



Rhea Mirmelstein Wolfram

April 19, 1919 - January 16, 2025

Rhea Mirmelstein Wolfram 1919-2025.

Loving wife, mother, grandmother, great-grandmother, lover of the arts, energetic community activist, lifelong supporter of educational causes, and nationally renowned trailblazer in the field of educational counseling, Rhea Wolfram passed away peacefully at her Dallas home on January 16 four months short of her 106th birthday.

Born in 1919 in the Tidewater Virginia city of Newport News at her parents' home to avoid the still rampant post-WWI Spanish flu epidemic, she was the second of Samuel and Etta Mirmelstein's four children.

Newport News at the time was a small bustling city of less than 35,000 at the mouth of the James River, where prosperity was largely dependent on CP Huntington's Newport News Shipbuilding & Drydock Co., the coal export activities of the Chesapeake & Ohio Railroad, and the growth of military installations in the Tidewater area. Arriving in the late 1800s, the Mirmelstein family found its place in the growing city, where Rhea grew up in the company of a myriad of cousins in a large extended family that represented a significant part of the close-knit traditional Jewish community in which her grandfather had served as the first rabbi. Her childhood was otherwise marked by her family role from a young age in caring for her visually and mentally-impaired

older brother, serving as his “eyes” to and protector from the world, a singular experience that, in her view, helped her become the keen observer and listener for which she became renowned.

An insatiable reader and ever curious about people, ideas and the society in which she lived, Rhea actively pursued education in all forms throughout her long life. As the economy floundered into the depths of the Great Depression, she graduated from Newport News High School in 1935 as Salutatorian, president of the National Honor Society, co-editor of the school newspaper, and editor of the yearbook. Rhea then attended the College of William and Mary, from which she graduated in 1939 with a Bachelor of Arts degree with honors (major in History and Political Science and minor in Sociology and Education) and with a professional teaching certificate.

Her first teaching position was at Armstrong Elementary School in Hampton, Virginia, where she taught 55 seventh-grade students from diverse backgrounds ranging from children of military personnel from all ranks, to blue collar and white collar workers at the shipyard and the C&O, to business executives and professionals.

After WWII started, she also served as an air raid warden. But she still had time for dances and socials at the USO and military clubs in the Tidewater area. At one of these, she met the love of her life, a physician at the Veterans Hospital in Hampton, Julius (Julie) Wolfram, whom she married in June 1942 and to whom she remained devoted for the nearly 69 years prior to his death in 2011 at age 98.

The newlyweds first moved to Somerville, New Jersey, where Dr. Wolfram practiced medicine in Bound Brook and Rhea worked in the Belle Mead Quartermaster Depot. Among her duties was carrying papers on orders of the Commanding Officer to an address in New York City which she learned after

the war were for the Manhattan Project.

When Dr. Wolfram volunteered for the Army Medical Corps, Rhea temporarily returned to Newport News, where she worked in secret documents and troop movement at the Hampton Roads Port of Embarkation. When her husband then was assigned to the Air Transport Command in Michigan, Rhea joined him and was employed as the Chief Administrative Clerk for the Judge Advocate General Officer Candidate School at the University of Michigan, some faculty members of which later served on the US legal team at the Nuremberg trials.

Later in the war, between postings in Michigan, Julie was assigned to the Army Air Corps at Love Field in Dallas, where the young couple was introduced to life in the Southwest. Recognizing the opportunities that Dallas could offer, they decided to make it their first home, now with their infant son, on Southwestern Boulevard, when Julie was finally discharged from the Army in 1946.

At age 26 Rhea thus embraced the city that would be her lifelong home, and Dallas began its 80-year relationship with Rhea, becoming the platform on which her energy, crackling intelligence and active commitment to numerous causes were to make her a community legend.

