

Survivor Of Russian Persecution Celebrates 103rd Birthday

By Boruch Shubert

Dignitaries and friends came together this past week at the Jewish Community Council of Greater Coney Island's (JCCGCI) Surf Solomon Senior Center to celebrate the 103rd birthday of Buzya Kimelfeld, a beloved member of the center whose unusually long life is even more remarkable given its turbulent beginnings.



Buzya Kimelfeld being awarded a plaque by Brooklyn District Attorney Charles J. Hynes upon her 103rd birthday, accompanied by her son and Rabbi Moshe Wiener, executive director, Jewish Community Council of Greater Coney Island (which sponsored the event).

As her son Peter explained, Mrs. Kimelfeld was born on March 20, 1908, in a small village in the Ukraine. While Buzya was just a young child, her mother died from an illness; when Buzya's father traveled to a nearby village to obtain food, he was brutally murdered in a pogrom. As the oldest child, little Buzya had no choice but to become the caretaker of her newly-orphaned younger brother and sister, a role that forced her to live by her wits as she repeatedly managed to shield her siblings from the anti-Jewish Russian authorities.

Growing up amidst poverty and government oppression, Buzya used her innate intelligence and survivalist instincts to pick up multiple skills – sewing,

sales, and mathematics – that enabled her to become a productive member of society. The proud young woman went on to marry and lead a family that today includes two grandchildren – both of whom are physicians – and numerous great-grandchildren. After decades of living under Communism, Buzya's lifelong dream of freedom was finally realized when she immigrated to the United States in 1991.

The birthday celebration was highlighted by an appearance from Brooklyn District Attorney Charles Hynes. Commending her for having survived intense persecution and building a successful life, the DA presented Kimelfeld with a Citation of Honor that proclaimed her an "Extraordinary Elder." Surf Solomon Director Grace Brandi regaled Kimelfeld with greetings from Mayor Michael Bloomberg – who stated, "You have shown perseverance and a strong sense of *tikkun olam*" – and Brooklyn Borough President Marty Markowitz, who officially declared the day as "Buzya Kimelfeld 103rd Birthday Celebration Day" in Brooklyn. The still-sprightly senior was also treated to special congratulatory messages from a number of other government officials.

Noting that Kimelfeld is entering her 104th year, Rabbi Moshe Wiener, executive director of the Jewish Community Council of Greater Coney Island, explained that Psalm 104, which states that a person goes out to perform labor "in the evening," is telling us that we accomplish our life's mission each day until the very end of our lives. "Buzya continues to bring light to everyone around her with her positive outlook on life," Rabbi Wiener emphasized. "She understands that her purpose is to make the world a better place."

A number of Kimelfeld's fellow seniors paid tribute to her, singing English, Russian and Yiddish songs that aptly expressed the joy of the occasion. "This unique event demonstrates the value of our five senior centers," Rabbi Wiener concluded, "which enables the community's older adults to maintain their physical and emotional independence."