

**B”H**  
**OCJAC A project of Jewish Heritage Programs**  
**119 N. 3rd Street, Philadelphia, PA 19106, 215-923-1222 -\*\*\*\*\*-+**

## **“The Zena Kaplan Memorial Art Exhibition”** **September 4-23rd, 2009**

### **Biography by Deborah Kaplan Mouhib**

My Mother, Zena, passed away in late March of this year from Alzheimer’s disease. Her work of more than 50 years is a legacy of intense intellect and a passion for color.

The first thing you would notice about Zena is that she was friendly, charming and had a real zest for life.

She received a B.A. and masters degree in political science while her children were still young and discovered painting in the late 50’s. Studying at the Art Students League in NYC, she consumed the abstract energy of the New York Painters and worked in a variety of medium throughout her life. During a 12 year relationship with Henri Bendel’s in New York, Zena painted custom napkins and tablecloths, pillows and ties.

After moving to San Diego, her work reflected the new landscape with its exotic plant shapes and tropical colors. Each new work began as an exploration of how shapes can dance around the space with line and color in reaction to each other. On her studio door a sign read: SURROUND YOURSELF WITH COLOR AND SING ALL DAY

Zena’s words taken from the notes left on the door of her studio for visitors.....

“I’ve gathered all my “warmest” clothing for a stay in Vermont. I expect to return to my studio on May 30th and again will look forward to your delightful visits. Something new is always happening here; this time I’m painting silk ties, One-of-a-kind in the ENTIRE WORLD, guaranteed to make the wearers feel buoyant about themselves and life.... As ever, Zena”

“DEAR HIGHLY RESPECTED PATRONS  
AND ART LOVERS”

I am going on a “Safari” in the Arizona desert. Therefore I will not be in the studio from Oct 22 –the 30th. Not that I need “reinvigorating”. What I do need is a healthy revival of the public interest in the ancient art of hand-painting and appreciation thereof. So if someone could hype that up while I’m on vacation, I’ll be forever grateful. Honest.

As ever, Zena

Some remarks written about her:

“It is in the true sense and heart of the artist that Zena Kaplan is compelled to paint and create; often music sets this whole process in motion. She is a contemporary fine artist who exhibits her museum level paintings in juried shows, galleries and public spaces including the San Diego Art Institute. Her work has been exhibited in New York, Connecticut, California, Sweden and Philadelphia. She is collectible and collected.”

### **Zena Kaplan’s Artist Statement**

*“I cannot live without color or good music.*

*The improvisations, unfamiliar tonalities, unexpected twists and turns, uncharted territories, inventiveness, exciting rhythms and varying moods motivate me in my work.*

*I feel an inner excitement when I paint that results not in realistic representation, but in shapes and forms that appear in my search to express my delight in hearing classical music and most of all, live Jazz.*

*Thus what results is an intensely personal response, aware at the same time that I live in a world of conflict and turmoil. Although the process is difficult, I am most fulfilled when I paint. “*

### **What scrabble means to the Kaplan's By Dora Kaplan, Granddaughter of Zena Kaplan**

Scrabble is Game of words. In my family it’s also a game of patience. Lots and lots of patience. Every move lasts long enough to read the New York Times front to back and solve the crossword puzzle. One of my fondest memories of my grandmother took place around a scrabble board. It was a time when my family had the rare opportunity to be together. You see, we Kaplans don't just play scrabble...we really play.

My grandmother was (and still is) scrabblemaster. She had the ability to turn the most frustrating letters into miraculous words. Anyhow, I was about eleven and had never seen the fabled scrabble tournaments. Of course, as Queen of the Letters, grandma sat at the head of the table. To her left was my mother, Barbara. I sat on her lap scanning the dictionary. On my grandma's right sat my aunt Deborah. Next to aunt Deborah was aunt Phyliss.

The board was filling slowly with massive words, half of which I would need a dictionary for. Despite the cool California temperature, it was sizzling on that board. Grandma, of course, led the points. Hot on her heels was Phyliss. Not far behind, my mother was busy twisting her letters. And flaming to the roots of her red hair was my aunt Deborah. My grandfather had steered clear of the battle zone hours ago and had chosen to turn in for the night. Suddenly rising from the silence came my grandmother's voice. Quiet at first, but slowly becoming audible. "L...L...L..."

I looked to my mother and aunts to see if they were aware of chant. The only sound they were making was shifting their letters like madmen. Apparently, I was the only one aware of the strangeness occurring at the head of the table. "L...L...L,L,L."

The clicking of the letters ceased. All three sisters exchanged glances. Who would get to break grandma's trance? There was a moment of unspoken argument. It seemed Deborah had lost. She sighed. Her hand stretched and gave an unnaturally loud yawn. No luck. "Hey! Earth to mom. just because you keep saying it, doesn't mean it will appear."

Grandma stared at her letters. It was Phyliss's turn. "Hey ma. Its fine if you don't have it. Just put something on the board. It's been too long."

Grandma smiled. Barbara's turn. "Mom c'mon. Dora's looking up profanities in the dictionary and I don't think you want to her to make it to F." Guilty as charged. I was eleven and curious. That statement did the trick. But not immediately.

Grandma gave a satisfied smile and gazed around the table. She had something good. We all knew any hope we had of comeback was about to get blown away. Slowly she set the letters down, taking care to ensure they were in the correct box and not a degree too crooked. The infamous L led the way to her victory. And was secured when her ten point Z landed on the triple word. All seven letters used and the whole package worth triple. There was a collective groan from Barbara, Phyliss, and Deborah.

Grandma smiled, took out her New Yorker, leaned back in her chair, and pretended to read. "I won," she said from behind the paper. I could hear her smile. We all smiled with her. Yes, grandma Zena Kaplan would always be unmatched in this game. And now, irreplaceable in life.

Family is a beautiful thing. Every member is infinite in value. Rest in peace grandma Zena. And may wherever you are have a scrabble set.