

Memorial

Judy Freespirit 1936–2010

By Susan Levinkind, 1942, Cathy Cade, 1942, Elana Dykewomon, 1949, and Pnina Tobin, 1941.



Activist, organizer, performer par excellence, Judy Freespirit died at the age of 74 in San Francisco. She leaves her son Joe, daughter-in-law Laurie, grandchildren Amy and Andrew, as well as a loyal band of ex-lovers, friends, and those who

consider her their greatest life teacher.

Judy was born Judith Berkowitz in Detroit to a working-class Jewish family. Subject to her father's incest, and pressured to diet from the age of eight, she danced and performed to survive her adolescence. She attended Michigan State, majored in drama, married, and worked to support her husband through graduate school. When he was drafted, she followed him to Japan, and gave birth to her son, Joe. In 1960, they moved to Los Angeles, where Judy finished college and worked in a psychiatric hospital.

All her life she founded and nurtured radical, activist, and educational organizations. In the early 70s, she discovered the Women's Liberation Movement and got divorced. She got trained in Radical Therapy and, with a collective, facilitated mediations with women's groups.

Judy was one of the founders of the Fat Underground—the first activist organization to deal with fat oppression. She coauthored the *Fat Liberation Manifesto*, proclaiming the rights of fat people, and organized Fat Lip Readers Theater and Fat Chance.

Judy joined the Berkeley disability movement and worked with the Center for Independent Living. Later she worked with the World Institute on Disabilities (WID) to bring the issue of fat to the movement.

She worked hard to fight the Briggs anti-gay teacher initiative in 1978 until it was defeated. She founded the Jewish Lesbian Writers Group.

Judy was recognized by NAAFA (National Association to Advance Fat Acceptance) in 1999 for her leadership of their Feminist Caucus. In 2004, she received the Bay Area Pat Bond Award, given to Lesbians over 60 who have worked unrecognized for the Lesbian community.