

As we remember Francis Ness today, our hearts go out first to her family. We extend condolences first and foremost to her son, Larry, his wife Debbie and their children Heather, and Gloria, and Gloria's husband Chris. We also extend condolences to Francis' brother's family, and to her cousins. We know that Francis was an important presence in all of your lives and we pray that her memory continues to be a blessing in your lives forever.

Francis Ness lived through some of the most tumultuous events of the twentieth century. While the world around her changed dramatically, she held firm to core values that were at the center of her existence. Hard work, activism, passion, caring, creativity. These were her hallmarks.

In the Jewish community, we have a long tradition of very strong women, and Francis certainly stands in that tradition. I did not know Francis personally but I spent time learning about her with Larry, Debbie, Heather and Gloria earlier this week and I came away thinking that as a young girl in Brooklyn she never could have predicted the twists and turns of the life she would lead.

She was born into the world as the daughter of a very strong woman, Helen. Her story is remarkable, how she literally walked across Europe barefoot in order to escape Eastern European anti-Semitism, take a boat to New York, and become a garment worker. From there she met, her husband Louis, and they ran a Grocery and had two children George and Francis in the 1920s. Life became good and stable in Brooklyn, as they ran

a Grocery. This steady income protected them from the worst effects of the Great Depression, but tragedy hit when Francis was only 10, in that her father had a terrible stroke. He was never able to be the same, but Helen stepped in, ran the family business and protected the children.

Because of Helen's hard work ethic, George and Francis, were spared some of the worst scarcity of the Depression.

She graduated High School in 1945 and immediately got a job as an officer worker in an architect's office. She was a typical Girl Friday of that era, running errands, interacting with people, watching New York change in the excitement of post-War America. Francis was happy. Helen, her mother, pushed her to be more ambitious, but she was with people, sharing conversations, helping out at the office, and content.

In that period she met Nathan, who would become the love of her life. They met ice skating at Madison Square Gardens. He was in college at Brooklyn Polytechnic studying for a PhD in Aeronautical Engineering. Imagine New York filled with servicemen returning from the war. An exciting time filled with dances, ski trips to the Catskills, movies and parties. Nathan and Francis enjoyed their dating and married in 1953.

Francis was a proud independent woman, but totally in love with Nathan. In 1956, they moved together to the Elkins Park neighborhood outside Philadelphia where Larry was born one year later. Nathan worked for defense contractors in New Jersey and Francis took care of the baby.

Elkins Park at that time was the epicenter of American Judaism, with more synagogues per square mile than any other city in America. While Nathan enjoyed his job and the success it brought them, Francis and Larry were busy with play dates, teas, preschools and picnics in Wall park or the Curtis Arboretum.

But Nathan wanted badly to be an academic, so he accepted a position at West Virginia University in Morgantown. That was where the family remained Nathan's entire career.

The culture shock must have been amazing, but Francis was determined and knew how to take care of herself and her family. She immediately sought out the Jewish community and joined the synagogue. She also began to study very part time and because she was math phobic she got a degree in journalism.

At the same time she raised Larry and ran the home. She was not the classic home-maker type, but she was a dedicated mother and wife. She was at all of Larry's after school activities. She volunteered to help out with anything she could. She was not crafty but she was creative so she could make excellent Halloween costumes and always kept everyone entertained.

This was the 1960s and Francis was very liberal in her politics. She was deeply involved in protests against the Vietnam War and she was a staunch supporter of Israel. In 1967 as the world watched, Egypt, Syria and Jordan

threatened to wipe Israel off the map and push the Jews into the sea. The rest of the world did nothing. The United Nations did nothing. Not Francis. She led protests from West Virginia all the way to New York to demonstrate on behalf of Israel. When Israel finally attacked to preempt the Egyptian and Syrian invasions, the world protested against Israel. Again, Francis spoke out to support the Jewish state. She even traveled to Israel together with Larry in 1974 to see the state only a year after the Yom Kippur War. She was an activist, an organizer, a liberal, a Zionist and a proud Jew. In 1972 she took Larry to a march in Washington against the Vietnam War and they marched together behind Abbie Hoffman.

