

MARILYN PORTNOY

July 15, 1930–December 25, 2012

THE FIGHTING LADY

Marilyn Portnoy came from a line of fighting women who believed that gender and lack of money did not disqualify you from exerting influence and helping people in your community. Marilyn's mother, Sally, "Simma" Bell, arrived at Ellis Island at age 12. Simma became a garment worker who made raincoats, and helped found the Boston chapter of the ILGWA, the International Ladies Garment Workers Association, affording women better working conditions and fairer wages

LIFE IN CHELSEA

Marilyn married Edward Portnoy, had four children, and soon found staying at home with children not entirely fulfilling. She became a lunch mother, then the President of the Parent Teacher Organization of the Shurtleff School and went on to hold the same position at Chelsea High School. Marilyn was more a strong cultural Jewish woman than a religious person, but was always active at the Shurtleff Street Synagogue, taking on the role of President of the Sisterhood.

At this time, Chelsea was changing; Latinx families were filling Chelsea's crowded housing stock, much as Jewish immigrants and Marilyn's family had done decades before. Marilyn refused to leave Chelsea, loving the city's diversity and enjoying her Latinx and Asian neighbors' friendship and foods.



Source: Ellen Rovner, *The Chelsea Gateway Project*, Cara Portnoy interview (2021), and the *Chelsea Record*, January 4, 2013.

ACTIVISM IN EDUCATION

A staunch anti-racist and strong supporter of education, Marilyn could see that children's needs were not being met as the city went through social and economic transitions. She decided to run for the School Board. She was defeated. With Edward's support, Marilyn ran again, becoming the only member of the School Board who had children in the public school system. She led Chelsea against Proposition 2 ½, knowing that limiting tax revenues would hurt schools and children.

1ST FEMALE ALDERMAN

The "Fighting Lady's" commitment to social justice, education, and love for Chelsea propelled Marilyn to become the first female Alderman from Ward 1, the first female Alderman at Large, the first female City Councilor from District 5, and the first female President of the City Council. When Chelsea went into state receivership in 1991, Marilyn opposed the city losing local control. She thought that if the city is broken, the city should fix it. In her later years, Marilyn became the President of her senior living at Admiral's Hill.

Gregarious, caring, and always "fighting" for her community, she defied people's views of politicians as narcissistic and money-grabbing.

Marilyn Portnoy loved Chelsea and serving the people in it.

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