



Leah Robinson Karpen

July 7, 1920 - September 1, 2020

LEAH ESTHER ROBINSON KARPEN, age 100, died on Tuesday, September 1, 2020. She was born in Asheville July 7, 1920 to Dr. Samuel and Esther Kroman Robinson in the old Mission Hospital. She was one of seven children, in order of birth: Eva Dorothy Serotta, Joseph Mendal Robinson, Leah Esther Karpen, Emanuel Harold Robinson, Rabbi Michael Aaron Robinson, Faela Mae Backer, David Mendel Robinson, all deceased. She is survived by her sisters-in-law, Ruth Robinson and Mary Robinson Ryals.

Leah attended David Millard Jr High and Asheville High where she graduated at age 15. She attended the University of North Carolina at Greensboro for two years where she majored in chemistry. She was then accepted at the University at Chapel Hill, earned Delta Phi Alpha award in 1938 and Phi Beta Kappa Award in 1939, and graduated with a BS degree in Science.

At that time, she was not a feminist and did not realize until years later that she did not get certain jobs because she was a woman.

During WWII, Leah spent time working as a draftsman for the Navy at the Mare Island Navy Yard in California. There she met her future husband Morris Karpen. Morris was in the Army, stationed in Vallejo, California. They met at Thanksgiving, were engaged by January 1, were married on February 2, 1944 and that union lasted 58 years until Morris' death in March 2002. Leah worked

at several different drafting jobs, wherever Morris was stationed. After Morris' discharge, they lived briefly in Asheville and then moved to Long Island, NY where they had four children. She is survived by all her children and their spouses: Daniel (Alexandra), Seth (Nancy), Joe (Jean), Rachel (Dana). Surviving also are her five grandchildren, Simon, Lucy, Joshua, Alexandra, and Devi and her great grandchildren, Jakob, Rai, and Isaac.

Leah worked at Underwriters Laboratories as an administrative assistant. She also worked at Friends World College, a Quaker college in Lloyd Harbor, in the late 1960's doing Public Relations. There, she met Toby Ives, a lifelong friend. She edited the "Journal of World Education" for the college.

She earned a Master of Science in Industrial Management in 1967 from the Polytechnic Institute of Brooklyn, NY. Karpen Steel Products of NY was the subject of many of her papers, assisting Morris in his business. She joined the League of Women Voters in 1955 after being invited by a friend. She once said, "Everything I have learned, I learned in the League...discussion leading, speaker training, foreign affairs and policy making." Leah was known for speaking up for what she believed in and for always having an opinion.

Leah loved art - performing arts (dance, theatre, and music), fine arts, pottery, and more. She loved going to Broadway shows and always supported local theatre, orchestra, and dance companies.

Leah and Morris moved to Asheville in 1977 when Morris retired from the factory in NY and started another business, Karpen Steel Custom Doors & Frames. They originally moved to Ox Creek Rd., just a mile from the Blue Ridge Parkway and full of hiking trails. Like her father, Leah was an avid hiker and traveler. She was an active member of the Carolina Mountain Club. She traveled the world - Russia, New Zealand, four trips to China, India, Italy, Spain, Norway, Sri Lanka, England, France, Greece, Austria, Hungary, Costa

Rica, Belize, Canada, Australia, and a few we may have forgotten.

Leah and Morris were continually active in the community during this time. In appreciation for their donations to UNCA Endowments, the university named both Robinson Hall and Karpen Hall in their honor. Leah became one of the first two women to obtain a Master of Liberal Arts from UNCA in 1991 and taught at both UNCA and Warren Wilson College.

Leah volunteered for numerous organizations, both local and national. She served on several boards and was considered a leader in the community. It is obvious in her actions and in the history of her life that she believed in her own words, "If we would all do what we can when we can, we would change the world." She was also strongly influenced by a saying from Rabbi Robert Ratner "If you see something wrong, you must do something about it." As many people know, she was not hesitant to speak her voice, to raise a call to action, or to make key connections between people and important causes. She stayed well informed on many issues including international affairs, environmental justice, prison reform, and public policy. Her dedication and passion for justice knew no bounds. Being a modest person, she never sought recognition or publicity. She was, however, honored by many organizations for her commitment and dedication.

There are two things that summarize Leah Karpen to the fullest. First - the words on her honorary Doctor of Letters from UNCA which states: "Leah Karpen personifies the committed citizen. She is informed, concerned, responsible and involved." It would be difficult to name, within modern memory, an important community cause with which Leah Karpen has not in some way been associated. A few of her particular favorites were voter education, literacy, affordable housing, French Broad River revitalization, and women's issues. Leah's dedication to civic improvement through informed

involvement, and her untiring pursuit of the life of the mind, provide a powerfully inspiring example to all.

