

Lois Hainsworth  
13 June 1927 - 8 October 2016

Her 89 years were full of grace, style, adventure and activism.

Born between the World Wars into an entrepreneurial family from Nottinghamshire, Lois was of the generation that endured the blitz in London and the privations of war. When asked what she remembered of that time, she said "I was scared". Yet it steeled her character and among other things, gave her a high pain threshold.

After leaving school in her teens after her matriculation, she did a secretarial course at the same time as studying to sing and at 16 left home and at 19, with help from an inheritance, went to Vienna to study opera. It was the time of post war partition and there are only glimpses of stories of her adventures at that time, perhaps best left to the imagination.

On her return to London she re-joined the chorus of Covent Garden opera but had to get a part time job to augment the pay. At a job interview she was asked if she was temperamental. She said, "Depends what you mean by temperamental. If you threw a bottle of ink at me, I would pick it up and throw it back." She got the job. It was as PA to a Director of Rank Films. She lived a life of expense accounts, cocktail parties, haute couture clothes and talent spotting trips for Max Factor. She met a Baha'i at work and investigated this faith. She said she loved Jesus but not churchianity and recognized in Baha'u'llah the return of Christ and a way of life that encouraged individual development twinned with service to humanity.

Soon after becoming a Baha'i in 1956, she met Philip, on one month's R&R from Uganda. After a week they decided to get married, three weeks later they were married and after a month, Lois found herself walking down the steps of the plane at Entebbe airport, leaving behind a budding career singing at Glyndebourne. As Philip worked to eradicate malaria, sleeping sickness and other water borne diseases for the UK government, Lois was immediately involved with this work and spent her first nights in Uganda living in a newly built hut in a village in the bush.

She set up an opera company with ex-pats and they toured schools across Uganda sharing Mozart with students, many of whom had not met a white person. Lois developed her networking skills meeting with the diplomats of Kampala and made good friends with the royal family of Uganda, especially the Nnabagereka of Buganda whom she often visited. Apart from these activities and her job in the pathology lab, Lois was very engaged with Baha'i activities for example serving as secretary of the committee that built the Temple in Kampala. She maintained close contact with the Temple and visited with Philip on the 40<sup>th</sup> anniversary of it's building and again in 2001 for the 50<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the first Baha'is arriving in Uganda, one of whom was Philip. While in Uganda her interest in equality in general became more developed, but especially for women and girls and she joined

the International Council of Women (ICW) in 1958. She was elected onto the executive board and the European Centre for ICW of which she remained a member until early 2000's.

In order to provide their children with better education without sending them away to boarding school, Lois returned to the UK in 1968, followed by Philip a year later. She began working with the Townswomen's Guild and was an active member in Leeds. She continued her voluntary work with the Baha'is faith, travelling the UK on various projects, working on a number of national committees and editing the national magazine for many years. Lois moved to London with Philip in 1976 continuing to work for women and girls, joining the National Council of Women (NCW) in 1981. She was an active member, organizing resolutions at national conferences, and holding a variety of posts from 1982 until 2013 at local, regional and national levels. She developed the work of the Foreign Affairs Committee and editing the NCW national magazine. Her day job, working as Public Relations Officer for the Royal Academy of Dancing, led her to join the Royal Chartered Institute of Journalists of which she became the first female President.

Through ICW Lois continued to travel widely attending international conferences including the United Nations Commission on the Status of Women (CSW) which she attended from the 1970s until 2005. Lois joined UNFEEM UK, the UK branch of the then UN agency for women, in 1983 and was elected President in 2001. She raised its profile and ensured that the UK Government knew of its activities. Through these activities she was aware of the suffering of children and women through trafficking and became an active member of the Coalition Against Trafficking. Fired by her usual passion and desire for positive change, she was instrumental in helping Tony Colman MP to get the law changed on trafficking of persons (now incorporated in the Modern Slavery Bill) to ensure a higher penalty for those found guilty of trafficking. Juliet Colman remembers, "Lois was the person who introduced me to gender inequality and examples of inequalities suffered by women on a global scale. She inspired me to try to do something about it and to become an expert in gender relations. She was representing UNIFEM in the UK at the time. Lois encouraged me to take over the leadership of UNIFEM UK. I have happy memories of being with Lois, and can remember struggling with her through snowy and icy New York streets during CSW in the early 2000s."

