



Fran Remeika
1915 - 2012

Frances Grace (Busse) (Zwickey) (Scoll) Remeika died on November 5, 2012, just two weeks short of her 97th birthday. She passed away peacefully in her apartment at Avalon in Fitchburg.



Fran was born November 19, 1915, in Meteor Township, Sawyer County, at her grandparents' farmhouse in the Wisconsin northwoods. Her parents were Joseph Busse, a farmer and adventurer, and Edith Busse, nee Way, a "city girl" from Madison. Until she was 10, Fran lived in a tarpaper-covered shack, among lumberjacks and dairy farmers, 10 miles from the nearest telephone and 30 miles from a doctor.

From her restless father she inherited a strong scientific curiosity, agnosticism, a fascination with mechanical objects, and a love of animals. She always had pets, and rescued many dogs, cats, chickens and wild creatures. For the last 30 years of her life, she was a vegetarian. Even in her late 80's, she took part in animal rights activities and went to hearings to oppose hunting of feral cats and mourning doves.

Fran's mother was of Manx/English heritage and loved reading and writing. She gave Fran a strong moral sense, optimism, a love of music and fun, and a lifelong enjoyment of words and wordplay.



Fran was the oldest of seven siblings, but lost her younger brother and playmate, Bobbie, when she was a child.

When Fran was 10, the family moved to Madison. She was intensely homesick for the northwoods, and although she finally adjusted to city life, she never lost her love for nature and the wilderness.



Fran was a teenager during Prohibition and the Depression. Unable to find other work, her father became a bootlegger and ran speakeasies in the family home at several addresses on Williamson Street and the north side of Madison, where Fran and her siblings helped their parents hide liquor and beer from police raids. Fran went along on liquor deliveries to area brothels and fondly remembered visiting with the prostitutes.

When Fran was in high school, her father started a motorcycle delivery business. Fran made friends with his delivery employees and subsequently learned to ride a motorcycle. She became the first and only woman in the Madison Motorcycle Club. Eventually she bought her own Indian “machine”, took part in a motorcycle stunt-riding act at local fairs, and said she even tried airplane wing-walking until her parents forbade it.



In June of 1933, she graduated from East High School. She started working at the Wisconsin Office of Vital Records, setting the course for her later careers. Her first marriage was in 1935, for one year, to Jared Zwickey. Fran said it was a pragmatic marriage; her father had left the family, her mother and siblings could not collect welfare as long as Fran remained in the household and held a job, and her mother would not allow her to live away from home without marrying.

In the late 1930's, Fran rose through the ranks at Vital Records, and often canoed to work across Lake Monona from her rented cottage. She then accepted a position as Assistant State Supervisor for the Wisconsin Vital Records Project as part of the Work Projects Administration. She supervised numerous projects and dozens of employees, and in 1940 went to Washington, D.C. to work for the WPA there. Her love of gadgets meant she was the only employee at work with a radio, making her office the gathering place on December 8, 1941, when President Roosevelt declared war against Japan.



Fran met her second husband, Armand H. Scoll, while working at the State Capitol Building, and dated him for several years before they were married. In 1943, when Armand was in the service, she married him in Louisville, Kentucky. Their marriage only lasted 14 months, because he was killed on New Year's Day 1945 in France at the Battle of the Bulge. It was a deep loss, and Fran mourned him for the rest of her life.

In 1945, Fran started working for realtor Rolf Darbo, joined the Madison Board of Realtors, and became a real estate agent herself. A year later she was the first Madison realtor to sell a property in a white neighborhood to an African-American family. She and Darbo were “tried” by the real estate board “vigilance committee” for “violating the code of ethics.” As a penalty, they were fined and suspended from the real estate Board. This discriminatory incident and Fran's early civil rights action were recognized in a 2006 Madison Theatre Guild play, “Surrounded by Reality”, by local playwright Nick Schweitzer.

