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Long-time P-FLAG activist Sally Ann Zumbach, well known for her advocacy and support of the lesbian and gay community, died Monday, August 7, at her home.

Zumbach, 61, was the president of the Triangle chapter of Parents and Friends of Lesbians and Gays (P-FLAG). She had been active with the organization for the past decade, and for many, to mention the organization was to immediately call to mind its most visible member.

Though she initially joined P-FLAG in search of support after her oldest son, Mark, 37, came out to her in his mid-twenties, she quickly became an activist and ardent advocate for the rights of gay and lesbian people.

"When I came out," Mark Zumbach said, "one of Mom's first concerns was because she was so fearful about what kind of prejudice there was against gay people." "She devoted her life to peace, justice, human rights, and family values," he added.

During the time she worked with P-FLAG, Zumbach did much to educate others about living with and loving their gay and lesbian relatives and friends. She often spoke to civic and social groups, and was a mainstay at North Carolina's annual Pride celebrations.

Along with P-FLAG, Zumbach was active with the The Religious Network for Gay and Lesbian Equality (TRNGLE), and was considering joining the congregation of Pullen Memorial Baptist Church in Raleigh. Her son Mark said that, despite being Roman Catholic, Zumbach had been drawn to Pullen because of the church's commitment to social justice and its support of gay and lesbian people. "She felt Pullen, the congregation, the people there were just so special," he said. "She really felt like that was a home, such a safe haven."

When area activists decided to create a community center dedicated to the needs of lesbian and gay people in the Triangle area, Zumbach was at the forefront. When the group formed Coalition 807 (a coalition comprised at this point of P-FLAG, TRNGLE, Helpline, and the ASPYN youth group) in 1994, Zumbach was a founding member and served as the organization's secretary. Now known as Community Works!, the organization just opened an office in the Community United Church of Christ in Raleigh.

Zumbach also volunteered with the Respond Program of the AIDS Service Agency of Wake Co., driving ASA clients to medical appointments. A registered nurse, Zumbach had worked at both Rex and Wake Community Hospitals in Raleigh prior to joining the medical department at IBM in Research Triangle Park. She worked at IBM for 17 years before retiring in 1990. Zumbach is survived by her husband, Arthur, son, Mark; daughter, Debra; sons and daughters-in-law David and Anita Zumbach, Scott and Ann Zumbach, and Todd and Jodi Zumbach; and nine grandchildren.

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There were many parts to Sally Zumbach's life, many ways to know her: as a wife, a mother, a grandmother, a mother-in-law, a co-worker, a neighbor, an admired community leader. Each of us knew her in different ways and have memories that connect to different experiences with Sally.

Each of us has a story or thought about her to share. None quite like the other. None quite able to completely sum her up.

But like the pieces of a quilt stitched together to make the whole, we can share our stories and thoughts and call to mind the Sally we know and love.

Sally Zumbach had many gifts: beauty and charm; a sense of justice; she had courage, passion, energy, patience and perseverance; she had great poise and grace, a deep spiritual reservoir of faith, hope and love.

Her greatest gift, I believe, was her gift of accepting. And she knew how to let you know that she accepted you, and that you were worthy of everyone's acceptance.

Sally was always on the front line for gay rights. She never flinched or avoided taking a public stand, even though she was a modest person and didn't crave the spotlight. She was disarming in her soft, gentle yet firm stand on gay rights.

It was always wonderful to observe people just meeting her who listened to her tell her story of how she came to accept that her son, Mark, was gay, came to understand the prejudice and discrimination that he experienced, and came to be his advocate and the advocate for every gay, lesbian, and bisexual person as if she were Mom to them all.

People were always mesmerized by Sally and seemed to say that her response is the only way a mother would respond, to say that it is the way they would respond in the same situation.

Sally helped people identify with her; she brought them into her world, her mind, her heart. And, being that close to Sally, you were persuaded, you got converted.

When mothers or fathers, struggling to accept that their own son or daughter is gay, called me, it was to Sally that I would send them. I knew that in her presence and with her support, they too would come to acceptance.

If the leaders of this world were Sally Zumbachs, there would be no wars, no violence, no injustice, no cruelty. There would be universal peace and grace, and everyone would be accepted for whom they are. We mourn our loss in Sally's dying, because there are so few like Sally Zumbach. We mourn her dying, because we love and honor her. We mourn her leaving, because she loved and honored us. We give thanks for her life. We have been blessed in knowing, loving and being loved by her, and what Sally has given to us we will never let go.

"Sally was such a genuine person, and her genuineness and integrity and her vulnerability helped her connect with so many people. She was so much herself. She made available so much of her own struggle to work through all kinds of justice issues." "I find the needs of parents whose children happen to be gay are often neglected. They have their own particular shock and confusion, and often no one to talk to. "Sally used her personal experience so well and many parents were helped by her. This was only one example of the ways she expressed compassion and courage. We will miss in this

community the breadth and depth of her caring.” —Dr. Mahan Siler, former pastor of Pullen Memorial Baptist Church