



Deena Hersch Mersky

January 14, 1931 - August 10, 2018

It is with heavy hearts that she share the sad news that our mother, Deena Mersky, died Friday August 10, at the age of 87, surrounded by her family. Like everything she did in life, she did it “her way.” She had been given a life expectancy of 3 to 6 months, and seemed to be in pretty good shape considering she had metastasized lung cancer, but yesterday morning after eating her favorite breakfast taco, she sat down in her favorite lounge chair, took a nap, fell asleep and didn’t wake up. It was a peaceful passing.

Deena was born in New York January 14, 1931, to Phillip and Mildred Hersch. Her parents were immigrants from Russia and Poland who became successful business people in Mt. Vernon, New York. Deena had an older brother Reuben, and an older cousin Florence she was very close to.

Deena had an adventurous life. After attending a year at Goddard College, she spent a year traveling around Israel, visiting relatives and living on a kibbutz. She then transferred to the University of Wisconsin, where she met our father, Roy Mersky. They married and had three children: Lisa Mersky, Deborah Mersky and Ruth Mersky Pool. As our Dad pursued his path to the University of Texas Law School, they lived in Connecticut, Washington State, and Boulder, Colorado, before they happily made it to Austin and finally settled down.

As a homemaker, Deena was very active in political and community affairs. She took classes in woodworking and learned to play the recorder. As we girls got older, she returned to school and pursued a Master's Degree in Social Work. She worked in her beloved chosen field into her early 70's. Her initial passion was women's reproductive health: she worked at Planned Parenthood as a social worker and served as Chairman of the Board. Then she found her true calling as professor of Social Work at the University of Texas, where she influenced the lives of countless students and colleagues, between the years of 1976 to 2000.

She had a lifelong commitment to progressive politics and social equality. She marched against the Vietnam war, and for civil rights.

Mom was a community activist, an arts appreciator and encourager, a 50 year member of KMFA. She served on the board of Planned Parenthood, Women and Their Work, and Jewish Family Services. She was a creative cook, and a pioneer in trying recipes from other cultures. She was a collector of countless beautiful objects and interesting plants, a recycler and a re-user. She was a talented and creative flower arranger and home decorator. She had a great eye for ethnic jewelry. She loved the full moon and always let us know when it was arriving. She was fond of ritual and tradition, a creative crafter, a music lover, a great storyteller, an inveterate bargain hunter, and she had a very playful sense of humor.

She was a world traveler (Soviet Union, Czechoslovakia, Hungary, Portugal, France, Italy, Spain, Greece, Mexico, the Dominican Republic, Cuba, Nicaragua, Honduras, Belgium, England, Wales, and Israel.)

As much as she loved Texas, she had a very special place in her heart for her summer home and friends in Lee, Massachusetts. Built by her parents in 1971, many family memories and traditions were created there.

Her favorite pie was strawberry rhubarb, and her favorite drink was Campari.

She loved her children, her grandchildren, her family, and her huge extended family of friends, and especially her famous dog Stella.

Our mother was one of a kind, a force of nature. We appreciate her for her constant encouragement of our creativity, for instilling wonderful values in us, and for teaching us how to appreciate the wonders of the world.

Having had only daughters and granddaughters, she felt very fortunate in falling in love with two wonderful son-in-laws, one grand son-in law, and very special boy friends. She is survived by her daughters Lisa Mersky (Albert Garcia), Ruth Pool, (Keith Pool), Deborah Mersky, Grace Pool Brady (Ryan Brady), Sophia Rose Burns, and Rebekah Pool. Her brother, Reuben Hersh, age 90, and his children, Eva and Daniel Hersh, and very special cousins, Tamara Lubliner and Merry Fanshel. And Donna Gold and family, And countless other relatives and very special friends, too numerous to name.

Her favorite saying was "Vote early, and vote often." (But only if you are a Democrat), she always added!

If you would like to honor Deena with a contribution, she asks you to donate to any cause which will remove the current president and those who support him, sooner rather than later. She asks us to work to stop gerrymandering and guarantee each person one vote. She asks us to prevent corporate money from impacting politics.

The world has lost a shining star...

Tribute Wall



“ I recently discovered that Deena was a cousin of my partner, and having read several obituaries, it became clear that she was a remarkable, passionate, woman. May her memory be a blessing.

