



Benne Susan Willerman

June 10, 1941 - April 2, 2026

Benné Susan Willerman (née Secter) was born in Chicago on June 10, 1941, to Belle Abend and Irving Isaac Secter, arriving ten years after her older brother, Morton. At age 20, one week before graduation day from Roosevelt University, Benné married the love of her life, Lee Willerman. In addition to his charm and academic ambition, Lee had impressed the studious Benné with his originality in first date ideas by taking her to the racetrack to bet on the horses. For her graduation present, her parents offered her a choice: a trip to Europe or a wedding. She chose to wed the man she loved.

Benné holds a Bachelor's in Music, a Master's in Anthropology from American University, and a PhD in Applied Linguistics from the University of Texas at Austin. Her passion for music remained a constant companion throughout her studies and her life. She taught music to young children at the Yamaha Music School, sang in the chorus of the Austin Lyric Opera, and performed in *Man of La Mancha*. Enamored of the soulfulness of Jewish music she served as the Cantor at Congregation Beth Israel in Austin. When her voice began to fade in her fifties, an early sign of the Parkinson's disease she faced valiantly, it was a profound loss. Still, she surrounded herself with many different kinds of music.

Moving to Austin in the mid-1970s suited her. She could never get enough of the Texas sun, and one would frequently find her at a neighborhood swimming pool or doing yard work in her bikini. She was an avid reader, the kind who

always had three books nearby. She loved languages and delighted in speaking French. She parlayed this love of language into a career of teaching English as a Second Language, connecting deeply with her students, learning their stories, and celebrating their cultures.

At home, Benné and Lee shared the verbal passion of the game, Scrabble. They played competitively, both with each other and in tournaments, filling notebooks with the scores of their battles. Their games were fierce, playful, and full of the kind of companionship that comes from decades of loving someone's mind as much as their heart. Within the privacy of our family, people called her Bean, a shortened version of her name but also a reference to "full of beans," in how much energy Benné brought to all aspects of her rich and passionate life.

Benné died on April 2, 2026, in Austin, surrounded by the city and the memories that shaped her life. She is survived by her daughters, Raquel Willerman (Warren Levy) and Amiel Romain (Trevor Romain); her grandsons, Isaac Lee Steinberg and Noah Warren Steinberg; and her beloved grand-dogs, Benny, Shrimpy, and Stan. She is remembered with enduring love by the caring and compassionate communities of Westminster and Hospice Austin.

Tribute Wall

AR

“ 2 files added to the album Benne



Amiel Romain - April 09 at 10:23 PM

CH

“ *Benne was admired and universally loved by those who worked with her during her decades in the French Department at UT Austin, where she supervised graduate teaching assistants, taught with flair and generosity, advised with unfailing kindness.*

Cheney - April 08 at 11:22 AM

JT

“ *I remember your mom's joyfulness and how easy going your parents were. They had such a warm and welcoming home. I remember staying there with Amiel in 1981 or 1982 for a month or so while they went out of town. Amiel and I were both in choir and had to be at school early, so I drove us everyday. I think we practiced for state UIL with the piano at the house. Who knows what we ate (I'm sure they left us money for that). I thought it was so cool they trusted me. We felt so grown up. I'll always remember your mom's natural beauty-she passed it on to both of you girls. Sending you hugs. I know you will miss her.*

Janet Joseph Taborn - April 07 at 11:43 PM

AR

“ 1 file added to the tribute wall



Amiel Romain - April 07 at 09:20 PM

AR

Alter at Westminster, where mom lived the last decade of her life. A resident wrote this beautiful poem.

Amiel Romain - April 07 at 09:25 PM

JT

What a lovely and heartfelt tribute. Your mom was a very special lady. I'm so sorry for your loss.

Janet Joseph Taborn - April 07 at 11:23 PM

AR

Ugh, I misspelled altar. Mom would have edited it!

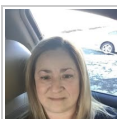
Amiel Romain - April 08 at 12:37 AM

TR

“ It was so wonderful to be one of Benne’s favorite son-in-laws. I called her Bean. She laughed at my dumb jokes and totally accepted me for the knucklehead that I am. Bean edited most of my published books and was always ready for our Mom and Son-in-law afternoon tea times during which she always had my anchovy toast at the ready. I teased Bean a lot and she always had a brilliant comeback. I have a comforting vision of Bean’s ancestors waiting for her with open arms. I can just picture her smile as they lovingly take her hand and join her for the next part of her journey. I will remember you fondly and with much love Bean. Jusqu’à la prochaine fois.



Trevor - April 07 at 08:28 PM



Hi Raquel, I'm so sorry to hear this. My thoughts are with you. May her memory be a blessing.