Aside from the opportunities for Julie in the medical field and for Rhea in community activities, Dallas offered them a rich cultural life that thrived already in the 1940s and that Rhea enjoyed until her final days. She rarely missed a performance of the Dallas Symphony Orchestra, for which she also served as a member of the Orchestra League. She and Julie spent many of their happiest hours in chamber music concerts at SMU and were active, long-time supporters of the Dallas Museum of Art, the Meadows Art Museum, the

Nasher Sculpture Center, the Dallas Theater Center, the Dallas Civic Opera, and the Tate Lecture Series at SMU. Even in her last years, Rhea took great pleasure in the special cinematic presentations of the Metropolitan Opera as well as at the Symphony.

From the beginning, a major center of Rhea's Dallas life was Temple Emanu-El, first at its South Boulevard location in South Dallas and then, from 1957, at the Temple's present location on Hillcrest. She was active at the Temple and in related Jewish affairs in many roles: National Council of Jewish Women - Life Member, National Council of Jewish Women (Dallas Section), Temple Emanu-El Community Affairs Committee, Women's Division of the Jewish Welfare Federation, President's Council of Jewish Women's Organization and Dallas Chapter, American Jewish Committee. She was a recipient of both the Irvin Katz Award and the Human Relations Award of the American Jewish Committee as well as a member of Temple Emanu-El's Sisterhood Hall of Fame and of Who's Who Among World Jewry.

Particularly close to her heart was her long association with Brandeis University outside of Boston, which led to friendships with women from around the country. She filled leadership roles at all levels on the National Women's Committee, of which she became an Honorary Life Member and also served as Dallas Chapter President.

After raising her three sons and sending them off to college, Rhea launched a major new phase of her life in the early 1970s when she became the full-time Director of College Counseling at Greenhill School. During this period, she also served as an educational consultant at The Episcopal School of Dallas and The Winston School.

After her 13-year career at Greenhill, where she first developed her reputation for insight and skill in the job of matching students with colleges, she

established a thriving independent guidance practice in 1985 in the fields of both college and secondary boarding school placement and placement for students encountering special educational challenges. Her work with countless students continued for the rest of her life, with many of her clients whom she met as teenagers becoming devoted lifelong friends as they moved forward with their college and higher education, often becoming community leaders and accomplished individuals in their own right.

In addition to her charitable work as a planner and Life Member of the Board of Trustees of The Winston School, Rhea worked as a consultant to several corporate scholarship foundations and on the search and scholarship committees for a variety of high schools and colleges.

As her reputation in the guidance field spread, Rhea became an active and recognized leader at the state and national level of the Independent Educational Consultants Association (Founder's Award), the Texas Association for College Admission Counseling (Founder's Award), and the Secondary School Admissions Testing Board, Learning Disabilities.

Other education-related work included service as a delegate to the White House Conference on Children and Youth and a member of the Goals for Dallas' Higher Education Taskforce. On the Rose Terrace Taskforce, Rhea worked to ensure funding for public pre-schools. She served on the Advisory Board for Townview - Talented and Gifted Magnet (Dallas Independent School District) as a charter member, and on the Advisory Board, University of Texas at Dallas - College of General Studies. Rhea also cherished her work on the board of Friends of the Dallas Public Library, where she served a term as President.

Rounding out Rhea's vast inventory of activities and service were the North Texas Taping and Recording for the Blind, the Orton Society, Women's

Council of Dallas County, the Dallas Museum of Art League, the Dallas County Medical Society Alliance, the SMU Meadows School of the Arts and the American Field Service SERV (Special Effort to Recruit Volunteers). In local governmental affairs, she served several terms as a member of the Dallas County Flood Control Committee. She was honored to be a member of the Dallas Women's Club and Dallas Charter 100.

Graced by Rhea's vivacious skills as a hostess schooled in southern hospitality, the Wolfram home was an active social gathering place for guests from all walks of life for lively dinner and cocktail parties where the welcome was warm and the conversation was interesting and intense.

