

Survivor of Two Pandemics, Woman Celebrates 103rd Birthday

By Abby Luby

Angelina Friedman just turned 103 and because she is a big New York Jets fan, the centenarian was honored with a special visit by former Jets stars Freeman McNeil and Wesley Walker.

Walker and McNeil joined Friedman last Thursday to celebrate the big day along with about 50 friends, residents and health care workers at North Westchester Restorative Therapy & Nursing Center in Mohegan Lake where she is a long-term resident. The main room was festooned with balloons, Jets flags and a large birthday cake.

To say that Friedman is a survivor is an understatement. Her mother died giving birth to her on a ship crossing the Atlantic Ocean from Italy, although her mother may have contracted the Spanish Flu of 1918, according to Friedman's daughter, Joanne Merolo, of Mohegan Lake.

"My mom's two young sisters were also on the ship and they were joining their father who emigrated from Italy to the U.S. to work as a stone mason," Merolo said.

Friedman overcame breast cancer in 1979 and during the past year-and-half twice survived COVID-19.

Friedman was thrilled to see the two former Jets players, and even though she has difficult hearing, she sang out "Thank



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Angelina Friedman was joined last week for her 103rd birthday at North Westchester Restorative Therapy & Nursing Center in Mohegan Lake by former New York Jets Wesley Walker and Freeman McNeill.

you! Thank you!"

Merolo said her mother was always a character – in the most complimentary

way.

"And she still is. As a teen my friends felt comfortable hanging out at her house

in the Bronx on Mosholu Parkway because they felt safe with my mom," she said.

When Friedman got sick in 2012, Merolo took to Facebook, suddenly hearing from old friends.

"People I hadn't heard from for 40 years were climbing out of the woodwork asking all about my mom," Merolo said. "They never forgot her."

Merolo recalled her 18th birthday when "one of my friends got wasted and fell asleep on my mother's lap. My mom didn't move for hours."

Friedman would also show up at an after-hours club at 2 a.m. and dance.

"She just wanted to be around us, have fun, but really she was making sure we were alright," Merolo said.

At her birthday celebration, with Walker and McNeil standing behind her for a photo op, Walker looked at Friedman and said "You're 103. That's a milestone."

"Freeman and I have been helping the elderly in their communities for years," said Walker, a former Jets wide receiver. "As we age ourselves and as athletes dealing with head trauma and other health issues, we can relate and we want to help."

"Helping senior citizens, showing compassion and sharing our experiences means a lot to them and to us," McNeil added.

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