Beth Roman - April 08 at 12:18 AM

SW

Trevor, how beautiful, from Susan

Susan Willerman - April 08 at 09:22 AM

JE

I am sorry for your loss-- May your good memories bring you comfort

Janet Ellingson - April 13 at 06:51 PM

RW

“ 1 file added to the tribute wall



rwillerman - April 07 at 07:08 PM

RW

We love having learned of Eloise Woods and feel the natural Austin landscape is the perfect place for her to be.

rwillerman - April 07 at 07:09 PM

FS

“ *Bean's love of reading. I called my newly married friend to learn that she was in the process of making French toast AND reading a book at the same time.*

After both of us moved out of Chicago we kept in touch through an active letter writing correspondence practice. Each letter was full of details of life as we were experiencing it. They were always welcomed and enjoyed.

Now to reflect on uncountable moments flashing to my mind from a friendship that really had been part of the majority of my life.

Felice Sachs - April 07 at 06:46 PM

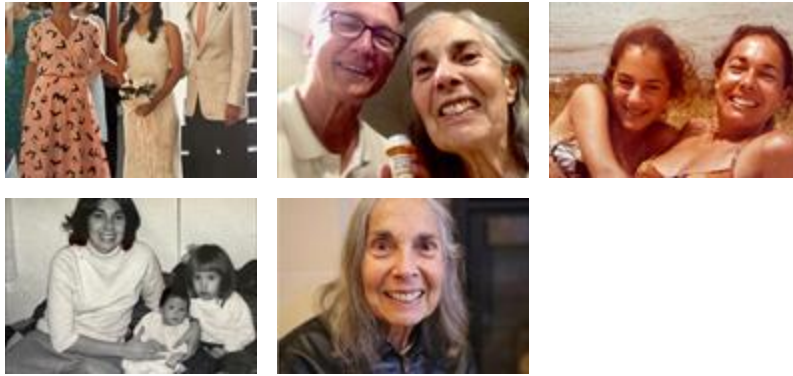
DS

“ I will be eternally grateful to Benne for the kindness with which she welcomed me to the Willerman family, and her selflessness in always putting family and friends first, including her grandchildren. Hopefully, someone will post a picture of Raquel's masterpiece, "Grandma's Bikini"!

Don Steinberg - April 07 at 05:53 PM

AR

“ 5 files added to the album Benne



Amiel Romain - April 07 at 05:50 PM

RW

“ 3 files added to the album Benne



rwillerman - April 07 at 05:15 PM

DW

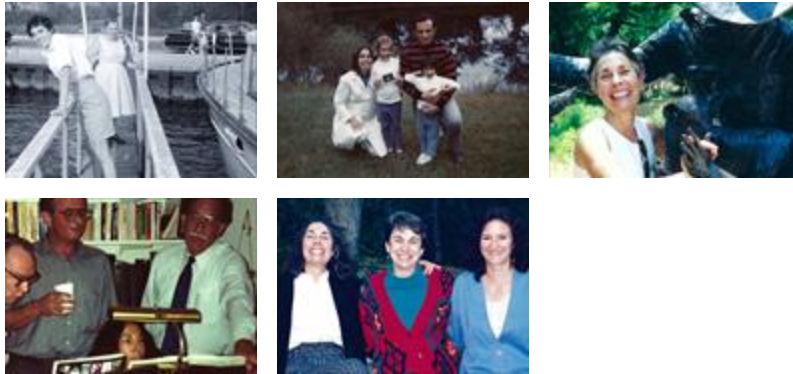
“ I remember Benne's beautiful home and how it reflected her style. She had the most beautiful smile and always went out of her way to make Blake and I feel wrapped in love and welcomed. She was truly kind and I can hear her giggle. She had such a great laugh!!!

Danielle Willerman

Danielle Willerman - April 06 at 09:54 PM

RW

“ 13 files added to the album Benne



rwillerman - April 06 at 03:29 PM

JE

I am so sorry for your loss— I have some wonderful memories of time spent with Aunt Benne and Uncle Lee

Janet Ellingson - April 06 at 09:49 PM

SW

When I learned at the age of 16 that my beloved Uncle Lee was getting married, I hated the woman who was taking him away from me. Then my father, the eldest Willerman brother, and I went to Chicago for the wedding. I was getting out of a car - I remember - the back seat behind the passenger side - and the door opened to a beautiful woman smiling warmly to me arms open and saying, "I have a niece!!" That was it. I was smitten.

My father cried at their wedding while hearing Benne sing. Her voice both singing and speaking was filled with lyricism.

Aunt Benne was a wonderful Aunt to me from then on, even though she was only 4 years older than I. I was in my college dorm in 1964 and got a phone call one morning in February. 'You have a baby cousin!' That would be Raquel. When my marriage broke up she comforted me with saying that just because a marriage didn't last a lifetime, didn't mean it wasn't a success. Her notes to me giving news were written in exquisite handwriting.

Thank you for being my beloved Aunt Benne. I will miss you.

Susan Willerman - April 08 at 09:35 AM

GM

*I love and will remember all of the many adventures Benne and I had together and there were many. Benne was always kind and witty, she had a laugh that always made me feel comfortable and at home. I will miss her...and her beautiful smile among other things! So very grateful to have known her. Rest in peace my dear friend... Much Love
Gwendolyn*

Gwendolyn Mask - April 09 at 09:24 PM