



Benjamin A. Miller

SEP 28, 1955 - MAR 1, 2024



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FUNERAL HOME, MEMORIAL PARK & CREMATORY

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Benjamin A. Miller, age 68, of Redwood City, CA died on March 1, 2024, due to complications of heart failure and lung cancer, both caused by treatments for previous cancers. Despite his many health issues, Ben had a very optimistic outlook on life and a great sense of humor, and was determined to live as long as possible. He met each health challenge head-on and just kept on going.

Endlessly curious about other people, Ben would strike up conversations with anyone and everyone. In minutes, he'd make strangers feel like they'd known him for a long time. He was so interested in talking with friends, family, and colleagues that they could tell how much he cared about them. Ben loved to share what he knew about the natural world, music, database programming, and many other topics, but was open to learning from others, too. He had a big, engaging smile he wore often that we miss greatly.

Ben was born on September 28, 1955, in Decatur, Illinois, to Lee Norman Miller (who died in 2016) and Sylvia Dordek Miller. Throughout his childhood, Ben and his family moved numerous times from Illinois to New Haven, CT, followed by Long Island, NY, and Durham, NC. When Ben was 11 years old, the Millers settled in Ithaca, NY, where his father got a professorship at Cornell University.

Although Ben was sad to leave NC because he “thought NY wouldn’t have enough snakes,” he ended up enjoying the beauty and nature of upstate NY. He loved reptiles, spiders, and insects from a very young age.

In 1967, Ben’s parents bought an old farmhouse in Slaterville Springs, NY, a rural village outside of Ithaca. The family enjoyed being out in the country. Ben spent hours exploring the forests behind the farmhouse and as a teenager, he loved helping the dairy farmer John down the road. He went to the farm almost every day after school and would milk the cows, bail hay, chop corn for silage, drive the tractor, and operate the kick bailer.



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During the summer months of 1969, when Ben was 13, the family lived in Tucson, AZ. Ben secured his dream job working as a teacher's aide at the Arizona Sonora Desert Museum. A fond memory of his from that summer was watching the first moonwalk on TV in Tempe, AZ with extended family.

In Ithaca, Ben attended DeWitt Junior High School and Ithaca High School, graduating in 1973. He started college at SUNY Brockport, then transferred to and graduated from Cornell University in 1977, with a BS degree in entomology.

Ben married Susan Freier in 1981. While living in South Bend, IN, Ben worked with children and adults as an education curator at The Potawatomi Zoo. He and Susan had two children, Sarah and Rachel. In 1989, the young family moved to the Bay Area of California. The marriage ended the following year.

In 1999, Ben married Cathy Spitzer. They bought a home in Redwood City, CA in 2003. Ben and Cathy loved spending time together watching movies and TV, going for walks, and socializing with friends. They adored their dog Bartok and enjoyed meeting other dog owners at the local dog park. They were married almost 25 years and Cathy continues to be a loving stepmom to Ben's daughters.

After moving to Silicon Valley in 1989, Ben decided to teach himself to program in HyperCard. He landed his first HyperCard job building educational software for math instruction. A few years later, a software development company named Claris hired Ben as one of four people to do global tech support for the full product line, including FileMaker and MacWrite. On the side, Ben also had a consulting business creating databases for clients using HyperCard and FileMaker. After six years, Ben left Claris to focus on database development. During his over 33-year career, he worked for Claris, Incyte Genomics, Digidesign, Sony Computer Entertainment, NBC Internet, Boston Scientific, and Nordic Naturals. He made good friends everywhere he worked, and his coworkers came to rely on his expertise, creativity, and dedication to his work.

Ben's final and most rewarding job was with Nordic Naturals, a nutraceutical company. His last project was creating a Product Lifecycle Management tool for the Product Development team. When he learned he had incurable cancer, Ben talked about this project as his "legacy." His work was intellectually stimulating and emotionally satisfying. He loved helping colleagues solve problems and was extremely fond of his last boss Jim. Even though his body was failing him,



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Ben's love for his work and colleagues persisted. His commitment and drive to finish his project led him to work up until the day he died.

Outside of work, Ben had many passions, most of all music. He took piano lessons starting in grade school. He became an excellent piano player and taught himself how to improvise. In high school, he played the sousaphone in the marching band. Ben also loved singing. He was a long-time member and past President of a large men's a cappella chorus, Voices in Harmony, known for its mastery of technically demanding close harmony. Ben participated in several national and international competitions with Voices in Harmony, and the chorus often placed very high in the rankings. Over the years, he also sang the bass part in several barbershop quartets.

Ben loved nature and animals of all kinds. He became skilled at nature photography using a long lens to take beautiful photos of birds and other creatures, often on outings with his daughter Sarah. He loved cooking for others and could easily whip up something yummy without a recipe. He became a big fan of collecting scotch whiskey from all over the world. In recent years, when he could no longer drink alcohol, he took pleasure in gifting bottles of his whiskey to friends. Ben also loved collecting glass paperweights and vases, and watching sappy rom-com movies on TV with Cathy many times over. More than anything, though, he loved his wife, daughters, and extended family.

Incredibly devoted to being the best possible father to his two daughters, Ben always made himself available as a sounding board, advisor, coach, and listener. Ben was an empathetic person, acutely attuned to his daughters' emotional needs and always willing to learn and grow with them. When the girls were young, he learned to braid their hair, and he read to them nearly every night. He always made them feel special. Sarah and Rachel loved their father fiercely, and, especially during Ben's last year of life, made it a priority to visit and call often and help out however they could.

Ben is survived by his wife Cathy Miller, his daughters Sarah Freier-Miller of San Francisco and Rachel (Gary) Sivek of New York City, his grandchildren Arielle and Henry Sivek, his mother Sylvia Miller of Maryland, his sister Danna (Larry) Katzman of Maryland, nephews Gabe and Eli Katzman, and many other dear family members and friends all around the world. One of the things Ben was proudest of was the positive and enriching relationship he and Cathy had with his ex-wife Susan, her husband Stephen, and their son Zachary. The blended family often got together for holidays, parties, and special occasions.



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Ben will be dearly missed by his family and everyone who knew and loved him!

There will be a Celebration of Life on what would have been Ben's 69th birthday, Sept 28, 2024, at a location in the Bay Area to be determined. In lieu of flowers, please send a donation in Ben's honor to the Mesothelioma Applied Research Foundation (<https://www.curemeso.org/>), the American Cancer Society (<https://www.cancer.org/>), or the Barbershop Harmony Society (<https://www.barbershop.org/>).



Tribute Wall

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Danna Miller Katzman shared 3 photos to the **Ben Miller** album.



March 21 at 8:50 AM



Mark Timares shared a photo to the **Ben Miller** album.



March 14 at 5:48 AM



Mark Timares posted:

Ben was so very kind, very smart, curious and patient. I will miss him and I send sympathy and condolences to his wife, family and close friends. Mark T.

March 14 at 5:42 AM



Olivia Deng March 29 at 8:14 AM

Hi Ben, You are such an optimistic, positive and outstanding, You taught me to look at life in a new way, It is my honor to meet you and served you!! hope you will be at peace and happy in another realm. Eternal Olivia Deng



Media

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Danna Miller Katzman shared 3 photos to the **Ben Miller** album.

March 21 at 8:50 AM



Ben and his sister Danna, 2008



Ben with daughters Rachel & Sarah, 2018



Ben & Cathy with Ben's parents Sylvia & Lee, 8/8/99



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Memories only last if you share them

Join us in honoring Benjamin by contributing to a collection of shared memories.



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