

# REMEMBERING

From page 1

embrace.

A farmer in Alva keeled over among his crops. A man left his office in downtown Cape Coral and fell to his knees in the parking garage, a fatal heart attack. A 40-something mother was diagnosed with breast cancer, and then killed by it, all in the span of the last 12 months. And thousands of miles away, a war rages on from which not everyone

who once lived here and fought there in 2007 will return.



Most of their lives revolved around a circle of family and friends. For the rest of us, equipped with our own circles and memories, it may be hard to find them significant.

How much should we reasonably care about those souls we may have passed only briefly, or not at all? Was he the bus driver with the handle-bar mustache? The shoe salesman with the red-rimmed eyes? The youthful teacher at the parent/teacher evaluation who offered the firm, calloused handshake? The elder

bagger at Publix who always smiled? A friend of a friend? Someone died, only that much is sure.

In defiance of mere anonymity, therefore, four tributes follow, celebrating those who left us in 2007 without a blaze of public glory. They are merely three of the 148,865 who depart the land of the living in every single 24 hours on this space-born planet. But they lived in our community, they were our neighbors, and they were here on New Year's Day 2007. Now they're gone.

So let us recognize them in these pages vitally, once, or one more time. Let us salute them for all times as our very own.

"A hero is someone who has given his or her life to something bigger than oneself"

— Joseph Campbell

## Ruth L. Faith

Ruth Faith, who worked throughout her life as, at times, a rocket scientist, engineer and philanthropist, never married and had no children. Her friend Dotti Ham, 64, said Faith's family was, the world at large.

"She had a commanding presence," Ham said. "Her voice was very deep, and sometimes people may not have seen the kindness because of the voice...She was someone that embraced people. She was kind and gentle."

Among other generosityes, Faith, born in 1930, gave a sizable donation to endow a scholarship for young women to study mathematics at Florida Gulf Coast University. The Ruth L. Faith endowed scholarship fund recipients are to be full-time freshmen at FGCU and pursuing an undergraduate degree in Mathematics. Two awards will be made annually and two new undergraduates will be chosen each year.

Family therapist Bonnie Dewar, who knew her through the women's organization Zonta International, an organization of executives in business and the professions working together to advance the status of women, said Faith chose to live her life as an independent person, who gave in a variety of ways.

"She wasn't just someone who gave money, she gave time," Dewar said. "She respected the idea very much that women could do anything they wanted to do. She didn't respect glass ceilings."

Ham moved to Fort Myers in 1978 and met Faith then. Since that time she grew to know her in three ways: as a business partner, through Zonta, and as a friend.

"She's been part of most of my life it seems," Ham said. "I moved here from Miami and didn't know anyone and she did things like just calling and saying 'Lets have lunch...We'd go to The Veranda sometimes, sometimes to the bagel shop. We didn't have one particular place. It was always fun, always interesting.'"

Ham and others remembered Faith as helping anyone she could, on the holidays or on any day.

Linda McMicken, who lived next door to Faith for two years around 2000-02, said she didn't know her well, but often witnessed her good will.

"When I moved in here and met her she was really a great person," McMicken said. "She was always picking up people who didn't have transportation and things like that."

That was not unusual, Ham said.

"She did things like that. She never gave up helping people. If, around the holidays, there was a particular family in real need, she would adopt the whole family; make sure they had a Christmas tree with lights, and toys for the children, and food in the kitchen."

One long ago Fourth of July, she and Faith worked through Zonta to deliver gift baskets to the needy:

"I remember buying watermelons and hotdogs and a Frisbee and things, and we made gift baskets ...she and I drove into some really scary sections of Fort Myers to deliver them. She didn't have any fear of it; I did...that's the kind of thing she would

do with no hesitation."

In business, Ham said Faith always supported her.

"I was a stockbroker and she did business with me almost until my retirement."

There was little to note Faith's death in print, Ham said. "She was a wonderful person, and a very big loss to this community. I was surprised when she passed away that nothing was written about her, because she had such a strong presence."

— Evan Williams

## Charles Weaver

Charles Weaver died suddenly at home last April at the age of 70, arriving at the bedside of his wife of 47 years, Adell, to call her name, his son Corey Weaver said. Moments later he passed away. About a week later, his obituary appeared in The Community Voice, a weekly newspaper Weaver published for more than 20 years, aimed at the Fort Myers Dunbar community in which he lived.

"He can not be cloned," Vivian Hill wrote in that April 19th edition, which is filled with photographs of the gregarious looking Weaver with figures like then-Gov. Bob Graham, Rev. Al Sharpton, Rev. Jesse Jackson, and former heavyweight boxing champion Joe Frazier. "One can't fit in his shoes. No one can act as his substitute. His creative skills are one of a kind and now he is gone."

Corey Weaver worked alongside his father at the paper for 18 years, and has struggled with the loss even while keeping the Voice in print.

"This is the first holiday we've been without him," he said, adding that both he and his mother are not yet ready to speak about him at length.

Former city council woman Veronica Shoemaker, who served Dunbar and its surrounding community for 25 years, remembered Weaver as a hard working family man.

"I thought he was a wonderful person," she said last Sunday, at her Florist shop on the corner of Martin Luther King Boulevard and Veronica Shoemaker Boulevard. "He was straight on the paper, getting it done, wanting to be successful, raising a family, and I think he did a very good job...I feel very grateful for the legacy he left, and for his family continuing that."