In 1947, Fran purchased and started running a student rooming house at 630 N. Frances Street in Madison. She affectionately remem-

bered students from all parts of the world, ethnic dinners, wild parties, and graduate students roomers who went on to success and acclaim in their fields, such as film critic Richard Schickel.



In 1948, Fran started a probate research business, that continues to this day, run by her daughter Diane, as "Scoll & Remeika". Fran had learned of this vocation when she worked for vital records, and her knowledge of records helped prepare her for years of genealogical research. One of her cases went to the state Appeals Court, and another to the State Supreme Court, establishing important Wisconsin probate precedents.

Fran met Frank Lloyd Wright several times in the late 1940's. Wright had been hired as the architect for the First Unitarian Meeting House, and Fran was on the site selection committee and board of directors. With the other committee members, she visited Taliesin for dinner and discussions with Wright. Fran recalled that Mr. Wright was as "lordly" with his guests as with his apprentices, whom he treated like servants.

On February 24, 1951, Fran married her third husband, Albert "Mike" Remeika, an ex-serviceman from Connecticut whom she had known for several years. They were the first couple to exchange vows in the not-quite-finished Unitarian Meeting House. Together they continued running their rooming house business for seven years, and they remained married until Mike's death in 2008.

Fran and Mike's only child, Diane, was born in 1954. A month after her birth, Fran's mother Edith, who lived with Fran, died suddenly. Fran herself almost died shortly thereafter when she was hospitalized for over a month with complications following childbirth.

In the late 1950's, Fran and Mike invented, patented, and manufactured "The Magic Bubble Pipe", a children's toy. Fran also ran a costume rental business, and then continued it as a holiday Santa Claus suit rental business. She and Mike joined her sister Irene and husband Duke in running a Christmas tree lot. One winter was enough!



In 1958, the family moved from Frances Street to Crestwood, a housing cooperative on the west side of Madison, where Fran developed her interest in food, ethnic cooking, and collecting cookbooks. She also took jewelry-making, flower-arranging, and pottery classes, and bought a kiln which she installed in the basement.

In 1963, Fran jumped into civic life as a citizen activist, spearheading the fight against urban renewal of the Greenbush neighborhood in Madison, and losing. As the 'Bush was razed, she forced architectural changes to save an old braided Osage orange tree, which lived for 35 more years before being turned into a community sculpture by artist Harry Whitehorse. For her activism, Fran was honored by being invited to speak at the 2002 dedication of the sculpture. She also helped save the one-of-a-kind Brashi grapevine. Originally carried by immigrants from Sicily, this saved grape variety has since

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The urban renewal fight gave Fran a taste for politics, and in 1966 she ran for city council. She made it through the primary, but lost the general election. That same year, she was one of founders of the Bayview Foundation, which built low-income housing at the edge of what was once the Bush. She served on the Board for many years, and the Bayview community still thrives.

Fran, Mike, and Diane moved to Fitchburg in 1970, the year her father Joe died. They had an old farmhouse with a couple of acres, giving Fran room to garden, create wildlife habitat, welcome feral cats, and adopt abused chickens and dogs. Here Fran became a “night person”, staying up while everyone else was asleep. Fran served on the Fitchburg Planning Commission, the Zoning Board of Appeals and the Emergency Services commission. She also attended Prairie Unitarian Society and Prairie Elders, and was active in the Wisconsin Manx Society.

Elect . . . FRAN
REMEIKA
Alderman 21st Ward

A REAL NON-PARTISAN
WHO KNOWS OUR WARD!

Qualifications
for 4th term

- Active resident here since in the ward since 1970
- Member of Mike Remeika, the child, Diane, El, who served, James, Madison Ward, would High School
- Coaches, own practice in search business
- Former consultant on A&E for Medical Services in Fitchburg, Maple, Agency, Washington, DC.
- 11 years experience in and around area in Madison

Member's Claims
Advocacy Committee member

- Active participant in the organized and unorganized groups since 1983
- Vice President of Revision Foundation, Inc.
- On Executive Board, James Madison Memorial PTA
- 111 Club, Project Teach, Community School



I BELIEVE:
The 21st Ward Alderman Should:

1. BEHAVE as a link between ward residents and City Hall, representing the interests of individuals and neighborhoods, for advice and assistance by promoting their own welfare & welfare of the ward.

