

Hilde English

Barbara Abt was pregnant when she fled what was Austria-Hungary during the Second World War. She gave birth in a bomb shelter on February 27, 1945 to a girl named Hildegard who would become known in Waterloo for her fighting spirit and legacy of kindness.



“She simply would not give up,” said a friend once. “She was the strongest person I ever met. She called herself the eternal optimist.”

Hilde Abt immigrated with her family to Kitchener in 1953. The spunky eight-year-old refugee embraced her new life and later attended St. Mary’s High School and Eastwood Collegiate. While attending University of Waterloo as a young woman, Hilde met her future husband John English. One of their first dates was at a Liberal convention in Toronto.

Reflecting upon their first meeting, John English said, “She was very intelligent, very determined and she made a lot of friends.” After university, Hilde English attended the University of Western Ontario Law School where she graduated on the Dean’s Honours List.

She practiced law in Waterloo from 1976 until 2006 and it was in her professional life that she became respected for her tenacity and commitment to her clients. A Superior Court Justice once remarked, “Her dedication to her clients was just remarkable.”

In 1999 she was named Kitchener-Waterloo Oktoberfest Woman of the Year in the professional category.

Hilde English also found time to volunteer endless hours as a board member of the Kitchener-Waterloo Community Foundation, CODA, the K-W Chamber of Commerce and the Grand River Conservation Foundation. She was also the founding chairperson of the Ontario Liberal Party Women’s Commission.

For her many gifts to the community, English received the Queen’s Golden Jubilee Medal in 2002 and the Tim Fitzpatrick Community Service Award in 2005.

However, when Hilde English was diagnosed with cancer in 1996 it was her deep friendships that she had nurtured in her life that carried her through a ten-year battle that ended on June 29, 2006. Friends and family stood by her during her illness, as she had supported them during their difficulties.

When she died at 61-years-old, more than 500 people attended a gathering to honour and remember English. At the gathering, she was remembered for her love of people and

entertaining; gardening, her wisdom and her devotion to her husband John and their son Jonathan.

One friend remarked, “I believe Hilde pursued and found truth, Hilde pursued and found love, Hilde pursued and found goodness. I believe Hilde found happiness.”

Photo courtesy of John English.