Tributes to Isabel Letelier, 2024



Credit for central image: Marcelo Montecino.

The Institute for Policy Studies collected these tributes in 2024 and presented them in book form to Isabel's sons Juan Pablo, José, and Cristian at Sheridan Circle on September 15, 2024.



John Dinges



I have known Isabel since 1974, when Orlando's sister Fabiola introduced us and Isabel asked me to work on a translation project with her. Orlando was still in prison and Isabel had to maintain the family while lobbying internationally and in Chile for his release. After his assassination, she rose above the pain to continue to campaign for the human rights of others. She is a very private person, but she knew Orlando's story had to reach the world, so she agreed to help me and Saul Landau write our book, in which we investigated the murders of Orlando and Ronni Moffitt and tried to tell that terrible story in the context of a great man's life in Allende's Chile.

She became a rock of the political movement to defeat Pinochet and bring Chile back to democracy, using her special status to overcome divisions and bring people together. She has her strong views, especially about the guilt of the U.S. government, but has never used her influence with spite or anger. She always found a way to win people, even many on the right, to the cause of truth, justice and democracy. To the dictator, she stood up in defiance, fearless, and eloquent. She showed Pinochet to be the coward he was.



Lucy Alexander Montecino, Maria Cristina Germany, Maria Soledad Labarca, Isabel Margarita Morel de Letelier, Nena Terrell, Carolina Kenrick. Credit: Carolina Kenrick.

Isabel is like family. She took care of my son Tomas when he lived in Chile as a young man. She found me an apartment with a friend of hers, then lent me furniture. She supported my projects and never missed an event—not just for me but for so many others who were working for the cause of human rights or just any cause. Isabel was always there, in the front row, proclaiming with her presence the worth of our books, photography, art, and activism.

Isabel is one of the wisest and kindest persons I have met in my life. Her observations – about your work, your relationships, your disputes with others—were astute and unerring. I will always remember her advice for a relationship seemingly on the rocks: Amála, Amála, she said. Just love her, then see what happens.

Ariel Dorfman:

ISABEL, ALWAYS ISABEL

I first met Isabel Morel de Letelier in early September 1973, a few days before the coup that would overthrow Allende. I was working at La Moneda and Fernando Flores, Allende's Secretario General de Gobierno, who had hired me to advise him on cultural and media matters, had organized a homage to General Prats. Prats had just resigned as head of the army under intense right wing pressure. Now that this upholder of democracy and the Constitution was out of the way, we feared that the plans for a military takeover had ever more chances of success. The least the most important members of the Unidad Popular government could do was to at least celebrate this stalwart and loyal general.

Among the guests at the Peña de los Parra, along with Prats, were José Tohá and Orlando Letelier and their wives, of course, Sofia and Moy and Isabel, all of them munching empanadas, toasting each other with warm mistela red wine and dancing and singing. I probably only exchanged a couple of words with Isabel, probably to complement her on how well she danced tango.

When I next met her in Washington DC in 1977, visiting the States in order to set up a network of solidarity with Chilean culture, so much, indeed too much, had changed. Prats and his wife, Orlando and Tohá, had been murdered by Pinochet, most of the others present, like Moy and Isabel, were in exile, and many others, like Fernando Flores, had been imprisoned and then expelled from the country. That new meeting with Isabel, four years after we had parted, in Santiago was not, however, dominated by pain and loss. During the long hours that we talked – no longer a hello and good-bye, a quick compliment on how well she danced – we cemented an alliance, a conspiracy in favor of the future, that has lasted till today, a friendship with her and her family, her family and mine, Isabel and Angélica, her sons with me, my sons with them, that has deepened over these decades.



This coalition of hope that we established in DC back in 1977 was strengthened and expanded when our family moved to the US capital in 1980, supposedly only till 1981, though we ended up living there for five years. It was during that period when we were stranded in what was now Isabel's hometown, without a job or health care or a residence visa, it was then that we received the hurricane force of Isabel's solidarity, it was then that I learned so much from her, it was then that her commitment to rights for women, for indigenous people, for the environment, opened my mind to so many new horizons, it was then that we came to appreciate her own commitment to beauty with her artistic work, it was then that she, along with Saul and Mark and Dick and Bob and John and a multitude of others at IPS and beyond, gave us a home and a refuge against the storm of time and repression.

