



Sheila Avrutin Engelhart

September 5, 1941 - July 2, 2020

It is with deep sadness and a devastating sense of loss that the family of Sheila Avrutin Engelhart announces her passing on July 2, 2020. Sheila was 78 years old and lived in the Linkwood area of Houston until her death. The Houston community lost a warm, shining light with the death of our wife, mother, sister, grandma, and aunt. Sheila battled various illnesses over the last three years, and fought hard until the end, surprising her family and doctors alike with her resilience. Sheila finally succumbed, yet maintained her kind and generous spirit throughout.

Sheila was born on September 5, 1941 in Brooklyn, New York. The elder child of Harry and Lucille Avrutin, Sheila and her parents lived in Flatbush, New York until 1952. Her sister, Alice Avrutin-Yellin was born in 1950. Sheila graduated from East Meadow High School in Long Island, New York in 1958. Sheila's father, Harry, worked as a labor organizer his entire adult life. He became the Secretary of the New York Central Labor Council and instilled in Sheila and Alice a very strong sense of pulling for the underdog in society. Sheila fostered that sense of moral purpose in her own children as well. She was immensely proud of her father's work. And Sheila was also fond of recounting her mother Lucy's harrowing and dangerous escape from Berdichev to the United States during the anti-Jewish Ukrainian pogroms. That flight is immortalized in the book *Letters from Rifka* written by Sheila's cousin, Karen Hesse. Sheila also spoke and understood Yiddish. Sheila's family got a German Shepherd named Molly while Sheila was in

college. When Sheila came home and was roughhousing with Alice, Molly growled at Sheila. Sheila went out and bought a huge bag of dog treats, and that was the end of Alice being Molly's favorite.

Sheila was interested in fashion and gourmet cooking from a very early age. According to her sister, watching her get ready to go out on the town was glamour itself like Marilyn Monroe.

Sheila was her daddy's girl. Her dad would spoil her to no end. Whatever Sheila wanted, she got.

Sheila became the first in her immediate family to obtain a college degree, graduating from Adelphi University in Garden City, New York in 1962 with a BA in Home Economics. Sheila went on to study Home Economics, Food and Nutrition Education at New York University in Manhattan, New York. Sheila returned to college to take classes in the late 1970s at Montclair State University in Montclair, New Jersey. Sheila started her teaching career at Turtle Hook Middle School in Uniondale, Long Island.

Sheila met George Jay Engelhart after their parents were visiting friends in a hospital in 1961 or 1962. George's mother suggested he meet Sheila, a nice Jewish girl. George called and they dated for about six months. Then George left for graduate school in Pittsburgh, Pennsylvania at Carnegie Mellon. They reconnected after two and a half years, in 1964, after George had finished graduate school. Sheila and George married on July 4, 1965 in Little Neck, Long Island.

The devoted couple first lived in Hightstown, New Jersey, where George worked for AT&T and Sheila continued her career as a Home Economics teacher. Their oldest daughter Elizabeth Sue "Betsy" Johnson, nee Engelhart was born in 1967. Several months later, George's work brought the family to Phoenix, Arizona for a year. Sheila liked to talk about how "uncivilized" Phoenix was in the late 1960s, mostly due to a severe New York-style-bagel paucity. In fact, when her sister Alice and her parents came to Phoenix to visit, they brought bagels. The whole plane smelled of garlic.

Then they moved to Summit, New Jersey, and their son Michael Engelhart

was born in 1970. They moved down the road to Berkeley Heights, New Jersey in 1972 where they lived until 1980. The family moved for George's work again in 1980, this time to Andover, Massachusetts. There they were members of Temple Emanuel. Both of the children's B'nai Mitzvot took place in Massachusetts. They were fabulous, memorable affairs wholly choreographed by Sheila. Betsy and Michael cherish those memories along with countless other family trips and adventures. The Engelharts returned to Berkeley Heights, New Jersey in 1984 and George and Sheila lived there until 2006. They were long time members of the Summit, New Jersey Jewish Community Center synagogue going back to the early 1970s.

Betsy and Michael remember Sheila studying at the kitchen table for her real estate license in the 1970s, and Sheila was licensed in the late 1970s. Sheila worked in residential real estate in the late 1970s and early 1980s.