January 15, 2025 at 10:27 AM



“ Deena Hersh Mersky

October 14, 2022 at 12:02 PM



“ I so remember Mrs. Mersky as a loving, interested and active parent at Casis Elementary School when I was the art teacher at Dill and Casis from 1967-69. I also remember having Lisa and Deborah, great young artists -- so sorry as my memory fails me on having had her other talented children! What a wonderful tribute in the newspaper and I cherish her views and support many groups she supported. I just sent another contribution to Beto in her memory. Blessings to all in her family. You HAVE lost a shining star. Fondly,
Emma Lea Mayton

Emma Lea Mayton - September 12, 2018 at 01:07 PM

CU

“ Oh, what a loss. Deena was a one-of-a-kind friend. We taught together, traveled together, celebrated together, and cried & commiserated together. I cannot imagine being in Austin without her. I am thankful for our 42 years of friendship. I just wish it had been longer. RIP, dear friend. Happy Trails to You...xxoo



Charlene Urwin - September 11, 2018 at 08:58 PM

JS

“ Dear Family,
I knew Deena as a Field Instructor from UT when I had students I was supervising. I just loved working with her to expand the values of social work into new students! But I mostly enjoyed just talking to her about her love of life, knowledge of much in the world, and social work! How lucky you are to have had a Mother that taught you to " appreciate the wonders of the World" as you say! Just remember, You were loved.
In Sympathy, Judy Schlotzhauer, LCSW MSSW, UT, 1972

Judy Schlotzhauer - September 05, 2018 at 11:59 AM

LS

“ Ruth,

Your mom reminds me of the warmth of our shared childhood. I spent years not seeing her, but when I saw her this past winter, I was embraced again by her affection and joy. She was, and always will be, one of those moms that raised us all up with her sense of right (and wrong), her core and correct values, and her nurturing spirit. We are all who we are because of these amazing women who were are moms. I send you all my love and good thoughts during this time of immensely missing her. She was the best. I also absolutely adored her request for donations. Always on the best side...and as I continue my ongoing donations to the right causes, I'll think of her! Love, Laila

Laila Stroben - August 29, 2018 at 06:27 PM

RH

“ *What a terrible loss for Austin . What an incredible life, my condolences dear Lisa and to all the Mersky family.*
Riley Hickerson

Riley Hickerson - August 28, 2018 at 11:30 PM

PR

“ Deena was indeed one of those special individuals whose friendship I cherish. Even though I didn't see her often, we could pick up our conversations immediately. I first met Deena through Planned Parenthood. At that time she was on their staff, and I was on their Board. We immediately bonded and shared a hotel room at a PP conference. I so looked forward to seeing her at the PP Annual Dinner in Austin every year. This week I saw her sponsorship on the invitation, "Deena Mersky and Family". She will be miss by all who attend, most especially by my family and me. To her daughters and granddaughters, I would say, "How blessed you all were to have Deena as your parent." All who knew her have lost a great friend, and this world has lost a wonderful human being. Peace be with you all.

Peggy Romberg

Peggy Romberg - August 26, 2018 at 09:31 AM

SF

“ What a beautiful obit for such a beautiful lady and what a peaceful departure from this earth. Betsy and I have enjoyed monthly lunch visits at Lubys with Deena for many years and we also enjoyed recent lunches at the Bistro hosted by Deena. She will be greatly missed! Shudde Fath and her daughter Betsy Fath Hiller, Austin TX

Shudde Fath - August 22, 2018 at 10:37 AM

BO

“ Deena was a remarkable woman who led an extraordinary life. My heartfelt condolences go out to her family and friends. And may I add that her obituary written by her children was very well done, a nice tribute indeed.

Bill O'Hara

bill o'hara - August 22, 2018 at 07:15 AM

BP

“ Deena was a great lady. I met her through her husband, Roy, the head of UT Law School Library. After I graduated from Law School I would run into her at many Democratic events and she was always so helpful and enthusiastic in fighting for her many causes. My condolences to her family. The world is made lesser by her passing.
Bob Perkins

Bob Perkins - August 21, 2018 at 03:32 PM

HC

“ What a beautiful tribute. What a special person! We just made a contribution to SPLC in Deena honor

Helen Cominos - August 20, 2018 at 07:52 PM

PM

“ I first met Deena Mersky in the late 70's when I helped with preparations for an event to be held at her lovely home for the UT Law Library where I worked and which had been organized by Roy Mersky. Over the years I worked there our contact was minimal, really, but she always had a warm and welcoming smile and had a knack of putting one at ease. Deena had a sparkle in her eyes to match her sense of humour. She was a dear lady. Her obituary captures what a remarkable woman she was and the wonderful legacy she leaves her daughters. My deepest condolences to Lisa, Deborah, Ruth, and their families and may the rich memories be of some consolation to them and all her family and friends.

Pierrette Moreno
Austin, Texas

Pierrette Moreno - August 20, 2018 at 06:28 PM

SN

“ Our family and the Mersky family go so far back that I can't remember not being family friends. Her obituary captures her perfectly. I loved poking around her house and later apartment and seeing all of her treasures and hearing the stories behind them. I will remember her with love and admiration. Lisa, Deborah and Ruth, I hold you close in my heart and thoughts.
Sona Spear Nast

Sona Nast - August 19, 2018 at 11:31 PM

LD

“ Lloyd and I are so sad to hear of Deena's death, but were relieved that she left quickly and peacefully. We are fortunate to have known her our entire adult lives and always looked forward to seeing her at Democratic events, planned parenthood gatherings and in the neighborhood. She brought love, advice, compassion, and intelligence to every encounter with life.