2. INITIATE and champion unique solutions to those problems which are unique to specific developing, existing, and new, school, fire and public transportation, emergency, shopping and cultural activities, and facilities. This must be done in cooperation with those organizations with similar problems. I believe I can do this!

3. VISIT the residents of the city as a whole in establishing policies which are applicable to specific areas, zoning, site pollution, traffic, trees, planning and housing. I believe I can do this!

MEMBER:

- National WARD Federation
- Fitchburg Council on Family Health
- Wis. Cooperative Housing Assn.
- Wis. Grandchildren Society

Fran was always vigilant about her health and interested in alternative medicine. She started regular swimming and yoga in the 1980's and 90's at various pools and health clubs. She swam, canoed, and snorkeled well into her 80's. At the age of 89, Fran refused to believe the medical explanation that her increasing paralysis and neuropathy was due to old age. Through her own Internet research, self-diagnosis, and insistence on further testing she convinced her doctors it was due to spinal stenosis and compression. Eventually, she had successful spine surgery, becoming the oldest patient in the surgeon's history.

When her busy and engaged life allowed, Fran also liked to travel. In 1977, Fran and Diane went to Ireland and England for business and family research. They went to the Isle of Man, Belfast, and Dublin where they were evacuated from the main street by a bomb scare. She travelled for business conferences as well, making trips to New Orleans and Hawaii. In the 1980's, Fran started her Lindblad Expeditions environmental cruising life, visiting the Columbia River Gorge, the Baja Peninsula, and Costa Rica.

In 1986, she purchased a small office building next to her home to expand her probate research business. One of Fran's unclaimed property cases involving a bank robber brought a Los Angeles television crew there to film Fran for an episode of “Unsolved Mysteries” that aired in 1989. The office lot was also the site of several family yard sales and hosted her sister's RV.



Fran moved to Avalon Assisted Living apartments in 2010, a wonderful place with an orchard setting, abundant wildlife visible from the windows, and a caring and committed staff. Employees Jan, Gemado, Michael, Olga, and Saphine, became true friends in her new home.

Fran woke up feeling optimistic every day, and she never turned down an adventure. She always said, “I'm not afraid to die, I just want to wake up in the morning.” Even in the last couple of years of her life, struggling with dementia, she had a ready and easy smile, a cheerful outlook, and a continued interest in nature and current events. Fran was captivated by watching hawk and eagle cams on her beloved computer, and just before her death, she supported Tammy Baldwin and the re-election of President Obama.

She is survived by her daughter, Diane "Dee Dee" Remeika (Larry Hamlin), sisters Gerry "Toots" Gapp, Irene Hanson, and Dorrie (Norm) Alff, and special cousin, Ellen Roberts. She was preceded in death by her sister, Ruth Robbins, and her brothers, Robert and Clarence "Hap" Busse. She is also survived by many nieces and nephews, cousins, and dear friends: Metje Butler, who travelled with her and visited her at Avalon; Karl Lang, who visited her until her final days and got her out in nature even in a wheelchair; Charlie Wheelock, a light-hearted, devoted, caring, and patient presence in her life every day; and Fedrick Gibbons, who called her "Mom" and whom she dearly loved. The family also wishes to thank Group Health Doctor Claudiu Gherlan and his staff, who took such generous and attentive care of Fran in her last years.

An informal celebration of Fran's life will be held on Saturday, January 19, 2013, from 11 a.m. to 1 p.m. in the Gaebler Living Room of the First Unitarian Society, 900 University Bay Drive, Madison. In lieu of flowers or gifts, memorials may be made to the pet rescue, animal rights, environmental, or progressive political organization of your choice.



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