

Mandel faces worst blow yet

■ **Love:** Marvin Mandel drew national attention when as governor he divorced his wife to pursue and marry a beautiful blonde. Now she has a fatal disease.

By C. FRASER SMITH
SUN STAFF

At a time when even his critics might think he's suffered enough, the torment of Marvin Mandel continues.

Almost exactly 20 years after his conviction in 1977 on charges of political corruption, the former two-term governor of Maryland watches helplessly as his wife, Jeanne — his fiercest and most faithful defender during two long trials and nearly two years of incarceration — struggles with amyotrophic lateral sclerosis, a fatal neuromuscular disorder also known as ALS and Lou Gehrig's disease.

"It's the first time in my life I've ever been faced with something I can't fight," said Mandel, who has taken his wife, now 60, to the most prominent clinics in search of help. The cruelty of the illness, which progressively robs its victims of the ability to walk, speak, eat and breathe, bears a heavier burden for Mandel.

"I think some of the problems I had helped to cause this to happen," he says. "The doctors say [See Mandel, 5A]



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Picture at an exhibition: A photo of Jeanne Mandel smiles from Marvin Mandel's office wall.

Ex-governor faces his cruelest blow

[Mandel, from Page 1A]

no, but that's the way I feel."

The "problems" he refers to made the slight, Northwest Baltimore politician the dominant figure in Maryland politics for much of the 1970s. Symbolized by an ever-present Meerschaum pipe, he rose unexpectedly to the governor's mansion in 1968; then came his dramatically public divorce and marriage to Jeanne, 17 years his junior. The arduous legal struggle over the corruption charges followed, ending his political career, though in 1988 his conviction was overturned on appeal.

Now, at 77, at a time when many of his friends are long since retired, Mandel argues the sort of general law cases he had in Baltimore before he became a member of the Maryland House of Delegates in the mid-1950s.

He spent most of Oct. 6, for example, in a Baltimore County courtroom on a divorce matter. He also has corporate and business clients and, until recently, represented such high-profile concerns as the lottery computer firm, GTECH, and the Medical and Surgical Faculty of Maryland.

Sometimes appearing before judges he appointed when he was governor, Mandel insists that the work is not a burden. Knowing that his public life would end, he had always expected to resume his work as a lawyer. But he could not return to gainful employment as an attorney until the appeals court ruling allowed restoration of his law license. When he left office in 1977 after his conviction, a Maryland governor's salary was \$25,000 and his pension was half that amount.

"He has to work," said a friend. "He has no financial security at all."

He has labored largely out of the public spotlight, unless a high-profile lobbying client like GTECH came his way.

His old connections remain valuable.

In the past few weeks, for instance, it was disclosed that Mandel was the lawyer in a case in which his friend, former Gov. William Donald Schaefer, commuted the double life sentence of a convicted murderer, Scott F. Caldwell.

Mandel says the Caldwell matter came to him not because he was seen as a close friend of Schaefer, but through the recommendation of someone pleased with his handling of another case.

This week, Mandel will appear in court to argue that the state canceled Caldwell's parole without cause and without the legally required hearing — not because Caldwell did anything wrong, but because the state neglected to notify a Caroline County prosecutor that the sentence had been commuted.

Though he is never far from his Annapolis area home, Mandel works every day at his office at 9 State Circle just across the brick-paved street from Maryland's State House, the setting of his greatest triumphs and deepest shame, the latter completely undeserved he insists.

"People never understood it. From the day I came home from prison, when it was finally over, there were more congratulations than when I was elected," he said.

Indeed, his admirers remain intensely loyal.

Asked if he thought Mandel had made a comeback from this period of disgrace, former state Del. Paul E. Weisengoff of Baltimore said, "Comeback from what?"

A columnist translated the case this way: "Apparently in order to pay for a costly divorce from his first wife, Mandel made a deal with some cronies that, to say the least, was too clever by half. It involved his vetoing a bill that depressed the value of a race track so that his chums could buy it at a distress-sale price, then the governor allowed his veto to be overridden."

Some say Mandel was cleared in the end by virtue of a technicality, but the former governor has no doubt he was fully exonerated.

"Things seemed to be going much better for him until Jeanne's illness came along," says Nelson J. Sabatini, a former Maryland secretary of health, who is now a vice president of the University of Maryland Medical System.

Friends say he remains as devoted to her as he was on the day they slipped away to be married 22 years ago. Until recently, she could drive, but the former governor said he was called to the beauty parlor recently when she was



Romance begins: Gov. Marvin Mandel and Jeanne Mandel in 1976. A year later he was convicted of corruption and spent two years in jail.

unable to get her car started. "She wasn't strong enough to turn the key," he said.

Mandel takes her to restaurants, to social or political outings and occasionally to his office, though he frets that her enjoyment of such moments is curtailed.

He is sustained now by old friends such as Sabatini and Schaefer, Edwin Hale Sr., chairman of First Mariner Bancorp; Anne Arundel County Police Chief Larry W. Tolliver, and Bruce C. Beareno, the Annapolis lobbyist who helped win a presidential pardon for Mandel in the early 1980s and, after Mandel's law license was reinstated, took him on as a lobbying partner.

The group meets periodically for dinner and a round of political war stories with Mandel serving as "patriarch" and chief storyteller. He occupies that position, Schaefer said, because he was involved in so many important events, because his expertise remains widely respected and because he was such a reliable ally.

"You'd go into his office, he'd put his pipe in his mouth, prop his feet up on the desk drawers and you'd know he was listening. If he said something was going to happen, I never worried about whether it would happen or not," Schaefer said.

One of the ironies is that a man so respected for making government work was convicted of depriving the citizens of fair and honest service.

Long after his departure from elected office, he is regarded as the architect of the state government

system that exists today. When he was elected, there were 238 separate and independent state agencies. He reduced that number to a handful, molding them all into a Cabinet-style arrangement.

The Mandel structure, says House Speaker Casper R. Taylor Jr., remains functional. Some things need adjusting, Taylor said, "but it's a matter of fine-tuning." Taylor said he and others meet with Mandel fairly often.

"When you're in a room with Marvin today," said Democratic Del. D. Bruce Poole of Hagerstown, "you feel you might be with a governor. He has an aura. He's probably the last guy you can point to who worked the system to the max. Except for those legal problems, he would be seen as the one guy who got the entire orchestra playing together."

Political leaders want to hear what he thinks, Poole said, "because he's seen every punch and every counterpunch."

Every one until the ALS diagnosis 18 months ago.

Once again, though, Jeanne Mandel is an inspiration to her husband. "She's not depressed. She's tremendously strong," the former governor said.

When a doctor asked her to rate the present quality of her life on a scale of one to 10, she held up 10 fingers, the highest rating.