Second - the new words to a familiar song which Leah wrote on the occasion of her 94th birthday. These words describe her philosophy of life:

...I'm proud of the meaningful things I have done

Empowering those around me,

...Invest in what you love, work for what you believe in.

Advocate for those who have no voice

Search for way to help those around you

...Never giving up

...People won't always accept you right away

You must know it's ok to be different,

Stand up for what you believe...

They'll see what you're doing is worthwhile

...My hope is for you...to Realize your Potential

Inspire those around you

...There's a future out there; It's yours to go make it.

Congregation Beth HaTephila is inviting you to a scheduled Zoom meeting.

Topic: Celebration of Leah Karpen's Life

Time: Oct 18, 2020 02:00 PM Eastern Time (US and Canada)

Join Zoom Meeting

<https://zoom.us/j/8500829162?pwd=UGhBWnZicFhNQnZmSzU4MEFCRzQ4UT09>

Meeting ID: 850 082 9162

Passcode: KarpenLeah The family would like to add that there will be special music played at 1:45 prior to the Zoom service.

And Leah would also add, "Get out there and volunteer!"

Morris Funeral and Cremation Care are serving the family. Condolences may be sent to the family at www.morrisfamilycare.com.

Previous Events

Celebration of Life

OCT 18. 2:00 PM - 3:00 PM (ET)

Zoom Meeting

Meeting ID: 850 08209162 Passcode: KarpenLeah

Tribute Wall



“ *Morris Funeral & Cremation Care created a Leah Karpen Zoom Service in memory of Leah Robinson Karpen*



Morris Funeral Home - October 22, 2020 at 10:30 AM



“ *Leah Robinson Karpen*

October 07, 2023 at 11:15 AM



“ *My condolences and apologies---I just today learned of Leah's passing; however, she has been in my tho'ts often over the years since we lost touch. I met her through Physicians for Social Responsibility. When my closest friend died, Leah got me out there. We went to Jazz Society concerts together, symphony, and we had a great time at a Harry Connick Jr. concert. I took her out to Hope for Horses to see how we rescue and rehab neglected horses for adoption. She was a force and a presence, and I miss her. The world of working for good will miss her.*

Cynthia Heil - June 08, 2021 at 09:21 AM

SA

“ *Leah was extremely committed to our community and if she heard something that didn't make sense she was the first to say so. Leah was always kind to me and wanted me to succeed. I miss you Leah.*
Sandra Abromitis

Sandra Abromitis - October 18, 2020 at 11:48 AM

RS

Thank you for the kind words

Rachel Smith - October 19, 2020 at 07:30 AM



“ *1 file added to the album Video of Graveside Service*



Morris Funeral Home - September 18, 2020 at 04:20 PM

SK

“ *I would like to send my condolences on Leah's death. I have many memories of time spent with Leah in NY and NC. As Simon and Lucy's mother and Rai and Isaac's grandmother, I feel a special connection. Please extend my sincere sympathy and prayers of comfort to the family.*

Susan Karpen - September 15, 2020 at 04:50 PM

RS

Thank you Susan. Yes we did spend a lot of time in each other's houses growing up.

Rachel Smith - September 16, 2020 at 03:19 PM

MH

“ *Leah was a force of nature. She was a brilliant, committed, passionate person who boldly challenged injustice wherever she found it. We are all the better for Leah's life. So grateful to have known her and Morris.*

Our love to the Karpen family as you grieve and celebrate this remarkable person.

My great great grandfather was Samuel Robinson. I would love to think that somewhere back in time, I am related to Leah Robinson Karpen!

Marylyn and Olson Huff

Marylyn Huff - September 14, 2020 at 11:09 AM

RS

Thanks. She certainly was quite a force in this community. I find it interesting about your Samuel Robinson.

Rachel Smith - September 14, 2020 at 11:42 AM

FB

“ *I have clear and treasured memories of my mother's Cousin Leah and family. My nephew is working on the family family tree and I have been telling him what little I know in recent days. Your family came to mind as we spoke of Aunt Esther Robinson so I googled Leah's name, and learned that your loss of her is very fresh. What a remarkable lady she was! We know the memory of her will be a blessing to you all. Our condolences and warm greetings to all. Fagel (Glassberg) Brooks (Daughter of Gwen and Rubin Glassberg)*

Fagel Brooks - September 11, 2020 at 07:00 PM

RS

Leah Karpen was my mother. I have some information on the Robinson family tree but don't recognize your name. Thanks for reaching out.

Rachel Smith - September 11, 2020 at 09:20 PM

FB

Hi Rachel. My given name is Fay but I have been known only as Fagel for over 50 years. I spent a Passover weekend with your family when I was 14ish and Joe, in particular, was very special to me. My mother Gwen was Hugo's daughter.

