



Leslie Sholl Jaffe

September 11, 1953 - February 18, 2026

Leslie Sholl Jaffe began her journey as Leslie Karen Sholl in Chicago, Illinois on September 11th, 1953. She was already bursting with too much life to wait for her parents -- Carol and Marvin -- to arrive at the hospital and was born on the move in a '47 Packard like the force of nature that she is. Leslie would go on to make a profound impact on the people who crossed her path, sharing her radiant warmth, generous wisdom, and fierce compassion for humanity on every level.

Leslie brought all of this into her work life. Moving through a series of people-centered jobs --lifeguard, community center director, executive director of Women Business Owners of New York -- she found her life's mission as a trainer and coach in personal growth, organizational change and leadership development. After consulting in the corporate sector for many years, she transitioned to the social justice world, which was much closer to her heart. Among her many clients were the Human Rights Campaign, the Service Employees International Union, the Rockwood Leadership Institute, and many Jewish social justice programs including the Selah project of Bend the Arc, Hillel and Entwine. Through this work she touched many lives; the ripples of her presence will be felt for years to come.

Leslie is most known for co-developing one of the most powerful and prolific leadership tools in the country: POP (Purpose, Outcomes, Process). This tool

has been taught to over 12,000 leaders around the world and is widely used across the nonprofit sector.

Too early in life, Leslie experienced deep loss with the deaths of her brothers Scott and Barry from cancer and complications of AIDS, respectively. She would ultimately be parted from her parents, her mother-in-law Phyllis, and several dear friends. The memories of her loved ones always stayed close to her heart and strengthened the empathy with which she approached the world.

Leslie's greatest joy was her beloved family: her husband of 42 years, David, their children Dara and Gary, and her sons-in-law, Omar and Jason. They will miss her an unspeakable amount and hold her tight with the infinite love she instilled in them.

The final part of Leslie's journey was a series of illnesses that weakened her body but not her resolve. She fought hard to stay on this earth as long as possible, and her bright light will remain here. In lieu of flowers, please consider donating to two organizations with which Leslie was personally involved:

Breakthrough Central Texas (<https://breakthroughctx.org/>) helps Austin area students become the first of their families to attend college. Leslie and David have supported the program for many years. For the past four years, Leslie mentored a young woman from Austin High School who is now a freshman at Texas State University.

The Settlement Home for Children (<https://www.settlementhome.org/>) promotes healing and growth in children, young adults and families by providing a continuum of care, support and resources. They serve individuals who have experienced severe emotional trauma, abuse and neglect. Leslie

spent hours preparing goods for their annual fundraising sale and informally mentored one of the young women in the program.

A memorial service for Leslie is being planned for May 16 in Austin. It will also be livestreamed. Details to follow.

Tribute Wall

RT

“ I had the extreme good fortune to be coached by Leslie in the first years that I stepped up to be the Executive Director of the LA Alliance for a New Economy. We met through Rockwood, and Leslie helped me and pur management team navigate change and organizational growth. I trusted her completely. She was so funny and very direct. I wanted someone to give me their unvarnished opinion of what to do and she gave me the perfect combination of encouragement and bossiness. I really loved her and it's so hard to imagine all that energy nomlonger existing with the rest of us...I want to appreciate her family for their willingness to share her with the rest of us.

Roxana Tynan - May 13 at 01:13 PM

ZE

“ I met Leslie through a Rockwood training I attended. What an extraordinary, wonderful human being. She made a huge difference in my life and I am so grateful. My deepest condolences to her friends and family.

Zeke - April 10 at 12:48 AM

SK

“ I met Leslie around 2006 through Rockwood. She immediately was one of my favorite coaches and consultants. Over time we became colleagues and friends. We stayed in touch even til the week of her passing. She was remarkably generous, always funny and insightful and driven by social and environmental justice. She impressed and inspired me every time we spoke. I still come across material on the internet inspired by or written by her. I miss her. On a trip to austin last year, we couldn't meet up becuae of her health. I regret not getting to hug her. Sending you much love Leslie

sean kosofsky - March 28 at 10:39 PM

MR

“ I did not know Leslie, just only through David, but I know how much she was loved by him and by her children. I am so very sorry for the loss of this wonderful person.

