



**a Generous
SPIRIT**

Lives On

**THROUGH THE GRAHAM FAMILY FOUNDATION'S
SUPPORT OF PAWS' SENIOR PROGRAM,
THE LATE OLGA GRAHAM CONTINUES TO
MAKE A DIFFERENCE IN THE LIVES OF SENIOR
CITIZENS AND THE COMPANION ANIMALS THEY LOVE.**

Olga Graham was a generous spirit—a devoted animal lover and lifelong mom to several cats, an active volunteer, and a longtime elementary schoolteacher who truly made a difference in many of the lives she touched during her 98 years. For three decades, she worked for the New York City Public Schools, primarily in the Bronx. She was known for developing creative and thoughtful lesson plans and always took the time to help a child who was in need of extra support and encouragement.

“My Mom’s whole philosophy in life was that it’s never too late for second chances,” says Oakland resident Dorothy Graham. “She always tried to work with the hardest-to-reach kids—those everyone else had given up on. My Mom just made such an impact on so many of her students’ lives.”

After retiring, Dorothy’s mother and her father, Victor Graham, moved to Los Angeles. However, Olga definitely did not view retirement as time for slowing down. “She was passionate about volunteering,” says Dorothy. “She became a mentor and reading tutor in the Los Angeles city school system, and received many awards and a lot of recognition for her work.”

Olga also worked as a volunteer in nursing homes. “She was very concerned about seniors’ well-being and their loss of independence,” Dorothy says. “Even when she was quite frail herself and losing her eyesight, she would continue to make telephone comfort visits for homebound seniors so they wouldn’t feel isolated. That was just her spirit, she was amazing.”

When her husband died in 1987, Olga established the Graham Fund at the Over 60 Health Center in Berkeley, which is part of LifeLong Medical Care (Dorothy continues to support the fund in honor of her parents). “The Graham Fund helps low-income seniors stay independent and avoid going into nursing homes for things Medicare won’t necessarily pay for—adaptations to homes, certain medical supplies, even phone bills. It’s a true life-saver for so many,” explains Dorothy.

While Olga worked as a volunteer in nursing homes she witnessed firsthand another “life-saver” for many senior citizens: the power of the human-animal bond. “She became particularly interested in programs where animals were brought in to visit residents,” recalls Dorothy. “She thought it was remarkable how seniors who normally were despondent would make an effort to communicate with the animals. She really became aware of the difference the human-animal bond can make for people.”

Olga passed away on January 31, 2005. Before she died, she asked Dorothy to help her set up another fund that could be used to continue projects that were important to her after she was gone. Dorothy thought of her mother’s enthusiasm for the animal visits

to the nursing homes and also kept in mind Olga’s lifelong love of animals, especially cats. Dorothy is a cat lover as well, and proud owner of Pepsi, a 13-year-old “tuxedo” cat.

A longtime supporter of PAWS since the group’s early days of serving people living with HIV/AIDS, Dorothy remembers how excited she was when she learned that the organization was starting a pilot program for low-income seniors in 2006. “I felt like it was the most tailor-made cause to honor my mom’s memory,” she said. “She was passionate about animals and about seniors’ independence. The PAWS senior program, which provides vet care, pet food and supplies, and volunteer support for the companion animals of low-income people over 60, is just an incredible blending of those two things.”

PAWS president, John Lipp, recalls meeting Dorothy for the first time. “Dorothy was one of our first funders to step forward and support the pilot program for seniors. I remember how passionate she was about the work we were doing and our potential to

expand our services. That initial grant - it was \$3,000—gave us the confidence that we were doing the right thing and that there were people out there who understood how important it was to keep seniors together with their beloved pets.”

“It is one of the major programs now supported by the Foundation,” says Dorothy.

Lipp is grateful for the continued support. “To date, the PAWS’ Senior Program has received more than \$50,000 in support from the Graham Family Foundation and we’re now serving over 156 low-income seniors in the program. Olga was a remarkable woman and Dorothy has done so much to ensure her mother’s legacy continues.”

PAWS staff keep Dorothy informed about the impact the foundation’s donations are having on the seniors and companion animals benefiting from PAWS’ support and services. “I’ve been absolutely inspired by the stories,” Dorothy says. “These seniors have such a strong bond with their pets. But as they age, they become less able to take care of their animals. There are many things about aging that make caring for a pet more difficult—physical limitations, financial constraints, isolation. Helping to provide that essential ‘background work’ for senior pet owners—food, vet care, grooming—relieves their worries and allows them to enjoy the beauty of their friendship with their companion animals.”

She adds, “PAWS Senior Program prevents seniors from relinquishing their pets, which would be heartbreaking and devastating for them—and their animals. It helps to keep seniors happier and healthier, and pets in homes. These things about the program touch my heart, and would’ve touched my mom, too.” 🐾

—JANE IRENE KELLY



A priceless memory as Dorothy celebrates her mother Olga’s 95th birthday in 2002. Olga passed away in 2005, but her legacy lives on through the Graham Family Foundation.