



Sandra Goldfine Weiner

July 28, 1933 - January 21, 2024

As a teenager growing up in Duluth, MN in the 1940s, news of the Holocaust reached Sandra Goldfine Weiner. Its magnitude and horror would define her and catalyzed a lifelong devotion to Israel and Jewish causes where she was a forceful and successful advocate, influencing presidents of the United States, leaders of the State of Israel, benevolent philanthropists and thousands of residents in her adopted and longtime home of Houston.

The longest-surviving matriarch of Houston's prominent Weiner family, Sandra died peacefully from complications of pneumonia Sunday, Jan. 21. She was 90.

Sandra would often say her greatest joy was seeing her children, grandchildren and great-grandchildren become educated and leaders in their own right. Her children would say in response they are deeply proud of being born to a trailblazer who participated at the highest levels when public life for women was not common. She served as a mentor to many, particularly women, who chose a life of communal service and leadership.

"I always felt guilty that I could not save the six million who perished [in the Holocaust], so I decided to help save Jewish lives and also work to make Israel strong," Sandra said in an interview with Houston's Holocaust Museum, an institution she helped create. This driving force of her youth defined a

lifetime of effort that touched upon all things that mattered to her: family, community, philanthropy and Israel.

Born Sandra Rae Goldfine (Yiddish name: Shayna Raizel) to Fannie (Overman) and Abe Goldfine in 1933 in Duluth, she was the youngest of three siblings, including brothers Manley (Monnie) and Erwin who predeceased her. The family owned a farm and a trading post serving the farmers of the Iron Range and central Minnesota. The business grew into a successful chain of stores named Goldfines.

When Abe Goldfine developed blindness due to diabetes, a teenage Sandra became his driver and partial caregiver. They had a close relationship, and she later came to believe the kindnesses she showed him may have helped bring her the many blessings she later experienced.

Fannie and Sandra's brothers ran the business. Sandra saw her mother as a tough, competent businesswoman, who also raised funds for the Jewish community and their synagogue. She also saw her mother open their home to Abe's eight younger siblings and to the grandparents. A relative was always living with them. In this boisterous, down-to-earth, and hard-working atmosphere, Sandra developed her sense of dedication to family, community, and the Jewish people.

She left Duluth in 1951 to attend the University of Colorado at Boulder. Her new roommate, Lottie Frankel, was from Houston. On a visit to Texas, Lottie's mother, Irma, arranged a date with Leon Weiner. It was the next major life-changing event for Sandra, and she would later repay the matchmaking favor for many others.

Sandra and Leon had a whirlwind romance. During a trip to New York City, she stayed at the Barbizon Hotel for Women and Leon took her to a Broadway

play each night. That week, Leon proposed, and three months after meeting, on August 21, 1953, they married in Duluth. It was a loving and tender pairing, one that endured for 60 years with laughter almost every day. Leon counted the days of his life from the moment he met Sandra. "I made the living," he said. "She made the living worthwhile." Sandra believed he was the sweetest, kindest man on Earth. He supported each endeavor, even those that were grandiose. On anniversaries, they literally counted their blessings.

Sandra would say two things about marriage. Marriage is like a business, you have to work at it, and you have to have a sense of humor. (Then, after a pause, she'd say, "It's a good thing I have one.")

Sandra and Leon made their home in Houston, and gave many lasting gifts to the city. Along with in-laws Annette and Sol Weiner, they helped launch what would become the Emery-Weiner School. They initiated Jewish singles parties, hitting the marriage jackpot for five couples. With nine other families, they started Congregation Brith Shalom in 1955 which became their spiritual home. The group of friends she made there were among her closest throughout life, along with those friends she made through community work and on her block. Her friends spanned all ages, but she was particularly kind to seniors.

Sandra channeled her energy into disparate activities as wide-ranging as local politics or working as a travel agent. She ultimately dedicated herself to a true calling: professional volunteer to the Jewish community. Her Judaism grounded her and gave her purpose.

Her defining and most successful job was as a mother to four children, Bayle, Rachel, Andy and Renee. For them, she created a home centered by Shabbat meals, family vacations and trips to visit relatives. She insisted on speech

lessons, participation in sports, and after school classes. There was involvement in Jewish life through camps, day schools, religious school, and trips to Israel.

