

Cathy and Nick shared this. The italicised text is Cathy, the non-italicised, Nick

We are here to honour and remember Ilse Boas, a caring human being, a crusader for justice, and an overall force to be reckoned with. As I am sure many of you came to realize, you had to pick your battles with Ilse very carefully, because when she felt that she had reason or justice on her side, you really didn't have much of a chance to change her mind. She held herself to the highest of principles, and she expected others to do the same. It often took two or three letters for some unsuspecting borough councillor, Member of Parliament, or local business owner to come to that realization. Ilse was dogged!

But no single descriptor can capture Ilse. She was quiet, serious, and thoughtful much of the time, but she never lost the playfulness of a child – still delighting in tickling you, pulling your leg, or daring you to do something silly, even while her mind was befuddled due to the scourge of Alzheimer's. She was still willing to get up and dance at her 90th birthday party and right up to our last visit with her in March of this year, she was singing along to some of the old tunes and was tossing a beach ball with ferocious intensity. Never far from her bedside was her treasured collection of teddy bears with whom, until recent years, she often had the most interesting conversations.

Ilse was born in Berlin, Germany on November 18, 1925 to a Christian father and a Jewish mother. It was not a good time to be coming into the world in Europe with that heritage. But Ilse's early childhood was happy. She was blessed with loving parents and an older step-sister. Unfortunately, early in 1938, Ilse's father died suddenly. With his loss, and the rise of Nazism, life became more difficult for Ilse and her mother. Despite being raised Christian, Ilse was labelled Jewish under Hitler's laws. Her childhood friends, and even her step-sister, distanced themselves from Ilse, and she became isolated at school and in her community. The Nazis confiscated the Boas's family home and sold it to a non-Jewish family. Years later, Ilse would return to that home, introduce herself to the elderly lady who had lived there since the war, befriend that woman, and forgive her for having benefitted from the terrible wrong that was done to Ilse and her mother. We so admired Ilse for having been able to do that.

In 1939, when Ilse was only 13, her mother sent her to England on one of the Kindertransport. Can you imagine how frightened she must have been and how difficult it would have been for them to say goodbye. Throughout her life, Ilse retained the memory of her being the last child at Victoria Station in London to be collected on the day she arrived. She was not placed with a family but instead was sent to a boarding school. As a teenager, Ilse joined the German Lutheran Church in London where my father – also a refugee from Germany – was the pastor. That is how Ilse came into my life. My parents called upon their young German refugee parishioners to be the godparents to their growing brood, and Ilse was chosen as mine.

Thankfully, Ilse's mother, Frieda, was able to get to England in August 1939 and, eventually, the two of them were able to get their own flat and embark on their life together in London.

With the help of a kind and generous English family, Ilse managed to get an education. She first obtained a social work diploma and then a university degree in economics. She worked most of her career at the London School of Economics and eventually was responsible for organizing the university's timetable of courses, a very challenging endeavour. After Ilse retired from LSE, she was happy to put her administrative talents to work with various non-profit organizations. It was incredibly distressing to her when she started to have memory problems and could not stay as organized and on top of things as she had always prided herself in being. It was at this time that I began to get numerous phone calls from an increasingly worried Ilse who was sure her memory problems were not simply the normal progression with aging. Unfortunately, she was right.

Ilse and her mother lived for years in their home at 100 Farm Road, Edgware – a home we visited many times over the years – the first time being in 1970 at the commencement of our honeymoon! Ilse was the wise and welcoming godmother, who invited us into her home and who made us feel loved and supported as we embarked upon our first European adventure, not to mention the adventure of marriage. Ilse and Frieda could not have been more warm and welcoming, though I have to admit that what was on offer were two small cots – not exactly what we had in mind for our honeymoon. Although Ilse would have been at my parents' home in Wembley many times around the time of my birth, my parents emigrated to Canada when I was only two, and I didn't see Ilse again until I was introducing my bride to her. In the interim, I was the beneficiary of many letters and books – Ilse wanting to make sure that I was becoming suitably literate. I am still reading some of those books to my grandchildren.

Unfortunately, in the late seventies, Frieda developed Alzheimer's. Ilse cared for her at home for as long as possible but, ultimately, with reluctance and great sadness, had no choice but to place Frieda in a care home. It was at this time that Ilse came to realize just how inadequate services were for Alzheimer's sufferers and their carers. Ilse decided to do something about that. She was the driving force in establishing the Alzheimer Disease Society in the Borough of Barnet, and she worked tirelessly for 20 years as a volunteer in that organization, earning herself the Society's 20th anniversary award in 1999. That same year, in part because of her fear that she might one day go down the same path as her mother, Ilse moved to Blake Court, Winchmore Hill, Enfield, a retirement community offering sheltered living. In true Ilse fashion, she was preparing for the future, putting into place whatever was necessary to ensure that she would be properly cared for if her health deteriorated. But, in the meantime, she got down to business, getting on the board of directors at Blake Court and taking on the developers and the local council!