It would take many pages to recount what Isabel accomplished through those years of exile and then when she returned to her beloved Chile. Suffice to say that when she was needed, Isabel was there. And she was always needed. Most alive in my memory perhaps is the day when I called her from Chile, as Rodrigo Rojas lay dying from the burns inflicted by Pinochet's soldiers, telling her that we were flying to DC two days hence and could she organize a press conference for that Monday in the offices of IPS on Q street – and sure enough, she had got all the major papers and networks to be present, and few events weakened the dictatorship like that crime, and the rest, as they say, is history. Why did I call her and nobody else? Why did I trust that she would come through?

Because she was Isabel. Because she still is and always will be, *simplemente y maravillosamente*, Isabel. Without her, our life would be more orphaned and the world and our country less free and joyful and conscious.

What a privilege, *qué alegría*, to have been able to spend such a long part of our lives in her serene and combative presence, her wise and hopeful presence.

CindyArnson

Isabel querida, siempre te he visto como un modelo de dignidad, compromiso, talento y fortaleza. Es difícil poner en palabras lo que significó para mí el asesinato de Orlando y tu lucha, a lo largo de tantos años, por la justicia, la democracia, y los derechos humanos de todos los chilenos. Gracias por todo que me has enseñado. Te admiro y te quiero mucho!



Joe Eldridge

My heart and soul abound with memories of Isabel. I first met Orlando as he was walking across the AU campus on his way to teach a class on development economics. I was with Michael Maggio who had also registered for that class. We introduced ourselves and the friendship happened automatically. We both came to know Isabel soon thereafter.

Then the unthinkable happened. Orlando was assassinated and ties with Isabel grew even closer. I would often find myself in her company in the Q Street offices of IPS seeking her counsel, wisdom and guidance. Isabel was and is far far more than a grieving widow. She not only had agency vis a vis policy toward Chile; she knew how to use it. Her iconic status put her much in demand as a spokesperson for the Chile solidarity movement – her bags packed she traveled all over the US. She always knew what to say to a wide variety of audiences – religious/ secular and in between. We all drew inspiration from her ferocious commitment to a free Chile – liberated from the travail of the Pinochet dictatorship.

Many are the memories. One in particular comes to mind: we had both been invited to the inauguration of Jaime Roldos on August 10, 1979. President Roldos would be killed with his wife Marta in a mysterious plane crash two years later. But his ascension was a time to celebrate – and among the events was a gran fiesta at the home of the renowned painter Guayasamin (now a museum). There was lively dancing – with Isabel demonstrating footwork worthy of Fred Astair or Gene Kelly.

What I most remember was her ecumenism with regard to everyone working on Chile at that time. She made time for everyone – no one was outside of her large and inclusive circle. Always generous with her time, she was able to unite us all in the struggle against Pinochet (women, indigenous, people of color). Her smile illuminated everything that we did and her refined aesthetic brought texture and beauty into the fight. She was indeed the center of a movement seeking the end of the brutal Pinochet dictatorship.



Thanks for the opportunity to pay tribute to the remarkable Isabel Letelier.

E. Ethelbert Miller

For Isabel, For Chile

Often when I'm asked to talk about becoming a writer I mention growing up in the South Bronx, going to libraries and bookstores, listening to Bob Dylan, Phil Ochs, Joan Baez and Simon and Garfunkel; I talk about coming to Washington D.C. to attend Howard University and meeting writers like Sterling A. Brown, Leon Damas and Haki Madhubuti. While sitting in my dorm I read many of the writers associated with the Black Arts Movement. My bookshelf was filled with paperbacks and chapbooks by Amiri Baraka, Sonia Sanchez, Carolyn Rodgers, Nikki Giovanni and Norman Jordan.

It was in the late seventies and early eighties that I emerged as a young writer heavily influenced by what I now define as the feminization of African American literature. I counted among my friends women writers like Alice Walker, Ntozake Shange and especially June Jordan.

While the work of these women had a significant influence on my artistic and political development it occurred almost simultaneously with my growing involvement with the Institute for Policy Studies (IPS). It was my growing association with IPS that was responsible for my maturity as a writer. It began with my working with Sue Goodwin who at that time ran The Washington School, a unit operating under the auspices of IPS and primarily responsible for cultural programming.

It was at the IPS office (then located in Dupont Circle) that I met Ariel Dorfman and Isabel Letelier. They introduce me to Chile. They lived the politics I struggled to

understand. What did it mean to be exiled from one's homeland? What did it mean to lose democracy? How did one find the strength to live and love after loss? What did it mean to remember tragedy and to pursue justice?

I read the poems, essays and novels of Ariel Dorfman and I learned about Chile. But it was in the presence of Isabel Letelier that I believed I learned and felt something more. If I was Pablo Neruda I would compose an ode to her eyes.



