



## Michael A. Wolfson

May 19, 1938 - May 13, 2020

Portsmouth – Michael A. Wolfson, 81, passed away peacefully on Wednesday, May 13, 2020 at the Edgewood Centre of Portsmouth. He was born in New York City on May 19, 1938, a son of the late Aaron H. and Ida (Abrams) Wolfson and the stepson of the late Marjorie Wolfson.

Michael spent his childhood in New York before leaving for college. He earned his Bachelor's Degree from Harpur College of Arts and Sciences in Binghamton, NY and upon graduation, took a job with the Census Bureau in Washington, DC. Michael retired from the Census Bureau after nearly 40 years of service.

In 2001 Michael moved to Massachusetts to be close to family and in 2011 moved to the Edgewood Centre in Portsmouth to be near his sister Marjorie and other family members.

Michael was an exceptionally compassionate and generous man who lived every day of his life with integrity and kindness. The greatest joys in his life were his work and his family.

Being born with cerebral palsy never held Michael back nor did it define him. Through determination and strength of will, Michael always found a way to achieve his goals. He loved his role as a valued member of his basketball team in DC and was an avid follower of all things political and cultural. Michael was also a self-avowed audiophile with an impressive sound system to show for it.

Michael leaves his brothers, Graham Wolfson of South Salem, NY and Noel Wolfson of Lee, NH and his sisters, Marjorie Wolfson and her husband, Neil Slepian of Durham, NH and Ellen Palmer of East Greenwich, RI. He also leaves many nieces, nephews and cousins, including Lois Schwab, wife of the late Thomas Schwab and Robert Abrams and his wife Frances.

Michael's family would like to recognize the Edgewood Centre for the exceptional care

and love provided during his 9 years in a place that he called “home.”

Services will be private. The family suggests memorial donations to United Cerebral Palsy Association ([UCP.org](http://UCP.org)).

# Comments

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“ We loved Michael for many reasons and one of them was his great sense of humor. Over the years, we had two running jokes. The first concerned the wedding gift that never came. Every time I talked to Michael, I would say "I've been waiting by the mailbox for your big check to come." He would then say with a chuckle. "It's on the way." The other had to do with our annual Christmas card. Many years ago, we sent all our friends, including, Michael, a religious card with a traditional nativity scene. When I made my usual January call to Michael, I asked him if he received our card. He said "Yes, but don't you know that I'm a Jew.". From then on, we would send Michael the blandest and most innocuous "Happy Holidays" card that I could find with a note "Is this one O.K.?". Good-bye Michael, and thank you for all the joy you brought into our lives.

Sincerely,

Vic and Janice Valdisera.

P.S. Just to set the record straight. We did receive a generous cash gift from Michael. It was just more fun for both of us to pretend that he didn't.

**Vic and Janice Valdisera** - May 26 at 09:10 AM

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“ Michael was such an inspirational sharp witted and intelligent human being. I was with Edgewood for almost as long as he was there and I am happy to say that he holds a special place in my heart. I loved our conversations about life, music and food. I shall miss you my friend and thank you for helping me be proud of who I am by watching you be proud of yourself

**Leah Hill** - May 21 at 09:49 AM

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“ 1 file added to the album Memories Album



**Jack Chambers** - May 20 at 11:40 AM

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“ I enjoyed weekly visits with Michael for the past four years. I took over this role from John Gregg when he moved to North Carolina. Michael had a quick wit, an engaging personality and a unique perspective on life. Having common political views, I would read to him columns from the NYT. He also enjoyed visits to familiar locations through Google Earth, and FaceTime conversations with John Gregg. I also assisted him in making phone calls to his favorite people.  
I was not able to visit him in the past eight weeks due to COVID-19 restrictions, but we did have a phone conversation last week.  
I will truly miss him.

**Jack Chambers** - May 20 at 11:35 AM

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“ I am sorry to be late in sending this. I am a Census Bureau friend of Michael and just learned of his passing. He had many remarkable qualities but what I remember and treasure most was his fearless sense of humor. His view of the world was unique and he had a wonderful way of expressing it and moving people through laughter. Neil Tillman

**Neil Tillman** - May 19 at 10:08 AM

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“ Michael will forever hold a place in my heart. I cared for him as a brand new LNA, he helped me grow into the nurses aid that I am today. He helped me look at life a completely knew way. Some people would say he was hard to care for, I just call it being particular and I understood why. Could you imagine not being to care for yourself? So I would try to follow every request exactly the way he instructed because that's what he deserved. Michael didn't always like to smile, but when he did it lit up the entire room. I always made it my everyday goal to get at least one smile out of him during my shift. When I left Edgewood to stay at home with my newborn son I still made it a point to visit with Michael, along with a few others I had grown close with throughout the years. My son loved going to visit. When we would walk into Michael's room they both lit right up it was always such a sweet moment. We will miss Michael deeply and are comforted to know he isn't in pain anymore.

