

ENTERTAINMENT



'America's mother' dead at 83

Ann Landers died Saturday at her Chicago home

CHICAGO (AP) — Ann Landers, the columnist whose snappy, plain-spoken and timely advice helped millions of readers deal with everything from birth to death, died Saturday. She was 83.

The death of Landers, whose real name was Esther Lederer, was announced by the Chicago Tribune, publisher of her column. She died less than two weeks before her July 4 birthday.

Landers died of multiple myeloma at her Chicago apartment.

"There was absolutely no wall between Ann Landers and her readers. It went straight from her to them," Tribune syndicated columnist and author Bob Greene said Saturday. "I don't think there has ever been the kind of mutual trust and affection between writer and reader as there was with Eppie."

Landers' column first appeared in print Oct. 16, 1955, in the Chicago Sun-Times. In 1993, she was the world's most widely syndicated columnist, appearing in more than 1,200 newspapers worldwide with 90 million readers daily. Her twin sister, Pauline, followed her into the profession as writer of the Dear Abby column.

The feisty, outspoken Landers was a housewife when she won the Sun-Times contest to become the second Ann Landers after the woman who created the column died.

At the end of her career, she was a with-it great-grandmother whose name often appeared on lists of the country's most influential women.

"Eppie Lederer was a great columnist and a wonderful person," said John W. Madigan, chairman and CEO of Tribune Co. "She helped people with her advice, and made important contributions to society through the causes she supported."

Psychology Today once gave her credit for likely having more influence on the way people work out their problems than any other person of her era.

"All the column means to me is an opportunity to do good in the world," she said in a 1993 interview with that magazine.

She attributed her skill to sheer instinct.

"I relate to these people like they are almost sitting in the same room. I feel their pain," she once said.

Her advice was always blunt, often sympathetic and sometimes sarcastic. But her answers, even to some of the silliest questions, were heartfelt.

In her column published in Sunday's Tribune, Landers gave advice to "Depressed in New Jersey" and "Stu in Florida." And to "Desperate in Des Moines, Iowa," whose husband is keeping his earnings from her, she wrote: "Edgar will not allow you to have any of his income and is planning to sell the house? Something smells rotten to me."

"See a lawyer immediately, and find out how to protect yourself and your children if Edgar leaves you and takes all his assets with him."

When she began her column, newspaper editors forbade her from talking about homosexuality.

In later years, there were virtually no taboos: In an Oct. 24, 1993, column, for example, she endorsed masturbation or mutual masturbation as a safe, realistic alternative to abstinence for everyone from teens to the elderly.

In a letter published June 16, 1993, a man wrote of being sexually aroused by his girlfriend's young daughters. In a typically pithy response, Landers wrote: "The klinker in your thinker has a pedophile-like twist that could cause real trouble at any time. Please get counselling at once."

She was a great believer in counselling and wasn't too big-headed to seek advice from prominent experts when a reader's problem

with her."

Instead, a new column called Ann's Mailbox will be written by Kathy Mitchell and Marcy Sugar, longtime editors of Ann Landers.

Lederer died at age 83 from multiple myeloma, less than two weeks before her July 4 birthday. A farewell column written by Howard will be distributed Monday, Lederer's syndicator, Creators Syndicate of Los Angeles, said in a statement Sunday.

Ann Landers columns that Lederer had already completed will run through July 27. "That will be the last column with Ann Landers' byline," said Richard



Ann Landers sits in her Chicago home in this October 1990 file photo. Landers, the columnist whose snappy, plain-spoken and timely advice helped millions of readers deal with everything from birth to death, died Saturday. She was 83.

AP file photo

proved too complicated.

Her column had lighthearted moments, though. Few topics excited readers more than the question of which direction the toilet paper should be hung in.

"She was like America's mother, and I'm not alone in my sadness," Landers' daughter, Margo Howard, told the Tribune.

"She was about fixing the world. She really wanted to make things better. She really cared about the people," said Howard, whose column, "Dear Prudence," appears in the online magazine Slate.

In addition to Howard, Lederer is survived by her sister and competitor in the advice column business, Pauline Esther (PoPo) Phillips, also known as Abigail Van Buren, author of the Dear Abby column.

Landers made headlines and inspired countless water-cooler debates in 1985 when she asked women readers whether they prefer tenderness and cuddling or sexual intercourse. Some 90,000 readers sent in responses, and 72 per cent voted for cud-

dling, she reported.

She answered hundreds of letters a day from the office in her high-rise North Side apartment, dispensing thoroughly modern advice by typewriter because she just didn't like computers.

She was based at the Sun-Times until March 1987, when she switched syndication companies and moved to the Chicago Tribune.

The daughter of Russian immigrants, she was born Esther (Eppie) Friedman on July 4, 1918, in Sioux City, Iowa, 17 minutes before her twin sister. When Pauline became Dear Abby, her older sister was so angry they reportedly feuded several years before reconciling.

Landers married Jules Lederer, who helped found Budget-Rent-A-Car, in 1939 — in a gown matching that of her sister, who got married that same day.

The Lederers had a daughter, Margo. They divorced in 1975, a decision Landers announced in "the most difficult column I have ever tried to put together. How did it happen that something so good didn't last forever? The lady with all the answers does not know the answer to this one." Lederer died in January 1999.

Landers was popular for tackling serious issues in a fresh way

CHICAGO (AP) — Ann Landers resonated with readers for nearly five decades because she evolved with the times, wrote about topics that others shied away from and never let her advice get stale, her daughter said Sunday.

While Esther Lederer won a contest to become the second Ann Landers after the column's creator died, it will not be carried on by another writer after Lederer's death on Saturday.

"She owned the copyright and she did not wish for the name to continue," Margo Howard said of her mother. "She felt it was very much associated

Newcombe, president of Creators Syndicate.

Creators will provide two new advice columns, one written by Howard, who has been writing the column Dear Prudence for the online magazine Slate, the company said.

Howard of Cambridge, Mass., said her mother's columns resonated with readers because she tackled tough topics and kept up with trends.

"She was very brave about what she chose to get behind and she went public about some issues that other people wouldn't have," Howard said. "She was able to change with the times. There

was nothing dated about her opinions. She just made it her business to stay current."

Lederer, who was known as Eppie, wrote about homosexuality, abortion and AIDS in the column she started writing in 1955 in the Chicago Sun-Times. She switched syndication companies in 1987 and the column moved to the Chicago Tribune.

"Her warmth, wisdom and common sense informed and controlled generations of Americans," said Peter Rowe, president of the National Society of Newspaper Columnists, which ended its 25th annual meeting in Pittsburgh Saturday.



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