In 2011, after years of fretting about her failing short-term memory and her increased confusion, Ilse was diagnosed with Alzheimer's. In 2014, much to her dismay, she had to move into Springview – another care home. Initially, she was determined not to stay there. Some of you may recall that one day she escaped and miraculously made it downtown, unharmed, to St. James's. We still don't know how. But that was vintage Ilse. She was smart, determined, and fiercely independent.

It was heartbreaking for Nick and me to take apart Ilse's apartment when the move had to be made. The rich and cultured life she had led was evident everywhere. Ilse had travelled

extensively – often to work on archeological digs. She had a wonderful collection of books reflecting her interest in Ancient Greece and Rome, art history, architecture, oriental carpets, the theatre, classical music, theology, and philosophy. She was an amateur photographer and a chronicler and had created albums about her jaunts all over the world. She had binders of notes regarding theological readings, services, and retreats, and it appears that after every Sunday service, she would write her own reflections and reviews. She was incredibly curious – an energetic, life-long learner.

When we were organizing Ilse's papers, we realized what a generous donor she had been to a variety of causes to which she was committed. She was someone who "walked the walk." As a refugee who had survived the Holocaust due to the willingness of the good people of England to open their doors and give their support, Ilse was passionate about providing the same opportunities for current-day refugees. Justice and equality were guiding values in her life, as reflected in the list of organizations she supported, some of which included: Amnesty International, Amos Trust, the Association of Jewish Refugees, Bail for Immigration Detainees, Bishop Simeon Trust, Emmaus Village, Christian Aid, Justice, Oxfam, and the Refugee Council. She was also a lover of nature and an environmentalist – something she carried into the minutiae of her daily life, such as never wasting anything, including used wax paper, grocery bags, napkins, old envelopes, bits of paper etc. etc. Ilse considered it extravagant to purchase more than one new item of clothing every few years!

Ilse loved being part of the larger Busing clan – that clan numbers almost 70, at latest count. She would join us for Christmas, family weddings, or special family birthdays. She would be overwhelmed by the noise and confusion, and probably a little disapproving about the amount of food and liquor imbibed (Ilse being very moderate in that regard), but she loved being included and experiencing a type of family life that she never had. She looked up to my parents with something akin to awe for having produced this gang who loved one another and who loved being with one another.

Ilse never married and had no children. In some ways, Nick and I and our two children, Andrew and Erika, replaced the children and grandchildren that, I think, she would have loved to have. She was very much a part of our nuclear family. Ilse was with us shortly after our first son, Andrew, arrived. She considered herself Andrew's godmother, and took this role very seriously. She probably thought that Nick and I were a little lax when it came to religious guidance, so she weighed in with her suggestions. Andrew – the gentle and generous soul that he is – rolled with things. When our daughter, Erika, arrived, Ilse realized that she may have found her match with this fiercely independent young woman determined to find her own way. What Ilse and Erika shared was their love of reading and their love of stuffed animals. In fact, Ilse entrusted her precious teddy bear collection to Erika to make sure her little friends got adequately cuddled.

Ilse, Nick and I, and when they were younger, our children, spent many holidays together – in London, York, Scotland, the Lake Country, Oxford, Cambridge, Ely, Wales, the Midlands, Ottawa, Algonquin Park, Vancouver Island, the Laurentians, Montreal, Niagara Falls, and more. Ilse loved sharing the beautiful English countryside and towns with us, and we loved introducing her to the

magnificent Canadian wilderness. Ilse was adventurous. Although it took us awhile to get her to come to Ottawa in the winter, she eventually gave it a try and soon found herself ice fishing and snowshoeing. She loved coming to our cottage and looking out at the magical beauty of the forest after a fresh snowfall, as she sat by the fire sipping cocoa.

All that being said, though, the family that truly sustained Ilse over so many years on a day to day, week to week, basis is the congregation at St. James's. This is where she felt at home and felt accepted for who she was. She loved being a member of a community that shared her values and priorities. She was not an outsider; she was not fighting the battles on her own. Being part of this larger community was so important to Ilse's spiritual and emotional wellbeing – something she would tell us frequently. Cathy and I are so appreciative for what you gave Ilse.

What will I miss about Ilse? Well, first let me say what I will not miss! The over-cooked fish tails she often served us to help manage her, and our, cholesterol levels. Sitting beside her in her little car as she raced around town striking the fear of God into me and others on the road. The phone calls in the middle of the night to review matters we had discussed countless times. But there is a lot that I miss of the old Ilse – her steadfast commitment to her values and beliefs, always grounded in what she believed was right; the times we spent together talking about politics, books, and the family; and the trust she placed in me and the love she showed me.

What do I miss the most about Ilse? ... the love she always gave me, the great talks and debates we had over the years, many about religion and relationships – neither of us being shrinking violets when it came to opinions and expressing them. I miss the gentle kidding, the smile, the playfulness, the little wave. I miss seeing the simple pleasure she took in small things – like every dessert that she was ever offered. I miss her intelligence, her decency, and her determination. As I said at the beginning, she was a force to be reckoned with – one who did a great deal of good in this world and who showed much love and compassion to her fellow human beings.

Catherine Aitken and Nick Busing