

# Shoshana S. Cardin, internationally known philanthropist and leader of Jewish organizations, dies



Shoshana S. Cardin was known internationally as a philanthropist and activist for human rights who had dealings with Soviet President Mikhail Gorbachev, U.S. President George H. W. Bush and other world leaders. (Gene Sweeney Jr. / The Baltimore Sun)



By **Frederick N. Rasmussen**  
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**B**eneath her yearbook picture as a member of the 1943 class of Western High School was a quote that young Shoshana Shoubin selected:

“I love life and ask no more.”

The woman who became Shoshana S. Cardin may not have asked more, but she gave more over a lifetime of civic and philanthropic work. She was internationally known as a humanitarian, counted presidents and world leaders among her close friends and led national and local Jewish organizations.

She died May 18 at the University of Maryland **St. Joseph Medical Center** from respiratory failure.

The Pikesville resident was 91.

“I loved her. She was a unique leader. Her accomplishments speak for themselves and made a lasting impact — they cannot be adequately described, you’d need a book to do that,” said Malcolm Hoenlein, executive vice chairman and CEO of the New York-based Conference of Presidents of Major American Jewish Organizations.

“She was a courageous leader who spoke truth to power. I saw her with presidents of the United States, sending solutions,” said Mr. Hoenlein, a friend of more than 30 years. “She would show them her warm and dedicated side as an articulate defender of the Jewish people in Israel.”

“Shoshana Cardin became an icon for leadership in the Jewish world, because her decisions affected the entire community,” said Baltimore Circuit Court Judge Ellen M. Heller. “Shoshana represented Jewish leadership at the very top and always made a positive impact on the Jewish community. That is the way we will think of her.”

Born in Tel Aviv in what was then Palestine, Shoshana Shoubin was the daughter of Sraiah and Chana Shoubin. After her mother suffered botched surgery for an ulcer, the family sought better medical care and moved to Baltimore in 1927.

As a student at Western High, she raised money for the Jewish National Fund, gave political speeches and served as president of Habonim, a Zionist youth group.

She had planned to become an attorney, and attended Johns Hopkins University for several years before attending UCLA, where she obtained a bachelor’s degree in 1946. She received a master’s degree in planning and administration from Antioch University in 1979.

She left Los Angeles in 1946, returned to Baltimore and taught English for five years at Southern Junior High School. “Very challenging,” she told The Baltimore Sun in a 1991 profile. “Extremely challenging.”

“Instead of becoming a lawyer, she married one,” The Sun observed in the profile. She married Jerome S. Cardin in 1948. They settled in Pikesville, where she raised their four children.

Mrs. Cardin enjoyed preparing meals for family and friends in a lavender kitchen she designed herself. She gained some notoriety — in 1958 Ladies Home Journal declared it one of “six unforgettable kitchens” in America.

It was her activism, though, that defined her life.

“I grew up in a home where responsibility to community, to fellow man, to people was a part of life,” Mrs. Cardin said in The Sun profile. She said she had a second life after her children were grown.

“I knew I would be doing something that was both stimulating and productive in the community,” she said.

Mrs. Cardin became active in community groups that supported Jewish and women’s causes. She served as president of Maryland’s Federation of Jewish Women’s Organizations in 1960 and 1961, then again from 1965 to 1967.

She was a Baltimore County delegate to the Maryland Constitutional Convention, held 1967 to 1968. She focused primarily on women's issues.

In 1968, she joined the Maryland Commission on the Status of Women. She served as commission chair in 1975, 1976 and 1979, and played a major role in planning the International Women's Year in 1975.

Regarding her work with the commission, she told Baltimore Magazine in 1978: "We advocate action, not just research and study.... We develop coalitions and actively lobby for women's rights."

She convened a state conference on battered women, "which eventually led to the creation of the House of Ruth in Baltimore," according to a biographical profile of Mrs. Cardin in the Archives of Maryland. The profile notes that in 1974 she wrote a pamphlet, "Women: Where Credit is Due," that spelled out women's "economic rights in terms of how to get credit and how to ensure fair credit laws."

