

THE ORAL HISTORY PROJECT SERIES

THE FIFTIETH ANNIVERSARY OF ELM STREET PRESS

by Madeleine Ward O'Shea

As part of the 60th anniversary celebration of the Point Association, a collection of oral histories is being recorded with longtime Point residents to learn about their experiences in the neighborhood. On September 8, 2015, John Ward spoke with Ilse Buchert Nesbitt at her Third & Elm Street Press about what it has been like to live and work on the Point for the last fifty years.

Born in Germany, Ilse spent most of her childhood in Japan. Her exposure to Japanese culture shows in an Asian influence in her work that is still evident today. Her path to the printing press could hardly be considered a rhumb line, but rather a journey with many detours along the way.

Ilse started out studying archeology in Frankfort but soon realized that her interests lay in the creative arts. This prompted her to enroll in an art school in Hamburg where she took, over the course of a year, classes on the basics of painting and color. In order to earn a living she shifted her focus to graphic design, where she developed a passion for typography. Most art students only take typography to fulfill a required course, but Ilse became captivated by the technological aspects of the craft and soon recognized this to be her calling. In 1995, after taking a series of classes in Berlin, she felt she had exhausted the offerings there, but did not feel she yet possessed the skills to enter the workforce.

While in Berlin she came upon a magazine article about a professor of typography at the Hamburg art school she had previously attended. The very next day, she bid the Berlin school farewell and returned to Hamburg to ask that professor to take her on as a student. Ilse explained to him her interest in illustration, but also revealed that she needed more knowledge in typography to design books. He agreed to take her on as a student and Mrs. Nesbitt remained in Hamburg for two years where she worked in a graduate program. The professor subsequently assisted her in securing a job at the Rhode Island School of Design in Providence where she worked as a typography assistant from 1960 to 1965. During her tenure at RISD, Mrs. Nesbitt met her future husband, a fellow RISD faculty member, Alexander Nesbitt.

Following the couple's departure from the Providence school, Ilse and Alexander relocated to the Point neighborhood of Newport. At the time, Newport was a far cry from the city-by-the-sea we know today. Back then Newport was a shady Navy town with an abundance of bars along Thames Street and the Point found itself on the wrong side of the tracks. Ilse recalled that houses were all painted gray and there were far less trees. Their house at 29 Elm Street didn't even have central heating when Ilse and her husband purchased it in 1965. Today we know this house as The Third & Elm Press. The business has been successfully operating at this location for the last fifty years and she and her husband raised two children here.

	<p>START YOUR OWN SUCCESS STORY... TRY TWO WEEKS FREE AT NAC WITH THIS AD!</p>	 <p>66 VALLEY ROAD, MIDDLETOWN 846-7723 newportathletic.com</p>	<p><i>Christmas Cards & Prints of Newport</i> at the Third & Elm Press 29 Elm Street, Newport 846-0228</p>  <p>www.thirdandelm.com</p>
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Ilse has seen many changes in the neighborhood since arriving on the Point. The streets are no longer filled with children playing games such as kick-the-can. Perhaps this is due to children playing computer games indoors, she mused. Or perhaps there are less children living here. Ilse shared the story of a man who grew up at 14 Third Street stopping by the Elm Street Press. He recounted growing up on the first floor in a family of eight children, while the second floor housed a family with nine children, and a widow with one child lived on the third floor.

Where does the inspiration for her work come from? Ilse admits that she does not work solely from her imagination, but needs tangible inspiration for her work. She credits Newport with providing a boundless supply of ideas through her walks around the neighborhood, visits to The Breakers and other mansions, as well as various special events.

In celebration of the fiftieth anniversary of the Third & Elm Press, the Redwood Library is mounting an exhibition of her work. The show opens on November 13 and runs through February 21, with a reception on December 2.



Ilse’s oral history conversation can be found on the Point Association’s website <https://thepointassociation.wildapricot.org/history>.

NEWPORT IN BLOOM AWARD

by Lisa Stuart

Newport in Bloom has declared Nancy Scott and Ron Barr’s garden at 82 Bridge Street “The Best Garden in Newport 2015” in their annual garden competition. Since 1982 Newport in Bloom has sought to beautify the city and create community by encouraging residents to get outside, meet their neighbors and beautify their homes through the planting and display of flowers.

Nancy and Ron commented that “It’s a happy garden that gives us a great deal of pleasure, the more so because we can share it with everyone passing by.”

See more pictures of Nancy & Ron’s Garden on page 13

