

## To Alice, With Love

**O**n my mind today is Alice Berreyesa, for seven years the vital heartbeat and sinew of FIIA and its relationship with its members. In that time, she ran day-to-day an organization that tripled its membership while other trade associations were shrinking. She flawlessly internalized the operation and oversaw a growing staff of competent, energetic, helpful people, handpicked, of course, by Alice. As early as 1995, she had the foresight to create FIIA's web site. Alice's ac-

complishments and contributions are too long to list, as Dick Starr noted in his Chairman's Letter in last summer's *BIM*.

Alice passed away on October 29, 1999, but she will live a long time in the hearts and memories of those who knew her.

It seems, lately, I've written a good many eulogies for family members, friends and colleagues. Alice was a colleague and a good friend, both to me, and my family. But, I'll not write a formal eulogy of Alice here. Instead,

By



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I'll share two letters to Alice, one from my daughter and new son-in-law, and another from my wife and me.

In late July, three months after learning her cancer was terminal, Alice called about Hilary and Michael's upcoming wedding. She was enthusiastic about my officiating the garden ceremony and excited for the bridal couple.

She was sorry she couldn't attend and insisted on sending a present. I protested that was not necessary. She became urgent, irritated, and then tearful. She said, "Listen, Mike. Don't hassle me on this. I want to do this, and you'll just upset me if you try to stop me." I hastily retreated and told her, "Okay, Alice, I won't hassle you. Let's go back to the old system where you give me a hard time." We laughed, and then I answered her questions about Hilary's tastes and interests.

Soon afterward, a week before the wedding, the gift arrived, and the next day, August 15, Hilary and Michael forwarded this letter to Alice and her kind husband Herb.

"Dear Alice and Herb,

"Thank you so much for the beautiful Tiffany Crystal Candlesticks. Last night we were sitting at the kitchen



Alice Berreyesa (second from left) celebrated at 1998 FIIA Raiken-Sender Award ceremony, joined by (from left to right) Michael White, Dick Starr, Judi Raiken, Charles Rice, Michelle Sender and John Hartigan.

table with Mom and Dad at their house, discussing wedding planning, etc., and Mom said that a package had arrived for us, and we should open it. When we opened the cardboard packaging and saw the trademark Tiffany blue box, my heart leapt with excitement! And then, when we unwrapped the tissue inside to reveal the two beautiful crystal candlesticks, Mom, Dad, Michael and I all instantly melted into an ‘Oooh, how beautiful.’

“And they are B-E-A-U-T-I-F-U-L. As I write, they are sitting on the dining table Michael and I bought for our new home. The light is shining into the different facets of the crystal from the windowsill behind, and they seem to sparkle happiness and elegance at the same time.

“It was so thoughtful of you to choose such a lovely gift for us – the candlesticks so perfectly suit our taste – it is as if you had spent hours shopping with us, and knew exactly the type of thing we liked. Which is funny, because I feel like I know you so well, Alice, as Dad has always raved about you through the years, ‘Alice is so great, Alice has broken another record, Thank God Alice was there and said...’ etc., etc. (smile). And then, when he told us the story of how you called to ask what sort of gift you would like to send to us, we were both moved at your incredible thoughtfulness.

“We wish so much that you both could be with us on our wedding day. And although you will be absent on Saturday, we are delighted with the thought that during the many dinners we will have together during our marriage, when we look across the table at your beautiful candlesticks, we will be instantly reminded of both of you, and of your love, and of how important it is to love each other and others during this very short life that we have.

“Thank you for extending your

fond feelings toward Dad to both of us.

“Much love and a big hug and kiss, “Hilary and Michael.”

Alice was just like that, too – a beautiful crystal candlestick of love with her different facets shining light, sparkling happiness and elegance, filled with incredible thoughtfulness of others.



The FIIA’s 1999 Annual Convention in Scottsdale ended on April 20. Alice had done a fine job, as usual, organizing this large conference, but she complained of stomach problems and being tired. After we said our goodbyes as the meeting adjourned, she and Herb took a side trip to Sidona to get a few days’ rest.

Upon returning home, she had some medical tests to see what was causing her discomfort. On May 10, her doctor told her that the cancer had spread and there was no cure. Next day, Alice wrote informing FIIA directors of her condition:

“My love of FIIA and desire to do everything within my ability to manage this situation is paramount on my mind. It will be necessary to begin seeking a replacement for me.... I am very sorry that I have to deliver this bad news. The FIIA has been such a joy for me. The directors have become my close friends and my employees are like family. You will all be in my heart forever.

“Fond regards, Alice.”



Ruthanne and I wrote to Alice on May 17, following receipt of her letter.

“Dear Alice:

“Like everyone else, Ruthanne and I are stunned beyond belief about the news that your cancer has now metastasized to your liver and that there is no cure. We are sick at heart over this and groping for words that might be meaningful and useful to you. How

can I ever express what your friendship means to us, how my working with you all these years for the benefit of FIIA has brought so much benefit to my life? I take to writing – you know that I have been in Puerto Rico and tied up in meetings, but that I will call – I take to writing for the moment in the hopes that my fingers will say what I know my lips will quiver at saying.