Madeline Reamy - March 17 at 08:13 PM

BA

“ I first met Leslie in September 1990 when my then 2-year-old entered All Austin Cooperative Nursery School. Being a Coop, it was a whole family experience. The Jaffe's already had one child at All Austin and another joining - Leslie was assigned as my "mentor" in all things Coop. We also connected as the "outliers" - across the river in Westlake. Leslie was a working mom; I was a stay-at-home mom. But we were able to support each other's different parenting experiences and needs. When Leslie was traveling and Dave had work commitments as well, they would drop the kids at my house for the "Breakfast Club". I would feed them and get them all off to school. And when I needed a friend in lonely times, Leslie was there. We spent many family gatherings, adult only gatherings (lots of music) and birthday parties together (Blue Whale Cake!!! and a Riverboat joint 40th with birthday twins, Leslie and Ryan). When my family moved to Boston in 1995, one of my biggest regrets was leaving the warm, loving community of which Leslie was such an integral part. Five years - but so strong. Luckily between trips back to Austin and the Jaffe's annual summer pilgrimage to the beautiful Otis, Mass we were able to watch our kids grow and stay connected. Leslie was all about connection. I will miss her more than I can say.

Barbara - March 07 at 06:37 PM

MB

“ *Leslie was the best of the best. We met in 2017 in Barcelona when she was facilitating for JDC entwine. She would go on to become one of my biggest champions and favorite people.*

She called me her favorite wandering Jew. I am in Karpathos right now, a Dodecanese island she would have loved, as I reflect on the miracle of our lives crossing. I hear her in the birdsong and see her in the wisdom of the trees.

Leslie modeled what it looked like to live with integrity. To laugh with love - at yourself and with the world. I carry her teachings and the many resources she generously shared. I am a kinder human and a stronger facilitator because our lives magically crossed.

David, Dara, and Gary, how she loved you. You were her greatest joys and she would light up as she shared updates from the wonders of your lives. May you find comfort and strength in each other. Thank you for sharing Leslie with us.

miriam bader - March 01 at 04:37 AM

JF

“ I first connected with Leslie during her time at Rockwood, and I will always be so grateful for this. To me, what made Leslie extraordinary was the way she could hold you with real care while also pushing you toward your best self. She saw what you were capable of and didn't let you be anything but that person.

I'll always remember her carving out extra time to connect with me, and provide inspiration. And in the midst of our time together, a moment that continues to bring a smile to my face was seeing the joy in her eyes as she spoke about her family. You could feel how proud she was and how deeply she loved them.

Leslie will be deeply missed, and her legacy will continue on in the many, many leaders and lives she shaped. Sending warmth and condolences to all that loved her.

Joshua Fried - February 28 at 05:56 PM

CV

“ Leslie was one of the best teachers I had the privilege to learn from. She was also a mentor and a friend. When Leslie was in your corner, she made you feel that you could accomplish anything! Everything that I've done that was meaningful as an advocate and public sector executive could be traced back to the most important lesson she taught: relationship before task. And I still use the POP process! Though she has left our world, she will never be forgotten. I miss her dearly.

Cuc Vu - February 25 at 08:58 PM

HB

“ Leslie was one of the trainer/coaches/wonderful guiding staff at the SELAH leadership training. In addition to her insightful training in leadership, as she did with so many, we bonded and became movement partners and friends--calling each other periodically for insight and support. She always had love at her center and a positive spirit--even in very trying and challenging times (personally and socially). She always sought how to expand our community, how to build on our values, how to lead people to find their highest calling. Leslie was a gift in this world. I am stunned by her passing and feel how the world is a bit less bright because she is not in it...and know that she has touched so many who carry on her spirit and who will never let it die.

Heather Booth - February 25 at 08:15 PM

AB

“ Leslie shaped my life and leadership in ways I am still uncovering.

I first learned from her in a coaching setting connected to my UJA-Federation Ruskey Leadership cohort, and then through JDC Entwine. What began as professional guidance became something much deeper. Leslie had a way of asking questions that cut through noise. She listened closely, reframed gently, and insisted on clarity. POP became part of how I think because of her, not just as a framework, but as a discipline of intention.

She believed that rigor and heart belong together. She would push for precision without ever losing sight of the person in front of her. “Relationship before task” was not just something she said. It was how she moved through the world.

After our formal work ended, she stayed in my life. She checked in. She coached me through a cross-country move and through career transitions. Her presence was steady and thoughtful. She held me accountable while reminding me who I was becoming.

