

ISABEL PICZEK

It is for others to write her obituary so these are but a few personal memories.

Isabel Piczek was one of the most significant Shroud scholars of the 20th century. Her unique combination of nuclear physicist and world renowned artist led her to publish many remarkable theories about the Turin Shroud and to present learned papers at international conferences over a period of many years discussing her various proofs of the age and probable authenticity of the Shroud.

I had the privilege of knowing Isabel for nearly forty years. She was forthright in discussion, meticulous in research, eloquent in reporting, and a charming companion with supreme qualities of gentility, compassion and courtesy. We met frequently at almost every conference in the latter part of the last century at which we both often presented papers. Over the years we had numerous meals and discussions together and we always met whenever I was in Los Angeles.

The remarkable works of art by this great woman are well known to the world. Who cannot marvel at her immense cathedral murals and vast stained glass windows?

On 29th April 1992 I had spent the day as Isabel's guest in Los Angeles visiting many of her works in churches and other buildings. And I remember her fearlessly climbing her ladders to work in her famous studio.

On that well documented day we were having dinner on the fourth floor of an Asian owned hotel a hundred yards from City Hall where the Rodney King matter had just concluded. I was able to observe the very first fire set by the mob opposite the hotel and to feel them trashing the lobby below us. Despite being offered the safety of rooms for the night by the management we left the hotel at midnight at Isabel's insistence. We picked our way through the devastation and debris of the ground floor which reminded me of my experiences in World War II in England. We finally got to the damaged and looted basement carpark.

A great deal of Los Angeles was set on fire that night and Isabel drove through the burning chaos to deliver me to my hotel just before much of the city was isolated and cordoned off. The final count was 3767 buildings set on fire.

A very important collaboration occurred when Isabel joined my expedition along with my son Christopher, a qualified archaeologist, to study the ceiling portrait of Christ in the Orpheus cubiculum of the Domitilla catacomb under Rome, the arrangements for which had been made by Emanuela Marinelli.

It was my theory that this was the earliest extant portrait of Christ and dates back to about 65 AD. It has striking similarities to the image of the man in the Shroud thus adding to the evidence for the existence of the cloth at that time and that the portrait had been painted by someone who had seen the man.

In the publicly excluded Orpheus cubiculum Isabel set about a detailed examination of the painting, of the cubiculum itself and the nearby passages. She conducted plaster analysis; examination of the paint colours and pigments used; brush techniques; the fresco style and skill level; and together with her observations that the portrait was done by a professional artist; there was no underpainting; it was life size; in profile Flavian style of the 60s and had cartouches of the same style as Pompeii and the architectural features of the cubiculum all led her to support the dating of about 69 AD.

Isabel also assisted Christopher and me with measurements of temperature, humidity and seepage from 2000 years old market gardens above the site. She also distracted our guide to enable us to inspect and photograph passages which had been closed off by falls of collapsed material and thus obscured much earlier entrances to the complex which had not been correctly recorded for centuries.

In the pursuit of facts from the market gardens above Isabel and I were chased off by ferocious guard dogs as we noted the enormous irrigation of the gardens which had caused untold damage to the catacombs below and their paintings for generations through seepage.

I had given papers on this subject at conferences in Hong Kong (1986), Rome (1993), Richmond, Virginia (1999) and published my (armchair) book *The Holy Shroud and the Earliest Painting of Christ* (1985). On all of these occasions Isabel and I had discussed the possibility of our collaboration.

Isabel was a pivotal partner in the documenting of the unique portrait in profile which pre-dates any other influence of the received likeness of Christ. We provided further evidence from an entirely independent source for the antiquity of the Shroud, for its existence in the first century and certainly neither a man made fabrication nor an object less than 2000 years old. I suggest readers might refer to my comprehensive paper *The Greatest Secret of the Catacombs?* given at the 1999 Shroud of Turin International Research Conference in Richmond, Virginia (Published in its Proceedings in 2000).

As a break from our underground endeavours Isabel took us to the Sistine Chapel where the totally unsupervised massive crush of people could easily have been life threatening. This amazed, alarmed and upset Isabel.

So we mourn a wonderful woman whose spectacular career as an artist of note since childhood and recipient of many honours and awards during a lifetime of work for the Shroud and the Catholic Church can surely be described as saintly.

REX MORGAN