

## Fran Johnson

We lost a cherished Senior Center board member, Fran Johnson, this past September. She had just celebrated her 81<sup>st</sup> birthday. This is a story I wish I did not have to tell. But I want to honor her and speak of our rather unusual friendship and meeting. I met Fran a couple of years ago at lunch and one day I arrived late, 1:15. There were no seats at the table and the little mini garage door to the kitchen counter passway had closed and I was hungry. A woman waived me over. It was Fran, a lovely looking woman, who wore a baseball cap and was very well dressed. Slacks but stylish. Beautiful complexion and very warm. She had bought a second lunch and offered it to me. I accepted and pulled out my wallet. She said, "you can put that away, my treat. They close that darn door right on the dot of 1:15. You'd think they could wait a few minutes!" I agreed with her, thanked her and introduced myself. We got to talking over several lunches and discovered we both loved the arts, theatre, music and a little gossip. We came to spare no one in the lunch room. But it was just between us. No one knew of our culinary barbs or our view of how the food was presented. I used to tease her that, "hey this isn't the 4 seasons restaurant." Fran said, "But why not aspire to be."

Fran was very curious about me and my family and I hers. She has a son and grandchildren. Last fall she wanted to take her son and daughter-in-law to a Broadway show for their anniversary. She was a bit reluctant to go the box office directly to get the tickets, which is the best way to get the seats you want and at a good price. So I went with her to the Neil Simon Theatre and helped her buy tickets to "MJ" (Michael Jackson) the musical. She was very grateful. Fran was also very caring and maternal. The Y offered an alternate lunch, (sometimes vegetarian) so I'd buy a 2nd lunch to take home to my wife. Fran would cover it up with a napkin till I packed it up. She didn't want any flies to get into it or any room dust. At certain special event lunches, (Passover, Mother's Day, etc.), Fran always saved me a seat,. She was very proprietary about her lunch buddy. She loved desserts. I am not a dessert person, so I usually gave her mine. We texted each other and met for lunch religiously for a couple of years.

We last saw each other in December 2024. In January 2025, she said she was going upstate NY to help her daughter-in-law who was having surgery. She'd let me know when she was back in town. She left me a voice mail in February to see how I was. She knew I had lost my mom in January. And she texted me in March saying she was back from Upstate but not coming to lunch. I texted her repeatedly after that but she never responded. Fran was very regular, like clockwork, so I knew something was wrong when she didn't respond to my texts and come to lunch. Summer came and went, I hadn't heard from her in months and I was very worried. I felt in my bones that something terrible had happened. It was not like her to just disappear. Months later, on September 2<sup>nd</sup>, I got a call from her son, Matthew. He said to call him and that he would give me an update on his mom. He'd gone through her phone and found my texts and voicemails. I called him the very next day and he told me that the hospital had just called him saying that his mom had passed that morning. I was in shock and deeply saddened that I was not to have closure with my dear friend and a final goodbye. Apparently she'd been

hit by an E-Bike motorcycle in January at Broadway and 178<sup>th</sup>. After being hospitalized, suffering blood clots and seizures, she made it to rehab only to eventually succumb to her injuries. She never once mentioned the accident in her text and phone messages back in February and March. She was a very proud and private person, but I wish she had told me. I wish her son had contacted me sooner to let me know of Fran's condition so I could have visited her, spent time with her and been there for her in her hour of need.