

OBITUARIES

Jeanne B. Mandel Dies; Ex-Governor's 2nd Wife

Jeanne Blackistone Mandel, 64, who became known nationwide for her love affair with her future husband, former Maryland governor Marvin Mandel (D), died Oct. 6 at her home in Annapolis. She had amyotrophic lateral sclerosis, also known as Lou Gehrig's disease.

Known as a strong-willed woman, she helped save a historic Maryland island in the Potomac River in the 1970s and twice served as a St. Mary's County commissioner in the 1960s. But she was most famous for her relationship with the powerful governor, who was indicted on federal charges of corruption and imprisoned for 19 months.

On July 3, 1973, the then-governor announced that he was "in love with another woman," whom he intended to marry after divorcing his wife of 32 years, Barbara "Bootsie" Mandel. The first Mrs. Mandel not only refused to go gently into the good night, she also refused to move out of the governor's mansion. She also suggested that her husband was suffering from mental illness.

The governor lived in an Annapolis hotel and on the state yacht until his divorce was finalized about six months later.

The second Mrs. Mandel, a striking blonde, became one of the most recognizable figures in the state in the 1970s and 1980s as she stood by Mandel's side, enduring two long trials.

"The skeptics, and there were many, said Marvin's marriage to Jeanne wouldn't last, but they were wrong," said Frank DeFilippo, who had served as the governor's press secretary for eight years. "In a way, it lasted forever. Marvin remained extremely devoted to her to the end."

In a 1981 interview with *The Washington Post*, Mandel, who served in the Maryland House of Delegates from 1952 until 1969, said he had planned to retire from the legislature in 1970, divorce his wife and marry the former Jeanne Blackistone. But this plan was shelved in 1969 when Spiro T. Agnew, Maryland's Republican governor, resigned to become vice president of the United States, and Mandel, as speaker of the House of Delegates, succeeded him as governor.

In the interview, he recalled his years as governor as "probably the most rewarding thing, other than Jeanne, that could have happened to me."

But stories abounded that the new Mrs. Mandel took her politically workaholic husband away from his longtime savvy associates and persuaded him to devote more attention to cultural and social events. As Mandel began his second term as governor, longtime aides began to leave, and Jeanne Mandel became perceived by more than a few as the governor's closest adviser.

Federal prosecutors eventually maintained that it was the governor's divorce that sparked his need for money. They accused him, along with several businessmen and political fundraiser Irvin Kovens, of a complicated scheme to devalue the old Marlboro Race Track.

The group was accused of reducing the number of race days, buying the track and then reinstating the days to raise the value of the track.

Mandel had won reelection by a landslide in 1974 before the indictments were handed up. The former governor's sentence was commuted by President Ronald Reagan in 1981. A few years later, his racketeering and mail fraud convictions were overturned when the U.S. Supreme Court let stand a lower court decision that his jury had received improper instructions.

Jeanne Mandel was born in Leonardtown and attended St. Mary's Academy High School and Strayer College.

Before marrying the governor, Mrs. Mandel, who was from one of St. Mary's County's original Colonial families, was married to Walter B. Dorsey. He had served in the Maryland Senate. That marriage ended in divorce.

She led the fight to save St. Clement's Island in the Potomac River, site of the landings of the Ark and Dove in 1634. She also headed the St. Clement's Hundred, a preservation group.

Her interests included fishing, gardening and local history.

Survivors include her husband, four children from her first marriage, two stepchildren, a sister and eight grandchildren.