



NEW YORK STATE SENATOR

Jose M. Serrano

Senator Serrano Presents Upper West Sider Emily Kessler with 2015 Woman of Distinction Award

JOSÉ M. SERRANO May 13, 2015

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(Upper West Side, NY)- Senator José M. Serrano honored Upper West Sider, Emily Kessler, with the New York Senate 2015 Woman of Distinction Award. This award highlights distinguished women across the state who have made significant contributions to our society.

Emily Kessler is a Holocaust survivor who grew up in the former Soviet Union. During World War II, she was forced into imprisonment at a Ukrainian concentration camp. Facing unspeakable horrors at the hands of the Nazis, she lost many beloved members of her family. She survived and was able to escape with her two-year-old son. She eventually moved to New York City, making the diverse and inclusive Upper West Side her home.

One day while walking in New York City, Emily saw a mandolin in the window of a music shop, which brought back many wonderful memories of her pre-war childhood. She scraped the money together to purchase the mandolin and quickly relearned how to play. She became such a masterful musician, that in November of 2014, at the age of 97, she was given the honor to perform at Lincoln Center's Avery Fisher Hall.

"I played when I was ten years old - I played the mandolin and violin. I didn't have a violin when I came to the United States, and I couldn't buy one, so I bought a mandolin. I didn't play when I was in terrible grief, but finally time heals everything. I am just happy to exist. I have lost a lot of people and saw a lot of bad things, but I still believe in good. I believe there are good people and this makes me happy. I stick to good people, and they stick to me too," said Emily Kessler.

Serrano presented Kessler with the Woman of Distinction Award and a Senate Proclamation with many of her friends and neighbors on hand. After the award ceremony, Kessler performed a number of traditional mandolin arrangements.

"Emily Kessler is truly an amazing individual and the epitome of a survivor, facing all her obstacles with determination, strength and passion. She is an immensely talented and beautiful artist, who shares her joyful music for her friends and neighbors to enjoy. I am so fortunate to have this opportunity to honor such an inspirational figure who is - without a doubt - a woman of true distinction," said Senator Serrano.