I was curious as to how her eyes could contain so much beauty after shedding so many tears.

How amazing was her grace after the death of her husband Orlando.

In my life I have only seen pictures of widows whose husbands were killed because of their politics, I have never touched their hands or kissed their cheeks as I often did when I saw Isabel.

Whenever I saw her I knew I was embracing and dancing with memory. I was being reminded that the struggle is always against forgetting.

I never viewed Isabel Letelier as a colleague. I was never as close to her as Saul Landau, John Dinges or Marcus Raskin. To me she was a woman who always conveyed a strong spiritual warmth and glow, much like Mother Teresa.

She spoke to the poet in me. She herself was a poem. Perhaps in her presence even Neruda would be speechless.

Jill Gay

A love letter for Isabel Letelier

Queridisima Isabel,

We spoke by phone not so long ago and I told you how much I love you.

I need to elaborate – you are one of the most amazing women on the planet.

When Pinochet imprisoned, tortured and killed so many, you spoke up at great risk to your personal safety. You gained the freedom for Orlando, which was then brutally taken away with his assassination. But even as a single mother with four sons, you were undaunted at speaking up, speaking out and continuing to persue “paz, justicia y dignidad.”

We started together the Third World Women’s Project in 1980, having such human rights heroines speak out and educate people in the US about human rights and women’s rights with women like Maria Helena Morreira Alves, who was tortured by the Brazilian military; women from the Vicaria de la Solidaridad of Chile; Renee Epelbaum – whose three adult children were disappeared during the Argentinian dictatorship; women from the ANC fighting apartheid in South Africa; women fighting the Marcos regime.

And your stories! Like when you spoke in Grenada and wore a white dress and they said you were so Grenadian patriotic – you had your period and your dress then looked like the Grenadian flag! And when you met with “the guys” from the Chilean left, who told you:
“Companera, you have become so burgesa – eres feminista!”

You have been such a guiding light in my life – from teaching me the right creams to put on my belly when pregnant, to kicking me off your couch in your office when I was pregnant to make room for Archbishop Arns, to teaching me that the Catholic Church was not just the oppressive Inquisition but also Liberation Theology, to showing me how at the Embassy receptions where so many powerful people tried to engage you in conversation but you took your time to talk to those who served the food, to your bravery in face of so much danger.

You are loved, Jill



ANN BARNET:

I believe Dick Barnet made the first IPS contact with Orlando Letelier in 1974 at the behest of Saul Landau. Orlando and his family were then living in Venezuela, in exile from Pinochet's Chile. Dick offered Orlando a Fellowship at IPS; Orlando accepted, and with his family, began the move to a house in a suburb of Washington, D.C. Of course, Isabel was no stranger to Washington where her husband had been Chilean Ambassador to the U.S . from Salvador Allende's government. Their four sons had spent a good part of their growing up in Washington. Dick and I and our children enjoyed our weekend suppers with the Leteliers in their suburban backyard, a far cry from their elegant embassy digs. I remember their welcome, easy laughter, and music.



In mid-morning on September 21, 1976, I was at work in my office at Children's Hospital when the call came from Dick, "Orlando! Ronni! They are dead. Killed." I made my way to George Washington Hospital Emergency Department where the ambulance had taken them. As I entered the hospital, I stopped in a rest room in order to wash my tear-stained face, and there I found myself alone with Isabel. "Ann.. He's dead." We embraced. "They won't let me see him." "Yes they will," I stated flatly, happy to be able to do something for my friend. "Let's go." I guided her past the police, the nurses, the residents making their stay-away gestures – they were waiting for the Medical Examiner to arrive. We walked back to the large Trauma Room where lay two stretchers covered with white sheets. "Do you want to see him?" She nodded and I drew back the sheet covering Orlando's white face. As I withdrew to give her privacy, my eyes fell on the lower part of the stretcher, flat where the ridges of his legs should have been. Isabel trembled as I held her, but her words were of her boys. Where were they? She needed to be with them.

In 1978, about two years later, I had the opportunity to be of help to Isabel, her family and Ronni's family when a civil suit for damages was brought against the Chilean government or its agents. I stood in a D.C. courtroom and testified as to the horrors I had witnessed that morning in 1976 and the pain and suffering that had been inflicted on the victims of the wanton murders. I believe large sums were awarded to the families, although I don't know how the eventual settlement turned out. Isabelle and her children put their lives back together – Isabelle is a gifted artist and activist, and her sons have gone on to uphold their parents' values in their productive lives.

PETER AND CORA WEISS

Dear Isabel,

Wherever you go beauty follows.

