

IN MEMORIAM: NANCY STEIN FRAPPIER (1947–2016)

## Celebrating Nancy Stein Frappier: A Lifetime for Social Justice and Human Kindness

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**N**ANCY STEIN FRAPPIER WILL BE LONG AND LOVINGLY REMEMBERED—NOT only for her many accomplishments during her 69 years on this earth, but also for her exceptional human qualities. Nancy wove a unique magic into her relationships with virtually everyone she knew. She emanated compassion and empathy for those around her. She instinctively knew how to make people feel accepted and enhanced their own sense of themselves. Through her grace, warmth, and respect, she transformed us all to be our very best. With her boundless generosity and solidarity, she supported her family and close friends. Even after she began a several years-long battle with lymphoma, she was always there for us—and always with that welcoming smile on her face and that twinkle in her eyes.

I begin with these special personal qualities because in addition to dedicating her life to collective social change, Nancy transformed the world one person at a time. Inspired at a young age to combat social and racial inequalities after the 1967 riots in her native Detroit, Nancy evolved from a social justice activist and writer during the 1960s to 1980s into a professional social work leader citywide in San Francisco at the Homeless Prenatal Program, from 1995 until her untimely death on May 30, 2016. Always driven by a passion for social justice, she understood and practiced it in political work, and also as advocacy for the well-being of individual families and mentoring of her coworkers.

I first met Nancy in 1969, when she and Jon Frappier moved to Berkeley, which was still at the height of “Berkeley in the Sixties.” Although she entered

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graduate school in psychology at UC Berkeley, she almost immediately deferred this to become involved in a broad range of community and anti-interventionist political activities. For several years she played a central role as an organizer of the Venceremos Brigade to Cuba and served on its National Committee. Already then, one fellow Brigade organizer says, he marveled at her ability to reach out to and incorporate new participants. Nancy herself went to Cuba with the third Brigade in 1970 and returned in later years.

Both before and after moving to the Bay Area, Nancy was also part of the anti-Vietnam War movement and participated in many of the large antiwar mobilizations on the East and West coasts, from the 1960s into the 1970s. Several decades later, in the early 2000s, she fulfilled her dream of traveling to postwar Vietnam, with her daughter Diana.

Nancy had worked with the New York office of the North American Congress on Latin America (NACLA), a small research and publishing organization devoted to educating North Americans about US imperialism and interventions in Latin America. In California, she was a founding staff member of NACLA's Berkeley office. She worked from 1970 through 1977 as a researcher, writer, editor, and all-around stalwart of the NACLA-West collective, where I became her colleague in 1971.

Nancy's research and writings for NACLA focused largely on the US military and police apparatuses and their training programs (School of the Americas and Office of Public Safety) in Latin America. She worked alongside Michael Klare to produce a long and very influential series of publications over the course of five years (1972 to 1976) about the functioning of these programs in Latin America and elsewhere in what was then called the "third world." In 1975, Nancy was one of the NACLA staff who contributed to *The Iron Fist and the Velvet Glove: An Analysis of the U.S. Police*, a project of the Center for Research on Criminal Justice in Berkeley.

In addition to collective projects, on her own Nancy undertook a major project on Panama. After hearing from Panamanian colleagues visiting NACLA, she traveled to Panama during the progressive nationalistic period under the presidency of Omar Torrijos and coordinated and wrote a Panama issue of the *NACLA Report* (September 1974). She focused on all of the major issues: US military bases in the Canal Zone, renegotiations of the Canal's ownership and status (which later terminated in the 1977 Carter-Torrijos Treaty), and the uses of Panama as a financial center for US economic interests, with negative consequences for Panamanian society.

Also crucial was Nancy's contribution to the human fabric of NACLA-West. Other staff members remember Nancy as the one who gave them the self-confidence to write and publish. No matter how intense the political

debates within the office, she maintained a civil, comradely presence. Because her enthusiasm was so contagious, and her organizing outreach so broad, she engaged in multiple community education initiatives. She was asked to be the master of ceremonies for public events, including a major rally on September 15, 1973, at San Francisco's Union Square, against the coup that overthrew the elected socialist Allende government in Chile. She was also central to building and maintaining NACLA-West's ties to Latin America support groups and coalitions in the Bay Area, such as Non-Intervention in Chile (NICH), La Peña cultural center, and broad pan-Latin America solidarity coalitions.

In the late 1970s and early 1980s, along with many other anti-intervention activists, Nancy began to prioritize the need for profound changes within the United States. In particular, she became more focused on domestic issues such as the rights of public-sector workers, opposition to California's Proposition 13, with its disastrous effects on jobs and social services for the entire middle and working classes, and measures to curb corporate dominance in San Francisco. Her skills in writing, editing, design, and production with various publications (newspapers, bulletins, leaflets) during these years were closely linked to grass-roots organizing campaigns.

During the mid-1980s, she also served on the editorial and coordinating committees of a Bay Area-based bilingual newspaper that covered the explosion of revolutions in Central America and US interventions there. By 1987, this extended to a Central America Education Project, which published curriculum materials for teachers. Throughout the period of the 1980s, Nancy balanced political activities with holding a full-time job in downtown San Francisco and bringing up her two daughters, Diana and Emily.

