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Marilyn & Aaron Schwartz

Herman: "Speak now or forever hold your pee.'"
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Marilyn Schwartz died in hospice care in Houston on Feb. 25. She was 89. And in her long and rewarding life we find a reminder of this frequent and happy occurrence: Interesting folks often find other interesting folks and get married.
Marilyn was married to the legendary A.R. "Babe" Schwartz, who spent 20 years representing Galveston in the Texas Senate (after four years in the Texas House) until he was ousted by Republican J.E. "Buster" Brown in 1980. What's not to like about an election pitting a Buster against a Babe?
Babe was a progressive back when progressives were called liberals. And he was a liberal back in 1980 when the Reagan wave swept lots of folks like that out of office. Like more than one ex-lawmaker, Babe found post-legislative happiness as a Capitol lobbyist and he and Marilyn maintained an Austin presence.
They were married on July 14, 1951. He died in 2018. Knowing what I remember about Babe, I'm guessing being married to him had its moments, if you know what I mean. But as family members recall, Marilyn had fair forewarning about what she was getting into by marrying Babe, who, as her obit said, was "a poor boy from Galveston who was five years older and rough around the edges" when they fell in love.
They first met at a mutual friend's house when she was 16. Many years later, Babe remembered the moment, recalling for a newspaper that Marilyn was wearing a Dutch girl peasant blouse and a skirt when they met.
They crossed paths again at a frat dance in Austin. It was there, according to the family-
written obit, that she got a glimpse of what we will call Babe's directness.
"He asked her to dance, but abruptly walked away in the middle of the song, saying, 'you don't dance worth a damn.' He saw her again awhile later at an intramural football game. When she walked up to say hello, he told her that her feet were dirty. 'I was very upset,' she recalled, 'because I was fairly popular in college and was usually treated very nicely.'"
Somehow, things advanced, most likely because this coupling for life was, as those of us who revel in the joys of Yiddish say, baSHERT. Look it up. And destiny for Babe and Marilyn was given a boost by his willingness to help her out when she was homesick. Home at the time was Harlingen.
"He told her he would be there in 15 minutes, and he drove her to Harlingen, a seven-hour trip each way, in the Studebaker convertible that he'd bought with the college

savings account his mother had handed him when he went off to school," the family recalled. "Before long, they were engaged. "

Family friend Paulie Gaido once said this of Babe: "Although he possessed a well-deserved reputation as a phenomenal orator, the most compelling evidence of his power of persuasion was the ability to persuade Marilyn to be his wife."

She was a political asset in that way that spouses can be. Babe, generally as certain he was right as he was certain that his foes were wrong, was not always beloved by all.

"She was also the softening presence to her husband's feisty, bare-knuckled ways," the obit noted. "It was not uncommon for Babe Schwartz's political foes, when introduced to a Schwartz son, to glower briefly and mumble something about having had disagreements with Babe Schwartz, but then they would brighten and ask, 'How's your mother? I love your mother.'"

And Marilyn was a longtime Austin presence, including as a leader in what then was known as the Senate Ladies organization, in which she remained active even after Babe was ousted from the Senate. She organized the Easter egg hunt at the Governor's Mansion and enlisted her grandchildren to don the Easter bunny and chicken costumes necessary for the event.

"During high school, when George W. Bush was governor, Grandma had me fly down from Chicago to wear the Easter bunny suit," Austin lawyer Justin Schwartz recalled in a Facebook tribute to her. "You have no idea how hot it is in those things. The next session (two years later), I got too big for the bunny suit, so I was Big Bird. I could barely fit in it. She sewed me into it and said, 'Speak now or forever hold your pee.'"

In Galveston, she was active at Temple B'nai Israel and served on the Beach and Parks board. Marilyn is survived by her four sons and their families, including her 12 grandkids and four great-grandkids.

But this might be my favorite thing about her, something I previously had not known and something that gives me a very personal connection to her. She skipped third grade. I skipped second grade. So it's clear that early in life we both were identified as geniuses for the ages.

Twins Bob and Dick Schwartz (Babe and Marilyn's older two sons) used to tell their younger brothers when they struggled with third-grade homework not to ask mom for help: "Don't ask her. She didn't have third grade."

And, as I still do to this day about second grade, when confronted with something she didn't know, Marilyn would say "They must have taught that in third grade."

Marilyn will be buried in the Texas State Cemetery in East Austin, next to Babe, at the bench the family installed last year. The wonderful notion is to have folks sit a spell and reflect, perhaps on the inscription on the bench: "Hell hath no fury like a liberal scorned." Maybe, but you're going to love his wife.

"She is now back with him," Justin Schwartz wrote of his grandparents. "Right where she wants to be. Here's hoping he didn't get busted having too much fun on his own. "Whenever we talked on the phone, Grandma would always tell me to 'Pinch those babies on the butt for me.' Well, Grandma and Grandpa, when you see each other, pinch each other on the butt for all of us. We love you."