



Rayna Leah Gellman

April 21, 1936 - September 19, 2019

Rayna Leah Gellman, 83, died peacefully in her sleep on September 19, 2019, after a brief period of illness.

Born in Chicago, IL, on April 21, 1936, Rayna was the middle of Sol and Julia Nathan's three daughters. Julia moved Rayna and her sisters Esther (Capin) and Roberta (Bracker) to Los Angeles, CA in the early 1940's. The girls grew up there, in the heavily Jewish Fairfax neighborhood.

As a girl, Rayna loved celebrating Jewish holidays as well as the family's involvement at both the nearby Reform temple and the JCC. She also loved playing the cello from an early age, especially in a trio with her sisters as they grew up.

While Rayna began college at UCLA as a music major, around that time she was introduced to her future husband, John Gellman. They wed in August of 1955, and began married life in West Lafayette IN, where John finished his engineering degree at Purdue University. Next came five years in Rock Island, IL, before they moved to Los Angeles with their two young daughters, Linda and Deborah. Their son David was born in LA. The family moved once more, to Tucson, in 1977.

When Rayna married John, she was thrilled that he was from a Conservative Jewish background, and eagerly embraced the deeper level of observance that came with that. Not much gave her more pleasure than making Shabbat and Jewish festivals at home, going to services, and the study of Jewish topics. Highlights of her Jewish life include wide volunteer involvement in synagogue life; serving as president of the women's organizations at both Temple Ramat Zion in Northridge, CA, and Congregation Anshei Israel in Tucson; working at the Jewish Post selling advertising; earning a bachelor's degree in Judaic Studies from the U of A in 1994; working in the education department of JFSA, managing adult education such as the Melton program; as well as all of her other volunteer involvement in the the greater Jewish community of Tucson.

For all the richness of Rayna's Jewish experiences and observances, the deepest joy of her life was truly connection to people, especially her family. She leaves behind her loving and devoted husband of 64 years, John Gellman; sister Roberta Bracker of Nogales, AZ; children Linda (Steve) Braun of Tucson; Deborah (John) Richards of Tacoma, WA; and David (Eric Banks) Gellman of Seattle, WA; grandchildren Clare Braun, Willie Braun, David Richards, Jack Richards, and Nicholas Ferro; and great-granddaughter Lucille Braun Collins; as well as many loving nieces, nephews and cousins.

In addition, Rayna leaves behind many, many other people whose lives she touched with her warmth, kindness and compassion, such as the students and faculty of Cesar Chavez Middle School in South Tucson, and her many, many friends and acquaintances.

Services were held at Evergreen Mortuary and Cemetery, with Rabbi Robert Eisen officiating. Contributions in memory of Rayna may be made to the Alzheimer's Association; Congregation Anshei Israel; or the charity of your choice.

Cemetery

Evergreen Cemetery

3015 North Oracle Road
Tucson, AZ, 85705

Events

SEP 22 **Memorial Service** 02:30PM

Evergreen Mortuary
3015 North Oracle Road, Tucson, AZ, US, 85705

Comments



“ Eulogies for Rayna, starting with David's:

My mom had a secret drawer. In her heart. In it, she placed the parts of her life that moved her the most, the experiences that lifted her up when she most needed a boost. Like so many people, my mother often felt overcome by self-doubt. Like every one of us, she had her unique burdens and challenges throughout her life, and they could leave her feeling that she wasn't good enough. Maybe as a parent, or a spouse, or in her religious life. Her anxiety over not living up to a standard she may never have fully consented to would strike her dumb. I grew up seeing her mouth moving in silent conversation with herself when her face betrayed these self-doubts. But Rayna found a way to pull herself out of these dark places, and I like to think it was the contents of this secret drawer that helped her persevere.

What did she hold onto that reassured her? Well, it wouldn't be a "secret drawer" if I knew for sure. But I have some ideas. Rayna loved family perhaps above all else. She fought for her husband and her children when they needed a queen's regal hand. She lavished praise on all family members she saw. She sent cards for all occasions, reaching out to the distant branches of our family tree. She prioritized travel for weddings and b'nai mitzvot. Family was Rayna's bulwark. I guess that's no secret. But some of the brightest memories of family must have been singled out and saved for when Rayna really needed them. Bright moments she knew she'd kept in this secret drawer.

Rayna loved music. All of her children remember her pulling out her cello and practicing—especially the Bach Suite No 1. Long after our mother set down her bow for the last time, her relationship with music must have been a special occupant of her heart's secret drawer. Her enthusiasm for music—both making it and hearing it—was

contagious. It spread to our father: they would attend concerts throughout their marriage. And it spread to her children and grandchildren. The records our parents bought were my first glimpse into the world of modern symphonic works that sustains me to this day.

Rayna's faith that right would always triumph over injustice was a living, vibrant thing. She was the most conspicuous righter of wrongs and builder of bridges I knew. This devotion to justice was a bright gem in Rayna's secret drawer, sustaining her through years of confronting humanity's darker nature whenever it intruded. And it did intrude in her life, even at a young age. I can speculate that justice was the first precious item she saved in her heart—or maybe that was love?

Is justice possible without love? Rayna might say that true justice—honest justice—requires we love not only the wronged, but the one who has wronged as well. This balance, this forgiveness, was perhaps the rarest item in Rayna's secret drawer, a lesson so few of us incorporate in our hearts the way Rayna did.

All of these treasures sustained my mother through the many crises small and large that she faced during her 83 years. We lay her to rest today, but her heart and its secret drawer we will take away together. Secret strengths and inspirations we might never have realized were passed on to us, we now carry in our own secret drawers. I have been asked also to read the ways my sisters remember our mother and her heart.