Fagel Brooks - September 12, 2020 at 08:17 AM

 Joe Karpen

PM me on Facebook, I can add alot more

Joe Karpen - September 19, 2020 at 04:45 PM

BP

“ *Joe and Jean and family we extend our sympathy. What an amazing lady who devoted her life for many causes to help make this a better place to live and to inspire all of us to do the same. You can be very proud of what she did. Love, Barbara and Barry Pate*

Barbara Pate - September 09, 2020 at 11:25 AM

NS

“ *I knew Leah in several different contexts, all of them good - but most personally, the friendship and support that she and Morris gave during the time my now deceased husband Sam served UNCA is most memorable. Our community has lost a treasure. Her frankness and ability to address a subject head-on, in a manner almost always bringing positive results, was truly remarkable and admirable. She and Morris will remain indelibly in my memory and that of so many folks in the Asheville area. She lived her conscience and her faith. Nancy Schuman*

Nancy Schuman - September 08, 2020 at 02:00 PM

RS

Thank you for the memories.

Rachel Smith - September 09, 2020 at 09:14 PM

RM

“ *I loved Leah. I met her while she was volunteering at Pisgah Legal Services, and found her to be amusing, matter-of-fact, and quite a role model for a younger woman. She invited me to speak at the Temple on our work at Pisgah Legal Services, quite a daunting task for a woman who identifies as Christian. The experience was wonderful, and the thank you letter she sent me is a prized possession. She praised me in the letter, and I knew it was praise I earned. Her legacy will live on for generations to come. I'm grateful to have known her.*

Robin Merrrell - September 08, 2020 at 10:09 AM

RS

Thank you. Pisgah Legal was always near and dear to her heart.

Rachel Smith - September 09, 2020 at 09:15 PM

LC

“ *Leah had such an impact in the Asheville community. We so appreciate Leah's support of literacy and her enthusiasm will be missed.*

Literacy Council of Buncombe County - September 08, 2020 at 10:01 AM

RS

Thank you. Literacy is certainly a basic need that Leah was adamant about supporting.

Rachel Smith - September 09, 2020 at 09:15 PM

NC

“ I loved Leah! What a woman! She loved life and was such an inspiration to me and so many with her support of important causes for justice. The obituary was wonderfully written and reflected her perfectly. One thing that I wanted to share with the family is the warm memories I will always hold of times when she and I played the dulcimer together at her condo. We were neither really skilled, but we worked at it and loved the instrument and the music played on it. It brought us much joy and fulfillment to attempt the old time music and classics of the repertoire. I miss her company. Nancy Ackermann Cole

Nancy Ackermann Cole - September 07, 2020 at 11:25 PM

RS

The dulcimer misses Leah playing it. A friend of mine used to come in to do private "concerts" for Leah and we always brought it out for her to strum as part of the music time together.

Rachel Smith - September 09, 2020 at 09:16 PM

AL

“ Leah was a singular personality. I met her decades ago when we were both on the Board of Directors of the YWCA. She was smart, forthright, and always generous in spirit as well as her philanthropy. What a well-lived, long life! My condolences to her family and friends.
AnnAdele Lloyd

AnnAdele Lloyd - September 07, 2020 at 11:14 PM

RS

Thank you

Rachel Smith - September 09, 2020 at 09:17 PM

MM

“ My earlieset memory of Leah was when she was doing consulting with the Asheville SCORE (Service Core or Retired Executives) where she helped many small business owners turn their dreams into success. I also saw the impact of her wonderful support of UNCA and the good work she did with the League of Women Voters. Asheville is a better place because of the tireless efforts of Leah Karpen.

Martha Marshall

Martha Marshall - September 07, 2020 at 05:45 PM

RS

Thank you.

Rachel Smith - September 07, 2020 at 06:30 PM

CS

“ Milt and I first met Leah and Morris in the mid-1980's at the Ox Creek Community Center. From then on we would see them, then Leah, practically everywhere we went. If not them in person, than their names listed as supporters of the event. Their values and philanthropy continue to have a positive effect in Asheville. They are remembered and appreciated!

Carolyn Shorkey

Carolyn Shorkey - September 06, 2020 at 06:37 PM

RS

Thank you for sharing.

Rachel Smith - September 06, 2020 at 08:10 PM

HF

“ I am sorry to hear of Leah's passing. I have known Leah for decades through our mutual work for social justice and involvement in Asheville's cultural community. I thought of Leah as a mentor, someone whose path I wanted to emulate, though I knew I would never be able to keep up with her. Though her directness was sometimes startling, I came to appreciate her ability to speak the truth and to follow through. Asheville is a better city because of her.

Hedy Fischer - September 06, 2020 at 11:53 AM

RS

Thanks for sharing.