A memory we cherish is watching you cover Orlando in wet clay during our walk on Martha's Vineyard beach. You made him into a statue.

You organized Chilean widows to sew Arpilleras and gave us 2 framed ones telling their story. You helped them survive their suffering.

Lots of love, Cora and Peter



Liliana Ravioly Cordova

A few words about Isabel Letelier;

It has been one of the most important times in my life to work with dear Isabel Letelier for The Working Group for Democracy in Chile (WGDC) where I shared the work with late friend Lisa Valenzuela. Isabel was working at the Institute for Policy Studies at that

time. When I arrived to Washington, DC in 1984 with my husband Miguel and my little daughter Elisa, whom Isabel welcomed with love, the first thing I did was to offer my help for any way she thought useful for the Chilean Cause. She started the work of the WGDC, group which proved fundamental in the return of Democracy in Chile, with so many greats working alongside. Isabel did not only open the door for me to work side by side with her but also next to Jill Gay, Katie Roberts and dearly departed Eliana Loveluck. The *Letelier-Moffitt Human Rights Awards* developed during that time, and the Institute for Policy Studies has continued and expanded on that essential work.

Isabel also invited me to join the *Chilean Women's Group* which was home to so many of us far away from our country. The group had wonderful discussions about Feminism, Politics, of course, and was a source of support, comfort, and friendships during those difficult years.

I am proud of having received a push from Isabel Margarita Morel, who incentivized me in pursuing my own work in Fiber Arts (helped by Sue Goodwin) and allowing me to do some small part in the work with the *Arpillera Collection*, which promoted and divulged the mixed fiber patchwork of the Chilean Women of Political Prisoners.

Isabel is always at the center of any memories that I may have of those years and beyond.

Stacie Jonas



Isabel has been and always will be an inspiration to me. She so graciously mentored me during my years at IPS, including by receiving me at her home in Chile (where she also introduced me to erizos 😬). I was young and had so many questions, and she always was incredibly generous with her time and guidance. Isabel is a model of persistent activism, resilience, warmth, humor, and kindness. I am grateful and humbled to have had the opportunity to work with her and know her.

Barbara Weaver

Isabel Letelier was a compassionate mentor who challenged my very understanding of how the world worked. In the early 1980s, I began a new job for the United Methodist Church's Women's Division's office of Development Education and Action. I had had

some international experience from my NGO work at the United Nations Law of the Sea (Treaty) Conference, but I knew little about women in the global south. I heard about Isabel's Third World Women Project from colleagues in the Washington, DC religious NGO community and was advised to meet with Isabel Letelier. Happily, she agreed to an appointment. Little did I know that that meeting would start a process that changed my life.

After our initial meeting, Isabel took time to talk with me about various political, economic, and social situations of global south women. She introduced me to the IPS Human Rights Project and through the combination of her projects, I learned about the Families of the Disappeared in Chile. She helped me interpret human rights issues within the framework of development to United Methodist Women.

When I went to visit a NYC friend who was visiting her mother in Santiago, Chile in 1984, I met up with Isabel. She showed me a different Chile from where my friend lived in Provedencia. Isabel introduced me to leaders and members of the Families of the Disappeared. Through Isabel, I was invited me into members' homes where they told me stories about how their loved ones had been disappeared and how they were surviving working together. I spend part of one day at a workshop where many of these women were worked making some money knitting sweaters and other alpaca winter item. Most of the workshop was devoted to women making arpilleras, "newspapers on cloth." I watched the women stitch together stories of the horrors they had experienced personally to get the word of their brutal losses out to the international community. Isabel changed my work on women and development and human rights from being mostly cerebral to work from my heart and soul.

Barbara Ann Weaver

Miguel L. Cordova

I first met Isabel Morel Letelier on September 10, 1976, in New York City where I performed with my Chilean music group APARCOA exiled in Europe during the Pinochet dictatorship in Chile. We performed in the concert *A BENEFIT FOR THE RESTORATION OF HUMAN RIGHTS IN CHILE,* that took place at the Felt Forum of Madison Square Garden. Joan Baez and Pete Seeger also performed in that memorable concert. It had been put together by several organizations supporting Chile, including The *Institute for Policy Studies* that provided valuable conceptual input to the event.

