



Dr. Samuel Kaplan

February 13, 1934 - May 25, 2024

Dr. Samuel (Sam) Kaplan, 90, passed away suddenly but gently, May 25, 2024. His wife, Karen, and Memorial Hermann-TMC ER heroes were by his side.

Eldest of five siblings, Sam was born “Lost in Yonkers” NY, February 13, 1934, during the throes of the Great Depression to a Russian immigrant pharmacist and a Yonkers-native housewife.

Childhood poverty informed many of his career decisions. He struck out on his own at 17 with a scholarship to Cornell University, majoring in biochemistry, then detoured to the Marine Corps as a pilot. His scientific acumen landed him in “ABC School” (Atomic, Biological and Chemical Warfare), where he shattered the previous test score record with a near-perfect score.

He then attended Yale University for his master’s in microbiology, then his doctorate from the charter class of the University of California, San Diego. He completed post-doctoral work at MRC laboratory in Cambridge, England, with later research sabbaticals at Oxford and the University of Geneva.

In 1974, Sam accepted a faculty position and later directorship of the School of Life Sciences at the University of Illinois, Urbana – Champaign, which became the work and hometown base for him and his first wife, Deanna

Palmer Kaplan, and their two daughters, Dandi and Lani.

In 1989, UTHealth Houston McGovern Medical School (then known as UT Houston Medical School) enticed him to serve as the founding chair of the Department of Microbiology and Molecular Genetics that he built from scratch – hiring, training and mentoring once and future world-recognized scientists in their fields.

Sam was known internationally for his groundbreaking and sustained research on his first love, *R. Sphaeroides*, a harmless but mighty bacterium with myriad superpowers including photosynthesis. His decades of leadership in the American Society of Microbiology advanced the field through editorships and creation of several august scientific journals— even children’s first “germ” books. He authored more than 225 papers in peer-reviewed journals.

He was beloved for his mentorship, particularly of women in science at a time when it was far from the norm. He earned numerous teaching and mentoring awards alongside those for scientific achievement. He was inducted as a Fellow to the American Association of the Advancement of Science.

A Renaissance man, Sam wrote as beautifully as he spoke. His eye for art was uncanny and his love for ballet insatiable. Yet he had a raucous Borsch Belt humor and possibly a Teamster card.

Above all, he loved NY pizza, Lani and Dandi, Bombay Sapphire martinis, his four grandchildren, Santa Fe thunderstorms, pistachios, “Cheers” reruns, cursing in Yiddish, Brig. Gen. Chuck Yeagar, Sinatra, and his wife, Karen. Not necessarily in that order. Actually, exactly in that order.

Sam is survived by his devoted wife, Karen Krakower Kapan; father-in-law, Dr. Alan Bath; brother, Charlie (Linda) Kaplan; daughters, Idanna (Jim) Appio and

Ilania (Chris) Stangler; grandchildren, Zoe and Lili Appio, and Inez and Irving Stangler; numerous nieces and nephews; Karen's children, Brittney Krakower Naaman (Michael) and Andrew Krakower; and grandchildren, Charlie and Toni Naaman.

A memorial service will be held Tuesday, June 18, 4:00 PM, at Congregation Emanu El, 1500 Sunset Boulevard, Houston, Texas 77005.

In lieu of flowers, the family suggests that gifts be made to the Samuel Kaplan, PhD, Memorial Fund at giving.uth.edu/memorial or UTHHealth Houston, P.O. Box 20268, Houston, TX 77025-9998. Or, to the Rabbi Roy & Linda Walter Enrichment Fund at Congregation Emanu El in memory of Dr. Samuel Kaplan.

Previous Events

Memorial Service

JUN 18. 4:00 PM (CT)

Congregation Emanu El
1500 Sunset Blvd
Houston, TX 77005

Tribute Wall

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“ Karen you were very blessed to have had Sam in your life. I'm so sorry for your loss. Love, Cheryl and Tim.



Cheryl Smith - June 10, 2024 at 12:56 AM