

April 19, 2009

*Excerpt of Eulogy delivered by*

**Dr. Richard J. Ellings**

. . . . Brigitte always had wings. She flew from Holland to the United States on her own as a young teenager—to New York of all places—with just a little money in her pocket, finding the Y to sleep in the first several nights. A couple years later, on a scholarship and work study, she flew from Holland to Shreveport, Louisiana, for college. While a student there at Centenary she jumped out of airplanes—twice! The Dean of Students required her to call her mom back in Holland to reveal what she had been up to – to explain the mangled ankle and hospital stay. But guess who paid for it. The Dean. An indication of in-kind contributions to come!

Married a few years later, Brigitte supported Steve as they followed the United States Air Force, flying to Germany to live, where she got a Master's degree—by the way, with Distinction, 4.0 GPA—and then flying to Japan to live. Japan is where Ben was born. Then, with Brigitte's tremendous gratitude, Steve supported her when she vaulted into the unknown again, this time with NBR. She flew to Asia for NBR many times, going first by herself ahead of meetings to explore the interior of China. Once she traveled with NBR friends to the Mt. Everest Base camp in Tibet.

She flew with Ben twice to South Asia, starting with an NBR meeting in Dhaka, Bangladesh, a trip that would kindle in a young teenage Ben a serious interest in international development. She flew to Africa with friends to build a chicken coop. She loved to meet people and take incredible photographs of them in these far-flung places. But she really loved to fly with Ben—just last summer to Bhutan to dine with the Queen Mother, and to Nepal and India. Boy was she proud of Ben, from Eagle Scout, to his hanging in there with the violin, to photographer, to student at George Washington University!

Yes, with Steve's unequivocal support, Brigitte kept her wings flapping. Much of her flying, however, frankly, was low-level on I-5—fourteen years of the worst commute we all know. About 300,000 miles. Pure dedication and loyalty. Not one ticket did she get, although she probably deserved dozens—each week. Her destination was NBR, where her impact is incalculable—although I'll give it a shot:

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In her capacity of Senior Vice President for Institutional Development and my right hand in dealing with the Board of Directors, she organized nearly 30 board meetings, complete with materials and associated events. Half of the meetings were outside the Puget Sound area—e.g., D.C., Atlanta, Beijing, Phoenix, Monterey, San Jose, and Honolulu. She was core to building every aspect of NBR, so that during her tenure we took NBR's annual budget from a few hundred thousand dollars in 1994 to raising \$16 million alone in 2008, from 3 staff plus three interns to 50 employees and fellows! She helped NBR fly: companies investing in NBR, people investing in NBR, foundations investing in NBR, government investing in NBR, and all sorts of leaders finding out how potentially expensive—but important and fun(!)—it is to share our mission.

Until we got too big about two years ago, she interviewed every prospective employee and intern—hundreds and hundreds of them over the years. She was a core keeper of NBR's culture, and sized up people's character quickly. Don't want to wash windows, think of yourself above answering the phones, believe that your duties are superior to someone else's ...or forget her birthday?! Look out! Brigitte dreamed up poems and awards, white elephant gift exchanges, one-of-a-kind books to honor this or that someone, and hundreds of personal gifts and cards. Karolos was her very frequent collaborator.

Her loyalty to us and her dedication to taking on any challenge, no matter how awesome, were second to no person I have known. Brigitte felt more intensely and passionately about things—many things—than most of us can understand. And she was our unambiguous champion to her very last days.

Most of all, she was the champion of her family, starting with the family in which she was born: her mom, who was here to say goodbye to Brigitte last week; her older brother Cees and younger brother Onno, who are here with us now, of course; and her beloved father, who led the way some years ago.

I think maybe that people with wings tend to attract others with wings. Along her flight path she made so many wonderful friends—from all walks—who feel like they're members of her family. Only for Brigitte would a former chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff and chairmen and CEOs of major companies witness a powerful member of Congress swear her in as America's newest citizen! And only for Brigitte would a former NBR intern and old friends fly great distances to see her when she fell ill. By you all being here today we know that you are among the members of that extended family.

Brigitte M. Gort-Allen Memorial Service

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For high-flying Brigitte there were corporate councils, mega-IPR programs in China, the Shalikashvili Chair, the Pyle Center, and jillions of projects between.

And then—over the past eight years—there is George F. Russell, Jr. Hall. Nary a foot of rebar nor yard of concrete would exist without her drive. That building project represents her tenacity, loyalty, dedication, zeal, sacrifice, and wicked humor—the characteristics we think of most when we think of her. And it represents her love of George and the people we met through him.

There will be, come heck or high water, a rooftop garden on that edifice sprouting Brigitte's tulips every spring, a rooftop ...to fly to ...anytime she wants.