The keynote speech was given at the beginning of the concert by Orland Letelier, Isabel's husband, both exiled in the USA at that time. He was a former Defense Secretary and Ambassador of the Allende Government, and was working at the *Institute for Policy Studies (IPS)* in Washington DC at that time. Coincidentally, the same date of the concert, Pinochet had announced that he had stripped Orlando Letelier from his Chilean citizenship, an illegal act. In his speech, Orlando gave the memorable phrase: *I was born a Chilean, I am a Chilean and I will die a Chilean. They were born traitors, they live as traitors and they will be known forever as fascist traitors*. Tragically, as punishment for his relentless work for the restoration of democracy in Chile, Orlando

was assassinated eleven days after the concert in Washington DC by a bomb placed in his car by Pinochet agents. Ronnie K. Moffitt who was in the car, also died. Her husband Michael miraculously survived as he was in the back seat.

In a split of a second, Isabel was left a widow, alone with her four young sons.

When me and my music group went back to Europe, I knew that I had met an outstanding woman. I got to know that she was an accomplished sculptress, true, but what impressed me the most was her clarity and humanity. During the reception after the concert, we briefly discussed about Chile and our solidarity work in Europe. Then I left without knowing if our paths would cross again.

But later, "cuando el tiempo dio su vuelta de vals" – *When time did its waltz turn* (Neruda, Canto General), in 1984, I came to Washington DC to work at The Urban Institute and I met Isabel again, and I started to build this permanent friendship with her. Thus, I had the opportunity to share with Isabel once again, and met and got to know those amazing people at IPS where she was already working.



Elisa and Miguel Cordova, 40th anniversary program at Sheridan Circle, 2016. David Rabin on left.

Her presence, her charisma, and her relentless work for denouncing and calling for an ending of the atrocities of Pinochet were not only inspiring, but gave me a place where I could be part of that effort led by Isabel in solidarity with Chile.

Beyond her forbearance as an organizer and leader, it must be said that Isabel was a brave strong woman raising alone her four sons. If that is difficult by itself, imagine doing it in exile. This tells of Isabel's character and strength, which explains the quality and intensity of the work she undertook seeking justice for the assassination of Orlando, and devoting uncountable hours for the work in solidarity with Chile…while raising four kids on her own…True, many good people helped her, but she was the only mother of the four boys…

The enormous work that Isabel did is well documented, but let me "explain some things" – *explico algunas cosas,* as Neruda said. Allow me expand on the human side of Isabel that had to do with me and my family:

Isabel was very generous with me and my family as newcomers to town. She even agreed – till today, to be a member of the Board of Directors of my non-profit *Chacabuco, Inc.* that supports my music group of the same name: *Chacabuco*. Through her, we were welcomed in the enlarged family of Chilean exiles, good expatriates, and activists that were living and organizing in the Washington DC area. We were able to blend in with our pairs and found a place in the struggle against Pinochet that was carried out by Isabel and many at the IPS and its extended family. These doors were opened to us by Isabel in a magnanimous way. It must be said that something like this is not self-evident to occur for newcomers to an unknown and new city. Thus the value of Isabel's generosity. In effect, while I was earlier touring Europe with my music group APARCOA, I had met groups of Chilean exiles in many countries that were struggling to blend-in in a meaningful way at their adopted homes, but, unfortunately, they could not always find that niche. But we were able to find it, thanks to Isabel, as me and my family were able to integrate with a progressive and meaningful community here in Washington DC that endures till today when I write these notes.

So, paradoxically, I found a home in the very city where the orders were given to overthrow the Allende government which causes me to write these notes today, orders that made me a planetary man. But even planetary men need a home and a family where to belong day after day. And that home was given to me and my family by Isabel. A dear friend once told me "home is where your friends are". This is absolutely true. Because an exiled looses his tribe; loses that extended group of relatives, of the relatives of the relatives, of the friends, of the friends of the friends, of the acquaintances and the acquaintances of the acquaintances… In exile, there is little of what you had in your homeland. True, you gain other things. But an exiled can only reconstruct part of that community left behind. And that is what Isabel's humanity helped us to do, and I suspect also helped many others. And as exile extends in time, the original tribe is replaced by the new tribe…if you are lucky, and the old tribe dwindles down. And you become more and more planetary. Isabel knew all this, but she did something about it to help others.

From the *Working Group for Democracy in Chile*, through to *The Letelier-Moffitt Human Rights Awards,* among the many other initiatives that Isabel created and undertook, valuable as they are, nothing can match the value of Isabel's humanity and

her understanding of the complexities of and the intricacies that exile creates at a personal level. Again, Isabel also knew all that, and she acted upon it helping and touching others.

Isabel's legacy endures till today: I am proud to say that I have participated at all *Letelier-Moffitt Human Rights Awards* events and the *Sheridan Circle* gatherings that I have been able while in the city. Those are inspiring events that we have thanks to the pioneering and continuous work and efforts of Isabel. Through time, I have cultivated a friendship with Isabel's sons, whom I see from time to time in those events in Washington DC. But every time, September 10th 1976, the fortuitous day I met Isabel, comes back to me in a gratifying way.

