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Dr. Ruth Westheimer, America's Diminutive And Pioneering Sex Therapist, Dies At 96

Reprinted From The AP, July 13, 2024-By Mark Kennedy
NEW YORK (AP) — Dr. Ruth Westheimer, the diminutive sex therapist who became a pop icon, media star and best-selling author through her frank talk about once-taboo bedroom topics, has died. She was 96.

Westheimer died on Friday at her home in New York City, surrounded by her family, according to publicist and friend Pierre Lehu.

Westheimer never advocated risky sexual behavior. Instead, she encouraged an open dialogue on previously closeted issues that affected her audience of millions.

Her one recurring theme was there was nothing to be ashamed of.

“I still hold old-fashioned values and I'm a bit of a square,” she told students at Michigan City High School in 2002. “Sex is a

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private art and a private matter. But still, it is a subject we must talk about.”

Westheimer's giggly, German-accented voice, coupled with her 4-foot-7 frame, made her an unlikely looking — and sounding — outlet for “sexual literacy.”

The contradiction was one of the keys to her success.

But it was her extensive knowledge and training, coupled with her humorous, nonjudgmental manner, that catapulted her local radio program, “Sexually Speaking,” into the national spotlight in the early 1980s. She had an open approach to what two consenting adults did in the privacy of their home.

“Tell him you're not going to initiate,” she told a concerned caller in June 1982. “Tell him that Dr. Westheimer said that you're not going to die if he doesn't have sex for one week.”

As a sign of her appeal across the
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Dr. Ruth

generations and social culture, tributes came from actor-comedian Adam Sandler — “She always made us smile,” he wrote on X — to New York Gov. Kathy Hochul, who appointed Westheimer the state’s Ambassador of Loneliness. “May her memory be a blessing,” said the governor in a statement. “She was brave, funny, candid and brilliant.”

Her radio success opened new doors, and in 1983 she wrote the first of more than 40 books: “Dr. Ruth’s Guide to Good Sex,” demystifying sex with both rationality and humor. There was even a board game, Dr. Ruth’s Game of Good Sex.

She soon became a regular on the late-night television talk-show circuit, bringing her personality to the national stage. Her rise coincided with the early days of the AIDS epidemic, when frank sexual talk became a necessity.

“If we could bring about talking about sexual activity the way we talk about diet — the way we talk about food — without it having this kind of connotation that there’s something not right about it, then we would be a step further. But we have to do it with good taste,” she told Johnny Carson in 1982.

She normalized the use of words like “penis” and “vagina” on radio and TV, aided by her Jewish grandmotherly accent, which The Wall Street Journal once said was “a cross between Henry Kissinger and Minnie Mouse.” People magazine included her in their list of “The Most Intriguing People of the Century.” She even made it into a Shania Twain song: “No, I don’t need proof to show me the truth/Not even Dr. Ruth is gonna tell me how I feel.”

Westheimer defended abortion rights, suggested older people have sex after a good night’s sleep and was an outspoken advocate of condom use. She believed in monogamy.

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In the 1980s, she stood up for gay men at the height of the AIDS epidemic and spoke out loudly for the LGBTQ community. She said she defended people deemed by some far-right Christians to be “subhuman” because of her own past.

Born Karola Ruth Siegel in Frankfurt, Germany, in 1928, she was an only child. At 10, she was sent by her parents to Switzerland to escape Kristallnacht — the Nazis’ 1938 pogrom that served as a precursor to the Holocaust. She never saw her parents again; Westheimer believed they were killed in the gas chambers at Auschwitz.

At the age of 16, she moved to Palestine and joined the Haganah, the underground movement for Israeli independence. She was trained as a sniper, although she said she never shot at anyone.

Her legs were severely wounded when a bomb exploded in her dormitory, killing many of her friends. She said it was only through the work of a “superb” surgeon that she could walk and ski again.

She married her first husband, an Israeli soldier, in 1950, and they moved to Paris as she pursued an education. Although not a high school graduate, Westheimer was accepted into the Sorbonne to study psychology after passing an entrance exam.

The marriage ended in 1955; the next year, Westheimer went to New York with her new boyfriend, a Frenchman who became her second husband and father to her daughter, Miriam.

