



Elayne Baliff

October 20, 1936 - March 26, 2024

Ms. Elayne Baliff, aged 87, passed away peacefully with her beloved family on March 26, 2024, in Houston, Texas. She was preceded in death by her beloved father David Marks and mother Frieda Heller Marks.

She died of complications following pulmonary illness and is survived by her twin children, daughter Elizabeth Baliff and husband David Bally of Brooklyn, New York, and their daughter Emma; her son Jonathan Baliff and wife Barbara of Houston, Texas, and their children Noah, Sam, and Eve; her brother Ira Marks and wife Frances Marks of Highland Park, New Jersey, and their son Brendan and oldest son Thomas and his wife Sloane of Richmond, Virginia.

Elayne was a master teacher, serving students and faculty for almost 50 years in the New York City, Mecklenburg County, North Carolina, and Henrico County Virginia Public Schools. She left an indelible mark on Tuckahoe Middle School in Richmond, Virginia where she was Chair of the History Department for decades, teaching thousands of twelve and thirteen-year-olds World and American History and mentoring hundreds of teachers in all departments. She was also one of the first middle school teachers in America to lead middle school students on annual trips to the United Kingdom and Continental Europe with the American Council for International Studies, a program she helped inaugurate in the Commonwealth of Virginia.

Elayne Baliff was born in The Borough of The Bronx, New York City in 1936 at a time of extreme change for the City, the United States and the World as a whole. She graduated with honors from Walton High School in The Bronx in 1954 (alumni include Penny Marshall, Shari Lewis, and Bela Abzug). As the first person in her family to go to college, Elayne graduated with a BS in Education in 1958 (again, with honors) from City College of New York, where her classmates included General Colin Powell (both were fluent in Yiddish) and the actor Judd Hirsh. She took a Masters in History from CCNY in 1962 while also beginning her teaching career in New York City.

Elayne loved CCNY (Dr. Jonas Salk was her biology professor and graduation commencement speaker) and was active in student government, the Volleyball Team, and Phi Alpha Theta, the National Honor Society in History. She was a popular student with many remarking about her sense of hilarity and laughter. Later in life, friends would remark that you could triangulate Elayne Baliff's humorous demeanor somewhere between Joan Rivers, Elaine May, and Elaine Stritch.

As New York City was in tumultuous decline in the 1960s and 1970s, Elayne took a chance with her young family and moved south – first to Charlotte, North Carolina and then to the suburbs of Richmond, Virginia. There, she was a successful teacher and administrator, but also active with causes dear to her heart – literacy and women's rights. A life-long Democrat, she was a constant presence during local, state, and national election cycles, driving fellow Dems to the polls. Elayne also always made a point of stating her Jewish credentials, dating to childhood: her family was religious, and she went regularly to synagogue. She was an active member of Congregation Beth Ahabah in Richmond where later in life she studied Hebrew and was Bat Mitzvah. When she moved to Houston, she was a proud member of Congregation Beth Yeshurun, where she was an ever-present member in the

front row on Shabbat morning services with her family – enjoying the thirteen-year-old Bar and Bat Mitzvahs she loved to teach.

As much as Elayne's success in teaching and education leadership were noteworthy, above all else, she was an incredibly devoted and capable Mother and Mother-in-Law, Sister and Sister-in-Law, Daughter, and Aunt. In 1977, She became both Matriarch and Patriarch of the Baliff Family, raising two highly energetic and challenging children. Elayne's attentiveness to "Her Elizabeth and "Her Jonathan" allowed them to achieve individual independence, an unbounded love of learning, a deep devotion to Jewish faith and values, and an unwavering commitment to family, especially one's elders. She lost her mother Frieda too early and was the most dazzling daughter to her father David, a 35-year veteran of the New York City Fire Department, whom she lovingly cared for in Richmond, Virginia till his death in 1999 at the age of 92.

Elayne was aided in her journey by a group of strong-willed, highly educated, and similarly minded women who were indispensable throughout her life. At every stage of her long life, she was blessed with friendships that softened the blows of unfair circumstances, expanded her world and worldview, and aided in the raising of the already mentioned challenging children. Friends like Professor Ricki Murphy, Anne Rockman and Marylou Buck, Dr. Terry Vance and her husband Mike, Jackie Warren and Jane Linus, her Sister-in-Law Frances and Daughter-in-law Barbara provided hours of laughter at bridge and mahjong tables, vacations, and lunches and dinners.

Over the past 28 years, Elayne took on the role she will want to be remembered most fondly: Grandmother to four incredible individuals: Noah, Sam, Emma, and Eve. To say she was the typical Jewish Grandmother would be a ridiculous understatement. Elayne Baliff's delight in her grandchildren is

legendary. She had distinct relationships with each grandchild as both infants, teens, and adults and treated them like the incredibly singular, wonderfully gifted, and individually superior people they are. Just ask her friends, whom she regaled with stories both brief and extended about honors achieved, classmates bettered, and challenges overcome. Unconditional love of her grandchildren, and their love of Elayne will be the highest of her enduring legacies.

Although Elayne's Master's dissertation was on the US Constitution, where even at the end of her life she could correct you on specific articles and amendments, she loved the language of the Declaration of Independence. And one verse stood out for her: "Let Facts be submitted to a Candid World." The fact is that Elayne Baliff was both a one-of-a-kind woman and also a classic example of a woman of her generation – a Jew and an American; a New Yorker and a Southerner; a very serious woman, and a tender Daughter, Mother and Grandmother. May her memory be a blessing as she lives on in the generations to come.

The Baliff family wishes to thank the staff of The Medallion at Seven Acres, and especially our "Team Baliff" care givers led by Ms. Brenda Moulton who were by Elayne's side for over 12 years at Apt 209/210 and at the Baliff home during the depths of the pandemic.

A graveside service will be held on Tuesday, April 2, 2024, at 11:00 AM at The Hebrew Cemetery. North 4th & Hospital Street, Richmond, Virginia 23219.

A Memorial Service will be held on April 7th, 2024, at 12:00 PM at Congregation Beth Yeshurun, 4525 Beechnut Street, Houston, Texas 77096 with lunch to follow.

In lieu of flowers or memorial donations, the Family requests that donations be

made to Elayne's favorite cause, Childhood and Adult Literacy: The Children's Literacy Initiative (<https://cli.org>); The Virginia Literacy Foundation (<https://virginaliteracy.org>); or the Barbara Bush Literacy Foundation (<https://bushhoustonliteracy.org>)

Tribute Wall

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“ Sincere condolences to the family. I am so very sorry for your loss. May God provide the necessary peace and comfort to your family and friends during this difficult time. Please remember these words of encouragement from the Bible: “Jesus plainly told her: I am the resurrection and the life. He that exercises faith in me, even though he dies, will come to life.” —John 11:20-25.

R Bell - April 02, 2024 at 11:35 AM