



Susan Berman Fink

February 22, 1929 - February 6, 2016

Susan Berman Fink was most proud of her large family. It was her personal claim to fame, not the tireless hours spent volunteering, anonymous good deeds or days filled with dance, exercise and music.

“I had five children in five years,” she’d tell anyone and everyone. Before you could do the math, she’d quickly add, “There was a set of twins in there.”

A cherished mother, precious sweetheart and lover of life, Susan passed away Saturday, February 6 at Big Bend Hospice after her heart finally gave out. But the undying affection in her heart for family and loved ones will survive into eternity.

The classy lady with the trademark mop of poodle-like white hair leaves behind a sweet memory of 86 years filled to capacity with deep friendships, many loves and unwavering devotion from her gang of kids and grandchildren.

“She was a beautiful and strong woman who could slam a ping pong ball, crush a tennis partner and glide elegantly across the dance floor until the last song was played,” said her daughter, Randy Ziffer, of Mount Dora, Florida. “Her five kids loved her more than life and it was mutual in every conceivable way.”

Susan was born in Bronx, New York City, attended Washington University in St. Louis for a bit and then returned home to finish her education, teach, marry and begin raising a family. With Jere, Jack, Randy and Gil in tow, and Gary in the hopper, she and her husband, Dr. Albert Ziffer, moved to Winter Park, Florida long before Disney World was envisioned.

It was a safe hamlet to bring up a family and her kids remember being the original free-range children with tremendous independence to do as they wished, while always keeping an eye on one another, and coming home in time for supper.

When the three boys would fight, she knew how to referee.

“If you’re going to kill each other, please do it outside,” she’d say.

In those days, she was known to haul the family’s black-and-white TV set to the neighborhood elementary school so the class could watch Walter Cronkite anchor a rocket launch or inauguration. Then she would turn around and volunteer with special needs children, knowing that her kids had advantages others did not.

Later, after marrying Louis Fink and moving to Tallahassee, she joined Temple Israel, held JCC fundraisers in her home, paid the inaugural salary of the synagogue’s cantor, traveled and embraced new friendships. Into her 80s, she gave of her heart to Big Bend Hospice, sitting vigils while “her patients” drifted off so that none would die alone. In an 18-month span, her bedside visits totaled more than 100 hours.

“She was totally dumbfounded when Hospice honored her in 2011 with Volunteer of the Year and then presented her with a Silver Star Award,” said

her son, Tallahassee City Commissioner Gil Ziffer. “She never asked to be recognized, just to go about quietly helping where she could.”

Susan settled into Westminster Oaks a few years ago, joined at the hip with the final love of her life, Frank Caster, who lives down the hall. Aside from doing all daily activities together, he'd get a kick out of watching her play ping pong on the Table Tennis Team, slamming the ball time and time again.

A graveside service was held at Roselawn on February 8. She is survived by her brother, Dr. Charles Berman (Lillian), of New York City; sons Dr. Jack Ziffer (Hope), of Miami; Gil Ziffer (Gail Stansberry-Ziffer), of Tallahassee; Gary Ziffer (Karin Meacham), of Lancaster, PA; daughters Jere Lifshitz (Dr. Fima Lifshitz), of Santa Barbara, CA; Randy Ziffer (Ric Feld), of Mount Dora, FL; grandchildren Lee Ziffer (Thalia), of New Orleans; Blair Graham (Dr. Aubrey Graham), of Cary, NC; Dr. Geoffrey Feld, of Durham, NC; Dr. Danielle Kaplan (Jeffrey), of Cornelius, NC; Frasier Ziffer, of Oakland CA; Sara Suvoltos (Andrew), of Melbourne, AU; Satchel Ziffer of Norfolk, VA; Hanna Ziffer, of Nashville, TN and five great-grandchildren. The family suggests donations be made to Big Bend Hospice.