In 1961, after a second divorce, she finally met her life partner: Manfred Westheimer, a fellow refugee from Nazi Germany. The couple was married and had a son, Joel. They remained wed for 36 years until “Fred” — as she called him — died of heart failure in 1997.

After receiving her doctorate in education from Columbia University, she went on to teach at Lehman College in the Bronx. While there she developed a specialty — instructing professors how to teach sex education. It would eventually become the core of her curriculum.

“I soon realized that while I knew enough about education, I did not really know enough about sex,” she wrote in her 1987 autobiography. Westheimer then decided to take classes with the renowned sex therapist, Dr. Helen Singer Kaplan.

It was there that she had discovered her calling. Soon, as she once said in a typically folksy comment, she was dispensing sexual advice “like good chicken soup.”

“I came from an Orthodox Jewish home so sex for us Jews was never considered a sin,” she told The Guardian in 2019.

In 1984, her radio program was nationally syndicated. A year later, she debuted in her own television program, “The Dr. Ruth Show,” which went on to win an Ace Award for excellence in cable television.

She also wrote a nationally syndicated advice column and later appeared in a line of videos produced by Playboy, preaching the virtues of open sexual discourse and good sex. She even had a series of calendars.

Her rise was noteworthy for the culture of the time, in which then-President Ronald Reagan’s administration was hostile to Planned Parenthood and aligned with pro-conservative voices.

Phyllis Schlafly, a staunch anti-feminist, wrote in a 1999 piece “The Dangers of Sex Education,” that Westheimer, as well as Gloria Steinem, Anita Hill, Madonna, Ellen DeGeneres and others were promoting “provocative sex chatter” and “rampant immorality.”

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Father Edwin O'Brien, the director of communications for the Catholic archdiocese of New York who would go on to become a cardinal, called her work upsetting and morally compromised.

"It's pure hedonism," O'Brien wrote in a 1982 opinion published by The Wall Street Journal. "The message is just indulge yourself; whatever feels good is good. There is no higher law of overriding morality, and there's also no responsibility."

Westheimer made appearances on "The Howard Stern Radio Show," "Nightline," "The Tonight Show," "The Ellen DeGeneres Show," "The Dr. Oz Show" and "Late Night with David Letterman." She played herself in episodes of "Quantum Leap" and "Love Boat: The Next Wave."

Her books include "Sex for Dummies," her autobiographical works "All in a Lifetime" (1987) and "Musically Speaking: A Life through Song" (2003). The documentary "Ask Dr. Ruth" aired in 2019.

During her time as a radio and television personality, she remained committed to teaching, with posts at Yale, Hunter, Princeton and Columbia universities and a busy college lecture schedule. She also maintained a private practice throughout her life.

Westheimer received an honorary doctorate from Hebrew Union College-Institute of Religion for her work in human sexuality and her commitment to the Jewish people, Israel and religion. In 2001 she received the Ellis Island Medal of Honor and the Leo Baeck Medal, and in 2004, she received the degree of Doctor of Letters, honoris causa, from Trinity College.

Ryan White, the director of "Ask Dr. Ruth," [told Vice in 2019](#) that Westheimer was never someone following trends. She was always an ally of gay rights and an advocate for family planning.

"She was at the forefront of both of those things throughout her entire life. I met her friends from her orphanage saying even when she met gay people throughout her life in the '30s, '40s, and '50s she was always accepting of those people and always saying that people should be treated with respect."

She is survived by two children, Joel and Miriam, and four grandchildren.

MS. MORE THAN A MAGAZINE, A MOVEMENT
HEALTH JUSTICE & LAW NATIONAL

'Not A Victory,' But 'A Delay': With the Supreme Court's EMTALA Ruling, U.S. Women Are Still at Risk

Reprinted From The June 27, 2024 MS-By Kendall Turner, Carrie N. Baker Kathy Spillar, Roxanne Szal and Shosanna Ehrlich

The Court refused to rule on the underlying question: Must state abortion bans provide an exemption when a woman's health is at risk, not only her life? Instead it punted the issue to a more politically convenient time.