Rhea traveled with her husband to China, Japan, Singapore, Israel, Egypt and widely through Europe. They brought the broader world into their home in 1961-62 when Rhea and her family served as a host family for a French American Field Service exchange student, Louis-André Gérard-Varet, who lived happily with the Wolframs as a member of the family for his senior year at St. Mark's School of Texas. Rhea wept when her beloved French son left Dallas to return to France, but she rejoiced that Louis-André and his family remained close to the Wolframs throughout his brilliant world-class career as a top scholar in economics and game-theory until his untimely death in 2001.

An engaged parent, Rhea was a constant presence at her sons' swimming, tennis and golf lessons and scout activities in their youths and at their sporting and drama activities in their high school years. She followed with great interest the development of her grandchildren and great-grandchildren, for whom she also knitted bundles of sweaters and scarves. With her husband she enjoyed tennis and golf. An active sports fan, she especially enjoyed following the Cowboys until her last days.

Typical was her thrill, as family matriarch, in sharing the eclipse of the sun in April 2024 at her home at The Tradition with several of her great-granddaughters and paying rapt attention to her 10-year-old great granddaughter's in-depth explanation of the astronomical phenomenon.

Rhea Wolfram was preceded in death by her parents Samuel Alexander and Etta Beck Mirmelstein, brothers Jesse and Benson Mirmelstein, and sister Esther Mirmelstein Weinberg.

She is survived by her devoted sons, Michael, Steven, and Richard and their wives, eight grandchildren, nine great-grandchildren, and, as family matriarch, many nieces, nephews, and cousins throughout the country.

The family wishes to express its deep gratitude to Rhea's extraordinarily devoted and sensitive caregivers Rebecca Kolluri, Melissa Mama, and Gidena Kelemework, and to her physicians, who provided her with the most caring, skillful medical attention throughout her adult life during which she encountered many medical challenges.

A private family graveside service was held on January 20 at Temple Emanu-El Cemetery attended by family and honorary pallbearers Baer Crossman, Dr. Douglas Orr, Dr. Steven Leach, and Jim Parrish. A Memorial Service and Celebration of Rhea's Life will be held at Temple Emanu-El Olan Chapel, 8500 Hillcrest, on June 16, at 3 pm followed by a reception to which all are invited. In lieu of flowers, contributions in her memory may be made to the University of Texas Southwestern Medical School, Jewish Family Service, Temple Emanu-El Older Adult & Accessibility Fund, or other charity of choice.

Contact Temple Emanu-El at tedallas.org or (214) 706-0000 for details.

Previous Events

Graveside Service

JAN **20**. 2:30 PM - 3:30 PM (CT)

Temple Emanu-El Cemetery
3430 Howell Street
Dallas, TX 75204

Memorial Service

JUN **16**. 3:00 PM (CT)

Temple Emanu-El
8500 Hillcrest Ave.
Dallas, TX 75225

Olan

Tribute Wall



“ *Dallas Jewish Funerals created a Webcast in memory of Rhea Mirmelstein Wolfram*



Dallas Jewish Funerals - January 20, 2025 at 05:56 PM

JL

“ *Rhea was my college counselor 25 years ago. I was planning to go to a certain university and after being accepted I put my deposit down. Rhea introduced me to another school I had never heard of — one that was much further away from home. I decided to switch at the last minute.*

This was perhaps the most pivotal decision of my life and set me on a course that I would have never attained had I gone to my initial choice.

I just wanted to thank you from the bottom of my heart for encouraging a young kid to take a different path. It has made all the difference in the world.

Jeremy L. - February 11, 2025 at 08:36 PM

“ On Rhea Wolfram’s Legacy - at least in education

I will be forever grateful for the friendship that I enjoyed with Rhea Wolfram - and the incredible education that I received through our many discussions. Whether it was discussing history, recent favorite books, the raising of our children, or the latest strategies for best supporting neurodiverse learners, we always had much to discuss. We often talked for hours, and then I would look for time to jot down all that I had come away from our conversation with. I still reflect back on those notes years later. Of course, Rhea never needed notes. I don’t think. She forgot anything! Even in recent years (or said another way - well past her 100th birthday!), she would ask about something that we had discussed a decade or early or how our grandson (who she had never met) was doing - by name.

