



Dr. Norma Kolko Phillips

August 7, 1938 - December 2, 2024

KINDERHOOK, N.Y. – Dr. Norma Kolko Phillips, whose efforts as a professor of social work influenced social workers in this country and around the world, died Dec. 2 after a brief illness. She was 86.

A mother, grandmother and aunt, Dr. Phillips was an active member of the Nassau Synagogue and Community Center. In addition to her generous contributions of time, talent and treasure, she served as a trustee and secretary of the organization. Synagogue members recalled fondly that whether she was writing a grant proposal for the synagogue or making egg salad in the kitchen, she performed with dedication and gusto. She sparked ideas and lit a fire under those around her to assist in seeing them to fruition. She also is credited with creating the popular Family Immigration Series.

As a young woman, she defied expectations and chose a life of travel and ideas, adventuring around the world and developing a never-ending curiosity about people, society, and politics. She channeled this mindset into a career as a social worker, eventually pursuing a doctoral degree in order to contribute more widely to the field.

As a professional, her passion and dedication will continue to be felt in how social workers around the world are trained and conduct themselves. Her work also impacted government social policy, especially toward immigrants. Dr. Phillips was on the faculty of Lehman College in New York City for 37 years. She was an instructor, an administrator and a mentor. The college credits her with expanding the social work program from a small area of study

to a department recognized as among the best in the country for undergraduate and graduate work. She developed, and led for many years, the Masters of Social Work program.

Her reputation was not only as a teacher and administrator but as a mentor. Many members of the school faculty recall how she helped them gain tenure and promotions.

She published numerous articles and several books with a particular interest in the urban environment, its strengths, and its challenges. She wrote *Urban Social Work: An Introduction to Policy and Practice in the Cities*, *Children in the Urban Environment: Linking Social Policy and Clinical Practice*, *Understanding Mass Violence: A Social Work Perspective*, and, most recently, *The Power of Policy: The Past, Present, and Future*.

Lehman College said her “efforts led to a more culturally responsive workforce in the Bronx, including social work graduates who were immigrants, spoke a variety of different languages, and had grown up in the neighborhoods where they returned to work. In this way, Dr. Phillips’s career has influenced and will continue to affect thousands of social workers, agencies, individuals, families, and communities for years to come.”

Dr. Phillips won several lifetime achievement awards from the state social work association, the Latino Social Work Task Force and the National Association of Social Workers-NYC Chapter.

“Norma was ahead of her time,” Lehman College said in her biography. “She was a strong female faculty member who earned the title of full professor, something only a small percentage of women in academia achieve to this day. She was also a powerful administrator, again at a time when few women held such roles. In addition, knowing the gender imbalance in social work, she encouraged men to be faculty members and to join the profession.”

Norma was a loving and involved grandmother, and after her retirement (finally!) at the age of 80 was delighted to spend more time at baseball games and family gatherings. She was a devoted member of the cheering section for Dylan and Brooklyn at sports events, and she was excited to see what

beautiful lives they were building for themselves.

Dr. Phillips leaves two sisters-in-law, Geri Kolko of Minneapolis, and Yuriko T. Kolko, of Reno; four nieces, Beth Kolko of Seattle, Karen (Kolko) Fenichel of Orange, Conn., Laura (Kolko) Brenneman of Fort Myers, Fla., and Mira (Kolko) Grossman, of Minnetonka, Minn. In addition, she leaves behind three nephews, David Kolko of Denver, Richard Kolko of Reston, VA and ST Kolko of Reno. Her survivors include three grandchildren, Dylan, Brooklyn and Grace; and her dear friend and mother of her two eldest grandchildren, Chrystal Perry. She also leaves several great nephews and great nieces. Dr. Phillips was predeceased by her son, David and her husband Sidney. Graveside services will be held at 1 p.m. Dec. 9 at Kinderhook Cemetery at Albany Avenue and County Road 21 in Kinderhook. Those attending are asked to use the first entrance on the left side of Albany Avenue when coming from Route 9.

Cemetery Details

Kinderhook Cemetery

Albany Avenue
Kinderhook, NY

Previous Events

Graveside Service

DEC 9. 1:00 PM (ET)

Kinderhook Cemetery
Albany Avenue
Kinderhook, NY