Thank you Isabel for all you've done, that we know and don't know, and your four wonderful sons!
We will love you forever.

April Powers

My Dear Isabel,

As I think back to the young adult I was when I met you, rich memories emerge:

You are on the telephone with a US government official advocating for the release of a detained Chilean human rights worker;

You are meeting with artists, writers, musicians, poets, journalists, senators and representatives, and religious and community leaders, building networks of justice;

You are hosting an exhibit of arpilleras, the art-form in cloth made by Chilean women that tell their stories and help heal the traumatic loss of their disappeared loved ones;

You are introducing North American communities to brave grassroots women leaders from Africa, Latin America, and Asia.

As a witness to your actions, love, and commitment, I came to know your qualities:

Generosity and graciousness;
Courage that steadies and guides;
Equanimity born from your faith;
Sensitivity to the world expressed in sculpture, prose, music, and laughter.
Isabel, thank you for leaving such lovely impressions on my heart. You live as a light in the souls of many.
With my deepest love, April Powers

Nena Terrell



Muy estimada y querida Isabel,

Boy did I not have a clue how my life, and world view, would change when Orlando walked into my classroom at AU and then after the assassination when I went to work for you. What a first job! Those seven years (Chile Committee for Human Rights, L/M Fund, IPS) were a real privilege and launched a bounty of life-long relationships, most notably with you.

THANK YOU for your courage and determination to act on your convictions, and to do it with such verve, class, confidence and integrity—over the pain, the anger, the loss to you and the boys, you chose solidarity, public outreach, nonviolent but dogged resistance. Mark Raskin and Dick Barnet gave you a podium and Saul Landau the megaphone.



You, Saul, Michael, (and John Dinges) knew pursuing justice for the killing of Orlando and Ronni could wedge open a door to some justice for others too.

I marveled (as did Eliana, presente ahora y siempre) on so many occasions as we watched you speak truth to power around Washington and across the US. Never dogmatic, you would and could talk to anyone.

You became an irrepressible, creative, and effective defender of human rights (not just in Chile), and women's rights, knowing how many women deserved to be "seen", not just as the wife (or widow) of a great man.

Long before social media existed you became a genuine "influencer" with a massive following.

John Cavanagh



Dear Isabel,

I came to IPS as a 27-year-old in January 1983, and you became a bit like a work mother to me. You taught me about Chile and about human rights. You taught me about the world, often through the dozens of women leaders you toured through the United States with your Third World Women's project. You introduced me to allies who became dear friends, like Carl Levinson of the Max and Anna Levinson Foundation, Barbara Weaver at the United Methodist Women, and Ariel and Angelica Dorfman.

You taught me how to stand straight. You taught me what made each person at IPS tick, and therefore new ways to work with them in harmony.

You were gently honest with me when you thought I wasn't being bold enough in my work, and you helped me with nuances on how to make the Global Economy project work in more effective ways.

You modelled bravery combined with compassion.

My last meal with you was in 2012 when you brought Camila Vallejo and Noam Titelman from Chile for the Letelier-Moffitt Human Rights Award, and it was a joy to see how much these incredible student leaders looked up to you.

Thank you for your love and your friendship and your four amazing children, who carry on the work for justice with creativity as they stretch the limits of the possible.

with love forever, John Cavanagh

Lucy Alexander-Montecino

Isabel is so important to me and my friends who were part of the Chile Committee for Human Rights in Washington. She was our friend and more. Her example of courage, commitment, empathy, pacifism, and love of life inspired us to act and think in ways we had not done before. Isabel was a friend in words, available to give advice over coffee and in deeds. When Chileans in exile arrived in Washington, Isabel helped them find a place to live, showed them how to open a bank account, where to shop, and then invited them to her house and into her wide circle. Isabel was fun. Gatherings at her home involved friends cooking wonderful meals together and lingering over the table with those conversations that encompass all the woes of the world. Isabel was spiritual, and embraced different cultures, Buddhism, Chinese medicine, and Tai Chi without finding it a conflict with her being Catholic. She was an artist, who showed her sculptures in a Co-operative gallery near Dupont Circle, that she started with Ella Tulin and other artists. She was a feminist, who championed women, but still enjoyed friendships with men. She was a naturist who recommended garlic and ginger for colds, homeopathics and acupuncture for pain, dancing for depression, and holding a needle on a thread over a pregnant belly because its rotation would predict whether the baby was a girl or a boy. When our son was born, Isabel was the first to show up at the hospital the next morning, bringing a sumptuous basket of fruit and imported mineral water. A week does not go by without remembering something she said or did or showed me how to do, and there are so many people who feel the same. All honor and love to our Isabel.