Sheila's education and love and devotion to her family made Sheila an incredible cook. Sheila was a kitchen sage, and even a cookbook author for a company called Leanline, a Weight Watchers competitor. Sheila always took calls asking for recipe and preparation tips. Sheila's matzoh ball soup was unmatched in the lower 48 states. Her family dubbed her the "Matzoh Ball Queen" and clamored for it each Passover and Rosh Hashanah. Sheila had a large bookcase larded with cookbooks of every type and it was her favorite subject to read and talk about (aside from her four grandchildren). No one could manage a kitchen like Sheila. For her, the kitchen was not just a place for making food but for orchestrating a loving and fulfilling life.

Sheila was outgoing, warm and always willing to help her friends and loved ones. A beloved family matriarch, Sheila was devoted to the love of and proud beyond words of the accomplishments of her children and cherished and spoiled her four grandchildren, who were the greatest joy in her life. Sheila was their biggest cheerleader, and often regaled new and old friends with their accomplishments. Sheila is now buried with her prized ring inscribed with the four grandchildren's names.

Sheila was known by all to have the best information. Period. If you were trying to make a decision about how to proceed with a purchase, or a career plan, or just about anything, all you had to do was ask Sheila for input, and then wait a little while. Sheila was like Mr. Popiel's famous cooking contraptions - set it and forget it! The next time you talked to her, Sheila had thought about the matter, researched it, and had a solution. Though you might be skeptical about it, darn it if Sheila wasn't always proven right! Sheila always knew which model of appliance would work best for you, and had considered all sides of the career or travel choices, and gave great advice. Her family lovingly referred to her as the Maven. And Sheila was that, in the most positive sense of the word.

Sheila and her family have been members of Congregation Brith Shalom in Bellaire, Texas since 2006. Sheila and George, and Betsy and her family made the cross-country move to Houston where her son Michael lived so that they could all be together in one place, allowing Sheila and George to further spoil their four grandchildren all in one place.

The families all lived within 2 miles of each other, in Linkwood, Meyerland, and inner-Loop Bellaire, and saw each other weekly if not more often. Sheila loved when everyone would get together, and made a point of everyone going out as a group for every birthday and anniversary. Sheila was a big part of the all four grandchildren's B'nai Mitzvot, too, sponsoring generous, delicious dinners for out of town guests.

Nothing brought out Sheila's huge smile and heart more than babies.

Everyone's babies. George would always tease her about having adopted yet another new baby that Sheila had run into at the mall. Her favorite gift for new parents was a giant stuffed teddy bear. Sheila asked the parents to photograph the baby alongside teddy at each milestone so everyone could tell how big the baby was growing. Everyone always did, and everyone always loved it.

Sheila got to see her son Michael elected as a State District Court Judge in Houston in 2008, and right before Sheila got sick in 2017, got to see him

throw out the first pitch at a Houston Astros game at Minute Maid Park in Houston.

Sheila was very proud of her daughter Betsy, a nurse, who obtained her RN from Stony Brook University in Long Island, New York, and her MA in Delivery of Nursing Services, and MS in Healthcare Management from New York University. When she moved to Houston, Betsy worked in Memorial Hermann Hospital in the medical center. Betsy did, on multiple occasions, literally save Sheila's life over the last three years. During Sheila's many lengthy hospital stays, Betsy, despite being displaced by Hurricane Harvey flooding, oversaw and helped coordinate her care. The family is grateful to Betsy for her tireless dedication to her mother. The family also thanks the many doctors, nurses and rehabilitation specialists and home care aides who cared for Sheila during her illness.

Sheila is preceded in death by her father and mother Harry and Lucy. Sheila is survived by her husband George. They would have celebrated their 55th wedding anniversary less than two days after Sheila passed away. Sheila is also survived by her sister Alice and her husband Bruce, Sheila's daughter Betsy, son-in-law Keith, and son Michael and daughter in law Eva. Sheila is also survived by her grandsons Joseph, Zachary and Noah, and her only granddaughter, Haley. Finally, Sheila is survived by in-laws, nieces, nephews and cousins, and many other loved ones, related and otherwise.

The family gathered for a small graveside service at Emanu El Memorial Park, 8341 Bissonnet St in Houston on Monday, July 6, 2020, followed by an online memorial service Monday evening at 7 p.m. The family will conduct shiva minyanim online on Tuesday evening, July 7, 2020.

In lieu of flowers, donations of blood or blood products may be made to the Gulf Coast Regional Blood Center and the MD Anderson Blood Donor Center or at your local blood bank.