



Leon Mucasey

December 24, 1928 - January 3, 2019

Leon Mucasey, born December 24, 1928 with the biggest heart of gold, passed away on January 3, 2019, when that heart gave out after ninety good years, surrounded by his three children and their spouses.

Leon was born in Camaguey, Cuba, the younger of two sons who were born to Rose and Felix Mucasey, two hard-working immigrants that left their homes in Russia, in search of a better life in America. After twenty one years of trying to emigrate, the family was finally allowed to enter the United States in 1941, and chose Houston, the home of several cousins, as their final destination. The family first stayed with Molly and Sam Pickelner, on their couches and on their floors. Leon became the babysitter and lifelong close friend to his cousin Bobby Pickelner, with whom he shared a room. Leon's father began by making burlap bags, and ultimately scraped together enough money to start a family grocery store named, of course, "Mucasey's Supermarket." His parents taught Leon from an early age about the importance of family and hard work, and when his older brother Johnny went off to the Navy and ultimately Medical School, Leon stood steadfast by his parents' side. While his father ultimately became President of the Lucky Seven Grocers' Organization, Leon was the Butcher, Green Grocer, Stocker, and finally the Manager of that grocery store. Leon attended San Jacinto High School and the University Of Houston, where he completed his Business Degree, all within a stone's throw of that grocery store, where he worked alongside his parents sometimes seven days a week.

Despite being born on an island, Leon did finally venture off the Texas mainland, and onto Galveston Isle, where he met Shirley Jean Plantowsky Mucasey, who became the love of his life for over sixty-two years. Leon took his treasure back to Houston, where Shirley, like Leon's mother Rose, took care of the family, raising the children, keeping the home, and cooking his delicious meals, while he worked tirelessly in the store to sustain the family.

When Houston's Jewish community migrated southwest to Willow Meadows and Meyerland, Leon and Shirley took their three children, Mark, Debbie, and Michael to a new home close to the synagogue and good schools, even though it meant a grueling hour-long drive each way to the store every day, long before Houston built its freeways. Despite Leon's difficult work schedule, he always made time to drive to Galveston to see Shirley's mother Libby, and to go to every family wedding or Bar-Mitzvah. Like his parents, he would travel to the ends of the earth, just to visit a distant relative of theirs.

Saving the money he could, Leon finally ventured into the real estate business in the early 1960's. While continuing to work with his parents in the grocery store, he bought his first little piece of land in Gulfgate, and built a small apartment project. The rest is a good history, as Leon was able to build more projects, teaming up with Leon Samet, who with his wife Peggy, became some of their most cherished friends. Leon learned not only to develop and build those projects, but to maintain and manage them. To do so, he called on a loyal group of employees, many from his native land of Cuba. He would treat them like his own family, giving them homes, cars, and even his own eyeglasses when they needed them. For this generosity and caring, they lovingly called him "El Capitan."

The apartment business gave Leon the freedom to spend more time with his family, and to begin to travel to distant lands with his many friends. "El Capitan" and his first mate Shirley took to the high seas, and when their

children got married and gave him grandchildren, his biggest joy was to take all seventeen of them on the annual cruises out of Galveston, the birthplace of his bride. Even though his wife Shirley would give him his favorite culinary treats at home including her famous Streudel, Leon never saw a buffet, especially on a ship, that he didn't like. Eating gave him great pleasure, but only when done in the company of his loved ones.

Leon was a man of simple taste and humility. Instead of fancy clothes, cars, or homes, he gave his money to the many community organizations that were near and dear to his heart. Leon and Shirley were major supporters of his synagogue Beth Yeshurun, B'nai Brith, Seven Acres, Meals On Wheels, The Hebrew Free Loan Association, Jewish Family Service, Aishel House, and Holocaust Museum Houston. Taking the cue from his parents on the importance of education, he helped found and sustain the wonderful Emery Weiner School, the Robert M. Beren Academy, the William S. Malev School, and the Shlenker School. Throughout his life, he supported the State Of Israel, via the Zionist Organization Of America and State Of Israel Bonds.

In spite of his success in the business world, Leon would often admit that his greatest pleasure in life was not his things, but his family that he and Shirley were always surrounded by. He never missed a family event, no matter how far away. Despite his ailing back, he would walk into the room and melt everyone with his warm smile and heart. Having learned from his wonderful parents Felix and Rose, Leon and Shirley became the family's Patriarch and Matriarch--holding the family together with the cement of love. Leon was like a jewelry store. When you opened the door and looked inside, you saw the precious jewels of his entire family, all out on the shelves--his three children, nine grandchildren, and four great-grandchildren.

Leon is preceded in death by his wife Shirley, and his brother John. When

Shirley took ill for her last four years, Leon did not leave her side at home.

He is survived by his loving children, Mark and his wife Judy Mucasey, Debbie and her husband Sheldon Bootin, and Michael and his wife Laurie Mucasey. His grandchildren on the top shelf of his jewelry store included Ariel Becker and her husband Steven, Evan and Marshall Mucasey, Rebecca Nussbaum and her husband Alex, Allison and Hersh Bootin, and Andrea, Robyn, and Michelle Mucasey. Leon's four great-grandchildren on the "special shelf" were Annaelle, Judah, and Liev Nussbaum, and Lily Becker. He has one great-grandchild that Ariel and Steven have on back-order, to be delivered in March of this year.

Leon even extended his family to include his caregivers who helped him and his wife Shirley for the last five years. After the "adoption," those caregivers, Venessia Reynolds, Ishia Owens, and Brenda Mouton would lovingly call them "Uncle Leon" and "Aunt Shirley." There was not a night without ice cream as they gave both Leon and Shirley the sustenance, dignity, and pleasure in their time of need. Leon's family included his loving doctors Alan Hoffman and Eduardo Hernandez, who performed their magic acts to grant Leon an extra fifteen years of pleasure with his family.