



Jewish Sightseeing

2002-01-04 Bernard Lipinsky obituary

Farewell to a benefactor

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Bernard Lipinsky is remembered by a grateful community

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[obituary file](#)

By Donald H. Harrison

The community bade a final farewell to San Diego's own personification of the American success story as Bernard Lipinsky, 87, was entombed Thursday, Dec. 27, inside the Shalom Mausoleum at [Greenwood Cemetery](#).

Earlier, several hundred had crowded into the cemetery's nearby chapel, where they heard Rabbi Martin S. Lawson of [Temple Emanu-El](#) eulogize the philanthropist who donated millions of dollars for education, the arts, care for the aging, and the Jewish community as one who "walked in God's ways."

Lipinsky, who died in his downtown condominium on the evening of Dec. 25 following a long battle with cancer, had moved in 1927 with his parents from his native Brooklyn to San Diego.

During the Depression, while still a student at San Diego High School and a leader of the AZA Jewish fraternity, he took a job as a milkman. He later dropped out of [San Diego State College](#) after only two years of study to take a job filing for a judge in Los Angeles, but he returned to San Diego to go into business with his older brother Bill Lipin, who survives him.

The brothers opened jewelry and loan stores, and later expanded into handling the pinball and jukebox concessions at local military installations, as well as "kiddy rides" all over town, Rabbi Lawson told the mourners.

Lipinsky met his first wife, Jane, during the 1940s, and their marriage produced two children, Jeffrey and Elaine, before Jane died in 1954.

Lipinsky's heartbroken mother-in-law, Bess Goldberg, arranged for him to date a young widow, Dorris Fagelson Levine.

"From their first date spent talking about their late spouses, Dorris and Bernard's relationship clicked," the rabbi related. "They could really talk and listen to each other. They had such mutual love and respect for each other that lasted for over 44 years. Bernard

and Dorris were true partners in family, in business, in life."

With his brother Bill, Bernard founded North Park Mortgage in 1956, which in turn led to the brothers investing heavily and successfully in apartment houses and buildings. They also purchased the Kona Kai Club on Shelter Island in 1968 and operated the resort property through 1984.

Lipinsky perhaps had been preconditioned to become involved in Jewish philanthropy. His mother, Ida Lipinsky, and his sisters, Katherine and Betty, had been among the 16 original founders of the San Diego Hebrew Home—a group still referred to as the "Jolly 16" at [Seacrest Village Retirement Communities](#), which are operated by the Hebrew Homes.

Bernard and Dorris Lipinsky helped finance the growth of the Hebrew Home when it was located on 54th Street, and their philanthropy followed the Home when it moved to Encinitas and became known as Seacrest Village. The Lipinskys were responsible for the construction of the administration building that is named for them.

"At the Homes' Annual Ball (last) November, we honored Dr. Lipinsky and said that we sit in awe of his presence," commented Robin Israel, vice president of fund development. "Today, we sit in awe of the memory of this great man."

So too did the administrators of other nonprofit organizations in a variety of fields throughout San Diego County.

In honor of Lipinsky's giving, San Diego State University conferred upon its one-time student dropout an honorary doctorate of humane letters — only the second person in the college's history to be so honored. The first was U.S. President John F. Kennedy, while the third was former Israeli Prime Minister Shimon Peres.

The names of the Lipinsky family may be found on a clock tower on the campus and on the door and literature of SDSU's Lipinsky Institute for Judaic Studies. Lipinsky also is credited with funding scholarships for 600 students, many of whom could not have afforded a higher education without his help. It became customary for scholarship recipients to write a letter to Lipinsky telling him of their academic progress, and Lipinsky took great pleasure poring over a book of such letters that he always kept within easy reaching distance in his downtown condominium.

He also helped finance a freshman success program established by former SDSU President Thomas Day, and was a generous contributor to the Hillel House adjacent to the SDSU campus.

"Bernard's contributions to San Diego State are genuinely seminal because he was the first major philanthropist who was prepared to invest in San Diego State University, and it opened the way for everything that has happened since that time," SDSU president Steve Weber told HERITAGE.

Prof. Lawrence Baron, director of SDSU's Lipinsky Institute for Judaic Studies, suggested that "Bernard would be the first to admit that he was not a religious person in the traditional sense. He did not strictly observe Jewish rituals; but he made giving to others into a ritual. He did not pray to God to make the world a better place; instead, he answered the prayers of others to make their institutions better places."

U.S. Rep. Bob Filner, who served as an acting director of the Lipinsky Institute during his

days as an SDSU history professor, said that Lipinsky "recognized that students at a modern university — be they Jewish or non-Jewish — could graduate with little knowledge of Jewish history or culture. He hoped to change that with the Lipinsky Institute. I knew Bernard as a straight-talking man who laid out his vision of his creation, but let the academic administrators and scholars have the autonomy they needed to create an intellectually-respectable institution."

A recent offshoot of the Lipinsky Institute was the decision to house the archives of the [Jewish Historical Society of San Diego](#) at the SDSU Library. The society's president, Stanley Schwartz, saluted the memory of Lipinsky "for his and his family's past and present contributions to the San Diego community that will enhance the lives of future generations."

Similarly, Jackie Tolley, director of the [Hillel House](#) at SDSU, paid Lipinsky tribute for funding the Lipinsky Jewish Campus Corps Fellow, "a position which provides for a staff person to seek out students who might not automatically get involved in Jewish activities on campus."

Education at all levels was a great interest for Lipinsky. Rabbi Simcha Weiser, headmaster of the [Soille San Diego Hebrew Day School](#), noted that shortly after Dorris' death, Lipinsky created a memorial scholarship fund at the Orthodox school in her honor. Without the fund, said Weiser, Soille might not have been able to educate 16 students who received the scholarships.