The family home, whether on Grennoch Lane or later on Braesheather Drive, perpetually hosted women's group projects, famous Jewish rabbis, scholarly speakers, phone banks for fundraising campaigns, bridge games, and seders for as many as 50. She was the family role model for public engagement and doing good deeds. If there was a shiva, there was a casserole delivered by Sandra even if it required diverting a carpool. If there was a recent widow, she was having Friday dinner at the Weiner home.

She was the center of a large family, close with her brothers and sisters in law: Zelda and Abe Weiner, Anne and Bernard Bell, Annette and Sol Weiner, Beverly and Erwin Goldfine, Lillian and Monnie Goldfine, Celia and Charles Gaitz, Tita and Babe Kamin. She was "Aunt Sandra" to many beyond her blood nephews and nieces. Whenever the family visited Israel, which was often, she brought together dozens of relatives and forged relationships across generations that stand today.

She became the first female president of a synagogue in Houston, and then later the first female Campaign Chair and then Board Chair of the Jewish Federation of Greater Houston. She was the highest-ranking female leader at the national level for the United Jewish Appeal serving as Chair for Big Gifts, responsible for raising over \$200 million in one year. In addition to helping start the Holocaust Museum Houston, she brought The Precious Legacy exhibition of Judaica from Czechoslovakia to the United States and was President of the Foundation for Jewish Culture. Sandra served as the Chairman for the Advisory Council to the National Conference on Soviet Jewry and then as Co-Chair for the March on Washington for Soviet Jews in 1987.

Sandra always had bold visions for new programs, strategies for communal growth, ways to save failing institutions and she worked to recruit new and strong leadership. She did not take “no” for an answer and was considered a master at fundraising, drawing out what was most meaningful to the person who she was asking for a donation. She believed the secret to living a happy life was having a cause greater than oneself.

She lived large and she lived well. Her homes in Houston and her farm in Vermont were mini-museums of her various antique collections. She loved Frank Sinatra and musicals, Broadway, Italian suits, art nouveau lamps, traveling, ice cream, and a quality handbag. But among her greatest pleasures was making a donation or giving a gift to a friend.

Sandra, who became less fiery and more sweet in her later years, never complained. Fittingly, her favorite poem was “No Complaints.” She was wise and left Earth content with her time on it. Each of her immediate family yearns to follow the example set by a woman who was an amazing leader, wife, mother, grandmother, friend, sister and daughter.

Sandra is survived by her four children, Bayle (Richard) Drubel of New London, NH, Rachel (Robert) Davis of Houston, Andy Weiner (Meredith Mouer) of Houston and Renee (Michael) Lafair of Austin. Her adored grandchildren: Anna, Julia, Jonny and Miriam (Chloe Mackey) Drubel; Noah (Hilary) Davis, Chana (Avi) Weisman; Yaakov, aka Jacob (Ahuva) Davis, Rabbi Yosef (Sora Miriam) Davis; David, Daniel and Michael Warren; Morgan and Max Mouer; Rebecca, Louis (Emma Dauterman) and Joshua Lafair. Her precious great grandchildren: Jordan and Jack Davis; Nesanel, Refael, Tzivia, and Tamar Weisman; Tehilla, Shalva, Yehuda Leib, Yeshaya and Tiferet Chava Davis; Hadassah, Yocheved and Elisheva Davis. And many beloved nieces and nephews.

Everyone has a “Sandra Story”, and we invite her friends, family and those she touched to share your “Sandra Story” with us at sweiner11@comcast.net.

The family acknowledges the many people who helped Sandra in her lifetime. For many years, it has been Lee Anne Zikeli, Homer Alarcon and Honning (Antonio) Chan, who have been her, and the family’s, trusted support. You extended her social engagement, communal impact and above all, her happiness and the length of her days. May you and your families be blessed. The family thanks Dr. Alan Hoffman for his special care.

In her memory, we invite you to donate to one of the following charities that meant so much to her: The Leon Weiner Employment Fund of the Houston Jewish Family Foundation (alexanderjfs.org/donate), Congregation Brith Shalom (brithshalom.org) , Holocaust Museum Houston (hmh.org), The Jewish Federation of Greater Houston (houstonjewish.org) or a charity of your choice.