Appearing on NBC's "Today Show" in the mid-1970s, she urged women to obtain credit in their own name and make important purchases such as houses and cars.

Mrs. Cardin also focused her efforts on the United Jewish Appeal, the Associated Jewish Charities, the Goldseker Fund, the National Retinitis Pigmentosa Foundation, the Chizuk Amuno PTA, the March of Dimes and the United Israel Appeal.

In 1984, she was the first woman elected president of the Council of Jewish Federations, and 15 years later assisted in its merger with the United Jewish Appeal — now the Jewish Federation of North America.

Mrs. Cardin made history in 1990 when she became the first president to lead the Conference of Presidents of Major American Jewish Organizations which represents the interests of American Jews to the U.S. government.

In 1994, she was named chair of the United Israel Appeal, the lead fundraising organization for the state of Israel in the U.S. that helps raise money for groups based in Israel.

She became increasingly concerned about the plight of Soviet Jews, and while serving as chair of the National Conference on Soviet Jewry from 1988 to 1992, she made freedom a priority for Jews living in Russia and Soviet republics.

Her efforts challenged then-Soviet President Mikhail Gorbachev to lift restrictions against more than 11,000 Jewish "refuseniks" living in the Soviet Union, and culminated in a 1991 personal meeting with Gorbachev. It marked the first meeting between the Soviet leader and leaders of U.S. Jewish organizations.

Mrs. Cardin once said that her most significant accomplishment was "to personally persuade former Soviet President Gorbachev in 1991 to condemn anti-Semitism and racism in a public statement and to remove such anti-social action from government policy."

As a direct result of her actions, more than 1.2 million Jews were able to emigrate from the Soviet Union.

Also in 1991, Mrs. Cardin and other U.S. Jewish leaders clashed with President George H. W. Bush over a \$10 billion U.S. loan guarantee for Israel.

After some 1,300 Jews spent a day lobbying congressional representatives in Washington to support the guarantee, President Bush commented at a White House press conference that he was apparently just “one lonely little guy” who opposed them.

Mrs. Cardin wrote to the president, calling his remarks “disturbing.” He apologized for sounding “pejorative.”

In 2003 Judge Heller became president of the American Jewish Joint Distribution Committee, and said, “the first thing I did was call Shoshana Cardin.”

“She was so welcoming in our first visit and met with me several more times,” she recalled of Mrs. Cardin. “She acted as my sounding board, and I appreciated her views. She had incredible good judgment, and she was a very warm and inviting person.”

Mrs. Cardin was co-founder and chair of the Shoshana S. Cardin Jewish High School on Park Heights Avenue.

Awards for her work were many — including the Justice Louis D. Brandeis Award from the National Zionist Organization of America, and the Henrietta Szold Humanitarian Award presented by [Hadassah](#) in 1994.

She was also author of a 2008 memoir: “Shoshana: Memoirs of Shoshana Shoubin Cardin.”

Mrs. Cardin stood by her husband, who in 1986 was found guilty of a charge related to the savings and loan crisis. He maintained his innocence, served one year and was later pardoned by Gov. William Donald Schaefer. He died in 1993.

Mrs. Cardin lived to celebrate this year’s 70th anniversary of the founding of Israel.

“She was born in Palestine and has — beyond a love — an affinity for Israel,” a daughter, Rabbi Nina Beth Cardin of Pikesville, told *The Jewish Times* in an April interview. “She belongs to the land of Israel.”

With her carefully coiffed platinum hair and finely tailored suits, Mrs. Cardin was an unforgettable presence.

Looking back over her life, Mrs. Cardin had said, “The most important message I have wanted to give people has been the importance, the pride and the responsibility, the blessing of being Jewish.

“That’s what gives me the strength to challenge what I have challenged and bring about change where I could.”

Funeral services were held Tuesday at Chizuk Amuno Congregation.

Mrs. Cardin is survived by two sons, Sanford R. Cardin of Guilford and Steven H. Cardin of Denver; another daughter, Ilene C. Vogelstein of Pikesville; 13 grandchildren; and 10 great-grandchildren.

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