

Eulogy for Isabelle – June 11, 1935 – December 29, 2008 – Read January 3, 2009

All of us here today are connected to each other.....and we are connected by one person, Isabelle.....our beloved Isabelle. From her brothers and sisters, to her nieces and nephews, her cousins, to her godchildren, and to her dear and loved friends.....we are connected! We all have our own stories, our good stories, our sometimes not so good stories, our ups and downs, our laughter and our tears..... Whatever we each have..... We come together today connected.....and through this connection we find love and peace within our own being.....together for this one day!

Last week I felt stronger and wanted Isabelle's suffering to end..... We all wanted her to be at peace and her poor wracked body to ache no more. So we said all the words that had to be said so she could let go and leave. I know you have to do this when you really love someone who is suffering. None of us wanted her to suffer any longer! So what I really felt, I didn't say.....like, please don't leave me Isabelle.....what am I going to do without you? What each of us must have felt in our own way? But that is the selfish side of me who knows I will miss her so much because she was such an important part of my life. Today I am sadder than sad! My heart is broken, but somehow I must find the courage to say these few words for her, because I see her saying to me, "yes darling, you can do this"!

I want to remember Isabelle in all the times when she enjoyed life the most. When she gracefully breezed into a room, almost unaware of how stunningly beautiful she was, always turning heads! She loved to dance and she was an accomplished talented dancer. I remember myself a young girl, and Isabelle coming home from the dance studio where she worked and had learned so much about dance, swirling around the house in her beautiful dress, looking so happy and elegant! Whenever there was a party, men who could dance, including all my mother's brothers, stood in line to dance with Isabelle! In those early years, Isabelle shared much of her knowledge and love of dance with me. She taught me and in turn, my brother, Robert, credits me with teaching him and developing his early love for dance. That's the way it was with Isabelle! She was the oldest and first-born daughter and granddaughter in a very, very large family. She learned at an early age the awesome responsibility of the very special place she held in our family. For the love of my parents, and in her need to help in whatever way she could, she learned early to give of herself, and taught us all the importance of sharing and teaching those who were younger! That's the way it was growing up in a large and loving family!

There were times in my life when I stood helplessly in awe of Isabelle.....like in 1960; I was still in high school, she was only 25, but had the poise and confidence to work with the then, Governor, G. Mennen Williams. I remember how she introduced me to him as though he were her dearest friend. At the time, she was working on the soon to be governor, John Swainson's campaign; so she asked me to be a Swainson girl! I rode in a red convertible in the Labor Day Parade downtown. I think this is when my great admiration for her began; when I saw how expertly she handled her part of the campaign as though it was second nature to her, delegating what needed to be done, while being totally aware of everyone's status and titles and their proper rank. She was truly



amazing! One of her greatest learning experiences politically came in those years when she worked on various committees with Congressman John Conyers. She was proud of those years in her life and her association with him.

I came to work with Isabelle at the UAW headquarters in 1964. In the almost two years that we worked together, I never ceased in my awe of her. She taught me the importance of knowing and understanding every department's function, of learning to pronounce and spell correctly, all the board members names and their staff, because she knew it was this kind of detail that made an important difference. I continued to learn from her every day that we were together. Isabelle had held top positions in many of the UAW departments, but had found her niche in public relations; there she really excelled. By the time I started working at the UAW, Isabelle held the top job in the Public Relations Department. I was always so proud of the fact that she had already served as the elected president of the Office and Professional Employees International Union, which represented over one thousand members. This was an incredible accomplishment, especially for her young years. She mingled so casually with some of the brightest minds of the 60's. It was during these years that she met and spent time with John Kennedy; always one of her fondest memories!

It was also during this phase of Isabelle's life that she met Tom Nicholson. Tom was a real dreamboat, and I was crazy about him. Sometimes when he was able to take Isabelle to lunch, he would often ask me to join them. It was always a thrill for me to be with them. We enjoyed so many wonderful lunches together at the Detroit Press Club, where Isabelle was on a first name basis with all the reporters and editors. Once, on very short notice, Tom arranged for Isabelle to bring me to the Press Club, where we would have ten private moments with Gregory Peck. I was eighteen years old when we met him, and I stood dumbfounded, while Isabelle charmingly said all the right things to encourage him to tell us about his most recent movie, *To Kill a Mockingbird!* She had the presence of mind to give him something to autograph with her pen, and then gave him the pen, which he said he would keep! In those days, a good pen was an important thing to have!

During the time Isabelle and I worked together, we also lived together. She had purchased a lovely home on the east side of Detroit, and had let me come to live with her. I loved every moment of the short time I lived there with her. When Isabelle told me she was going to leave Michigan to live in New York, I was devastated. I had relied on her so much and she had guided me through so many situations, I couldn't imagine my life without her. Of course, I understood and knew she was leaving to marry Tom and I wanted to be happy for her. When she left the UAW, she left as one of the most well-respected and loved persons ever to work there! The ripple effect of her legacy of work ethic and trustworthiness, directly and indirectly, improved the lives of many people in our family; so much good that happened to many of us can be traced back to Isabelle.

Now, her years in New York only widened her professionalism, increasing her experiences, and allowing her to grow and nurture her love of the arts and meet celebrities and other wonderful people who became life-long friends. She was able to attend Columbia University for a time, and continually found ways to challenge her



mind. But there was never any doubt that her family remained her first love! During her years in New York she arranged for our mother as well as many of her siblings to spend quality time with her and Tom, enjoying all the best New York had to offer. They did the same thing when they owned their retreat in the Pocono's. She always wanted her family to enjoy that beautiful mountainous area. And along with our parents, many of us did!

Well, we all know that Isabelle always loved the water. When we, her siblings, were all younger, Isabelle would sometimes rent a summer cottage in Port Huron, and invite all her family to spend time there with her. So it was no surprise when Isabelle and Tom decided to retire, that it would be somewhere near the water. To everyone's delight they finally settled on the town of Saugatuck, not that far from most of her family. A place of incredible beauty and peace, etched by our glorious Lake Michigan, this was a town that understood the importance of culture and the arts. The perfect place to make their new life! Though we could all understand why they fell in love with this area, I don't think any of us, including Isabelle, ever realized that this perfect place would come to mean so much! Though life for Isabelle changed dramatically during her years in Saugatuck, her family remained her solid core. Because her family was so much a part of her life, she once again encouraged all of us to visit, giving us the opportunity to enjoy this beautiful area and create new and cherished memories! Our mother totally loved this town and the people who loved her daughter. It was because of the people who live here, all of you, who eventually became her dear and beloved friends, that this beautiful place became the second core and foundation of her life.

We all believe Isabelle had a beautiful life here! We know too though that in this past year her health issues had become insurmountable. Her family all wanted her to live nearer to us; but she fought valiantly to make us understand that leaving everything she had come to love so dearly would have been the same as death for her. She understood clearly that without the personal sacrifice and dedication of her family, she would have had to leave the home and place that had become her world. She knew it was her family and friends that had sustained her through some of her most bleak and difficult times, and she was grateful everyday for the endless acts of kindness and love she received! Isabelle often said there was not a day that went by that she did not recognize her blessings! She knew clearly that it was the love and support of her family and friends that allowed her to stay in her home and die in the place she had come to love with all her heart!

Without hesitation I believe Isabelle is now at peace, without pain surrounded in beauty protected and safe in the arms of Our Lord! Her incredible spirit and love will live on in all of us, and for the rest of my life, her life will be a source of inspiration beyond compare.

God speed .....dear and beloved Isabelle! Go well my sister!

Mary Ellen 12/31/08