While there is so much that I gained from Rhea, I hope that the thing that I and many others will always emulate was her commitment to care for the individual student - no matter what that student’s strengths, profile, background or individual challenges might be. I was fortunate to work for a number of young students with Rhea, all of whom had struggled in high school before finding Rhea. Those students and their families hadn’t found just the best advisor in Rhea, but more importantly someone who understood, cared, and advocated for them. It didn’t matter if the student was one who was disenchanted and disinterested in learning, or a student who was positioned for acceptance to the most selective schools or college, or whether their parents could pay a fee, Rhea embraced them all equally. More often than not, because of her connection with her students, Rhea understood her students better than their parents or their teachers - and sometimes better than the students themselves. Her students soon recognized this and respected and loved her for this.

We honor Rhea Wolfram’s remarkable life and perpetuate her legacy by committing to our students in the same way that Rhea did. I know for one I will always try to be more like Rhea.

*John Kerney
February 2025*

John Kerney - February 11, 2025 at 03:52 PM

YT

“ *dont you die on me i gonna miss you so much.*

yaremi del toro - February 04, 2025 at 08:33 AM

LB

“ *We at the Dallas County Medical Society Alliance Foundation were so very sorry to hear about the loss of this wonderful woman. Rhea was fondly regarded as a legendary lady and loyal friend to the Alliance. We are thinking of her family and sending heartfelt sympathy.*

*Lori Benold, Corresponding Secretary
on behalf of the Dallas County Medical Society Alliance Foundation*

Lori Benold - February 03, 2025 at 01:22 PM

NP

“ *I am grateful to have known Rhea for the last 11 years. She kept me on my toes and was always so grateful to the entire team here at The Tradition. I enjoyed popping by her apartment on occasion to discuss current events. Her sharp mind never ceased to amaze me! What a gift you were to the world, Rhea. Your legacy lives on through all the lives you touched. ~Natalie*

Natalie Pietsch - January 31, 2025 at 08:29 PM

LK

“ Rhea Wolfram was a class act, a legend in our business. When I first became a consultant in the 90's and was introduced to Rhea I was in awe of her knowledge, endless energy and beauty. She would push herself to go on all of the college tours, boarding school tours and therapeutic program tours. I would try to visit her as often as I could when I was in Dallas. She was always so gracious to receive me even if she wasn't feeling her best. Her mind was as sharp as ever and our conversations were always spirited and thought provoking. Rhea did not hold back on her opinions. Her memory amazed me.

I will miss this great lady who was such an inspiration to us all.
Lindy Kahn

Lindy Kahn - January 30, 2025 at 08:46 AM

GS

I met Rhea as we both worked with struggling adolescents and their parents in the early 2000s. Her compassion and thoughtful care for students and their families was abundantly evident. Her engaging, thoughtful and fiery spirit drew me in as it did with everyone around her,. She was a deep thinker with a vast reservoir of knowledge. She cared deeply for the humanity around her. I remember driving her on one occasion to a program and we were so engaged on various topics that I drove right past the turn off and it wasn't for another half hour that I realized that we had missed our stop. It was a happy mistake. More time to talk with Rhea. We both laughed about it. She was always gracious and forgiving to me. Her commitment to families long after they were in her care told so much about her character. Even when her body became less mobile, her mind remained sharp and clear. I had the privilege to visit her a few times in Dallas over the years. That she lived so long and so well was a gift to all of us. I will miss that gift that she gave. She enhanced the quality of my life. She brought out my better self.

Gillan Smith

Gillan Smith - February 03, 2025 at 04:25 PM

JB

“ I met Rhea through IECA and she taught me the kind of consultant I wanted to be. She was the consummate professional and an even better person. Her caring and kindness always shined through. I loved receiving her Jewish new year cards and writing her back. She was a lady in every sense of the word. We need more people of such extraordinary character like Rhea.

Jill Burstein - January 23, 2025 at 10:12 PM