



Bernard Louis Balkin

January 18, 1926 - January 23, 2021

Bernard Louis Balkin of Kansas City, Missouri, passed away on January 23, 2021 at the age of 95. Bernie is survived by his wife of 72 years, Bettye Sue, his daughter Jan Ellen of Falls Church, VA, his son Jack Mason, of Branford, Connecticut, and daughter-in-law Margret Wolfe, also of Branford.

Bernie will be missed for his turkey calls on Thanksgiving, his hatred of peanut butter (having worked in a peanut butter factory as a youth), his love of seafood (and lack of understanding why his daughter could not tolerate it), the stories of his summers spent with his many cousins, and his love of the law.

He served two years in the Navy and Naval Reserve as an Ensign stationed in the San Francisco area, traveling to China on one occasion. While still in the Reserves, Bernie graduated from the University of California at Berkeley in 1947, with a degree in engineering. He then applied to and was accepted at Harvard Law School, where he received his Juris Doctor degree in 1950.

Upon returning to Kansas City, he joined a local law firm before establishing Achtenberg, Sandler and Balkin, with the late Irving Achtenberg, and the late Sheldon P. Sandler (Bettye Sue's brother). The firm was known for many years as Sandler Balkin Hellman & Weinstein before Bernie joined Gilliland & Hayes in the 1990s. With an international base of clients in the areas of construction, fidelity and surety law, Bernie traveled widely and was the go-to attorney in his field, authoring many papers and treatises. He was most proud of co-founding the Surety Claims Institute, of which he served as president from 1991-1998. He remained an active participant in American Bar Association activities, especially as vice-chair of the ABA's Fidelity and Surety Law Committee, and from which he received the ABA Fidelity and Surety Law Committee's Lifetime Achievement Award in 2009.

A loving father, a devoted husband, and a joy to be around when teaching his daughter baseball and telling old jokes to his son, Dad will be missed.

In lieu of flowers, contributions may be made in Bernie's name to Congregation Ohev Sholom, 5311 W 75th St, Prairie Village, KS 66208.

Events

JAN **Zoom Graveside Service**

11:00AM

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Please email zoom2@louismemorial.com for zoom ID and Passcode
MO, US

JAN **Zoom Shiva**

07:00PM

30

Please email zoom2@louismemorial.com for zoom ID and Passcode
MO, US

Comments



“ I was so very sorry to receive the news that Bernie died. He was my mentor, and such a wonderful teacher to me in every way. He was brilliant, handsome, devoted to his family, and to his partners, and always was such a person of integrity. As a lowly clerk, he treated me with such respect and kindness, and I saw him treat everyone this way. From the receptionists, secretaries, and the file clerk. He and Bettye Sue invited me to their home for Passover, and were always incredibly fun, warm and generous in their expansive hospitality.

One of my favorite memories was watching him at a jury trial in the Jackson County courthouse on a warm summer day. I was a lowly associate, and I was thrilled to be invited. We were in a courtroom on the 8th or 9th floor. We had watched the other side perform their opening arguments, by which time the entire jury AND the judge were dozing. I couldn't believe I had chosen to join the most paralyzingly dull profession ever conceived. I was rethinking my decision to leave waitressing...Then, it was Bernie's turn to speak. He rose, and smiled at the jurors, smiled at the judge, and courteously began to explain to everyone how the law actually applied to the facts in this case. He began to teach about the role of the surety in construction projects, and everyone in the jury box began to lean forward. I don't know if we all thought there might be a quiz, but we all WANTED to learn from this man. He spoke fairly briefly, but summarized his entire case so beautifully that I think everyone knew that the only clear victory in the case would be for Bernie's client.

This gracious, courteous, brilliant, ethical, man made me want to be a better person, and someday, a good lawyer. On many vexing cases, and with many a vexing opposing counsel, I have asked myself, "What would Bernie do?" It has been a pleasure to bring him to mind, and I know it must be of some comfort to his children to know that he loved his family first, deeply and truly and well.

Saphronia Young

Saphronia Young - February 10 at 02:59 AM



“ I am an old friend of Jan's. My favorite memory of Bernie is him taking Jan and to ride her horse. Neither one of us could ride well, but Bernie was there encouraging us on- both of us on the same horse. Of all Bernie's many accomplishments, being a Dad was important to him and that's how I remember him. My thoughts and prayers to Jan and Jack.

