

Connie Goldman, former MPR reporter and 'ATC' host, dies at 91

By  **Leigh Giangreco, Reporter** | March 17, 2022



Goldman on her 90th birthday.

Connie Goldman, a bohemian Minnesota Public Radio journalist and arts reporter for NPR, died March 8 of stomach cancer. She was 91.

Active and impish even in her last days, the Minneapolis native was a spirited raconteur who became a pioneering journalist in the early days of NPR. Whether ensconced in her Georgetown, Santa Monica or Wisconsin home, friends recalled Goldman welcoming them into an inviting space adorned with eclectic antiques and tchotchkes that reflected her diverse taste and love for art.



Goldman's home

Goldman began her career as a journalist later in life, and the theme of late bloomers would persist throughout her work. Shortly after divorcing her husband, she received a master's degree in communications from the University of Minnesota in 1971. She worked as a reporter for KSJN in St. Paul, Minn., where she first started contributing to *All Things Considered* in 1972.

Four years later, she traveled to Washington to fill in as co-host of *All Things Considered* on weekends. She would go on to host the show permanently and become an arts reporter for NPR, an organization that was in its infancy when Jim Russell, one of the founders of the program, hired her.

"She was not as fully appreciated at NPR as she should have been," Russell said. "She was not a hard-news person, and NPR was very full of hard-news journalists ... and I felt that there was a lot more to life than just that. And she was one of the people who took the arts as a very serious subject."

Goldman did not possess what would become known as the "NPR voice," a delivery marked by meticulous modulation. Instead she set her subjects at ease with a friendly, casual manner and a nasal Midwestern tone. Her lack of pretense became her strength as a reporter. She would show up to interviews wearing her signature patterned clothing and a crocheted vest, a look that reminded people less of a hardened journalist and more of a friendly neighbor with whom they could share their secrets, said Jay Kernis, who produced for Goldman on NPR program *Voices in the Wind*, which focused on pop culture. That "hippie" persona belied a savvy interviewer who knew when to be silent to keep a subject talking.

"I watched her do many interviews, and this wasn't acting at all — when someone said something you could see it on her face, hear it in her voice, you could hear real reactions," Kernis said. "There was nothing false about her reactions. When she was delighted, you could see it on her face, so the people in the studio could see that and respond to it."



Log In



In a fledgling organization that identified as a community of misfits, Goldman's pixie personality and infectious humor charmed her colleagues. Jonathan "Smokey" Baer, who worked with her as a production assistant on *All Things Considered*, recalled Goldman as a wide-eyed flower child whose imaginative streak often rubbed up against the serious news that NPR covered.

"When I think of Connie, I think of somebody who was buoyant, bubbly and excited even if people were depressed and concerned or worried about whether NPR would exist," Baer said. "She would be bouncing down the hallway, talking about the interview she had just done with some artist, and we're working on stories on Nixon's impeachment."

During her time at NPR, Goldman interviewed artists, writers and performers. She was a well-read reporter with a zeal for the arts and culture, but it was her interviews with older guests that captured her imagination.

"These were exceptional people," Goldman said in a 1994 interview with the *Los Angeles Times*. "They had wit and wisdom and years of experience to draw from. But the perspective of society was and still is: You're as disposable as Kleenex, the economy doesn't want you anymore, you've had your time."

In 1983, Goldman left NPR to freelance and create her own production company. For the rest of her career, she would focus much of her work on the elderly. Goldman believed that old age could prove the most fruitful period of one's life, a tenet she explored in multiple interviews and books, including *Late Life Love: Romance and New Relationships in Later Years* and *The Ageless Spirit: Reflections on Living Life to the Fullest in Mid-life and the Years Beyond*.

She searched for grants for her work, nabbing a \$7,000 grant from the National Endowment for the Arts to produce radio shows focusing on the elderly. As she grew older, friends noted she became more concerned and often angry about the way older people were characterized by the rest of society.

"She was very concerned about ageist language, not only in relationships and families but also in public policy," said her longtime friend Gary Solomonson.

Goldman lived an active life into her later years. She traveled across the country to speak about aging and took daily walks until about a week before her death. But even as her wit and conversation skills remained sharp, she struggled with memory loss. During her last decade she suffered from dementia, a disease she referred to among friends as her "leaky brain."

Solomonson would often accompany Goldman on her daily walks, where she would pick up leaves around her neighborhood in Hudson, Wis., and arrange them artfully in baskets at home. They played puzzles and card games like gin rummy, which she often won, to test her memory. He was with her the day she experienced a pain in her stomach and was rushed to the hospital where doctors discovered the cancer.

"She liked being my pal. Those were our last words together, that we were pals," Solomonson said. "I don't have many pals in my life, but she was one. She was a mentor to me."