Lois worked hard to develop the Women's Advisory Council to the United Nations Association of which she was a member from 1982 - 2001 serving as Treasurer, Vice-Chair and Chair. She was chair of the Westminster branch of UNA, with a strong belief in the value of the UN, she encouraged others to be active in work for universal peace and equality. "She was a delight, brightened up people, loving, friendly, always giving time. She encouraged other women to work for gender equality. We were so fortunate to have the leadership of such a talented lady. We benefitted from her expertise, contacts and friends gathered throughout her life from all around the world - she had visited over fifty countries. The members of WACUNA remember her vividly and fondly. She worked hard, was spiritually motivated and

dedicated to improving all aspects of women's lives," says current WACUNA Chair Sally Spear.

Lois attended the world conference for women in Copenhagen in 1980 and Nairobi in 1985 and then in 1995 Lois organized a charter plane to take women from across the UK to the fourth world conference for women in Beijing and from that time worked tirelessly to see the Beijing Platform for Action implemented in the UK and globally. Her organisational skills enabled many women from the UK to attend, who otherwise might not have been able to go. And Beijing was a watershed experience for the world and gender equality, and everyone who was there.

In 1996 she was elected to the European Women's Lobby and served on its board for several years, visiting women's organisations across Europe and developing strong friendships that remained until dementia reduced her memory in recent years. Despite working in PR, writing and editing, bringing up three children, and her voluntary work, she taught herself Russian to add to the French, Italian, German, Spanish and Swahili she already spoke. In 2005 Lois set up the Women of Faith network bringing together feminists of faith to ensure a gendered voice of religion at the CSW and at national level in the UK.

In 2006 Lois moved to Stroud to be closer to family and immediately carried on with her activities becoming involved with choir's, yoga group, organizing the first Peace One Days on 21 September in Stroud, inter-faith activities, the Gloucester NCW and UNA. She was awarded the MBE for her work for women, equalities, women of faith and was recognized as doing this as a Baha'i.

In 2007, Lois did a parachute jump for her 80th birthday. When asked how it was, she said, "Very refreshing, I think I will do another one for my 90<sup>th</sup> birthday". In 2013 after organizing a successful conference on forced and early marriage for Gloucester NCW, Lois fell and after a month in hospital was discharged into a care home, shortly moving to More Hall Convent. She gradually declined and whilst she kept her wicked sense of humour and feisty character, her body failed despite her regular drumming classes and hosting a monthly gathering of a devotional nature in the library.

In typical manner, she hosted a Baha'i gathering in her room, though she was too weak to be downstairs in a meeting room, in her new care home, Scarlet House. Less than two weeks later, she passed away. Despite that short time, she was popular with all the staff and renowned for her loving manner and thankfulness. She touched the hearts of many.

A woman of style and grace who enjoyed the finer things of life, Lois lived a life to the full, courageously taking on new endeavours and using her keen intelligence with verve.

She is remembered and loved by many including her three children, eight grandchildren and three great grandchildren. Her enthusiasm, vision, passion and kindness supported many people, whose lives hers touched. She was famous for her elegant hats and carrying on with talented needlework at all meetings where she had to sit and listen. "You knew here was someone to take notice of when she came into the room"..."She was like a queen"..."She knew how to listen, something we all need to learn", are some of the comments made of her in the last few days as testimonies have flooded in. Lois has left this room, but her legacy lives on, not least, in those from whose hearts she can never be absent.