



## Helen Colin

April 15, 1923 - July 22, 2016

Helen (Goldsztajn) Colin an extraordinary woman of strength and valor, died at her home on Friday, July 22, 2016, surrounded by the love and unending gratitude of the family she blessed with life. Though tiny in stature, Helen cast an enormous presence as she approached each day with unstinting grace and elegance, and an astonishing charisma and charm that engaged others easily and bound them together with love and respect. "To be respected, you must give respect" was a concept both lived and often articulated by Helen. Helen created a successful life out of the enormous challenges she faced as a Holocaust survivor, in her own soft, gracious but unwaveringly tenacious and courageous manner.

Born in Tuszyn, Poland, in 1923 to Miriam and Joseph, she recalled fondly a loving childhood with an active and socially engaged family that included sister Stefa, brother Romek and an adored baby sister Selinka. Her idyllic childhood ended brutally one day when Nazi troops entered her schoolyard, burned all students' possessions and ordered Helen and all Jewish students never to return to school. Soon after, Nazis forced her family into the Lodz Ghetto. During her four years of imprisonment in the Ghetto she was starved, terrorized, and forced into slave labor. Helen ultimately lost her father who did not return one night. Fearing he had died, Helen and Stefa looked for him among corpses stacked like cordwood. Helen and Stefa found their dear father's body and buried him in a makeshift grave dug by their bare hands. Shortly after, Helen, who had known Kopel Colin and his family before the

war, was asked by him to be his wife. In a group ceremony in the Ghetto, they were married and received an extra portion of bread as their wedding gift. Inhumane treatment, disease, starvation and death continued until the final liquidation of the Lodz Ghetto in August, 1944. Helen, Kopel, her mother, brother and two sisters were forced into a cattle car to Auschwitz. At the selection process, she was separated from her husband and brother. Helen, her mother and older sister were put in one line and her baby sister in another. Helen's last memory of her mother was watching as her mother pleaded to be allowed to accompany the young sister and left Helen with her older sister, waving to them and throwing kisses. Helen said she asked a Nazi guard where they were going and he motioned to the smokestacks of the crematorium and laughed. Helen was selected for work, moved to several camps, finally ending in Bergen-Belsen Concentration Camp with her sister. Miraculously, despite contracting typhus, Helen lived to see the liberation of Bergen-Belsen on April 15, 1945, Helen's 22nd birthday.

After Liberation, Helen and her sister were sent to a Displaced Persons Camp in Germany. Weeks later, Kopel, a survivor of Dachau, came to her DP camp searching for family. They reunited and even found Kopel's brother, David, who married Stefa in the DP camp. Helen soon became pregnant but desperately wanted to go to America to start her family with Kopel. With her charm and charisma, even present after five years of horror, she persuaded those in authority to permit them to come to America. At the end of 1946, they arrived in New York and in February, 1947, Helen gave birth to their first child, a daughter. Helen always counted her immigration to America and the birth of their first child as the beginning of her life, a destiny prophesied to her by an elderly German bricklayer. Taken by her Nazi captors to perform heavy labor in a city ruin, barely alive and burning with fever, Helen approached the bricklayer, begging him to give her something so she could die. His life at risk for speaking to her, the bricklayer returned with a bottle of medicine and the day after with a hard-cooked egg wrapped in German newspaper, which

predicted the imminent end of the war. The bricklayer told Helen not to give up, as she would live to have a family, see her grandchildren and have a special life. Helen called him Opa and from this example of kindness from a righteous German, she drew strength throughout her life knowing that one must never give up nor should they label anyone based on superficial qualities. Helen often said that each person is unique and capable of great good.

After a brief stay in New York, Helen, Kopel and now two daughters came to Houston, Texas. They opened their own jewelry business, Colin's Jewelry, working together. Helen's confidence, charm and impeccable taste assured the success of their business and later her own and ongoing fine jewelry store, the Jewel Box at Smith Tower.

