store. *à propos* opened in 1979 in Fountain Square, moving in 1985 to the Courthouse Square where it remained open until the pandemic of 2020 closed all commercial establishments. When interviewed for Bloom she recognized that her store was comparable to "a gallery, but without being intimidating, stiff or formal." She chose every item in the store herself—traveling to trade fairs to purchase everything from "Kenyan fair-trade stuffed animals to Frank Lloyd Wright-design ties." While *à propos* was known for its crystal, art glass, Japanese ceramics, silk shawls, scarves and jewelry, it also offered such light-hearted objects as unique socks, specialty cards and seasonal items. With their flower arrangements and decorative pieces, her window displays were themselves works of art.

When declining health prevented Anita from reopening the store in 2021, she realized how much she missed her customers. Many had shared stories about their lives with her while they browsed. They had become akin to a community-wide family. After the store closed, she relished encountering some of them while out doing errands and always appreciated it when they recognized her and loved to reminisce about past purchases.

Anita was preceded in death by her parents and her former husband, John P. Dyson, who remained a close friend until his death in 2019. She is survived by a circle of friends, near and far, who will miss her stylish elegance, her whimsical sense of humor and wry comments on wide-ranging matters, her artistic eye, her love of flowers and plants, her knowledge of literature, her enjoyment of music from opera to Elvis, and her appreciation for good food—especially NY cheesecake!

As per her request, her remains will be cremated and there will be no memorial service. Arrangements have been entrusted to Allen Funeral Home and Crematory 4155 South Old State Road 37. Donations in her name can be made to Meals on Wheels ([bloomingtonmealsonwheels.com](http://bloomingtonmealsonwheels.com)), which allowed her to live independently until her death.

# Tribute Wall

VM

“ *Virginia Meeker lit a candle in memory of Anita Rozlapa*



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**Virginia Dyson Meeker** - March 27, 2024 at 04:21 PM

KS

“ *Anita was a wonderful professor when I studied with her in graduate school at IU in the 1970s. I was fortunate to have developed a friendship with her in the following years. Her shop was the go-to place for elegant gifts. She was often a guest in my home and I will miss spending time with her.*

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**Kathleen Sideli** - March 27, 2024 at 01:49 PM