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## Rothchild, Cornelia "Nina" Howard (nee Peek)



Feminist and civil servant, Nina Rothchild, age 91, died on October 12, 2021 in Saint Paul, Minnesota, marking the end of a long life filled with love, accomplishment, and an unceasing commitment to grammatical correctness.

Born March 5, 1930, in New York City, Nina attended the progressive Buxton School before earning a scholarship to Smith College in Massachusetts, where she graduated Magna cum laude in mathematics. Her academic accomplishments garnered an invitation to the prestigious Phi Beta Kappa society - a point of tremendous personal pride and satisfaction for the rest of her life.

As she graduated from Smith College, Nina met her lifelong partner and soul mate, Kennon Valentine Rothchild, on a blind date. She later joked that their socioeconomic status made them a good match... "we were both poor." Milk punches, a feature of that first date, remained a favorite for them both. Ken and Nina married in 1951 and were inseparable for the next seven decades.

Children arrived soon after and the fledgling family fled west to Minnesota, where Nina embarked on a professional career to augment her role as mother and wife. With three small children, she completed a bachelor's degree in teaching from the University of Minnesota and taught high school mathematics. She proceeded to volunteer at a suicide hotline, followed by election to the Mahtomedi School Board, leading to a lifelong commitment to raising the status of women and girls, especially Title IX and athletics.

Nina was a lioness of the women's movement. Her work to remove barriers to women's economic security made a tangible difference to countless women. She was architect of Minnesota's internationally-unique pay equity law, the State Employees Pay Equity Act of 1982, when she was director of the Minnesota Council on the Economic Status of Women. After successfully lobbying for its passage, she became Commissioner of the Minnesota Department of Employee Relations under Governor Rudy Perpich, where she led implementation of that law as well as its companion, the Local Government Pay Equity Act of 1984. Together those laws led to significant salary increases for 40,000 people (90 percent of them women). The average earnings of state-employed women rose from 72 percent of the average for their male counterparts to 98 percent. Both those laws were significant for their ongoing enforcement, as permanent changes to compensation systems for all 1,200 government employers in the state. In addition, they have served as models for countless pay equity initiatives around the nation and the world thanks to Nina's dauntless and tireless advocacy.

She co-authored the book *In the Company of Women* (Minnesota Historical Society Press, 1996), a history of the American women's movement with a forward written by Gloria Steinem. The book represents a narrative quilt with stories of "how I became a feminist" for 82 women. Many were in awe of her accomplishments, as well - not only for women to receive equitable pay for comparable work, but to ensure pregnancy disability benefits, funding for battered women shelters and displaced homemakers' programs, and to add sexual harassment as a form of illegal discrimination under the Minnesota Human Rights Act.

She received awards for Distinguished Service from the National Governors Association in 1984 and from the National Pay Equity Committee in 1987. Nina also received a DreamMaker award from the Anne Bancroft Foundation (alongside Amy Klobuchar) recognizing individuals and organizations for their accomplishments in support of girls and women.

After retirement, Nina and Ken settled into a comfortable rotation of summers in Fire Island, New York and winters in Mahtomedi, Minnesota. Frequent adventures abroad punctuated their later life: the two would eventually visit more than 80 countries and all seven continents, including Antarctica. (Nina could never identify a favorite place, comparing them to a parent's equal love of children. Her actual children took no offense.)

Nina's later pursuit of new tricks - including tap-dancing and an admirable embrace of technology - betrayed her appreciation for the past. She adored opera. She despised change. The thought of wasted food was an anathema to her - no doubt a product of her Depression-era upbringing. Ken and Nina enjoyed Twin Cities opera, theater and chamber music as both patrons and supporters. They were inseparable - his hand in hers.

A trailblazer and role model, a fierce and influential matriarch, Nina is survived by her beloved husband, Ken; children (as she said, "my three perfect children") Kennon III (Hilarie Blumenthal), Mary (Dan Bruggeman), and Sally (John Soric). Nina has seven grandchildren and two great-grandchildren. She is preceded in death by her sister Sally and is survived by her brother Bob, nieces and nephews.

A celebration of life event is forthcoming, but you can bet it will include swing tunes, tap dancing, and not one out-of-place comma. Donations or tributes preferred to organizations that support women and girls.

