



Niki Rosenblum Demaio

January 10, 1951 - July 11, 2022

Niki Demaio was a devoted sister, a doting aunt and a loyal friend to countless people whose lives she brightened with her droll sense of humor and enormous heart. She appreciated the finer things in life, from a Manhattan made with top shelf bourbon and Luxardo cherries to a Galveston sunrise by the sea. Niki, who lived in Houston, passed away unexpectedly on July 11, 2022. She was 71. Niki was the daughter of Earle and Isobel "Billie" Rosenblum, the second oldest of four. She graduated from Bellaire High School in 1969, where she made lasting friendships with a group of classmates who still meet for lunch regularly. Niki studied at George Washington University and The University of Texas earning a bachelor's degree in Art History. Her passion for the arts continued throughout her life, and she was a generous patron of her local museums and performing arts venues. "Going to a museum with her was a treat," said her sister, Debra. "She knew so much about every painting, every statue - the period, the artist, the meaning of the expression. She had an amazing array of facts at her fingertips." Niki enjoyed live theater, the symphony, concerts, films of assorted genres and ... baseball. She had more than 30 books about the game and a collection of signed baseballs, and she applauded for the Houston Opera and the Houston Astros with equal gusto. "She had taste without airs; she'd go to beautiful museums in a T-shirt and jeans and drink Blanton's bourbon out of a jelly glass," said her nephew, Sam. After spending several years living in New York and New Jersey, where she worked in advertising and marketing, Niki

returned to Houston in 1982 to care for her father following his stroke. Too unconventional for a standard 9-to-5 job, Niki created a business as eclectic as she was, a personal concierge service aptly named "Whatever." An outgrowth of her willingness to help her family and friends whenever needed, she used her innumerable skills to coordinate Passover Seders, plan parties, organize the offices of busy executives and provide care for the elderly parents or children of her diverse and loyal clientele. "I can't describe what Niki has meant to me," said longtime client Sally Andrews. "She did everything for me - she would even write my Christmas cards, my Chanukah cards, my 'I don't believe in anything' cards. If you didn't have a religious faith, you got modern art." Niki loved a good meal and often befriended the chefs and servers at her favorite restaurants. A foodie but never a food snob, she appreciated a well-prepared burger or platter of fried chicken and waffles as much as a gourmet meal at an acclaimed dining establishment. "Being with Niki was magical. She made everything around her special," said Jim Van Over, Sr., her partner of 20 years. "She had a deep appreciation for beautiful things and beautiful places, good food and good music." She loved browsing thrift shops and estate sales, packing bubble wrap when she traveled, in case she encountered the perfect piece of vintage glass. Her renowned shoe collection included mile-high heels trimmed with brocade and rhinestones. An eloquent conversationalist, Niki had an extensive vocabulary that served her well when playing online Scrabble or solving the daily New York Times crossword with her brother, Eric. "Niki experienced life with such a sense of pure joy; it was a pleasure to see and to be around," said Eric. Her duck collection was legendary. Niki literally had hundreds of them - rubber ducks dressed like doctors and spacemen, mummy ducks, Queen Elizabeth Ducks, ducks for St. Patrick's Day and Cinco de Mayo. At every holiday or major event, she would post photos on Facebook of her rubber ducks in the appropriate costume. The collection expanded as people began bringing her ducks from their travels around the world. "My sister Niki had a huge heart," said her sister, Jo. She was always ready to help us out anytime we needed

anything." To her niece and nephews, and later, her great-nieces and nephews, Niki was the consummate "cool" aunt. "Everyone needs that aunt or uncle that opens their mouth at a restaurant to show their nephews 'see food' and takes them to rock concerts," said her nephew, Josh. In addition to keeping in touch through social media, Niki sent actual cards to family members and friends for every imaginable occasion. "She probably had 200 greeting cards on hand just in case. I think she's the last person in the world to use envelopes," said Jo. Sometimes, the cards included newspaper clippings or New Yorker cartoons. "And it didn't matter if you ever did the same, or even replied; she did it because she wanted you to know she was thinking about you," said her niece, Anna. "She was always thinking about people." Her sister, Debra, believes that Niki related well to her niece and nephews and their children because she never lost touch with that part of herself. "There was always a 5-year-old lurking just beneath the surface," said Debra. "She was always able to entertain the children because they responded to the child in her. Niki always knew how to talk to the kids, not as kids, but as people, and they definitely responded to that and loved her for it." Niki Demaio is survived by her partner, Jim Van Over, Sr. of Sun Valley, Calif.; siblings, Jo Rosenblum King (Steven) of Houston; Eric Rosenblum (Lisa) of San Jose, Calif.; and Debra Rosenblum (Ken Blahut) of Philadelphia, Pa; nephews, Adam King (Naomi Zweben) of Columbus, Ohio; Josh King (Della) of Pakenham, Victoria, Australia; and Sam Rosenblum (Enfel) of Billings, Mont.; niece, Dr. Anna Cohen Rosenblum (Rabbi Michael Cohen); six great-nieces and -nephews; numerous cousins and a world of friends. Those wishing to honor Niki's memory may contribute to the Houston Grand Opera houstongrandopera.org/donate/ or a charity of one's choice.