

LEGISLATIVE RESOLUTION honoring esteemed and cherished teacher and author Bella "Bel" Kaufman upon the occasion of her 100th Birthday

WHEREAS, It is the sense of this Legislative Body that certain individuals who have distinguished themselves in their profession and have brought both enlightenment and pleasure to thousands upon thousands of people around the world through their work merit the recognition and celebration of certain milestones in their lives; and

WHEREAS, Attendant to such concern, and fully in accord with its long-standing traditions, this Legislative Body is pleased and justly proud to congratulate and honor renowned author and teacher Bella "Bel" Kaufman upon the occasion of her 100th Birthday; and

WHEREAS, Born Bella Kaufman in Berlin, Germany, where her father was studying medicine, on May 10, 1911, she is best known for her 1965 best-selling novel UP THE DOWN STAIRCASE and as the granddaughter of, and the last living person to have known, her grandfather, the great Sholom Aleichem, well-known as one of history's greatest Yiddish authors and playwrights, the Mark Twain of Yiddish literature, on whose work, the story about Tevye the dairyman, the renowned musical "Fiddler on the Roof" is based; and

WHEREAS, Sholom Aleichem passed away in New York City on May 13, 1916, at the age of 57 while Bel was living with her parents in Moscow, where she witnessed pivotal events in the Russian Revolution; and

WHEREAS, As she observes her 100th Birthday on May 10, 2011, Bel Kaufman poignantly also marks, during the same week, the 95th anniversary of her grandfather's passing; and

WHEREAS, Bel Kaufman will, in addition, celebrate the auspicious occasion of her 100th Birthday at a special program and reception on Wednesday, May 11, 2011 presented and hosted in her honor by Bernstein Global Wealth Management and The National Yiddish Theatre-Folksbiene, the oldest and the only remaining professional Yiddish theatre in the United States; and

WHEREAS, Though born in Germany, she was raised in Odessa, now a city in Ukraine, and her native language was Russian; she began writing at an early age and, as a child, published her first poem, "Spring," in the Odessa magazine LITTLE BELLS; and

WHEREAS, Bella "Bel" Kaufman emigrated to the United States in 1923 at the age of 12 with her parents, moving to New York City, where she first began learning the English language; and

WHEREAS, At the age of 18 she attended Hunter College in New York, from which she earned a Bachelor of Arts degree, then pursued a master's degree at Columbia University after which she began working as a teacher in various New York City high schools, along with working part-time as a writer, including articles for ESQUIRE magazine, for which she began to use the name Bel, rather than Bella, Kaufman thinking the editors would assume she was a man, a strategy which worked, leading her to use the name Bel ever since; and

WHEREAS, Bel Kaufman married the late Sydney Goldstine in 1940 and they had two children, Jonathan and Thea Goldstine; and

WHEREAS, In 1965 she published UP THE DOWN STAIRCASE, a novel, based on Bel Kaufman's own teaching experiences, about an idealistic young honors college graduate who becomes an English teacher in a New York City high school and deals with the gritty realities of her colleagues and students; it became an enormous success, remaining on the NEW YORK TIMES Best Seller list for 64 weeks and was, in 1967, turned into a highly successful and entertaining film on which she served as a consultant and in which she happily appeared in a brief cameo; and

WHEREAS, In 1979 Bel Kaufman published a second novel, LOVE, ETC. and

has, since then, written various short stories including "Sunday in the Park," which won the National Education Association/P.E.N. Short Story Contest in 1983; she has also continued as a teacher and lecturer at a number of colleges, including the New School for Social Research, Manhattan Community College, the University of Rochester, the University of Florida, and since February 2011, at age 99, at her alma mater, Hunter College of The City University of New York, where she teaches coursework on Jewish humor; and

WHEREAS, She also still spends her days at home writing in her book-lined study and being glad, as she says, that she is "too busy to get old"; and

WHEREAS, This distinguished woman, who has experienced the incredible joys and sorrows characteristic of and reserved for those with the stamina and courage to savor a full life, has inspired the lives of her friends, family, colleagues and students; and

WHEREAS, This beloved lady has distinguished herself in her chosen field of endeavor and has enriched the lives of those around her through her work and through the charm and wisdom which comes only from a fullness of years; and

WHEREAS, In keeping with its time-honored traditions, this Legislative Body is pleased to publicly recognize those such as Bel Kaufman who have reached such a remarkable age and who have witnessed and celebrated the innovations, cultural developments and awesome achievements during the last century, while themselves contributing to the growth and excellence of this great Empire State; now, therefore, be it

RESOLVED, That this Legislative Body pause in its deliberations to pay tribute to and congratulate Bel Kaufman upon the occasion of her 100th Birthday; and be it further

RESOLVED, That a copy of this Resolution, suitably engrossed, be transmitted to Bel Kaufman.