



SYLVIA BAUM

January 16, 2015

Mrs. Baum died January 14 at the age of 99. She was the beloved wife of the late Leon Baum.

Sylvia Baum, who delighted in caring for her family and helping customers at Winkleman's stores, died at home in Southfield, Michigan on Wednesday, January 14. She was 99 and the cause of death was Alzheimer's Disease. Sylvia, the youngest of seven siblings, was the last member of a generation that came from Bialystock, Poland's once-thriving Jewish community. Her family spoke Yiddish at home before emigrating to America in the early 20th Century. Sylvia's father, Avraham Epstein, arrived in 1916 and was joined by his wife, Gela, the following year. Sylvia, who emigrated through New York's Ellis Island in 1926 at the age of eight, was the first of her siblings to graduate from an American high school. The family settled in Sheepshead Bay, a working class Brooklyn neighborhood near Brighton Beach, where her father worked as a caretaker, or shames, in a nearby synagogue, and as a bookbinder of prayer books. At age 19 Sylvia's oldest sister, Freidel, organized a shidduch, a Yiddish term for a proposed marriage arrangement, with a suitable prospect in Bialystok. Sylvia returned to Europe after high school in 1937 and married Leon Baum, a skilled jeweler who learned the diamond trade through an apprenticeship. The wedding took place in Bialystok. Leon joked that Sylvia's sister sent him a photo of the actress Betty Grable with a note that read ❖This is my sister!❖ The couple soon returned

to New York and settled in Michigan within a year. Their marriage lasted until his death in 1993. Sylvia and Leon started their family in the depths of the Great Depression in a small flat on Tyler Street. The war in Europe was also underway and Poland was overrun in 1939. Leon's siblings and parents were lost, and Bialystok's Jewish population never recovered. The experience left an indelible mark that affected their relationship with each other, and their lives in metropolitan Detroit. Leon steadily became more religious as he built diamond tool business that tapped the skills as a trained jeweler. He eventually opened a small factory in Highland Park that sold diamond drills and grinding wheels to Ford, General Motors and Chrysler. Sylvia's connection to Bialystok was permanently severed, and her focus became a new existence in America that incorporated traditions and values from Jewish life in Eastern Europe. She initially focused on raising their three sons, Martin, Ronald and Jack, and then pursued other interests that utilized her instincts for helping others, particularly in social settings. Her Seders and other holiday meals were constant streams of dishes prepared in accordance with traditional recipes. She rarely sat down until dessert and coffee were served. She began to build her own social network at NA'AMAT USA (formerly known as Pioneer Women), a philanthropic group that worked to improve the lives of women, children and families in Israel. When her children were older Sylvia found work at Winkleman's, a women's retail clothing chain started on Fort Street in Detroit. She thrived for more than 20 years in the fast-paced environment of holidays sales, and soon developed a loyal following of middle class clients. Other women were drawn to her natural sales approach, which was reassuring, and highly ethical. Shoppers were never asked to spend more than they could afford. In private, Sylvia described herself as hamish, a common term for a plain person. The description could sound dismissive in contemporary circles, but in Sylvia's upbringing it was a proud distinction that denoted dignity and stability. She knew exactly who she was in life and what made her happy. She also had a gift for making those around her happy.

Funeral services at Hebrew Memorial Chapel in Oak Park.

Family Info:

Husband: the late Leon Baum

Sons: Martin (Marcia) Baum

Ron (Gail) Baum

Jack (Claire) Baum

Siblings: the late Ralph (late Margaret) Epstein, the late Zalman Epstein, late Esther (late Benjamin) Halpern, late Freda (late Max) Levine, late Golda Epstein

Grandchildren: Monica (Craig Campbell) Baum, Eric Baum, Elizabeth Baum, Ben Baum, Susan Baum.

Great-grandchildren: Andrew Gomez, Hollis Jacob Baum Campbell, Henry Baum

Loving nieces and nephews

Caregivers: Patience McGill, Elaine and Paris Craighead

Tribute Wall



“ *Hebrew Memorial Chapel created a Tribute Video in memory of SYLVIA BAUM*



Hebrew Memorial Chapel - January 16, 2015 at 12:00 AM