



## Meryl Mae Holley Lawlis

August 19, 1956 - October 5, 2024

Meryl Mae Holley Lawlis (nee Sontz) loved Barbie and Metallica. And if that contradiction wasn't enough, she would find another way to make you laugh.

“She was one of a kind,” her brother Joseph Sontz said. “She lived life according to her rules and she was loved for that.”

Meryl, 68, died of complications from cancer in her Houston, Texas home Saturday, October 5, 2024.

Born in Lynn, Massachusetts on August 19, 1956, the youngest daughter of Edith and Hyman Sontz, Meryl graduated in 1974 from Marblehead High School. She earned a bachelor's degree in food marketing economics at the University of Massachusetts - Amherst and an MBA at Suffolk University.

Urged by a friend already living in Texas, she moved to Houston in 1980 to work for Kraft Inc. where she promoted cheese, dressings, and dinners, assembled award-winning merchandise displays, and met her first husband, William Jay Holley. The couple married in 1982. But less than 10 months later, Jay was killed in a car accident on the way to a company picnic.

That didn't stop Meryl from continuing to build a life of her own in Houston. Her optimism and sense of humor propelled her forward in both her career

and relationships.

“She did not let all the hardships change who she was,” said her friend Michelle Parsons. “That was something she brought to other people. She brought light into a room if there was sorrow.”

In 1996, Meryl started making sales calls to Susie Eshet, the new executive vice president of a food distribution company.

When Susie mentioned that she would be taking time off for the High Holidays, Meryl made her recite the Hebrew blessing over wine to prove she was Jewish. Susie was taken aback by her audacity and over the next 28 years, the two women became the best of friends.

Susie soon learned Meryl possessed a tremendous work ethic, always studying up on the wines and foods she promoted and going above and beyond to sell them. But she also loved to sleep long hours, often starting her days at noon.

The contradictions didn't stop there. Even though she sold cheeses and dressings, wine and hors d' oeuvres, she really loved candy and sweets. Neighborhood children knew to go to her house first on Halloween. And occasionally step-grandchildren children who spent the night woke up to gourmet cupcakes for breakfast.

Her sister, Linda, remembers when Meryl would come to visit their home on Martha's Vineyard, she would always buy a batch of fudge from a local shop to eat for breakfast.

Meanwhile back at home, she would fill neighbors' fridges, freezers and tables with samples of the many provisions she sold.

Meryl also joined Linda and her family for vacations. Meryl's nephews, Howard and Dan Pashman, often fought over who would get to share a room with Auntie Meryl.

"She could be 6 or 60 depending on who she was with," her sister said. "She could play make-believe with the kids or sit with the grownups. With the kids, she always found ways to relate to them."

Girls in her family often benefited from Meryl's vast collection of Barbies, which had a room of their own even when she was a young girl. At one point, she owned more than 700 dolls, occupying multiple rooms. Boys in the family enjoyed her love of sports cars and heavy metal music. Dressed in pink and sparkles (which she pronounced spahkles in her Boston accent), she always stood out among her fellow heavy metal fans.

In 1999, Meryl accompanied Susie and her mother to an antiques auction. The auctioneer's thick Texas drawl caught Meryl's ear, and she began raising her paddle in hopes of catching his eye. She bid on furniture she had no room for at home in hopes that the auctioneer, Michael Lawlis, would deliver it himself. When his son, Phillip, delivered it instead, she let him know the meal she had prepared was not for him. Michael eventually got the message.

"She could read me better than anybody ever has," Michael said.

Michael and Meryl lived together for 25 years before getting married on September 27, 2024 under a chuppah in Houston Methodist Hospital's intensive care unit. Susie served as the couple's wedding coordinator.

"Meryl had a way with my dad that I had never seen," Phillip said. "When he

was getting fired up, she would just look at him and start laughing at him and say something off the wall and then you could see whatever he was upset about just left his face. He would be laughing at her. It was good to be around.”

Meryl also had a way with dogs. The couple rescued at least six of them from shelters – often pit bulls.

“She was always looking for a reason that we might end up getting another dog. We foster-failed a couple times,” Michael said, meaning they adopted those dogs too.

Meryl is survived by her husband, Michael; stepsons, Michael Jr., Dale, Phillip, Daniel and Josh (Amanda); sister, Linda Pashman (Louis); brother, Joseph Sontz (Risa); nieces, Jennifer Sontz and Carrie Moskowitz (Seth); nephews, Howard Pashman (Manya) and Dan Pashman (Janie); three grand nieces and two grand nephews; 20 step-grandchildren; four step-great grandchildren; three dogs, Chloe, Casper and Sancha; and many devoted friends.

In lieu of flowers, donations can be made to Big Love Rescue, [www.bigloverescue.org](http://www.bigloverescue.org), a Houston nonprofit that rescues and rehomes lost or abandoned dogs.

A graveside service took place on Wednesday, October 9, 2024, at 2:00 PM at Emanu El Memorial Park, 8341 Bissonnet Street, Houston, Texas 77074.