Rachel Smith - September 06, 2020 at 12:30 PM

LF

“ Leah was a unique Asheville citizen and an inspiring model for us all. Dedicated and engaged in the betterment of our community, she brought out our best efforts always. I first encountered Leah when I moved to Asheville in 2003 and quickly learned her value to our community. She will be missed.

Linda Fowler

Linda Fowler - September 06, 2020 at 09:59 AM

RS

Thanks Linda for sharing.

Rachel Smith - September 06, 2020 at 08:11 PM

AC

“ *This community has lost a TREASURE! We will remember her always with respect and love.*

Annette Coleman

Annette Coleman - September 06, 2020 at 08:14 AM

RS

She really was a treasure. Thank you.

Rachel Smith - September 06, 2020 at 08:11 PM

HN

“ *Julie and I are very sad to hear of Ms. Karpen's passing. We have always admired and respected her since we first met in the early 1980's when we joined CBHT after we moved to WNC. She and her family and friends were blessed with her long and full life. She will be missed but remembered.*

HENRY P NATHAN - September 06, 2020 at 07:30 AM

RS

Her presence will certainly be missed. Thanks for sharing.

Rachel Smith - September 06, 2020 at 08:12 PM

IG

“ I am saddened to know that Leah, one of my heroes and role models, has now left us. i will miss her. From 1975, when I arrived in Asheville, to several years ago, when I became too ill to keep in touch regularly, I was fortunate enough to know her through the Jewish community, through our joint interest in the environment and social justice issues, through common friendships, and an occasional visit with her. Her sense of justice, her outspokenness, her courage to act for the good, her generosity and constant good deeds, were a constant source of inspiration for me. While Morris was alive, their obvious rightness for each other (and Morris's shining goodness and sweetness, about which I could write a long tribute as well) was a reminder to me of what marriage could and should be. Life without him must have been tough, but she took it on with her usual determination and lack of self-pity. Her bluntness could sometimes make me blink, but I admired it as part of her remarkable character.

Toward the end of her life, we talked just a tiny bit about my conviction that we survive death. I did not convince her, but I am convinced myself that she will continue to be a force for good from the next stage of our existence. I loved her and I will miss her.

Ileana Grams-Moog

Ileana Grams-Moog - September 04, 2020 at 04:00 PM

RS

Thanks for sharing. And yes blunt was her middle name.

Rachel Smith - September 04, 2020 at 05:22 PM

DS

“ Leah cared about those disenfranchised people that God tells us to care about, particularly the poor, people of color, prisoners, and nonstandard gendered folks. She marched for peace and fought the military-industrial complex with a passion! She was determined and fierce in her compassion. Nothing soft about Leah! She wrote prisoners and knew Black Lives Matter long before the phrase became popular. She fought AIDS and misogyny and racism and apathy and stupidity. She was a fighter. And like Mother Teresa, she felt she was fighting alone. What a woman!

Leah and Morris supported education in a big way. Karpen Hall is named for them and Robinson Hall is named for Leah's father. Education matters and it mattered to the Karpens, both of them. I consider it a privilege to have been Leah's friend. I thank her family for their love and care for Leah. Now Leah knows that life is eternal, and we happily celebrate her exemplary human life and her new opportunities.

With lots of love, Dot Sulock

Dorothy Sulock - September 04, 2020 at 10:55 AM

RS

Thanks for sharing your memories and for all your friendship with her.

Rachel Smith - September 04, 2020 at 01:08 PM

PD

“ Leah used to take my exercise class every Friday until several years ago. She was a ball of fire and never hesitated to speak up, You always knew where you stood with Leah. I had a deep respect and great admiration for her.



Peg Dixon - September 04, 2020 at 10:30 AM

RS

Thank you for sharing.

Rachel Smith - September 04, 2020 at 01:08 PM

CK

“ *Because of my father being business partners with Morris, I remember a few times when our families would get together at your Lloyd Harbor home on Long Island. I guess our fathers (Morris and Harold) had work to do! I remember it being in the woods and very secluded but so interesting. Lots of books and very rustic. I also remember seeing Leah a few times at "the shop" in Farmingdale. Our families did not socialize much together, but we will always share the bond of Karpen Steel and if I can speak for my sisters, we are grateful that Morris met my father and that they shared almost 40 years in business together. It was so nice reconnecting with Rachel last year in Asheville after so many years. From the Kardeman's, we send our heartfelt condolences to all the Karpens at this time. Leah had a long and full life and from what I read about her, she was clearly ahead of her time! May her memory be a blessing- Cindy Kardeman*

Cindy Kardeman - September 04, 2020 at 09:48 AM

RS

Thank you. And I am so grateful we reconnected. Your dad and mine were quite a team.

Rachel Smith - September 04, 2020 at 01:09 PM



“ *1 file added to the album Memories Album*



Morris Funeral Home - September 03, 2020 at 05:00 PM