

## A Tribute to Felice Yeskel, April 6, 1953 – January 11, 2011

From co-worker and friend, Jenny Ladd\*

Felice was a powerful, articulate, committed activist for equity and justice. She challenged sexism, anti-Semitism, racism, homophobia and heterosexism, class and classism, and all forms of oppression. She touched thousands of people's lives with her speaking, teaching, listening, facilitating, writing, and living. She had a remarkable gift of presence in large groups and was able to inspire and move people to examine their own lives and commit to making this a more just world. She also was gifted in group facilitation – able to perceive subtle (and not so subtle) dynamics charged with pain and anger – and able to help people speak their truths by naming what she saw, non-judgmentally, opening up space for authentic and transformational communication.

She dearly loved her family – Felicia, Shira, and their extended family. She would often come to work with stories of trips to the local farm, craft projects, game nights, group singing and meaningful Jewish ritual. She had a terrific sense of humor and play - often available in the most difficult times.

Felice was curious and made a life of asking difficult questions with others in deep conversation, inquiry and action. This curiosity and commitment to truth and self awareness is what drew me to her and kept us connected. Felice and I had our struggles and challenges but we also shared a deep desire to cross personal and societal class barriers and in doing so we shared very vulnerable experiences and tender connections. My relationship with Felice has been one of the most intimate friendships I have ever had with anyone. This is very much due to both the intense friction and our face-to-face, side-by-side openness.

These last two years she has focused her laser attention on healing and receiving and giving love on a personal level and, in the process, has created even stronger and more loving community with so many of us. I feel, as many others do, that her illness catalyzed and cohered an already existing network, near and far, into a true community of love that was shared not only with Felice but with each other.

She was and is a great, complex, and beautiful spirit. I deeply miss her.

**\*Background:** Felice and I connected in the fall of 1989 at a meeting about creating a social justice training center. Over coleslaw and cold cuts we both acknowledged our different class backgrounds – she came from a Jewish working class background, brought up on the lower east side in New York and I was brought up White Anglo Saxon Academic from an owning class family in Cambridge, MA. Four years after meeting we had worked together with others to create Responsible Wealth based at United for a Fair Economy which she co-founded with Chuck Collins. We decided to start a cross-class dialogue group in 1995 which ran for 6 years; out of that we co-founded Class Action as a non-profit with the help of Dana Gillette and board members Juan Carlos Aguilar, Charles Bodhi, Jerry Koch-Gonzalez, Betsy Leondar-Wright, David Rosenmiller and Linda Stout. I left working full time for Class Action in 2006; Felice continued to hold and build the organization until her cancer diagnosis Feb 2, 2009.