# Cemetery Details

## Emanu El Memorial Park

8341 Bissonnet St  
Houston, TX 77074

# Previous Events

## Graveside Service

OCT 9. 2:00 PM (CT)

Emanu El Memorial Park  
8341 Bissonnet St  
Houston, TX 77074

# Tribute Wall

LP

“ *Linda Pashman lit a candle in memory of Meryl Mae Holley Lawlis*



Linda Pashman - October 16, 2024 at 05:14 PM



“ *The highlight of my weekends was spending lunch with her at work and listening to countless stories about her life. She almost never missed a day to text me and check on my family and I. I nicknamed her "The costco golden girl. " and she would snap back every time, "I'm not that old and I'm definitely much better looking. " Work will never be the same and we already miss her so much.*

Gabriel Ramos - October 10, 2024 at 06:39 PM

JE

“ *I first met Meryl when she made sales calls to me in the 80"s . Right away I knew we would become friends. I cannot count the concerts we went to ,every chance we got . Metalica was out fav. We had so much fun together.We were suppose to get together for lunch with our friends from many years but she got sick all of the sudden,We will defintley get together in Heaven one day .Yesterday in my car I played Metalica and cried and remembered the good times . She was special,she was good ,always had good to say and loved to make people laugh but today Meryl Mae you made me cry because I will always remember you and all the good times we had. If you were honored to know her you were blessed .Her body gave out but her spirit sparkles live on forever. Love You,Jeanie Erickson*

Jeanie Erickson - October 10, 2024 at 08:55 AM

GB

*I have not had the pleasure of recent friendship with Meryl since our days in Marblehead growing up together and graduating from Marblehead High school. But she has always been dear to my heart. We shared humor, sleepovers, and the crazy teenager antics one can imagine. We also share the love of pit bulls and rescue pups. You made the world a better place! RIP Meryl! ❤️🐕🐶🌟🌟🌟🌟*

**Gayle Benson** - October 29, 2024 at 10:51 AM

JE

“ *Jeanie Erickson lit a candle in memory of Meryl Mae Holley Lawlis*

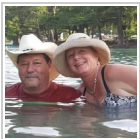


**Jeanie Erickson** - October 10, 2024 at 08:40 AM

JB

“ *We will always have fond memories of Meryl. Her smile and laughter and kindness was magical. We will miss you. Jackie and Ralph*

**jackie and Ralph Barbagallo** - October 09, 2024 at 10:24 AM



“ *Jennifer Wunn-Records lit a candle in memory of Meryl Mae Holley Lawlis*



**Jennifer Wunn-Records** - October 09, 2024 at 10:14 AM

TF

“ *The world lost a shining sparkle of joy. Auntie Meryl brought so much fun and laughter into our lives. Birthday cards from Meryl would explode with glitter, and vacations were filled with Barbie playtimes and outings for fudge (just not before noon). The memories of Auntie Meryl will always be a blessing to our family.*



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**The Pashman Family** - October 09, 2024 at 08:58 AM

DL

“ *What a precious lady Meryl was, always brought her special sense of humor and the best of desserts to every occasion! I know she loved Michael and her sweet fur babies with her whole heart but that 💕 for Barbie was something else! Rest in Peace, Meryl You will be missed immensely!*



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**Donna Lawlis** - October 09, 2024 at 08:17 AM

DP

“ Meryl would light up a room when she entered. Working with her in the early 80's at ITC. I remember when I was promoted into Sales and I needed a new wardrobe - if you knew Meryl, you knew she loved to shop and had so many clothes in so many sizes. Meryl literally brought me 2 - 50 gal trash bags full of clothes from her closet, most still with the tags on because as she said "they are just not my size today". She was a fashionista from the beginning. She loved her dogs, but must of all she loved life. She has earned her angel wings and every jewel in the crown she will be wearing. Prayers and White Light to the Family.  
Darlene Setrella Pettit



Darlene Setrella Pettit - October 09, 2024 at 07:49 AM



“ I slept in that Barbie room when Meryl took me in when I was divorcing from my husband. I donated a quilt my mom made of cats to her Pits when I was living there. Michael, do you remember that? Her love of sweets was my love of sweets. She was my mentor when we worked for FSI. I was honored to know her. When she gave me a key to her house when I lived there, It was hot pink with diamonds. I still have it. We fought, we loved and I will really miss her. She was something....

Jennifer Wunn-Records - October 08, 2024 at 10:31 PM

SJ

“ Samantha Jameson lit a candle in memory of Meryl Mae Holley Lawlis



Samantha Jameson - October 08, 2024 at 10:13 PM

SW

“ Meryl was a very special person to a lot of us at Costco (Galleria) I am so saddened to hear about her passing. She will be truly missed. Farewell my Costco buddy. Love Shelby

Shelby Watkins - October 08, 2024 at 09:55 PM

JJ

“ Judy, Rob, Kerri & Jesse lit a candle in memory of Meryl Mae Holley Lawlis



Judy, Rob, Kerri & Jesse - October 08, 2024 at 09:09 PM

GW

“ Gayla Wilson lit a candle in memory of Meryl Mae Holley Lawlis



Gayla Wilson - October 08, 2024 at 08:49 PM

GW

“ Meryl had such a big beautiful heart and had the best laugh. She was smart, funny and knew her business completely and was well respected with her customers. I will miss her and she will always hold a special place in my heart.

Gayla

Gayla Wilson - October 08, 2024 at 08:49 PM



“ *Susie Eshet lit a candle in memory of Meryl Mae Holley Lawlis*



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**Susie Eshet** - October 08, 2024 at 08:22 PM