The memorial service took place at Congregation Brith Shalom at 1pm on Wednesday, January 24th. Rabbi Ranon Teller officiating.

Cemetery Details

Beth Yeshurun Post Oak Cemetery

7445 Awty School Ln.
Houston, TX 77055

Previous Events

Memorial Service

JAN 24. 1:00 PM - 2:00 PM (CT)

Congregation Brith Shalom
4610 Bellaire Blvd.
Bellaire, TX 77401

To view the memorial service online, visit <https://youtu.be/ue2jMVGdpBU>

Graveside Service

JAN 24. 3:00 PM - 4:00 PM (CT)

Beth Yeshurun Post Oak Cemetery
7445 Awty School Ln.
Houston, TX 77055

To view the recording of the graveside service online, visit <https://view.oneromstreaming.com/index.php?data=MTcwNTk4NDA4OTI5MjAyNiZvbWVyb29tLWFKbWluJmNvcHlfGluaw==>

Tribute Wall

JH

“ *There must have been a ripple in The Force when Sandra left our presence, as she was a force of nature....a Woman of Valor. I grew up around meetings where Sandra and my mother, Ettie worked tirelessly for Jewish purposes. We were also neighbors and shared roots in MN. Always on task and elegantly dressed, Sandra was a clear favorite of my parent's friends and I grew to appreciate my own friendship with her. Her memory will remain for blessings for us all.*

Jay Hamburger - February 05, 2024 at 02:06 AM

RD

Such a lovely tribute, Jay! She was very fond of you mom!

Rachel Davis - February 07, 2024 at 12:29 AM

KR

“ *We had the opportunity for a brief visit with Mrs. Weiner last summer at her home in Vermont. It was definitely a treasured moment.*

Mrs Weiner was so supportive, kind and generous to Bob and myself. She was very encouraging and gave me confidence when I was starting my work as an artist and mural painter. A wonderful friend! So grateful always!

Lots of love to you and your family. XO 🙏❤️

Kim & Bob Ray

Kim Ray - January 24, 2024 at 01:08 PM

RD

Thank you for sharing this memory. She loved Vermont and the people she met there!

Rachel W Davis - January 31, 2024 at 09:21 PM

MB

“ *A brilliant shining star has fallen. A dear person and friend. Anne & Mike Bernhardt*

Michael Bernhardt - January 24, 2024 at 12:27 PM

TO

“ *We will always miss her love, friendship, kindness, generosity, wit, companionship, laughter, spirit of adventure, passion for all things Jewish, care for Israel, her boundless energy and compassion. Tom, Eva, Jenny, Michelle.*



Tom - January 24, 2024 at 10:14 AM

RD

Tom, you and your family were so dear to her.....thank you for the years of friendship you gave her.

Rachel W Davis - January 31, 2024 at 09:27 PM

BW

“ *Rachel — you have truly captured the life and legacy of your beloved Mom ! Only you could have written such an extraordinary dissertation of the life of such a human star ! 💕💕💕 Barby*

Barby Weiner - January 24, 2024 at 10:07 AM

RD

So sweet, cuz!

Rachel W Davis - January 31, 2024 at 09:27 PM

JR

“ My heart goes out to Sandra's entire family. I always thought of her as a "lamed-vavnik", one of the 36 people on whose shoulders the world stands. I first met Sandra in about 1971 when I was a teenager visiting Houston and Brith Shalom for the first time for a USY event, and she impressed me with her hospitality, and her interest in what we teens were passionate about. And it was her passion for Jewish life, culture, and continuity that made her such an inspiration to me. In addition to the the many institutions in the Jewish community that she and Leon sustained, she encouraged and supported my artistic endeavors, and those of many other Jewish artists. I pray that her family will find comfort. May her memory always be for a blessing. Janice Rubin



Janice Rubin - January 24, 2024 at 12:30 AM

RD

Janie, thank you for all your beautiful photos that capture moments we never want to forget, and all your kindnesses.

Rachel W Davis - January 31, 2024 at 09:28 PM

JD

“ If you knew my grandma, you knew she was a character who marched to the beat of her own drum and made no apologies for it, something I will always admire about her. Everyone has a "Sandra story" and while I could share many, there is one I would like to share that no one has heard before...

