

Risa Hirsch Ehrlich

Risa Hirsch Ehrlich, a cherished and longstanding member of our community, a mother of two, passed away on December 28th, 2025. As a Washington Heights local, the Y was a place she visited with joy for many years. She spoke fondly of attending Tai Chi classes and participating in community events, and she embodied the spirit of lifelong learning and connection that defines our center.

Risa spent most of her career as a science and math teacher, a role that reflected who she was at her core: a natural teacher, endlessly curious, open-minded, and generous with her knowledge. That love of learning extended far beyond the classroom. She was a gifted ceramicist, with shelves of her apartment filled with her and her friend's pottery, each piece a testament to her creativity. A world traveler and art lover, Risa collected beautiful artwork throughout her life, carrying with her a deep appreciation for culture, beauty, and human expression.

Outside of the Y, Risa was an active participant in a virtual "Resilient Aging" women's group, meeting weekly with peers to reflect on both the beauty and the challenges of aging, and to explore how to embrace or overcome them together. She believed in doing all things as well as possible, while also closely holding humility and grace. A social butterfly and believer in human connection, she knew the names and life stories of every person she encountered in her short stay in a nursing home this past summer, stopping them in the halls to chat at every opportunity.

Risa was known for her sharp wit, humor, intelligence, and optimism. She welcomed visits from the Social Work interns on our Center for Aging in Place team with openness, forming meaningful relationships with the team that reflected her belief in community. She was also a steadfast supporter of the Y, regularly referring friends and neighbors, and sometimes complete strangers to our services, encouraging others to find what they are looking for with us, just as she had.

Risa will be remembered not only for her talents and accomplishments, but for her generosity of spirit and her enduring belief in community. She leaves behind a legacy of curiosity, kindness, creativity, and support that will be felt at the YM&YWA for years to come.