Deena raised an awesome family that "got" her values and continues her tradition of giving back. We are particularly fortunate to have had Ruth baby sit for our two daughters for a number of years. This made us feel like the Merskys were part of our family.

Deena, as it says in the obituary, was a force of nature and added value to everything she touched. She will be missed. All our love to the family. Lloyd and Libby Doggett

Lloyd and Libby Doggett - August 19, 2018 at 07:49 PM

JH

“ *Deena Mersky was a wonderful professor. She was so passionate, warm, and encouraging. She was such an inspiration! With deepest sympathy,*

*Joyce Haight Hefner,
BSW 1988, MSW 1993*

Joyce Hefner - August 16, 2018 at 04:07 PM

JW

“ Deena’s creativity was legendary. Her eye was influenced by her dry sense of humor and spectrum of ethnic cultures. Whether Jewish, Mexican or Middle Eastern, subject matter and sense of design found its way into her whimsical imagination. Her clothing, jewelry, and home decor were all touched by her unique gift. Even her delicious meals were beautifully presented.

Deena’s love of family and her generous ingenuity on behalf of her friends was unmatched. I treasure, for example, the miniature collage that she made for my 80th birthday, containing my personal interests arranged attractively in an Altoid tin. Who could imagine? Deena, that’s who.

When it came to politics, Deena not only talked the talk, but she walked the walk. She was not to be taken lightly. I have so much respect for her advocacy, always on the right side of history.

I’m heartbroken by her passing. The world has indeed lost a shining star, as her daughters note, but her vivid essence will remain in our hearts always.



Janice Wetzel - August 15, 2018 at 07:09 PM

MM

“ Deena was my faculty liaison during my undergraduate social work studies and shaped me into the social worker and educator that I am today. She was a fabulous mentor, friend, role model, activist, and teacher. When Deena retired from UT she allowed me to have her office and it still carries her spirit to this day. She was inspiring and will always have a special place in my heart.

Mary Mulvaney - August 15, 2018 at 06:56 PM

MF

“ I joined the UT SW faculty just as Deena left, but she reached out and was a constant source of support and insight. In recent years I attended the monthly lunch group with Deena and other longtime Austin-area activists. They came to my class on a couple of occasions, and the wisdom and energy for life gushed like an arroyo in a Texas flood. I heard so many good stories (the ones about LBJ would make a longshoreman blush) that I decided to bring a film crew and interview them all in Deena's living room last spring. She was truly one-of-a-kind, and will be sorely missed. If we do in fact have souls, then wherever Deena's has taken residence is a much more interesting place!

Miguel Ferguson - August 15, 2018 at 06:14 PM

JK

“ So many memories of Deena and the influence she had on my life and career! Deena was among those who hired me to be the Director of Jewish Family Service in 1987 and promptly told me I WOULD be taking interns from the UT School of Social Work! Two years later, she encouraged me to apply and join her at the school as a clinical faculty member. She was a great mentor for me and for all of the students' lives she touched. Deena's commitment to social justice came through in all she did and said. I am glad she was at peace...a woman whose life was well lived.

Jane Kretzschmar

Jane Kretzschmar - August 15, 2018 at 03:25 PM

SL

“ I've known Deena since she and her family moved across the street from us on Townes Lane in Tarrytown. Don't even remember the years now but it was during the sixties. We were so happy to find ourselves near liberals with similar allegiances. Over the years we followed and crossed paths, so it was a happy event for me to join Deena in the memoir writing group now known as the Wordlings. Having her move to Westminster was an additional delight, especially since it meant also seeing the three girls again. A circle of acquaintance and friendship is now complete in a sense, but I will miss Deena enormously, I wanted more time with her. Isn't that the way it should be? She told me about her illness the day before she died, without the slightest sign of self pity. I still marvel at her courage.

Sally Leach - August 14, 2018 at 03:55 PM

JA

“ Deena’s obituary is wonderful....it captures her so well....I loved working with Deena at the School of Social Work....her intellectual abilities blended with her creative powers made her an extraordinary teacher. Many years ago Deena called in regards to a resident armadillo in her yard . She was moving and wanted to find a new home for the armadillo. ..We captured it and escorted it out of town. A week later Deena sent us the recipe for Roasted armadillo, always the inventive cook. So many memories of a wonderful woman! I will always treasure our friendship.

jean avera - August 14, 2018 at 11:25 AM

JK

“ Deena was a REAL person - her opinions sharp and funny, her home a fascinating jumble of memories, and her interest in the world around her amazing. I will miss knowing she is still with us.
Jean Kubala - old member of the writing group

jean kubala - August 13, 2018 at 08:10 AM