But, her true calling was to come. Helen was never unwilling to speak out as a Holocaust survivor. In fact, only days after the British liberated Bergen-Belsen, they asked for a survivor who spoke German to speak to German citizens who had resided outside the Concentration Camp. Helen volunteered. The German civilians were brought to the camp and there, in front of multiple pits of mass graves, her testimony was filmed and recorded and has recently been determined to be perhaps the first filming of a Holocaust Survivor giving her testimony after WWII. Helen said that despite assurance from British officers that she was protected she was very frightened, certain a Nazi sniper hiding on a roof would murder her as she spoke. But, fear did not silence her.

For more than 70 years, Helen willingly shared her experiences as a Holocaust survivor. Each time she spoke, Helen would experience anew her anguish, pain and deep sadness, but drove herself to speak because she felt that it was critically important to convey her message that a more peaceful, loving and tolerant world should be our continuing work and was possible.

She particularly cherished the opportunity to speak to younger students and implored them to remember the future rests in their hands. These students often wrote to Helen to tell her how profoundly she touched and transformed them to be more respectful of all human beings.

At her core, Helen never thought of herself as a victim but saw herself as a Survivor who believed fervently that the world could be a better place. She always spoke from her heart with no script, whether to a small group or a ballroom filled with thousands of honored guests. Helen hoped and believed that by sharing her experiences, she might touch just one person who would help her change the world to be more loving, safe, and inclusive for all.

With encouragement from dear friends who knew the power of her message, Helen published her book, "My Dream of Freedom: From Holocaust to My Beloved America" at age 89. After reading Helen's book, First Lady Barbara Bush lauded it in a handwritten letter, saying: "Your book, "My Dream of Freedom" brought tears to my eyes. Your lesson of love-not hate is so important...I wish every child could read it." All proceeds from her book fund the Holocaust Museum Houston's Helen Colin Speak Out For Tolerance Scholarship established to encourage high school students to combat bigotry and intolerance.

Helen, known as Nana, adored her children, grandchildren and great-grandchildren, calling each a "treasure". Immensely generous, she encouraged each to strive to achieve their full potential. She often said that one's mind can never be taken away. She drew great pride in her progeny's achievements, but never measured one against another. And she always cherished the hugs, kisses and opportunities to be with her family. In her talks, she told students to not to leave home angry, to forgive and to express love because a later opportunity to take back an angry word is never assured.

Helen's husband, siblings, parents and nephews Alan and Bob Kolin predeceased her. She will always be cherished by her surviving family: daughters Muriel Meicler (Marcel) and Jeanie Goldman, grandchildren Emily Quinn (Aaron), Michele Meicler and Philip Meicler (Thayer) and great grandchildren Zaia, Moriah, Naomi, Ethan, Zoe and James. She is also remembered with love by many other nieces and nephews including Keith Miller, Joy Kolin (Nat Averil), Shane Kolin (Maureen) and Jonathan, Jackie and Ann Dei. Helen also leaves her dearest friend, Fini Konstat, and Fini's family which have become an extension of her own.

The family gratefully acknowledges the extraordinary care provided at the end of her life by Houston Hospice, Jewish Family Service and Ruth Sherman, the staff and friends at Brookdale Galleria, numerous kind companions provided through At Your Side and Christian Companions and by her doctors Mark Hausknecht, Nizar Dholakia and Gregory Mangum.

In lieu of flowers, the family gratefully requests that a donation to the Helen Colin Speak Out for Tolerance Scholarship at Holocaust Museum Houston be considered and that each person reading this consider reading Helen's book, "My Dream of Freedom".

Helen's fondest hope was that we all practice and choose kindness daily. As she often quoted her grandmother, "It costs nothing to be kind."

# Tribute Wall

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“ My daughter Liv and I first met Helen Colin at a church in Kingwood, Tx. I never will forget when Ms. Colin took my daughter’s face in her hands. They both looked in each other’s eyes for a very long minute. We all were crying. Once we all gained our composure, Ms. Colin told my daughter to never forget. Helen’s story certainly caught our attention. We will never forget Her. Blessings to you, Ms. Helen, and your family.

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**Sandra Campbell** - June 18, 2025 at 02:01 PM

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*Ms. Helen was amazing. We will never forget her.*

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**Sandra Campbell** - June 18, 2025 at 02:03 PM