



## **Alice M. Isen**

May 17, 1942 – February 29, 2012

Alice Isen died on February 29, 2012, after a long illness, although she remained a vital and involved colleague until the last few weeks of her life. At the time of her death, she was the SC Johnson Professor of Marketing within the Johnson School of Management and Professor of Psychology in the College of Arts and Sciences at Cornell University.

Her undergraduate degree in Russian Language and Literature from the University of Pennsylvania was awarded in 1963. She received an MA and a Ph.D. from Stanford University in Clinical and Social- Personality Psychology, concluding her studies in 1968. In 1972, she was hired as an assistant professor at the University of Maryland, Baltimore County, and was promoted all the way to full professor before coming to Cornell in 1989.

In the meantime, she was a visiting at Stanford University, the University of Michigan, and Ohio State University, as well as serving as the Administrative Officer for Special Projects in Science Policy at the American Psychological Association. She has published extensively and is the co-author (with A. H. Hastorf) of *Cognitive Social Psychology* and (with B. Moore) of *Affect and Social Behavior*. She has been a member of the executive committee of the Society for Consumer Psychology and the Society for Experimental Social Psychology. For several years, she served as the Editor of *Motivation and Emotion*, as well as on the editorial board of ten other journals.

Alice Isen was a pioneer along several dimensions. She entered the academic arena at a time when few women held positions at major research universities, fewer still without a powerful supporter. Yet, she succeeded in igniting a research program that would become a central touchstone in social psychology. She would end her career as one of the most widely-cited business school professors in the world.

Decades before the advent of “positive psychology,” Isen focused on the impact of positive affect on thought and social behavior. Over her career, Isen investigated the relevance of positive feelings for consumer behavior, organizational behavior, medical decision making, doctor-patient interaction, risk preference, and self-control. She examined how such feelings fostered creativity, spurred altruism, and influenced risk-taking. In doing so, Isen opened the study of emotion on human life during years in which the rest of the discipline was dominated by the study of cold cognition. She also focused on the positive side of human experience at a time in which the rest of the field concentrated more on the “darker” aspects of human behavior.

Isen pushed this work in ambitious ways, examining how positive feelings spurred action in real world settings. As such, she applied her research ideas to how people conducted themselves in everyday life, years before the term “translational research” was even coined. As neuroscience techniques became available to psychologists, Isen worked hard to ground her previous findings in what was becoming known about the working of the brain and nervous system. It is fitting that work on emotion and optimal human functioning has within the last decade joined Isen’s pioneering research as central themes in psychological work.

For colleagues, Alice was a constant source of energy, activity, and stimulation. She was an active participant in departmental deliberations and decisions. She contributed generously to research seminars, colloquia, and classes. Her mind and thought were razor-sharp, and her ability to cut through to the core of a colleague’s or visitor’s thinking was well-known and appreciated. She worked tirelessly with students, whether they were doctoral students under her supervision or undergraduates spending a semester gaining experience in a lab. It was not a surprise how devoted they often were to her.

Her wit was also enviable. Many of her colleagues and students acquired an ever-changing series of clever nicknames. National politics was a lifelong passion, exceeded perhaps only by her devotion to her hometown Philadelphia Eagles, a team she supported through good years and bad. Despite the fact that she had traveled the world, she was mindful of her origins and the richness of the journey she had taken throughout her life.

*David Dunning, Chairperson; Vithala R. Rao, J. Edward Russo*