Sherry Gibson Wells - February 03 at 10:28 PM



“ I had the privilege of practicing law with Bernie Balkin for over 40 years. He was a nationally known and respected figure in fidelity and surety law, but his practice was not limited to those areas and he set a standard for excellence in all his professional activities. He welcomed many young attorneys into the profession. He was living proof that a lawyer need not be difficult to get along with in order to represent a client effectively. Bernie was generous with his time, fun to be around, and always interested in his friends' lives. He loved learning about the world and sharing his vast knowledge of it. His was a unique voice that I will miss.

Keith Witten - January 30 at 11:18 AM



“ In 1971 I was privileged to become a law clerk at Achtenberg, Sandler and Balkin. It was the beginning of my legal career. The mentoring I received from Bernie was a gift. The firm was known for the quality of the lawyers and the firm's commitment to integrity and community. Bernie was an incredible attorney and a wonderful mentor. As hard as I worked to have the opportunity to work at the firm, (first working at the UMKC Law Library under Eleanor Blue, the head of the library and a known connection to the firm) my years with the firm and the friendships I developed were beyond my expectations and will always be treasured.

I am sorry for the family's loss. He was an exceptional human being.

Ann Mesle

Ann Mesle - January 29 at 12:40 PM



“ Jack Friedman is following this tribute.

Jack Friedman - January 28 at 08:38 PM



“ Betty, Jan and Jack.
My earliest memory of Bernard is when Marilyn and I would go to your house on 75th St. so we could car pool to Ohev Shalom. One of the reasons I became a lawyer was the respect I had for Bernie. As Scott mentions, there were many simcas there were celebrated together. May he rest in peace.

Ronnie

Ron Gold - January 28 at 05:39 PM



“ We send our most sincere condolences to "Bernie's" family. We have lived next door to Bernie and Sue for the past 33 years in the Foxcroft neighborhood. Bernie was a great neighbor, and he and Kathy often consulted on their joint interest in growing roses. He was a warm and kind person, and a good friend. We will miss him very much.

Frank & Kathy Carey

Frank Carey - January 28 at 01:26 PM



“ Our condolences on the loss of this mensch. Bernie was a close friend of the family, dating back to his early days and those of my mother's family (Shirley Cohn Levine). Several years ago I showed him a letter that he wrote to the family in November, 1944 expressing his sorrow and condolences after my mother's brother, Melvin, (the uncle I did not know) and Bernie's good friend was killed in WWII. Bernie was surprised I kept the letter and realized how much his friendship throughout the many years had meant to us. He was an active member of Ohev Sholom where for decades he attended morning minyan. When Bernie was a bit younger, he participated in programs and in the adult choir where we could enjoy listening to his beautiful voice. He will be missed. May his memory be for a blessing. Joel and Bev Levine

Joel Levine - January 28 at 11:09 AM



“ Our sympathy and best wishes to Jan & Jack. I remember your father as handsome and smart.

Harry Edelman

harry edelman - January 27 at 03:29 PM



“ A lion of the law and the Surety industry. I met Bernie in the late 1980's and he was both kind and understanding of younger lawyers like myself. I will be forever grateful for the time we spent together, and for his leadership of the Surety Claims Institute. My deepest condolences to Betty Sue and the family.

Seth Mills - January 27 at 02:13 PM



“ My law partners were each fine lawyers in Kansas City, but my favorite and best law partner and tennis partner was Bernie Balkin. I called him last week at his home just after his 95th birthday. I couldn't seem to lift his spirits much but I congratulated him on arriving at this big score. I loved him.

Lloyd Hellman

Lloyd Hellman - January 27 at 01:52 PM



“ Susan and I send our deepest condolences. I remember growing up the many Thanksgivings and Passovers we shared -celebrated in a way that seems lost today, but remains a fond memory. I also remember Bernie failing to stand up to Naomi and side with my argument that Thanksgiving dinner should not begin until the game was over. Lots of good times and I always appreciated the great relation Bernie had with my dad.If there is anything we can do to help locally ,please call 913-980-9799.

Scott Asner - January 27 at 11:01 AM



“ My longtime friend and law school classmate, with memories of the class of 1950-- and later. I am very sorry. Howard Sachs

Howard Sachs - January 27 at 10:13 AM



“ Jack,
Heartfelt condolences to you and your family. Your father must have been very proud of you.
fondly, Debbie (Thompson) & Marvin Gates

Debbie Gates - January 26 at 01:05 PM