Before starting the newspaper, Weaver was many things: he ran for city councilman and lost, owned a nightclub called "The Name of the Game," was a Bail Bondsman, a taxi driver, and a mortgage broker, among other things.

"He was a visionary, who used the marketplace as a vehicle for achieving self sufficiency and he kept forging ahead towards his goal," Hill wrote. "In the mid 80s his ventures were distribution of soft drinks and juices; also during that time he (developed) a new non-toxic pest control product, an all purpose cleaner, and grooming products."

Weaver stood on a number of boards, including the Fort Myers Board of Realtors and Exceptional Children's Council, and served as a special education teacher

at Franklin Park Elementary School.

His daughter, Jacqueline Harrington, lives in Jacksonville, Flor. His older son, Cedric, died in an auto accident in August 2005.

"So that's the end of his episode," Shoemaker said. "We didn't have anything like him, nothing like Charles Weaver's Community Voice. We were a lost community."

— Evan Williams

## Gaye Levine

Lee County lost a rare Renaissance woman in May. The Sanibel resident was a passionate restaurateur, cellist, talent agent, patron of the arts, animal lover and friend. She died of cancer at home in May. She was 54.

Passion ruled her life. "She was a warrior," says friend and abstract artist Hollis Jeffcoat. "She could not stand when she found that people were being treated unjustly."

Woe be it to any successful artist if Levine heard him badmouthing a lesser known one.

"Those things were not going to get past her," Jeffcoat says.

Flautist and friend Kat Epple says, "When she and I played music together, I always had the feeling that it was like two birds flying through the trees, ducking and changing course, always synchronous... There was a real spiritual connection ... It was really like a sacrament."

She knew better than to ask Levine to play something twice.

"It was always very fresh and she just did not rehearse," Epple says. "It was kind of against her religion."

My clearest recollection of her is an evening in 1999, when she played a jazz gig at the now-defunct Liquid Café with a pianist/singer.

She worked for my husband as assistant manager of Chadwick's at South Seas Resort on Captiva, and invited us to attend. Curious about what sort of music this tough-talking, hard-living woman played, we went.

We found her at the café surrounded by a crush of friends who had turned out for one of her rare performances. Drinking a glass of red wine and lighting a fresh cigarette before finishing the last one, she talked intently, her laughter raspy from smoking, her speech saltier than any sailor's.

But when she took off her shoes, put down her glass and picked up her electric cello called Lizzy, a transformation occurred.

As she played the sleek cutaway cello, her whole body swayed while her soul poured out sweet and plaintive melodies through the strings of her instrument.

It was three or four years later that doctors found the cancer and performed a hysterectomy. Eschewing most Western medicine practices, she rejected chemotherapy as a precautionary treatment. Instead, she kicked her three-pack-a-day smoking habit cold turkey, cut alcohol and meat out of her diet and adopted a holistic, natural lifestyle she maintained until the

day she died.

Levine grew up in an Orthodox Jewish family on Florida's east coast. She earned a master's degree in music from the University of Miami and worked in sales and marketing for Motown and Arista.

She then struck out on her own in the 1980s, becoming a major force in the emerging South Beach club scene as a nightclub owner and performer. She owned Fifth Street, a nightclub and restaurant. In the '90s, she opened Cheers, a gay dance club near Coconut Grove.

She eventually tired of the east coast scene and moved to Sanibel Island in 1998. Few of her Southwest Florida friends knew much about her previous life.

After playing a large part in creating Ellington's Jazz Bar and Restaurant in downtown Fort Myers, she went on to manage Club Neptune, bringing in musical legends, including jazz violinist Jean Luc Ponty and Willie Nelson.

That's where she was when she learned she had cancer. Following her surgery and recovery, she set out on her own once again. She opened Redfish Blufish on Captiva shortly after Hurricane Charley in 2004, decorating the small restaurant with flotsam she'd found by combing the islands after the storm.

Last fall, she moved the restaurant to its current spot on Tarpon Bay Road.

She set high standards for herself and her staff, inspecting every dish before it left the kitchen.

"She cut out a picture of Thomas Keller (the culinary superstar who created The French Laundry in Napa) and put it on the side of the beverage cooler," Cohen says.

Her small-plate concept attracted a loyal following that included celebrities such as artist Robert Rauschenberg, journalist Ted Koppel, former vice president Walter Mondale and TV personality Willard Scott.

Despite the restaurant's diminutive size, "she was a very passionate wine collector who had an unbelievable selection," Cohen says.

She so loved wine that she sometimes forbade her staff to sell a specific bottle, despite the fact that the customer was willing to pay three figures for it.

Levine enjoyed the beach and tooling around town in her red Miata convertible. She doted on her dachshunds and cat and loved animals in general, often e-mailing friends pictures of touching and/or funny animals.

"As gruff as she could be, she had the softest heart," says friend Sally Maitland, of Matlacha. "It was a side of Gaye a lot of people never knew but was definitely an important part."

Janice Kemp, a close friend who spent a lot of time with Levine up until the time of her death, remembered her in ways she said she wasn't capable of before:

"In all the chapters [of her life], she's very memorable," Kemp says. "Gaye was like Belgian chocolate, it's good and it keeps going on and on and on...You met her immediately; she just knocked your socks off for her audacity, her bluntness, her freakin' power...She didn't mince words, she lived from the heart." ■

— Karen Feldman and Evan Williams