Mark L. Schneider



I am delighted to share my deep and abiding respect, regard and affection for Isabel at the upcoming memorial gather at Sheridan Circle. I was privileged to speak at several earlier memorials. Each time, I recalled the courage of Isabel and the other widows, wives and daughters of those who sought democracy for Chile and justice for victims, like Orlando, of the Pinochet dictatorship. When Orlando was murdered at Sheridan Circle, Isabel called me from the hospital emergency room and I left the Senate floor after Senator Kennedy delivered a call for those responsible to be brought to justice. Her courage and determination to hold Pinochet, Contreras and Montecinos accountable, in addition to the actual assassins, fueled a movement that

would not rest until those terrorists were criminally charged and democracy restored to Chile.

Isabel urged us to bring bi-partisan support to the “No vote” plebiscite and that sparked the formation in 1988 of the U.S. Committee to Support Free Elections in Chile, with Senators Ted Kennedy and Richard Lugar as chairs and former Presidents Jimmy Carter and Gerald Ford as honorary co-chairmen. When the inauguration of President Patricio Aylwin finally occurred on March 11, 1990, Senator Kennedy and I were privileged to sit beside Isabel in the national stadium and watch as the names of the victims were scrolled down the scoreboard and the Chilean flag was unfurled across the stadium, and the inaugural speech of President Aylwin was heard, with the words, “Nunca Mas”.

Mark L. Schneider, former Director of the U.S. Peace Corps, human rights activist, recipient of the Bernardo O’Higgins award from President Aylwin and the “Orden de Merito” from President Lagos.

Michael E. Tigar

Our tribute to Isabel must take account of what it must have been like for her and the sons on that September day. And what we all saw and knew it was like: a counerpoint of -- on one hand -- solidarity, shared grief, vows to seek justice. And on the other, calumny and the sort of official indifference that is crueler than deliberate vengeance. Isabel’s courage shone through from the first day. She could have left the work to others. She had made the sacrifice. She chose otherwise, with eloquence and courage.



Michael Tigar with Isabel and Sam Buffone

Katie Roberts Hite

I have a memory from the summer of 1983, when I was a college student in Chile for the first time, studying with Chilean professors who had lost their university professorships under the dictatorship. I remember that you returned briefly to Santiago then, in spite of the "L" in your passport. I remember reading in a Chilean newspaper about your return and being profoundly struck by how you managed to communicate that you had come back to your country to address some personal matters, that you were **not** grateful to the regime for granting you temporary permission to enter, that it was your right to return.



Isabel, Letelier-Moffitt Human Rights awardee Camila Vallejo, Katie Roberts Hite.

I don't know if that memory is accurate, and while I was searching for verification, I came across a short video clip of you, surrounded by the press, when you returned to Chile in 1978. Of course, you are absolutely stunning. You forcefully, poignantly explain to reporters that you had a moral duty to your murdered husband, and to your sons, to reclaim Orlando's

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Chilean citizenship, that this is why you were there. You also insisted on speaking in English. Listening to the beautiful lilt in your voice brought back such a flood of memories of things you told me and taught me, things I won't forget (some of which I cannot share here, haha), ever.

I have such a vivid memory of meeting you for the first time, when you led the protest march marking the Chilean dictatorship's tenth anniversary, September 11th, 1983, through the streets of Washington. I was 21, I'd just finished college, I'd been a campus activist against Reagan's bloody policies in Central America, against his silence on Pinochet. You were a rockstar. You were speaking on campuses and in other venues all over the country, you modeled activism, particularly for women of my generation. At the march, I walked up to you and begged you to let me work with you, and you immediately said, "of course," and you turned me over to Eliana, who was by your side. I couldn't believe how lucky I was, I was so happy. Now when I visit your country, I often find myself compelled to let people know what your activism, your voice, truly meant in the US and elsewhere, before you moved back home to Chile.

You have taught me that human rights meant social rights, economic rights, as much as civil and political rights; you have taught me how to be more politically astute and

discerning; you have taught me how to look more professional and be more aware of my body; you knew how to make Eliana and me laugh, even when you drove us crazy.

