

# Jeanne Blackistone Mandel dies at 64

Her love affair  
with former governor  
was widely followed

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SUN STAFF

Jeanne Blackistone Mandel, whose love affair with former Gov. Marvin Mandel sparked one of the most dramatic chapters in Maryland political history, died Saturday from heart failure at her Annapolis home. She was 64.

Known her entire life as a strong-willed woman, she waged in the final years of her life a battle against Lou Gehrig's disease, a fatal neuromuscular disorder.

"She fought the entire time that she was ill," said son Philip H. Dorsey III of Leonardtown. "Her doctors were amazed with the way she fought."

While Mrs. Mandel accomplished much — preserving a historic Maryland island and being active politically in her home St. Mary's County — it was her relationship with the powerful, pipe-smoking governor that captured national headlines.

"The skeptics, and there were many, said Marvin's marriage to Jeanne wouldn't last, but they were wrong," said Frank DeFilippo, Mr. Mandel's press secretary for eight years.

"In a way it lasted forever," Mr. DeFilippo said yesterday. "Marvin remained extremely devoted to her to the end."

One of the most recognizable and glamorous figures in the state during the 1970s and 1980s, Mrs. Mandel stood defiantly by her husband after he was indicted on federal charges of political corruption, convicted and imprisoned for 19 months.

At the heart of the government's case was Mr. Mandel's need for cash to finance the di-

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# Jeanne Mandel, St. Mary's Co. official, wife of former governor, dies at age 64

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orce he wanted from his wife of 32 years, Barbara, so he could marry Jeanne.

Baltimore furniture dealer and political fund-raiser Irvin Kovens and several other businessmen were charged with Mr. Mandel with engineering a labyrinthine scheme to diminish the value of the old Marlboro Race Track by reducing the number of racing days.

After Mr. Kovens and the others bought the track, the days were restored and the value went up.

In exchange, the government contended, Mr. Kovens handled some of Mr. Mandel's divorce-related financial obligations and guaranteed the monthly alimony payments: Mr. Mandel's take-home pay then was about \$17,000 a year — less than the alimony he had agreed to pay. As Mary McGrory of the *Washington Post* wrote: "He loved beyond his means."

## Troubled times

On July 3, 1973, Mr. Mandel announced to Maryland "I am in love with another woman, and I intend to marry her."

Mr. Mandel's wife, Barbara, known as Bootsie, did not make it easy. She refused to leave the governor's mansion and suggested her husband consult a psychiatrist. Mr. Mandel moved into an Annapolis hotel and later to the state yacht, *Maryland Lady*. Five and a half months later a divorce agreement was reached.

Though they may have admired Barbara Mandel's pluck, voters endorsed their governor's determination to be with the woman he loved, re-electing him in 1976 — in spite of his indictment — with 64 percent of the vote.

A confident, smiling Jeanne Mandel's picture ran frequently in



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**Jeanne Mandel** served as a St. Mary's County commissioner.

newspapers and TV news programs, as he endured two long trials.

"She was a very elegant, charismatic and strong partner," said Mr. Mandel's friend, Annapolis lobbyist Bruce C. Bereano.

She called her husband's conviction "the greatest travesty the American people will ever see."

After Mr. Mandel's sentence was commuted by President Ronald Reagan on Dec. 4, 1981, the couple was reunited.

## Prominent background

Before meeting Mr. Mandel, Mrs. Mandel was the wife of Walter B. Dorsey, then a state senator and the son of a politically prominent family in St. Mary's County. Mr. Dorsey's father had been a Circuit Court judge.

She, too, carried impressive social bona fides, being from one of the families that settled St. Mary's County in the 17th century.

Born in Leonardtown, she attended Holy Angels Roman Catholic elementary school in Avenue, St. Mary's Academy high school and Strayer College.

She served two terms as a St. Mary's County commissioner during the late 1960s and later became the county's first female police commissioner.

After that government service, she worked in real estate.

In the 1970s, she led a crusade to help save St. Clement's Island in the Potomac River, site of the landing of the *Ark* and *Dove* in 1634.

Later, she headed a group called St. Clement's One-Hundred, a state preservationist group for the site.

Family members said yesterday that Mrs. Mandel had a passionate love of the Chesapeake Bay and often enjoyed sitting on a boat or riverbank fishing. She was an accomplished gardener and was fond of local history.

Services will be held at 11 a.m. Thursday at Sol Levinson & Bros., 8900 Reisterstown Road in Pikesville. Burial will be at Lakemont Memorial Gardens in Davidsonville.

The family requests donations to ALS Research, in care of Dr. Daniel Drachman, Johns Hopkins School of Medicine, Department of Neurology, 600 N. Wolfe St., Baltimore 21287; or to the St. Clements One-Hundred, P.O. Box 54, Bushwood 20618.

In addition to her husband and son, survivors include three other children, Paul Dorsey of Annapolis, Helen Dorsey of Williamsburg, Va., and John Michael Dorsey of Green Bay, Wis.; two stepchildren, Ellen Maltz and Gary Mandel, both of Los Angeles; a sister, Virginia Duke of Leonardtown; eight grandchildren; and several nieces and nephews.