



Barbara Ann Zalesky

October 22, 1941 - March 12, 2022

Barbara Ann Zalesky was born in Minnesota on October 22, 1941 to Roy F. Zalesky and Lillian K. Guetz. Roy was a fighter pilot in World War II and was shot down and killed when Barbara was young. He was awarded the Purple Heart. Lillian served as the private secretary for the owner of The Saint Paul Dispatch, an important Minnesota newspaper.

Barbara, along with her younger brother Roy (Buddy) Zalesky, with whom she honed her wrestling moves, was raised by her mom and her grandmother, Johanna Guetz, in St. Paul. The family would gather around the piano and sing together or play the deadly serious Minnesota card game 500.

Young Barbara was athletic and enjoyed competing with, and beating, the boys in sports, especially softball. She graduated from Central High School in St. Paul, playing a prominent role in the school production of “Our Town”. She went on to graduate from the University of Minnesota with a degree in English. Rumors of a romantic involvement with Bob Dylan, with whom she may or may not have overlapped with at University, are firmly denied.

During these years she travelled widely, often with her lifelong friend Judy Haider Merl. Moved by the spirit of the freewheeling 60s, after college she travelled with Judy around England and Italy for several years—think sleeping illegally in tents on Italian beaches, not 4-star hotels. During this trip she gave

birth to her son, David Sobel, in London in 1965.

Barbara had great enthusiasm for the world around her and was fearless in exploring it. She had little time for gendered understandings of what was appropriate for her but followed her own muse at all times. This period of her life was marked by a tremendous joie de vivre and carefree living.

When she returned to the US she initially lived in Brooklyn, but soon moved with her boyfriend Geoffrey Himes to Columbia in 1970 when Columbia was new. She would live in Columbia the rest of her life--few have lived in Columbia longer. It was there that she began her lifelong profession in early childhood education, earning a master's degree in Education from Antioch, teaching a stint at the Montessori Bryant Woods Nursery School, before settling into her career teaching in Baltimore City Public elementary schools for over 30 years. She also sometimes would work part-time as a successful real estate agent to provide a better life for her son.

She excelled in tennis and coaching tennis—priding herself with teaching her son the intricacies of the use of the lob. And with a half a pina colada remaining in one hand and a ping pong paddle in the other, you better be ready for some serious trash talk about how she is going to take you to school. She helped start up an elementary school in Columbia, an important junior tennis tournament in Columbia, a birthday club among her friends, and too many other such things to mention. Her friends would call her the “Instigator”.

After she retired she would spend months each year in her beloved Provincetown and Key Marathon, which allowed her to indulge her lifelong love of the ocean; blissfully basking in the sun while listening to Joan Baez sing Bob Dylan or Jamaican-style steel drum covers of the hippy classics. Here, as always, she was the opposite of a wallflower. She would drive her

bright yellow VW Beetle, license plate “Ylo Sub”, slowly down Commercial Street in Provincetown, a one-woman parade, and smile broadly and shout back as everyone she passed would shout “Hey Barbara!” or “There goes that wild Yellow Submarine lady!” Late in life she developed a serious passion for watching and discussing classic old movies—always keen to explain to one and all why such movies were much better than the trash they put out today.

She died at peace in her home with her son by her side. She is survived by her son, her sister-in-law, Kimberly Zalesky, and her niece, Hanna Zalesky. Services will be private. In lieu of flowers it is asked that donations be directed to Baltimore City Public Schools by contacting Monique Simms at donations@bcps.k12.md.us

Tribute Wall

TC

“ Mrs Z! I never forgot you. Of all of my elementary school teachers in the late 70's you were the one I remembered dearly. Thanks for being kind to me as a child and wonderful teacher. Rest easy.

Trina Caldwell - July 29, 2025 at 08:28 PM

SF

“ Dear Barbara, I have never forgot about you although it has been many years ago when I rented a room in your house in Clary's Forest. I felt regretful for the terms I left you. May you rest in peace Barbara. \n\nStephanie (Fox) Forehand\nFormer Tenant

Stephanie Forehand - April 27, 2024 at 01:42 PM

AZ

“ We are deeply sorry for your loss ~ Simplicity Cremation & Funeral Services

A Memorial Tree was planted for Barbara Ann Zalesky - March 16, 2022 at 10:02 AM