Leslie, you helped so many of us find our footing as leaders. You challenged us to be clearer, braver, and more human. Your voice still echoes in my head before big decisions, asking the questions that matter most.

Your impact lives in the thousands of leaders you trained and mentored, and in the quieter moments when one of us pauses to lead with more care because of something you taught us.

May your memory continue to guide us toward leadership that is purposeful, accountable, and deeply human.

Andrew Belinfante - February 25 at 07:11 PM

SR

“ Many people have written about Leslie’s encouragement to define one’s purpose. I often think she spoke about it so powerfully because she had such clarity about her own. She didn’t just teach fulfillment — she embodied it. There was an unmistakable aliveness about her, a woman deeply rooted in what mattered most.

It was obvious how profoundly in love she was with Dave. She lit up when she talked about him. And her children she raved about them endlessly with that particular blend of pride and tenderness that only a devoted mother carries. I don’t think they could ever fully know the number of lives she quietly and powerfully touched including mine.

I knew about her love of tequila and music and the intentional beauty of the life and home she built in Austin. Everything she created felt thoughtful and alive and deeply hers. But more than that she modeled something rarer how to truly make space for people’s stories.

I remember the first time I nervously shared what was happening in my personal life during a retreat she helped curate in San Francisco. I kept trying to pivot back to the professional to keep things polished and contained. But she gently held the space. She knew that if I was going to show up fully in my work I needed permission to explore my own life first. She understood that our humanity is not separate from our leadership it is the source of it.

That was Leslie. Clear. Intentional. Loving. Fully alive.

And because of that so many of us are too.

Shauna Ruda - February 25 at 06:18 PM

NN

“ I met Leslie z"l at Selah, when I was very tender, having just lost my mother. So I skipped the first evening social event. Leslie joined me in a rocker on the porch and we talked for hours. She was the rare person who could listen deeply and authentically, understanding much more than was actually said - and at the same time, displaying vulnerability by sharing her own challenges and struggles. She talked openly about her own losses and grief journeys.

We kept in periodic contact over the years and I saw her when she was in Boston. That last visit was a special one. I left my job under difficult circumstances and decided to launch a coaching practice. We sat talking on the dock for a long time (conversations with her were all so expansive!) as she offered one gem after another. Know your own worth and be clear about what you expect. Only take on work that will teach and challenge you. Don't use the word "help" in your materials - better to say "work together".

I can't retrieve all that I learned from Leslie since so much of it is now absorbed in my being. But she taught me so many wise lessons on living with purpose (and joy!) and being clear about your own vision and how to pursue it. Plus I got great advice about where to buy cowboy boots in Austin (probably from you too Dave) and how to make the yummiest brownies (with cinnamon!) Best of all, we always laughed a lot together.

From the evening of that porch conversation to the last time I saw her, I felt like we had a bond so special that it must be unique. She saw, heard and understood me and she generously offered the perfect guidance to propel me toward my chosen vision for the life I wanted to lead.

What I have learned since hearing this shattering news is that the connection I had with her was not at all unique. I'm now reading messages from an astonishing number of people who were also the recipients of her kindness, insight and wisdom and whose

encounters with her changed the trajectory of their lives.. I realize that what I experienced was indeed very real - but that she had the miraculous capacity to be just as present for SO many people. Her gigantic heart knew no limits and it filled the universe.

I imagine you all know how much she ADORED all of you - how proud she was of her children, your accomplishments both professional and interpersonal and how deeply in love she was with you Dave.

I know that your beloved wife and mother will remain a close presence in your lives and that you will continue to honor her. Someone that extraordinary endures.

Thank you for sharing your wife/mother with all of us -

Nahma Nadich - February 25 at 05:46 PM

IS

“*I am so terribly sad about this news. Leslie was wise, kind, funny, and being in her presence is feeling her warmth. It just felt so good to be around her. I use POP in most of my meetings and have made it a practice wherever I work. Now, when I use POP, I will think of Leslie's extraordinary contributions and legacy. Her memory is a blessing.*”

Irene Lehrer Sandalow - February 25 at 05:44 PM

LN

“ To know Leslie was to love her. From her giving spirit, creative soul, and lighthearted joy; every space brightened simply because she was in it. Leslie had the rare and beautiful gift of making people feel cared for and welcomed. I had the true honor of getting to know her through workouts and movement. My favorite, simple memories will be admiring jewelry and fashion together. She made an impact that will continue to ripple through my life as well as so many others. Heaven gained an angel, but we were so lucky to have had her with us first. My absolute condolences and prayers to her family.

