

BERKELEY TIMES

berkeleyx.org the people of Berkeley



Drawing by Ursula Flache

Obituary – Ursula Flache

December 2, 1936 – June 20, 2016 • BY R. TODD KERR

Ursula Flache, a passionate Berkeley citizen and modern day pioneer, passed away on June 20 after a three-year battle with cancer. At the time of her passing, she was surrounded by three generations of Flaches

and hundreds of flowers in the 2nd-floor bedroom of her Elmwood apartment. She was 79.

Ursula Elsbet Flache was born in Berlin, Germany on December 2, 1936. As the

world readied for war, her single mother, Elsbet Frey, worked as a legal secretary. And because her father was half-Jewish, it was not possible for her parents to marry.

Soon after the fighting began, Elsbet took

a job in Kraków, Poland, where Ursula spent her early years. Generous even in her youth, Ursula was known to throw her toys out of

see page 7

INSIDE

UPCOMING EVENTS.....2	SCHOOLS.....8	ARTS CALENDAR.....12
CITY NEWS.....3	BACK TO SCHOOL.....9	ARTS & ENTERTAINMENT.....13
TIPITAKA PEACE CEREMONY.....5	FEATURES.....10	REAL ESTATE.....14
COMMUNITY CALENDAR.....6	TELEGRAFFITI.....11	POEM & DEDICATION.....16



Drawings by Ursula Flache

Obituary – Ursula Elsbet Flache

from front page

her bedroom window to her Polish friends waiting below. But there must have been some resentment in the community, because one day, while playing with other children in the neighborhood, there was an accident. When Ursula regained consciousness, she found herself at the bottom of a ditch. Severely concussed, she spent a long while in the hospital. Ever since, Ursula attributed her idiosyncratic learning methods and frustrations with formal education to the incident.

After the war, she and her mother moved to Prague, where there were many close calls during air raids; but Ursula's quick reactions and lack of hesitation led them



Ursula & Volker Flache of Berkeley

away from danger. These were lean times. In 1946, after moving back to Berlin, she and her mother survived on American rations dropped on the city as part of the U.S. Air Relief campaign – for which Ursula remained grateful until her dying day. Months later, as the Russians advanced on Berlin, it was Ursula who forged rivers during the night carrying her mother's luggage.

Eventually, Ursula and Elsbet settled in Damstadt, Germany, her mother's town of origin, where Ursula attended high school. Though Ursula became frustrated in classroom settings, she found her passion while pursuing a vocational career as a photography technician. In the process, she became a fabulous photographer.

In Damstadt, Ursula met and married Heino Flache, an architect who shared her ambition. Together the young couple parented four boys – Andreas, Timo, Dirk, and Kai – while converting an old watermill into a fashionable home. The converted mill featured a dramatic open-beam ceiling and a photography darkroom, Ursula's sanctuary. In fact, it was so interesting that it was featured on the cover of the *LA Times Home* magazine in the early 70s. It would not be the last time one of Ursula's home makeovers would attract international attention.

A DOLLAR AND A HALF JUST TO SEE 'EM.



But in 1975, when interest rates spiked throughout the world, Heino was not able to sustain his growing empire – and so lost everything in bankruptcy. It was about that time that Heino's cousin Volker Flache, who had been a political prisoner in East Germany and who also was an architect, moved to Damstadt to help close the failing business.

Volker remembers it as a chaotic time. In addition to the stress

of the bankruptcy, the four boys were being raised “American-style – in other words, they were completely out of control.” When Volker also began assisting with parenting duties, it was not long before Ursula and Volker took up their own residence.

Again, these were lean times. Eventually,

Ursula and Volker moved to Hamburg to be closer to the boys, and where Volker went to work for architectural firms serving what was left of the German aristocracy. Their situation improved, but it was not enough for Ursula. With her encouragement, Volker took a sabbatical in 1981 in order to further his studies of architecture at U.C. Berkeley.

The couple took to Berkeley immediately, and Ursula started a housecleaning business – “Inter-Putz” to pay the bills. And it was at this time that she began drawing non-stop with colored pencils. She drew still lifes and portraits, and some of her compositions were very strange.

In 1985, once Volker had completed his studies, the couple returned to Hamburg, where Volker resumed work as an architect. But in 1987, he came home from work one evening and found Ursula pulling plants out of the front garden. “We’re moving back to Berkeley,” she announced. And that’s exactly what happened.

Indeed, at the age of 48, Ursula and Volker Flache returned to Berkeley to start life over. They took an apartment on Claremont Ave. Ursula went back to cleaning homes, and Volker took a job with Esherick, Homsey, Dodge & Davis, a prominent architectural firm in San Francisco.

It was a modest re-beginning, but with Ursula's constant nudging, together they created a life that was more consistent with her ideal vision. In the mid-90s, Ursula became an American citizen about the time that two of her sons moved here. The enterprising family started multiple businesses (including Bauwerk Construction and Gaumenkittel Restaurant) and purchased three properties, including a historic property in “Forest City” – a ghost town in Sierra County.

Quite dilapidated when they purchased it in 1998, Ursula and Volker restored “The Porch House” during weekend trips over several years. Their work did not go unnoticed. Once their work was done, the house was featured in “This Old House” magazine.

Ursula Flache is survived by her husband Volker Flache; all four of her sons: Andreas, Timo, Dirk, and Kai; daughters-in-law Charlene Salas and Anja Voth; and four grandchildren: Laurin, Jokin, Murti, and Alina.

After a private ceremony on July 1, Ursula was laid to rest in the Forest City Cemetery, quite fittingly, a cemetery exclusively reserved for pioneers of the American West. And now Volker is preparing an exhibition of her drawings – which number more than 200 in all.