“Your letter of May 11<sup>th</sup> to Dick was so focused, so well written, so full of courage in the face of your serious situation. I take it at face value that the doctor has told you that you can only expect two years, as you put it, on this beautiful earth. This is so terrible. Our hearts go out to you and to Herb and to Heidi. They must be heartbroken to lose you. And you, dear Alice, show such calmness in your letter that I am ashamed at the far more trivial things in life about which I have allowed myself to be upset.

“I know you are focused on properly preparing and positioning FIIA to move forward without your leadership. You are very organized in that regard, addressing the issues of transition and a replacement for you. But you can never be replaced. You will always occupy a place unique in everyone’s thoughts and heart. The same was true of Allen [Raiken] and Stan [Sender]. They have their own place, and Kathleen [Collins], kind person and good professional that she is, is making her own place among her friends at FIIA. Your successor, if he or she is good, can only hope to do that – to make a new place, but never to take your place.

“I am so sorry, now, that Ruthanne was unable to accompany me to Scottsdale so we might have spent time with you and Herb like we did in Charleston. Ruthanne and I have often commented this past year about what an enjoyable day that was with the two

of you. Sitting back in the carriage, touring the old town and seeing the historical points and homes, laughing and joking, followed by a delightful lunch back at the hotel. That is a special memory we shall not forget.

“That whole trip, which you got organized for the benefit of so many, that wonderful evening of the first Raiken-Sender Award with Charley Rice and his wife, Judi Raiken, Michelle Sender, John Hartigan, and all the rest of those present. What a fine job you did making that an exceptional event; I remember you moving the table favors in several locations around the plates to see where they were best appointed. It is amazing to think of the detail you’ve considered and dealt with to have the smallest things work so well so that the larger event came off in sterling fashion. Well, that’s you, isn’t it? Sterling fashion.

“I know from Dick that you and he are organizing his visit to FIIA headquarters to review the more urgent business and office issues that confront FIIA, like office and equipment leases, check signing, and so forth. Ahead of that is his concern for your staff, and that they be assured and comforted. He will do a good job of assisting you in maintaining the good order at FIIA HQ. Dick is a good man, and you will be able to count on him during this difficult time.

“But, I want you to know that no one expects you to think of and work only for the benefit of the FIIA. You may wish to reorder your priorities and timing to think more of yourself and your family. You should feel free to do that at any moment you choose.

“Do you remember the conversation we had a few months back when you said you were somewhat ‘angry with,’ or perhaps the phrase was ‘disappointed in,’ yourself? You had been through an ordeal that was so life changing spiritually, and you worried

that you had forgotten the discoveries you had made and the lessons you had learned. You were concerned that you were succumbing to pressures you ought not to, that you should stand up and say, ‘I won’t do that anymore.’ Or, ‘I don’t believe that.’ Or, ‘I want to do this’ and ‘I believe that.’ You probably don’t remember, but I commented that perhaps you were being too hard on yourself. I mentioned that

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**I sought to hear  
the voice of God  
And climbed  
the highest steeple.  
But God declared:  
‘Go down again—  
I dwell  
among the people.’**

-- John Henry Newman

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the fact that you could comment on your spiritual insights during hard times and question whether you wanted to engage in a particular action was, in fact, a sign that you had not forgotten what had changed you and how it had done so.

“I wasn’t just saying that at the time; I believed it. Your activities and attitudes since that conversation, and your letter of May 11, confirm that belief, as far as I am concerned.

“We have shared a lot privately, like our discussions of our fathers and our losing them. I was grateful that you knew Allen and Stan like I knew them; that we could cry together when they passed away; that, together, we created something to tangibly keep their memories alive. I was glad I could share my father-in-law’s eulogy with you. There is a poem in that eulogy that epitomized his life of service, and yours, too. It goes:

I sought to hear the voice of God  
And climbed the highest steeple.

But God declared:

‘Go down again—

I dwell among the people.’

-- John Henry Newman

“Like my father-in-law did, you, Alice, ‘dwell among the people.’ Your early morning work on the telephone hotline speaks volumes of your compassion for others and your willingness to serve. You are kind unto others, and you always have been since I have known you. Whatever lessons in life you have learned, you have learned them well. And, you have learned the good lessons. And, you have been teaching those lessons to all those around you, to all those who know you, for some time. And, now, you are teaching us all some really big lessons.

“You are a true friend, Alice, and I wish I could be more of a friend to you. I wish I could do something to relieve your pain and take this cup away. I wish I could be more helpful to you, more of a comfort to you. I wish that I had been more helpful and more available to you in the years that have passed. If there is anything Ruthanne and I can do for you, will you call upon us and test our friendship and love for you?

“You, and Herb and Heidi, are in our thoughts and our prayers. We send our love to you and to them. Meanwhile, we are trying to take comfort in what we perceive to be the biggest lesson that you have obviously learned and that your May 11<sup>th</sup> letter so strongly and courageously teaches us: ‘This is the day which the Lord has made; let us rejoice and be glad in it.’

“With all our love and prayers,

“Ruthanne and Mike”

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*This article first appeared in  
**Bank Insurance Marketing**,  
Winter 2000, V.9, N.1, pp. 29-32.*

*“To Alice, With Love”*

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## In Memoriam



**ALICE BERREYESA**

**August 4, 1939 – October 29, 1999**

**FIIA Administrative Director**

**1993-1994**

**FIIA Executive Director**

**1994-1999**

I have fought the good fight,  
I have finished the race,  
I have kept the faith.

— *2 Timothy 4:7*