**Anna Trafton** - May 18 at 07:54 PM



“ Thank for this. Means a lot to see this  
**Graham Wolfson** - May 18 at 10:27 PM

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“ Michael forever changed my life.

He was a man full of light but was admit on covering it up. He thrived off of his family, friends, and caregivers who could poke holes in his hard shell and let his light shine. I remember the first time I cared for him. I was to give him a shower and help him to bed . I was given his care run down and his specific shower requests.

I was an experienced LNA at Edgewood so I went in with confidence but I still carried some nerves. I was DETERMINED to make this experience perfect for him!

Halfway through the shower I realized his shoes were on.

I LEFT HIS SHOES ON!

HOW!?

WHY!?

I was so worried about being perfect that I missed the most oblivious of details!

I was MORTIFIED.

I looked at him, his sweet face (he would look at me with disgust if he heard me say sweet face) full of anxiety as I was a new caregiver to him, on a new unit, providing him the most vulnerable of services and I wanted to cry.

I didn't want to cry because I was scared. I wanted to cry because I felt as if I had let him down. I felt like I, the woman who had run the halls of the East wing for 6 years, had shown him we weren't to be trusted.

I wanted to cry because I wanted nothing more than to make him comfortable and to gain his trust.

And then I told him.

I told him his shoes and socks were still on and quiet honestly they were wet.

He looked at me and he said, "Idiot!".

But that was okay. I was OKAY with that.

Because at the end of the day I COULD take my own shoes off.

I could get in the shower and wash myself.

I could put myself to bed.

But Michael couldn't.

And I couldn't even fathom the frustration and pain that went along with that.

So I joked and played along. I made light of a situation that was his whole world.

I listened to every request he had, and I worked as fast and gentle as possible.

When I got him into bed, lotioned, powdered, clothed, tucked in, window cracked, he looked at me with that sweet face and he said, " I'm sorry. Thank you. You did great."

I told him he never had to be sorry and I hugged him good night. As I walked out of his room I joked about his shoes and he laughed the SWEETEST (yes Michael, you are sweet!) laugh.

That was the start of our long, beautiful relationship.

He became close friends with my grandmother who was in the facility and a close friend to my children - who to this day remember him and love him.

We shared so many laughs, cries, hugs, meals, shaves, and stories together.

He truly was a best friend.

My heart shattered when I heard the news of his passing as I have not been able to visit due to the pandemic but I am glad he is at peace.

He deserves all the love and serenity this universe has to offer.



“ Kaylie...that was a beautiful message and it helps to know that Michael had such warm people at his side in the last few years. We knew his gruff exterior and we knew that there was something else inside. Might not get us to say 'sweet', but he was a good man and a great friend.

**Jack McNeil** - May 17 at 08:18 AM



“ Beautiful. So happy to know my brother was so loved and cared about. And you obviously knew him well!!! He had that mischievous smile.

**Graham Wolfson** - May 18 at 10:33 PM



“ Kaylie - what a lovely story. Thank you so much for taking the time to share it with Michael's loved ones - and I sure sweet Michael enjoyed it too - from his new peaceful abode. I knew Michael when my mother resided at Edgewood. He was a keen observer, and fully expressive in his looks and his few words. You knew where he stood on issues of the day and you knew his immense kindness and compassion toward others. It was an honor to have known him. May his friends and family tell his stories and keep him close in their hearts forever.

**Cheri** - May 20 at 03:13 PM

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“ Michael enjoyed attractive women and food. Many years ago, we would go out to dinner every month or so. He loved the "Old Europe" restaurant on Wisconsin Avenue. One night while we were dining there he said "didn't you notice that the prices have gone up?"

A couple of months later, we were going to go out for dinner again. I asked if he wanted to go to the "Old Europe". Michael quickly said "I don't know, a cup of their borscht went up ten cents."

Thomas Stoterau

**Thomas Stoterau** - May 16 at 10:10 AM

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“ Graham remembered this citation that Michael kept on his wall.

