

My personal friendship with "*Dear Abby*"

during my undergraduate years at Stanford

Sheldon Breiner

During my sophomore thru senior years at Stanford, I had become a close friend of Pauline Phillips, otherwise known as the advice columnist, 'Dear Abby.' She lived nearby on Floribunda in Burlingame, California. I met her and her husband, Mort, at a Passover Seder in 1957 at a friend's house not far from Stanford. After a bit of friendly conversation, she asked if didn't mind dropping by their house on my way back to Stanford to cheer up their daughter, Jeanne, who was recovering from a case of mononucleosis. From that point on, I was a frequent guest at their house for dinner, staying there for sojourns, wining and dining and was, for a variety of reasons, almost like family.



From left, unidentified Stanford student, Bob Jones, Mort Phillips, Mrs. Pauline Phillips ("Dear Abby"), Sheldon Breiner, Jeanne Phillips at the Tonga Room, Fairmont Hotel, San Francisco, April 10, 1959

Frequently, I would go to their house and from there, "Mom" (as I was asked to address her), Mort, Jeanne and I would drive to San Francisco, with me driving their Fleetwood Cadillac, to dine at the best restaurants in the City, where she was a well-known, popular figure. By 1958, Dear Abby was already a widely read columnist, appearing in about 400 newspapers.

On several occasions, Mom, Mort and I would sit around their living room writing 10 days' worth of her column for the McNaught Syndicate which then sent it out to the newspapers. I'd sometimes meet the half-dozen ladies that came by to pick

up the letters, returning them several days later after replying to everyone and vetting them for interesting material for the column. She had several filing cabinets where she kept hundreds of the most precious letters that she sometimes discussed with me, casually, some very impressive, but not for publication. I would baby sit for Jeanne and her younger brother, Eddie, when Mom would go on speaking tours. Once, while she was in St Louis, she visited my folks, taking them to lunch. She even sent wedding presents to my sister and brother when they were married (she seemed to know all about me and my family news).

Some of my Stanford fraternity brothers knew I knew her, when she would call to invite me to dinner when my frat brothers would then tease me for my connection with this prominent advice columnist. The ribbing was worth it when I borrowed their Cadillac (surely, the only such vehicle on the campus) to try and impress my dates. (It didn't work.)

I have many, many stories and sweet memories of our times together. They were all fun as she was a most interesting, fun and personable individual, easy to get to know and absolutely wonderful to be with. We would have penetrating, far-ranging, sometimes philosophical conversations. I interacted at different levels with all members of the family, each recalling some memorable experience. My wife, Mimi and I visited her once in her Beverly Hills home where she moved in the early '60s, during which she took us on a tour of her house showing us, among other things, her closet with maybe a hundred pairs of high heeled shoes. After the tour, she treated us to lunch at the nearby Beverly Hotel.

Eddie with whom I had had an exchange of letters in recent years passed away from complications of leukemia a couple of years ago at the age of 66. He had lived in Minneapolis for many years, where the Phillips family had many friends and, at one time, a wholesale liquor business.

Dear Abby was showing signs of dementia when she was about 80 years old, later diagnosed as Alzheimer's. Jeanne began to work with her mother on the column and soon took it over completely. On occasion, I've had telephone conversations with Jeanne, much of which was about Mom's condition.

On January 16th, 2013, Pauline Phillips, at the age of 94, passed away. She had been living in Minnetonka, MN for the past several decades. She is survived by Mort and Jeanne and her many friends and loyal readership in many lands who counted on her wit, wisdom and support.

I have missed her for all these years and often think back at the fun moments and relationship we had during that time. How does one write a goodbye letter to the virtual 'Dear Abby' media for someone as memorable as its creator?

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Sheldon Breiner, Pauline Phillips
atop, Eddie Phillips -- 1958