"He had benefited from a tremendous opportunity to be successful, to lead a good life, and he extended that circle outward to encompass other people," the rabbi said. "I have a beautiful picture of Bernard sitting with the kids in our school."

At the [Agency for Jewish Education](#)'s offices is the Bernard and Dorris Lipinsky Teacher Center. Dr. Cecile Jordan, e-mailing to HERITAGE from Israel, said that Lipinsky not only funded AJE programs, but immensely enjoyed participating in them.

"Bernard often attended the AJE workshops and seminars," she wrote. "We will always remember Bernard borrowing and returning videos from the AJE Video Collection. In fact, during the past 10 years, Bernard viewed more of the AJE videos than any other San Diegan."

As Lipinsky revered education, so too did he love the arts. Recently, he underwrote the annual Jewish cultural festival mounted by the San Diego Repertory Theatre, which gratefully renamed it as the Lipinsky Family Jewish Arts Festival. Rabbi Lawson, in his eulogy, also noted that "his *tzedakah* strengthened the Jewish Film Festival," which is produced annually by the Center for Jewish Culture at the [Lawrence Family JCC](#).

Lipinsky's generosity was not limited to arts programs in the Jewish community. Jack O'Brien, artistic director of the Old Globe Theatres, commented, "The Globe has lost one of its closest and most loyal friends, and the theater one of its most irresistible enthusiasts." Lipinsky, said O'Brien, was "our gentle patriarch, whose kindness and generosity has sustained us in the past and will ever nurture our future."

Jeff Lipinsky recalled that O'Brien had gone over all the plans with his father for what would become a patrons' suite named for the Lipinskys "even before the first hammer went against the walls."

He noted that his father's last public outing was at a small family dinner Dec. 14 in the suite, which sits in the shadow of the California Building's famous tower and dome in Balboa Park.

Another beneficiary of Lipinsky's donations was the [San Diego Young Playwrights Project](#), which enables young students to have their plays produced on real stages like that of the Old Globe. One of the graduates of that program was Annie Weisman, a former student at [Torrey Pines High School](#) who has since become such an accomplished playwright that the La Jolla

Playhouse recently produced her play, *Be Aggressive*.

The director of the Playwrights Project, Deborah Salzer, said Lipinsky also "helped us spark the imaginations of students in marginal schools and neighborhoods. He pledged his first major gift to Playwrights Project so unexpectedly, and quietly, that I gasped in response.

"Bernard's contributions went beyond dollars," Salzer continued. "He came to events, right up to his final weeks. He talked with us about his life. And when we asked for opinions, we got them, succinct and direct, as when he walked out of a play he didn't like."

As the son of one of the Jolly 16, it was perhaps to be expected that Jewish causes would attract his interest. "A gentleman of great generosity, his devotion to the State of Israel and Jewish causes will be sorely missed," commented Bernard Lewis, San Diego regional chair for [Israel Bonds](#).

"Bernard Lipinsky was a great community leader and a generous benefactor to the community, particularly in Jewish education," said a statement from the [United Jewish Federation](#).

"He was very generous to the [Israel Guide Dog Center for the Blind](#)," commented Helena Galper, representative of that organization in this area.

In his eulogy, Rabbi Lawson shared that when Temple Emanu-El "was searching for economic assistance, Bernard and Dorris stepped forward with an amazing gift that helped Emanu-El survive and also created the magnificent stained-glass windows in our sanctuary.

"But that was not enough," Lawson continued. "They went on to establish at Temple Emanu-El the Lipinsky Family Education Fund, helping to bring parents and children together for Jewish learning and allowing us to re-establish our Family Camp program in the coming year.

"When I spoke to Dorris and Bernard about their gift, you simply could not find kinder, more unaffected people."

Lipinsky's children, Jeff and Elaine, said their father's philanthropy also contributed quietly to a seemingly endless list of causes that included the Fred J. Hansen Institute for World Peace, the Balboa Theater Arts and Education Fund, the San Diego Zoo, Meals on Wheels, Mama's Kitchen, Doctors Without Borders, juvenile diabetes, multiple sclerosis and "many others too numerous to mention."

Lipinsky, who had been aware for more than a year that his cancer was terminal, was surrounded during the last week of his life by his children, grandchildren, family members and friends— a scene that reminded Rabbi Lawson of the biblical Jacob bestowing blessings from his deathbed upon his children.

Jeff Lipinsky said that his father started experiencing a little pain the last week, "and he took a fall the night before his 87th birthday, on Thursday, Dec. 20. We knew that on the 20th he was failing, but he lived for his 87th birthday and stayed lucid up to the very end. He was on morphine, but he was very aware. Dad's mind did not turn off, even when he was sedated."

[San Diego Hospice](#), another institution that Lipinsky had helped support, came to his aid in the final days, the son said.

Jeff Lipinsky noted that whereas Dorris Lipinsky died Feb. 14, 1999— Valentine's Day — his father expired on Dec. 25, Christmas Day. "I will never have any difficulty remembering the dates of their deaths," he said sadly.

As well as for his love of the Jewish community, "he will be remembered as a man who was concerned with education, taking care of elders, and the arts," his daughter Elaine said. "He wanted to give back to the community, because it had been so good to him."

Lipinsky is survived by his two children and daughter-in-law Sheila; his older brother Bill Lipin, whose 96th birthday came Jan. 1; Elaine's three children Diane (Robert) Zepf, Jane (Brad) Murphy and Nathan (Cara) Segal; Jeff's two children Daren (Gina) Lipinsky and Steve Lipinsky; and two great-grandchildren, Yardyn Shraga, 3, the daughter of Jane Murphy, and Noah Segal, the son of Nathan Segal.