Michael Wolfson learned the game of basketball on the playgrounds of Stuyvesant Town – Peter Cooper Village on the east side of Manhattan. Wolfson grew his basketball abilities during the years that he attended summer camp where legend has it that he once beat Pete Seeger in a game of H-O-R-S-E. Wolfson went on to Harpur College in Binghamton where he earned the coveted Harpur College lettermen's sweater.

Wolfson was an active member of the SMBA for many years, and won the title of Mr. Congeniality in 12 of those years. After a morning of P Street basketball, Wolfson liked nothing better than to invite all the players over to his Dupont Circle apartment where he would telephone a liquor store with delivery service and order a case of ice-cold Heineken.

Michael Wolfson holds two SMBA records that may never be broken.

On July 12, 1969, at the P Street basketball court, Wolfson set six illegal picks in one game. The number could have gone higher, but as he was setting his sixth illegal pick he was flattened by a violent collision with Rockwell Livingston. Livingston has called this collision and the flattening of Wolfson his greatest sports thrill.

On August 5, 1972, Wolfson set the record for highest field goal percentage in a single Saturday morning. The record, 5 field goals made in 5 attempts, was set at the College Park campus of the University of Maryland at a court located outside of Cole Field House.

Jack McNeil - May 16 at 07:51 AM



“ Michael was always helpful in the library, but he would try to jab with his elbow.

Rockwell - May 16 at 08:21 AM



“ Perfect. Thank you. Smiling now.

Graham Wolfson - May 18 at 10:33 PM



“ Michael was my big brother. I still remember after he graduated college he was going to move to Washington D.C. Hard to remember how old I was. Probably about 8 years old. I was so excited that my big brother was moving to WASHINGTON D.C!!! How cool is that!!

Our father and I went to D.C. to see 'his place'. It was a tiny rented room with a tiny bed, a tiny dresser and tiny desk. And I think it was in the basement so it had a tiny window over the bed. I thought it was the coolest place I had ever seen!! My big brother had his own pad. Wow. I could not stop telling my friends about my big brother and how he had 'his own place'. Somehow that made me cool as well.

From there Michael made his way in the big city. In the late 50's, early 60's there was no affirmative action. There were no programs to help people with disabilities get jobs and function in the working world. You were on your own. And all on his own with only a high level of intelligence and massive amounts of determination and gumption Michael got that first job. From there he worked his way up through the ranks in the Census Bureau to a GS level near the top of the rankings. During all those years I was so very, very proud of all he accomplished. And I still am, always will be.

One of the things Michael and I shared (aside from DNA) was a love for audio equipment. That became a bit of a problem for me. He was working and earning a salary. I was a teenager with 'limited' funds. He would tell me about his research and shopping for and constantly upgrading his audio equipment. I tried to keep up with my own purchases but could not even come close. I would go to D.C and revel in listening to his sound systems as he would show them off with various jazz records. Although I would have preferred some good old rock and roll. We sure had a ton of fun with all that was involved.

I could go on for a long time with this. But I hope those who read this get a bit of a feel for Michael from a little brothers perspective.

Gonna miss him. But am grateful for a life time of having Michael as my big brother.



**Graham Wolfson** - May 15 at 11:09 PM



“ Michael was a well-loved member of a group who worked in the Washington DC area, primarily at the Bureau of the Census. For many years, a number of Census Bureau workers met on Saturday mornings to play basketball. Michael was a long-time member of that group. Michael had many friends and lived a courageous and beautiful life. I have good memories of Michael that involve basketball, shopping trips, music (Mike listened to classical music and jazz), and conversations about various topics including current affairs, his childhood in New York, his summer camp days, and his time at Harpur College. Jack McNeil.

**Jack McNeil** - May 15 at 06:49 PM



“ Thank you Jack for that beautiful remembrance of Michael. I probably saw you playing ball with Michael during one of my visits to D.C. Any chance you were part of the hysterical memento describing Michael's basketball adventures that was sent to him years ago?

**Graham Wolfson** - May 15 at 11:13 PM



“ It was my good fortune to visit Michael on a weekly basis for 3 or 4 years while he was at Edgewood. He was good company. Twinkle in his eye. Impish. Polite. Brightened my day as I hope I did his. We talked of Manhattan, musical theater, basketball, census bureau, DC, family and friends and politics. He loved being current on politics.

It was a privilege to have known Michael.

**John Gregg** - May 20 at 11:43 AM