

Francine April Herman

March 1, 1921 – May 18, 2008

Those at Cornell University who knew Francine April Herman remember her passion for teaching and her strong sense of social responsibility. Growing up in New York City during the 1930s, Fran developed a commitment to social and labor causes and was an early advocate for women's rights. A story is told that, while still in high school, Fran was invited to a luncheon at the White House. Walking up to the entrance, she encountered President Franklin Delano Roosevelt who was on his way to a meeting. Anxious to put the young girl at ease, Roosevelt remarked, "Oh, so you're going to have lunch at my house—tell them I said they're to treat you well!" From then on, Francine April Herman was hooked on politics, a topic to which she devoted much of her energy throughout the following years.

Fran attended Hunter College, located in the center of Manhattan and one of the oldest public universities. Its strong public service mission fit well with Fran's evolving interest in the welfare of employees and employee rights. She had also fine-tuned her writing skills, focusing primarily on advertising. This background ultimately led to a contract with Rothschild's Department Store in Ithaca, New York. Fran immediately fell in love with the quirky little town and decided to make it her home. In 1953, she married Louis Herman.

Ithaca provided opportunities for Fran to become heavily involved in communication and the performing arts. She began a program of essays on WHCU, Ithaca's radio station, called "A View from the Kitchen Window." Fran was also instrumental in creating The Green Room Circle, an Ithaca summer theater company. Her love of theater regularly took her to Stratford, Ontario, where she enjoyed the Shakespeare Festival. During this time, she was able to travel, visiting Italy and the Middle East.

Her husband of 11 years, Lou, died in 1964. A few years later, Fran decided to return to school. Because of her life experiences, she was provisionally accepted into the Industrial and Labor Relations School at Cornell University. She quickly embraced academic life, and by 1967, was teaching in the Industrial and Labor Relations Extension Program. Fran received her Master's of Science degree from Cornell in 1973. Her specialty was labor relations with emphasis on communication. In 1973, she joined the faculty in Cornell's School of Hotel Administration where

she applied her interdisciplinary background to courses in human resources management, labor relations, and management communication. Fran had a significant impact on the Hotel and the hundreds of students she taught. She quickly realized that it was essential for future hospitality leaders to be able to clearly communicate complicated analyses and ideas to a variety of constituencies. What evolved from Fran's efforts were a two-course curriculum in management communication and a new disciplinary area in the Hotel School.

Fran loved interacting with her students, especially her teaching assistants whom she mentored enthusiastically. She treated them as budding professionals but also showed concern for their emotional and personal lives so that they would thrive when they stepped out into the world beyond Cornell. Her colleagues at the Hotel School recall the hours she spent with her students discussing controversial issues of the day—particularly those related to labor relations. When it came to her students, Fran had a tireless energy that was often contagious.

Fran orchestrated great parties, always inviting a mix of people drawn from the diverse facets of her own life. She included graduate students as well as faculty. She crossed the borders of many segments of the university and often included members of the local community. Her friendships were wide ranging. The conversations at her parties were rarely superficial: major political and social issues of the day were discussed and debated. One always left her home knowing that Fran had orchestrated more than a simple social gathering.

Fran Herman worked closely with the New York City Hotel and Restaurant Workers' Labor Union. She researched the types of grievances filed and how they were negotiated and settled. Fran provided good insights about the way that people within the hospitality industry—whether they are entry-level housekeepers or top-level executives—can work together to ensure social justice for all. The net result, she believed, would be a humane workplace and a genuinely successful hospitality industry.

Throughout her career, Francine Herman continued to apply her talents to the political arena. During President Jimmy Carter's administration, Fran was appointed a mediator for the U.S. Department of Labor. She was also a mediator and fact-finder for the New York State Public Employment Relations Board from 1973-91. Fran mediated union negotiations in many public school districts, thus contributing to education in yet another important way. She served as a member of Cornell's Advisory Committee on the Status of Women and was Secretary of the University Faculty. Fran strongly supported and worked

tirelessly on behalf of the “Cornell 11,” a group of women faculty who sued the university for sex discrimination. In 1979, Fran created an endowment, the Mildred April Scholarship Fund of the College of Arts and Sciences at Cornell, in honor of her mother. The endowment supports undergraduate financial needs.

Fran had friends and former students living all over the world. She visited them in Europe and Australia and spent a term teaching in Paris, one of her favorite cities. For many years, Fran’s role model and best friend was Alice Cook, an ILR professor who was the University’s Ombudsman and co-founder of the Women’s Studies Program. Fran fondly recalled a time in Japan when Alice Cook and she were being honored at a country inn by former students. The meal included the swallowing of live goldfish. “ ...The hard part was getting them down without chewing, and having the strangest tickling sensation in your stomach,” she said in describing it. Following Alice’s death in 1998, Fran was instrumental in establishing a chaired professorship in her honor and was, in turn, honored in 2007 with the Alice Cook Recognition Award. This award is bestowed upon individuals “...who have significantly contributed to women’s issues, changing the climate for women at Cornell University.”

In 1989, Fran retired from Cornell as Professor Emerita. She died at the age of 87 on May 18 at the Hospicare Residence in Ithaca. Fran Herman appreciated the manifold dimensions of both issues and friendships. Throughout her life, Fran kept her sense of humor and her love of good friends and good scotch. She never stopped fighting for what she knew to be important—a fair shake for all.

Born in New York City on March 1, 1921, Francine Herman was the daughter of Abe and Mildred April. She was predeceased by her father, mother, brother, and husband, Louis Herman, who died in 1964. She is survived by her stepson, Dr. Paul Herman and daughter-in-law, Polly Herman, four grandchildren, Dr. Peter Herman, Anne Herman and Louisa Herman, all of Portland, Oregon, and Dr. Edwin Herman, his wife, Laura Herman-Schultz, and one great-grandchild, Lily Herman, all of Stevens Point, Wisconsin. Many thanks to Dr. Paul Herman for his assistance in creating this memorial statement.

Judith Brownell, Chairperson; Florence Berger, Daphne Jameson