You very deeply influenced the direction I went in life – from that of an eager young assistant at IPS, to graduate school and becoming a professor. Your life and work in political exile shaped my focus and writing, your return to Chile made me think about what it meant to return to a country whose political economy was so dramatically different from the one you were forced to leave, your memories of the past have affected my understanding of the politics of memory. In the spirit of IPS, I try to live as a public scholar, an activist as well as an academic, and particularly in your spirit, I recognize that the people in my community's everyday struggles for decent employment, housing, health care, and education are struggles for human rights. I love you very much.



Nancy Lewis, Isabel, Katie Roberts Hite. Credit: Marcelo Montecino.

Bob Borosage

Isabel Letelier is a remarkable leader, a wonderful colleague, and a woman of exceptional grace. A loving mother and spouse, her life was shattered in the horror of the assassination of her husband, Orlando, on the streets of Washington by an agent of Chilean dictator Augusto Pinochet. In that moment, she became a symbol and leader of the democratic Chilean resistance, and suddenly had to navigate its complex and often conflicting currents. In the face of that unimaginable act of terror, she demonstrated truly heroic courage and grit.

At the time of Orlando's assassination, I was a member of the IPS Board, later to become its director. In that position, I watched as Isabel grew into her new role. She put together an extraordinarily talented team that was fiercely devoted to her. She put particular focus on demonstrating the depths of the Chilean experience and resistance through its arts and crafts. She helped bring wider and wider circles of people to

support the Chilean cause. The revival of dem ocracy in Chile – and the eventual bringing of Pinochet and his henchmen to justice – owed much to the continued commitment that Isabel helped to inspire. And in deserved tribute to her, it was fitting that one of her sons would play a significant role in new democratic movement, while another would through his art and teaching continue to this day to bring to Americans a deeper understanding of our connections to our neighbors outside this country. Isabel, a voice of hope and a model of dignity, has enriched all of us who had the joy of working with her.



Peter Kornbluh

Isabel changed/saved my life in so many ways, shapes and forms. I arrived with the beloved Eliana Loveluck to Washington in July of 1979. We visited IPS, the institution of our dreams. Isabel already knew Eliani and her family from Ann Arbor; she had stayed with them during her national tour after Orlando and Ronni were killed. "Elianita, que haces aqui?" Isabel asked when we appeared in her office. "I am looking for a job, and my boyfriend is going to grad school," Eliana replied.

"Well, you will work here, with me," Isabel stated clearly and firmly. In less than 20 seconds, Eliana secured an important job at IPS, and soon I started working with Saul Landau, and Dick Barnet and Isabel as well. In opening her office, her arms and her heart to us immediately as we arrived in Washington as young, committed human rights activists, Isabel set us both on our journey. The rest of our lives, our community, and our visions derived from Isabel's warm and enduring embrace.



For Eliana and myself, I send the deepest love and affection and respect and gratitude to our cherished Isabel Morel de Letelier.

Aviva Kempner

Isabel's Dance for Chile's Independence



Credit: Marcelo Montecino.

Of all the years I attended programs demanding the downfall of the Chilean junta that finally morphed into celebrating the return of democracy in that far away land there is one image of Isabel that always comes to mind.

Dressed in a colorful outfit, Isabel is dancing the cueca with Orlando in their backyard on Chilean Independence Day on September 18, 1976. The loving gaze from her comrade in struggle celebrating their beloved Chilean traditions shine brightly. This loving portrait was taken by exiled Chilean photographer and dear friend Marcelo Montecino.

But their celebratory portrait is also a sad reminder that a few days later there was the brutal assassination on Embassy Row and how Isabel and IPS would fight for justice for Orlando and Ronni.

Through the years Isabel always commanded our attention with her elegance and leadership. On that one afternoon Isabel captured her joy of a Chilean tradition and the beloved gaze of her husband.

Isabel's beauty and spirit lead us all, and was especially inspiring to us females who participated in the anti-Pinochet movement. Vive Isabel!!!!!!

Sarah Anderson

I came to IPS in the early 1990s, after Isabel had returne d to Chile. But I was lucky to be able to spend time with her on her frequent visits to Washington, DC, and I had the wonderful opportunity to visit her apartment and Orlando's grave site in Santiago in 1998 when I was there for a people's alternative to the official Summit of the Americas.

I have always been blown away by Isabel's charm, warmth, and humor. But I think what will stick with me more than anything is a story that Juan Pablo once told in an interview. He said that when he and his brothers arrived at George Washington University hospital on the horrible day of September 21, 1976, the first thing Isabel told her sons was: "I don't want this to make you hate anyone."

All these 48 years later, it's obvious that they took her message to heart. The whole Letelier family has turned their personal tragedy into a force for justice, accountability, and love — not hate.

