

Diane McDowell, 76, a teacher of children with special needs, remembered as an advocate for women and young people, died February 13 in Mount Sinai Hospital, Manhattan.



Born and raised in Midland Beach, she relocated to Florida in the 1990s, and was living in Pompano Beach and working as a teacher. When she became ill several months ago, she returned to Staten Island to live with her daughter, Serena Stonick, of Grymes Hill.

Miss McDowell was a graduate of Tottenville High School and earned both a bachelor's and master's degree in special education from the College of Staten Island, Willowbrook. Before she relocated to Florida she taught for a time at PS 25, a special education school on the campus of Mount Loretto in Pleasant Plains.

A great-grandmother, grandmother, and a single mother who raised five children, Miss McDowell was also the author and illustrator of several children's books. Ms. Stonick called her mother "a true Renaissance woman."

"In true Renaissance style, my mother was an artist, an author, an educator, a seamstress, a choreographer, a role model and a mentor. Among her many talents of writing, illustrating and publishing children's books, she could also sew dresses and costumes, fix a toilet or design a pool, while at the same time educating some of the most vulnerable population of students and also representing her colleagues as a union representative," Ms. Stonick said.

"She was a trailblazer, a staunch supporter of women's rights. She strongly believed in the empowerment of woman and women's equality," said former Rep. Dan Donovan, who had been helping Ms. Stonick, his fiancée, care for her mother.

"She was an inspiring woman," said Miss McDowell's daughter, Judith MaGee. "She inspired all of us to do our best and never give up. She was passionate about her family, her grandchildren and great-grandchildren."

While she lived in Pompano Beach, Miss McDowell also enjoyed running for fitness. She would run at least three-miles a day along the boardwalk and beachfront, her daughters said.

In addition to Ms. Stonick and Ms. MaGee, Miss McDowell is survived by two sons, Anthony Stonick and David Bungarz, and a daughter Elizabeth Bungarz. She is also survived by seven grandchildren and three great-grandchildren.

Funeral arrangements are being handled by Casey Funeral Home, Castleton Corners. Arrangements include visiting and services from 2 to 6 p.m. Saturday. In lieu of flowers the family has requested donations be made to the Cancer Center of Staten Island University Hospital.