In the late 1980s, Nancy and I coedited *Democracy in Latin America: Visions and Realities* (Greenwood/Bergin & Garvey, 1990), a collection of articles written by leading Latin American and Latin Americanist scholars. We also collaborated on a major research article on "The Construction of Democracy in Nicaragua," a study of one of the Sandinistas' unique contributions to Central America in the 1980s, published in *Latin American Perspectives* (Summer 1990). Since the late 1980s, because I have always valued Nancy's political and editorial judgment so highly, I have steadily asked for her comments on drafts of my articles, Op-eds, and books.

During these years, Nancy served on the editorial board of the journal *Social Justice*. In the 1990s, she coedited several special issues of *Social Justice*. These included *Feminism and the Social Control of Gender* (1990), *Criminality, Imprisonment, and Women's Rights* (1990), *Columbus on Trial* (1992), and *Losing a Generation: Probing the Myths and Reality of Youth and Violence* (1997). At the

same time, always the internationalist, she participated on the coordinating and editorial committees of a project that published popular bulletins about the 1991 Gulf War. She was also devoted to seeing the end of apartheid in South Africa.

Between 1993 and 1995, Nancy defined a new career path, enrolling in the Master's program at San Francisco State University School of Social Work. During her years there, aside from being a stellar student, she was on the editorial board (and in 1994–95 one of the editors in chief) of *Social Work Perspectives*, the School's journal. She wrote several articles, including one with her daughters, "Growing Up in the '90s: A Family Responds to an Untimely Death." She graduated from that program with honors, receiving a Graduate Student Award for Distinguished Achievement.

Shortly thereafter, in 1995, she began to work at San Francisco's Homeless Prenatal Program (HPP), and it was here, over the course of two decades, that she made her most lasting social and personal contributions. HPP Director Martha Ryan has written the following appreciation:

Nancy spent the last 21 years building and directing the Wellness Center at the Homeless Prenatal Program in San Francisco. Nancy created a holistic system of care that supported thousands of poor and homeless mothers deliver healthy babies. Her kind and generous spirit impacted all who crossed her path—clients, staff, community partners, and students. She was an extraordinary social worker, always seeing the goodness in each person sitting before her; she never stopped trying to help parents and colleagues reach their highest potential. Nancy was firm in her commitment to health equity and social justice. While she had numerous accomplishments, her greatest was giving the most oppressed the tools and hope they needed to change their lives. Nancy's spirit will live on through the work she began and in the many lives that changed through her love and support.

Nancy's colleagues, coworkers, and clients at HPP have shown their gratitude to have worked with her in an outpouring of concern and love. At the July 9 Memorial for Nancy, Martha Ryan added, "Nancy became a mentor to me, she always guided me to the kindest response; she taught me to say 'yes'; she never said 'no' to anyone." HPP held its own memorial event on July 30, 2016. As a permanent recognition, the HPP Wellness Center, which was shaped over two decades by Nancy, will bear her name.

In 2015, Nancy was honored with a Community Partner Award at the San Francisco Black Infant Health Program's 20th Annual Afrocentric Family and Life Conference. She was recognized for her tireless work in partnership with

SFBIHP to improve black infant birth outcomes and for her commitment to ensuring that all babies receive an equal start at life.

Along with her endless social justice activities, Nancy was the role model of a mother and grandmother, and always prioritized family. When her daughters Diana and Emily were growing up, she managed to balance parenting with political work and social activism. And when Emily and Diana had their own children (Mia, Marlon, and Justice), Nancy was never too busy to drive through the Bay Bridge traffic to take them to sports team practices/events and other activities, or to celebrate any special moment with them. As Mia grew older, Nancy took her on several exotic vacations. Within her own generation, she had a transformative impact on her two life-partners, first Jon Frappier, and during the last year of her life, Doug Davis.

Nancy also had an unusual number of close friends and was endlessly generous with all of us, sharing her passions for art and music of various genres, multiple cultures, and endless other interests. We each have many stories about how she transformed us. At the Memorial, one close friend highlighted Nancy's optimism even in her last months, adding, "I see the world differently because of her." Another highlighted how "just being Nancy," she ended up listening to the problems of the nurses who were giving her chemotherapy treatments. In the lyrics of a song written for Nancy, another friend added, "Never taking as much as you gave." Another, an artist, plans to dedicate her *Día de los Muertos* altar and exhibit to Nancy this year. And from a younger generation, one of her daughters' friends expressed her gratitude: "She changed my life; she embraced me; she encouraged me to finish school."

Before the Memorial, yet another friend highlighted Nancy's ability to bring a great diversity of people into a large extended family. This multiracial diversity, including friends from all walks of life, from many communities, and from two (eventually three) generations, was reflected over several decades in the warmth of the Frappier family's annual Christmas Eve parties, organized by Nancy, Emily, and Diana.

Nancy did so much to bring justice to this troubled world and to so many individuals within it. Even as we will sorely miss her, we celebrate her incredible life. Our memories of Nancy will inspire us to carry forward her legacy, and to stretch our own capacities and efforts to build a more just and equal world.