You will hear some themes repeated, yet having all three siblings' stories will paint a richer picture for you. And so I will turn now to what my dear sister Deb asked me to read. My voice is now her voice.

D'vora Richards - October 07, 2019 at 12:42 AM



“ The Greek Statesman Pericles said, “What you leave behind is not what is engraved in stone monuments, but what is woven into the lives of others.” What Mom wove into my life was:

- the strong value of family
- being forgiving
- being philanthropic
- being kind
- getting a college degree – no matter what!
- and being loving, even when others might not seem lovable in the moment

Since Mom's fall at the end of May when it became undeniable that her health was failing, I have had many thoughts and memories pass through my head, sometimes onto paper. And yet, as I sit to gather these to a concrete piece to be read by my brother, I find there is little I can write that encompasses the whole of the short time I had with my Mother.

So here are a few things that occur to me at this moment as important and descriptive:

Mom might have single handedly kept Hallmark in business! As many of you know, she was the consummate sender of cards honoring birthdays; anniversaries; and Valentines Day. It was no surprise to Linda and me when we were cleaning out Mom's room a few weeks ago to come across a rather large container filled with all manner of cards. Through this, Mom taught me to honor the important times in other's lives, to see people and not to let them assume that I love and remember them.

A subset of Mom's valuing family was her dedication to us. While there are many examples from recent years of how Mom devoted herself to taking care of Dad, my personal experience is from when I had a pituitary tumor removed in 1985. Mom was by my bedside every day for 8 days, apparently uncommon enough that the hospital staff believed her to be a hired private duty nurse. And that was Mom. That is who she taught us to be. This has been echoed back to us in the words of Mom's caregivers as we have showed up for her. But, how else could we be? This is what one does for family.

Mom modeled for me unconditional love. There never was a time when I did not ask for her forgiveness in the week between Rosh Hashanah and Yom Kippur that she did not without hesitation reply that there was not anything to forgive me for. As we head into the High Holidays, I know without a doubt that Mom loved and forgave me and that she knew I loved and forgave her, too. One of the last times I was with her, when she was too weak to be heard, we held hands and exchanged a multitude of sweet kisses.

Mom was multifaceted, not all facets shining at the same time, some opaque, some in shadow. Some people say that, “The brighter the light, the darker the shadow.”

Some of Mom's strengths – like being strong willed – could also at times be experienced by me as challenging or as weaknesses. Nonetheless, Mom's shiny bright facets of being kind, being a bestower of loving kindness are reflected in the number of you here today, in your faces and greetings, in all of the people who have called or texted, liked or commented on our social media posts, who relate to us how kind Mom was to them. There are many circles Mom touched represented here today from extended family, friends, neighbors, fellow congregants, places she worked, places she taught, caregivers. There is no circle she touched and influenced more than the circle of my family.

In the words of the poet Nayyirah Waheed, "My mother was my first county; the first place I ever lived." Mom will always live on in my heart.

Two siblings down and one to go. Next I'll read my dear sister Linda's words about Rayna.

D'vora Richards - October 07, 2019 at 12:40 AM



“ Yesterday, I wrote a very different eulogy than the one I am ready to write early this morning, on the day Mom will be buried. Yesterday, I tried to capture her character and life in a list of adjectives and further descriptions of how Mom lived, and what it meant to me and my family. But this morning I awoke with different (and fewer) words in mind. Words I want to address directly to Mama, praying they will reach her eternal spirit, her neshamah, on its new journey, even as we prepare for the imminent burial of her frail, worn out physical body.

So. . .here goes.

Mama, thank you for everything you ever taught me about how to be a kind, caring, and loving human being, committed to serving others in a myriad of small and large ways, and to making the world a better place. Thank you for encouraging me in both large and small ways to become an artist, and a teacher, and a community leader. Especially thank you for all the ways you modeled how to be a wonderful mother. From you I learned the importance of nutritious food, beautiful lullabies, wonderful children's books, and the intertwined rhythms of healthy family life—from bedtimes to Shabbat

dinner to celebrating all the holidays. You saw the individual gifts of each of your children and did whatever you could to support their development. . . Thank you for the life lessons that gave me the opportunity to have so much joy and success in parenting my own amazing children, Clare and Willie.

And finally, thank you for all you did as an amazing grandmother for and with Clare and Willie. A large part of why I wanted to move to Tucson thirty years ago was so that you would be close by, and a regular part of their lives. What a good choice that was, for us and for you. Now that I have become a grandma myself, I get that even more. . .

With so much love and gratitude, and prayers for the journey ahead. . .

Linda

To those gathered here, thank you for indulging us our stories about Rayna Gellman, and for putting up with just my slow speaking voice for all of them. I am honored to have been entrusted with the words of my family today, and I am full of joy that all of

you have been here to celebrate the woman who touched all our lives with queenly grace.

D'vora Richards - October 07, 2019 at 12:36 AM



“ Rayna was one of the kindest and gentlest people I have ever met. She always cared to ask about my family members and her compassion was evident in all she did and in the causes she supported. I worked with her on bills and paperwork and I often took her on errands as well. One day, we took Sterling along with us in my car, and that was an adventure! :-). Rayna's love for Jack was so evident and he often sat with us while we worked. I pray that he and your family finds peace during this time of loss and that your memories of Rayna sustain you all. Rest in Peace, Rayna. I will miss your smile and your gentle grace. Love, Karen Gillespie



Karen Gillespie - September 22, 2019 at 01:32 PM



“ Thank you, Karen. Your loving tribute means so much.
with love, Deb

D'vora - October 03, 2019 at 07:25 PM



“ just heard the passing of Rayna. We were not close friends, but I knew how special she was. May her name will always be a blessed memory. And she will forever have a special place in my heart. Shalom dear Rayna

Sallie Kranitz - January 30 at 03:10 PM