

A daughter's perspective of Florence Ross
by Anne Maron

Florence was no ordinary Jewish mother. She was a feminist before there was a feminist movement and a civil rights activist before a prominent civil rights movement emerged in the national conscious. I am 64. Here are some lessons I learned from her.

The first lesson I remember my mother teaching me was in regard to the "N" word. I was 7 years old. My friend, Kathy, was at our house playing. She used the "n" word, something I had rarely heard but knew the meaning of. From somewhere in the house came my mother's voice, louder and deeper than usual. She said, "Kathy, we DON'T use that word in our house." Gulp.

Next, I remember her forbidding the use of the term "girl" when referring to the women, usually African-American, who occasionally cleaned house for us. Unfortunately, that term was meant to demean also and was widely used even by people who should have known better. At least my mother knew better.

Then there were the Human Relations Workshops she organized and held in our living room monthly. She tried to spread the message of understanding and acceptance between blacks and whites. This was the early 1950's. My friends' mothers were definitely not doing that in their living rooms.

When I was 17, in 1962, my mother sent me off to the Hampton Institute of Virginia, now Hampton University, to integrate a summer social science program. I was one of two white kids at this predominately black college. I felt right at home and had one of the best and most important experiences of my life. My mother had prepared me, you see, to be a human being, not a white person.

My mother instilled me with optimism. The future holds promise. Tomorrow will be brighter. You can do anything you put your mind to. She taught me that adversity can be overcome, that you should look for the lesson in our experiences, good or bad. Be open to change and embrace it. She was the first "Be all you can Be" cheerleader. The Marines stole that slogan from her.

So for this celebration of her 90 years, I say, Mom, you did good. You raised two self-actualized kids, and have helped countless others your "adopted" kids to grow up to become successful adults.

You have helped countless adults to see farther than the tips of their own noses, and you have taught them to seek justice and pursue it. You have improved everyone you have touched with your love and wisdom. I love you very much and am proud and privileged to be your daughter.