

Frances Naftalin MAYOR'S WIFE, LIBRARY BOARD MEMBER

A life full of politics and intellect



« SHE WAS THE PERFECT POLITICIAN'S WIFE. SHE WAS A GOOD LISTENER. SHE WAS INTERESTED IN PUBLIC AFFAIRS. »

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Frances Naftalin, the wife of former Minneapolis Mayor Arthur Naftalin and an avid reader whose passion for books and public service led her to preside over the city's library board, died in her Minneapolis home on Friday. She was 95.

She had suffered strokes and seen her health decline since her husband died in 2005, family members said.

While Naftalin supported her husband as he became a pioneer in DFL politics and led the city through civil rights unrest of the 1960s, she didn't conform to the stereotype that a political wife be a "lady in white gloves," according to longtime friend Arvonne Fraser.

"She was a real intellectual...an early feminist," said Fraser, who was the city's first lady in the 1980s.

Naftalin's children and friends remembered her as generous and active in community affairs, with a passion for cooking, travel and learning.

Naftalin was born Frances Healy on March 20, 1919.

While studying romance languages and psychology at the University of Minnesota in the 1930s, she met Arthur Naftalin. They spent many dates walking around the campus and sitting and talking on the library steps

before he proposed to her one spring evening.

Frances Naftalin came from a Republican family, but switched to the DFL Party before her 1941 marriage.

The Naftalins became contemporaries and friends of Minnesota's prominent progressives of the time: Hubert and Muriel Humphrey, Orville and Jane Freeman, Walter and Joan Mondale, and others.

Jane Freeman recalled that Naftalin was so widely read that she often suggested quotes as her husband was writing speeches as an aide to Humphrey, then Minneapolis mayor, in the 1940s.

"We got together politically and we got together socially, but our social life was not card playing or beer drinking — it was talking politics, solving the problems of the world," said Freeman, adding that their political debates continued when the Freemans and Naftalins moved into the same senior home.

Arthur Naftalin served as commissioner of administration under Gov. Orville Freeman in the 1950s. He was elected mayor of Minneapolis in 1961 and led the city through racial turmoil over the next eight years.

The couple's daughter, Gail Naftalin, said her mother was constantly in the mayor's office, talking about

city issues.

"She was the perfect politician's wife — she was very friendly, well-spoken. She knew how to make conversation and she was a good listener. She was interested in public affairs."

Despite a busy political schedule, Frances Naftalin always made time for reading. Gail said her mother would pore over books late into the night. At times, she'd have trouble getting her mother's attention because she was so immersed in the *New Yorker*. (Another friend recalled that even in recent years, with her health failing, she was often seen clutching a newspaper.)

Naftalin served on many boards and committees throughout her career, but she was best known as member of the library board for 18 years, starting in 1971.

Libraries are taken so for granted," she told a reporter in 1980. "Sometimes, even now, people have no idea what storehouses of information are in them."

In addition to her daughter, Naftalin is survived by sons Mark of Westport, Conn., David of Los Angeles, and five grandchildren.

Family members said that Naftalin's remains were donated to the University of Minnesota for research.

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