But her biggest passion was being with people. She was very social, in the synagogue, and in the community. She became something of a social worker, working for MONVAC, the Monangalia Voluntary Action Council, placing volunteers with needy organizations. She loved helping people. She even placed Larry once she was so in need of volunteers.

She knew how to motivate people, to organize groups and to get things done. She eventually left MONVAC, to work of Biometrics Corporation running trials of safety equipment with large groups of people. She was very effective and kept volunteers coming through the corporation so that the equipment could be tested and used for workers around the world.

She also loved being a part of the academic community. She was friends with many professors and their families, hosted parties and attended many events on campus. Nathan and Francis were regulars at the campus theater

and at campus events. She loved discount shopping, bowling, socializing, and going to as many movies as possible.

She was also an accepting and supportive mother as Larry grew up. She had never been controlling and wanted Larry to be free and independent. She wanted him to have skills and abilities and the freedom to manage his life. She did not hover and control him, but rather challenged him to try new things. When he needed a new chest of drawers, she asked him which color he wanted. When he said red, she bought him the paint, gave it to him and told him to figure out how to paint it himself.

She was also supportive when Larry moved out and began to have a life of his own with Debbie. They actually had met years earlier when Debbie attended a music camp with Larry and Francis was the champion of the Jewish campers. Even though the camp had worship services for the Christian kids on Sundays, the Jewish kids had nothing. And on Friday nights, the Jewish kids were supposed to be in practice. But Francis would have none of that. She protested and arranged to take all the Jewish kids to services at the synagogue, and then took them out for ice cream afterwards which she bought at Baskin Robbins.

She was that kind of mother and eventually that kind of mother in law. Very supportive, very proud and very protective of her family. She was also welcoming to Debbie and she loved becoming a grandmother. When Gloria was born, she was waiting in the hospital during the actual delivery. She could not wait to be with the grandchildren, even though they were all

the way in Reston. She would drive from Morgantown every chance she got, sometimes getting lost along the way.

Francis wanted to entertain her granddaughters and spoil them. She loved having them at the house and taking them on trips. She would build a tent in the living room for them and fill it with toys and pillows facing the TV, so they could have a slumber party and spend the night. She once took them on a trip to Chincoteague and Assateague, to a week-long ecology family camp. When the girls were wading through marshes looking for animals, she was right there with them. When they wanted to jump in the water, she was right there with them. When they needed costumes for Purim, she showed up with a Valise filled with scarves, hats, dresses and all kinds of creative parts for costumes. With Grandma's help the girls won awards. She called them Glo and Bubela and spoiled them as much as possible. She wanted to be a Bubbie.

Her relationships were always at the center of her life. And that was the hardest thing for her.

The cruelest lesson of life is that the amount of love we feel for others in life is directly proportional to the amount of loss we will eventually feel at the end of life. When Francis' mother, Helen, passed, Francis felt that loss deeply. And when her husband Nathan died, that loss was almost too much to bear. The rest of the people in her life became even more important. She surrounded herself with momentos and souvenirs holding

onto to every memory of her time with the people around her. She built for herself a safe home that protected her from loneliness.

Francis' greatest joy in life was being with people so when her health demanded that she move to Ashby Ponds, she became highly active in the social scene. She joined as many clubs as possible and went to as many events and programs as possible. She was active in the movie club and wanted to share some of the edgier films she enjoyed with the crowd. But she was too hip and modern for their traditional tastes. That did not prevent her from making many friends. She went bowling, joined the Songbirds choir, and enjoyed her new life.

Francis never stopped supporting her causes and her politics. She was a lifetime supporter of Israel, a proud Jew, and an outspoken member of whatever community she joined. She was a tireless worker and organizer, and a leader of people. But above all of that, she was deeply devoted to Nathan, Larry, Debbie, Gloria and Heather. She loved her family. She might have been a little eccentric, but she was deeply beloved and a deep source of love.

Francis' creative mind and her physical presence will no longer be with us, but the beauty she shared with the world lives on after her. Her legacy can be found in the life she led, the friendships she created, the family she built and the love she shared. While our bodies are like grass that withers and fades, the life we bring to this world lives on after us in eternal memory.

When someone dies in Judaism we say Zichronah Livracha, may Francis' memory be for a blessing.