I was around nine years old, attending one of my grandparents infamous shabbat dinners. Earlier that day I had been teased relentlessly at school and because my grandma didn't miss a thing (you couldn't get anything past her), she could tell almost immediately that I wasn't myself. She pulled me aside and asked what was wrong, I told her what the kids at school had said and without missing a beat, she looked me right in the eye and said "Jonny, you are perfect just the way you are, don't ever let anyone make you think differently". While this story might sound insignificant, this was the first time I had felt seen and accepted for exactly who I was and was told to never apologize for it, a feeling I will never forget and always be grateful for.

I love you grandma, you will live on in my heart forever.

Jonny

Jonny Drubel - January 23, 2024 at 11:10 PM

RD

Jonny, she loved you deeply. What a beautiful memory. Aunt Rachel

Rachel W Davis - January 31, 2024 at 09:25 PM

DL

“ *Wishing all of you condolences at this most difficult time. May Sandra's memory always be a blessing.*

David Lazarus - January 23, 2024 at 09:41 PM

SR

“ MY BEST FRIEND JUST PASSED INTO HEAVEN. SANDRA WAS A ONE TIME LADY FRIEND, ALL THATSHE HAD SHEGAVE TO THE COMMUNTIY. I SHALL MISS HER . SONIA RAIZES

SONIA RAIZES - January 23, 2024 at 03:46 PM

CK

“ What a beautiful tribute to a true Woman Of Valor and conviction. We were all blessed to know Aunt Sandra and see her devote her life to making life better for others. May her memory be a blessing to all knew and loved her. Sending prayers for peace and comfort to all.

Cindy Kamin van Keppel

Cindy Kamin van Keppel - January 22, 2024 at 09:48 PM

RD

Cindy, she was very fond of you and her family. Thank you for your lovely words!

Rachel W Davis - January 22, 2024 at 11:31 PM

JJ

Dear Rachel, thank you for taking my call as I wanted to express my deepest condolences to you and your family for the passing of your beloved Mom. As you know, I have had a very special relationship with Sandra, partly because of my admiration of her philanthropy and the support of the Jewish community. We have also shared our mutual connection to Prague where she worked hard to rescue Judaica items stolen by the Nazi during the War. I was born in Czechoslovakia, a son of a holocaust survivor mother. My father, who died in 1950, when I was two years old is buried in the New Jewish Cemetery, in the Žižkov part of Prague which is 10 times bigger than the more famous Old Jewish Cemetery, in Prague's Jewish quarter. About 30 years ago, when visiting the large cemetery, I asked the cemetery caretaker to help me find my father's grave site. He asked me where I was from and when I told him from Houston, he proudly showed me a new computer just donated to the cemetery by Sandra to create a database of all the graves so that they can be more easily found by the love ones. He (and I) was so touched and appreciative of Sandra's so generous and meaningful support. As you know, before I met Sandra and became her neurologist on 2/2/2004, I was honored to participate in the care of her husband, your Dad, Leon, who passed away 9/12/2013. Over the years Sandra and I shared many memories about Leon and about Prague. It has been the greatest honor for me to know both Leon and Sandra, and to participate in their care. You, Rachel, have always been there for them and, along with their caregivers, provided them with the most compassionate support. My only regret is that I never was able to accept her numerous kind invitations to visit her in the fall in Vermont. I, and countless others all over the world, will miss Sandra's wisdom, kindness, generosity and so many other characteristics that made her so unique and such a true mensch. May her memory be a blessing.

Joe Jankovic, MD

Joseph Jankovic - January 23, 2024 at 08:47 PM

SP

I just learned of the passing of my dear and cherished friend Sandra Weiner. She was one of the most influential people in my life. Her support, her tzedekah, her caring and sharing was unequalled. I learned valuable life lessons from her and Leon too. May her memory be a blessing Shimon Pepper

shimon Pepper - January 24, 2024 at 07:19 AM

EO

What sad news to learn of Sandra's passing. She was such a remarkable force for Jewish life, culture and education. Her pioneering work for Jewish Museums across the globe and her dedication to Holocaust Museum Houston changed the world and made it a better place. A true innovator has been lost. Condolences to the Weiner Family.

Ellen Orseck - January 24, 2024 at 06:47 PM