Lily Noonan - February 25 at 05:41 PM

DN

“ I am deeply appreciative of Leslie's work and to have known her.

Dan Newman - February 25 at 05:17 PM



“ I am so, so sorry to hear of Leslie's passing. I knew her from way back at Chippewa Ranch Camp where she was one of my campers. She was one of the sweetest people I knew. Thinking of her family and sending my heartfelt condolences.

Judy Bard - February 25 at 04:14 PM

SE

“ Leslie was my coach for many years, who became a friend and mentor. Leslie was stunningly beautiful so it was hard not to watch her, she sparkled, quite literally, and had a fierceness and joy about her, and the way she worked and related with people was masterful.

She had a ripple effect....I feel so lucky I found her and that she said yes to working with me. Leslie was the single biggest influence on how I now work and lead. And I'm not alone - so many people in the Jewish world and beyond were impacted by Leslie's work, and in turn the organizations and programs they lead.

POP POP POP...I know anyone reading this who worked with Leslie will know what this means. It's such a simple tool and reframe but it is everywhere in my work. Leslie had me do a POP for my life (which took me months) and would remind me when she noticed one of the sought after Outcomes had happened. Every meeting, every conversation, email, document had a POP. If not on paper, then in my head. Being more intentional and focused with my work and interactions changed me, our team, and our organization.

Sharper and Softer....working with her all those years both sharpened me as a leader and at the same time softened me. She pushed me to face very difficult situations, but not alone because she was in it with me. I loved how thorough she was even when it drove me crazy. She taught me that working with greater purpose and focus leads one to greater rigor but also greater care. Sharper, softer.

She was fierce and tough, but no one had a bigger heart....I love that our family got to experience her beloved lake house. That when my girls were born a blanket she had knitted for them would arrive. She made the time and she was all love - she loved the work, she genuinely loved people, she was so in love with her husband and children, and endlessly proud of them.

Leslie, thank you. What a gift it was to know you and learn from you.

Your memory will always be a blessing. ❤️❤️❤️

Sarah Eisenman - February 25 at 03:58 PM

WC

“ I am so saddened to hear of Leslie's passing. We were friends in grammar school in Evanston in the 60s but lost touch when she switched high schools. We reunited in 1995 when I tried to reconnect with her because she was my only friend who lit a candle at my Bar Mitzvah that I had lost contact with. Through the internet we found Leslie living in Austin. We arranged a party of grammar school friends that Leslie attended in Chicago when she was here on a business trip. Our friendship started again as if we had never lost touch. We shared a lot of laughter and music and some personal tragedies together. What I will remember most about Leslie is her warmth and friendliness, her ability to accept everyone without judgement, her love for David, her children and their partners and the fact she was the first girl I ever kissed on the lips (1966). May her memory bring everyone peace, comfort and happiness.

Wayne Cooper - February 25 at 03:47 PM

SH

“ Such a loss to the world but an angel gained. I had the privilege of attending a Women in Leadership weekend as a Board member of the Human Rights Campaign. Leslie was a facilitator who shared her brilliance, compassion and light to all of us. Much love to her family and friends. - Suzanne Hamilton

Suzanne Hamilton - February 25 at 02:10 PM

SM

Lesli was truly a special person in my life. I met her at Selah and immediately bonded with her. She helped guide me in making important career decisions, and I consider her to have been a special friend. I am grateful that she introduced me to Gary (in NYC) and I enjoyed attending some of Gary's events with her. As many have noted, Leslie was insightful and caring - she had a heart of gold and an infinite soul. We will all miss her.

Steve Mendelsohn

Steve Mendelsohn - February 26 at 02:03 PM

SS

I met Leslie around 1993, when we were both working in the corporate world. She was my first spiritual mentor, and forever changed the way I looked at myself and at the world.

When I left the corporate world, to start my own nonprofit, Leslie's voice and wisdom guided me. I was proud to create an organization where girls and young women could experience some of the love, deep listening, empowerment, and vision that Leslie shared with me and so many others.

Leslie was such a blessing in my life. The many posts here did a beautiful job of witnessing her impact so powerfully.

So much love and hugs to David, Dara, and Gary.

And to everyone else who posted here.

(Sue Schooner)

Sue Schooner - March 29 at 09:49 PM