

Following a valiant two month struggle against Covid-19, Thelma Violetta McNish Ramirez took her final breath on the evening of Tuesday, June 2, less than one week shy of her 70<sup>th</sup> birthday. She had spent nearly sixty days at Robert Wood Johnson University Hospital in New Brunswick, New Jersey, and succumbed to the dreaded disease after five weeks on a ventilator. This heroic fight for life so clearly captures the tenacity of Thelma whose name translates in Ancient Greek to “will” and “strength.”

Born on June 8, 1950 in Asuncion Mita, Jutiapa Guatemala, Thelma lived a life that encapsulates the American Dream. Married to Arthur McNish for fifty three years, she gave birth to three remarkable children (Gladys, Luis, and Sully) who will forever carry on her beautiful spirit. While raising her family in New York City, Thelma developed herself professionally through a meaningful career in public health. Working as an Outreach Specialist at Sloan Kettering Hospital, she collaborated with medical experts on a wide array of research projects such as “Ethnic Disparities in the Impact of Breast Cancer on the Workforce” and “Do Our Patients Have Enough to Eat? Food Insecurity among Urban Low-Income Cancer Patients.” Deeply committed to social justice and equity, she spent her life sacrificing for and in service to others. Always in motion, Thelma spent the past year or so travelling back and forth to care for elderly friends and she did the same for children throughout her life.

Thelma represented the best and highest in the human condition. She contributed kindness and generosity to the world; her empathic nature resonated with all of those whom she met. Always concerned with ensuring that her guests were comfortable and well-fit, she epitomized hospitality in every regard. Her zest for life, sharp sense of humor, love of deep conversation, intellectual curiosity, and sensitivity to others made Thelma a true pleasure to be around always.

Thelma radiated joy, particularly when she shared stories about her children and grandchildren of whom she felt immensely proud. She beamed when discussing Gladys’ doctorate in physical therapy; she glowed when talking of Luis’ entrepreneurial success; and she was in awe of Sully’s brilliantly aesthetic sense of style. A youthful and energetic grandmother, Thelma became exuberant when talking of her incredible grandchildren (William, Cristina, and Caitlin). Thrilled with their academic and athletic achievements, as well as their gorgeous looks, she did not stop sharing their accolades with the world. Thelma had tremendous love for her daughter-in-law, Kathleen, whom she thought was just perfect for her son, as well as endless devotion to her siblings, countless cousins, nieces, nephews, and friends.

Leaving behind a legacy of love, Thelma is survived by so many: her husband Arthur McNish; her three children, William Cheatham, Christina McNish, and Caitlin McNish; her daughter-in-law Kathleen; her brothers and sisters; her nieces and nephews; and so many dear friends.

Thelma campaigned for social justice in all forms, and the nation’s racial disparities truly troubled her. As a woman of color, she lived a life filled with meaning and purpose. Please share her story, and her legacy will endure.