In [an opinion published Thursday](#), the U.S. Supreme Court dismissed [its final major abortion case](#) of the term. The opinion was a narrow ruling that Idaho cannot prohibit doctors from performing emergency abortions for women with life-threatening pregnancy complications while the case is appealed in the U.S. Court of Appeals for the Ninth Circuit.

The ruling had the justices split 6 to 3. The majority agreed to dismiss the case as "improvidently granted"—meaning that the Court should never have accepted the case for review. As is customary in such cases, the majority did not explain its reasoning in its one-sentence decision.

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The Court's improvidence has endangered women's lives. "In the six months the Supreme Court deliberated on this case, at least six pregnant patients in Idaho had to be airlifted to out-of-state hospitals for emergency care—according to just one hospital's reports," said Indivisible's chief campaigns officer Sarah Dohl. "Countless other pregnant patients, terrified and in crisis, were denied necessary care due to Idaho's extreme law."

The SCOTUS case is a consolidation of two cases regarding Idaho's near-total ban on abortion: one originally filed by Biden, *Idaho v. United States*, which ruled the federal Emergency Medical Treatment and Labor Act (EMTALA) preempted the state-level ban; and another brought by Idaho legislators, *Moyle v. United States*, challenging a Ninth Circuit decision to allow a district court's decision to prohibit the ban from going into effect while the case is on appeal.

- Justices Clarence Thomas, Samuel Alito and Neil Gorsuch dissented from the dismissal, and Justice Ketanji Brown Jackson dissented to the dismissal but joined the majority in allowing emergency medical care for pregnant women in Idaho.
- Justice Amy Coney Barrett wrote a concurrence, joined by Justices John Roberts and Brett Kavanaugh, saying that "the shape of the case had substantially shifted," including a Biden administration clarification about the reach of EMTALA and a change to Idaho law itself.
- In another concurring opinion joined in full by Justice Sonia Sotomayor and in part by Justice Jackson, Justice Elena Kagan said the Court's decision "will prevent Idaho from enforcing its abortion ban when the termination of a pregnancy is needed to prevent serious harms to a woman's health."
- Justice Jackson also filed a separate opinion saying she would not have dismissed the case.

It may be that the decision was a compromise between the three liberals and the three conservatives.

"The three liberal justices stand for protecting pregnant patients. They valued their lives and health," said Dohl. "The other six justices chose to ignore their plight. Three of them even wanted to uphold Idaho's right to deny care, paving the way for other states to enact similarly extreme laws, effectively overruling the federal emergency room law that has protected patients for 38 years."

The ruling remanded the case back to the Ninth Circuit Court of Appeals for a decision on the merits.

Make no mistake: The Supreme Court ruling in *Moyle* and *Idaho* is barely a win for abortion supporters. The Court refused to rule on the underlying issue: Must state abortion bans provide an exemption when a woman's health is at risk, not only her life?

Instead the Court punted the issue to a later time—perhaps wary of the approaching election and [Thursday's debate](#) between President Biden and candidate Trump.

"While we are temporarily relieved for Idahoans that enforcement of the law is delayed, kicking the can down the road just means giving right-wing judges another chance to rule in favor of the anti-abortion extremists – or delay the outcome till after election day entirely," said Dohl.

This Court had a chance to bring clarity and certainty to this tragic situation, and we have squandered it. And for as long as we refuse to declare what the law requires, pregnant patients in Idaho, Texas, and elsewhere will be paying the price.

Justice Jackson

Miss Kansas Goes Viral for Powerful Pageant Declaration: 'My Abuser Is Here Today...But That's Not Gonna Stop Me'

Reprinted From People, July 20, 2024-By Abigail Adams



Miss Kansas Organization & Bill Rea
Alexis Smith

"As Miss Kansas, my platform is deeply rooted in empowering people to break free from cycles of domestic violence," Alexis Smith tells PEOPLE

A moment from the 2024 Miss Kansas pageant is making the rounds on social media, which featured a powerful onstage revelation.

Alexis Smith, of Butler County, was officially crowned Miss Kansas on June 8, beating out 25 other contestants for the title, according to [CBS affiliate KWCH-DT](#) and [Garden City Telegram](#).

Smith, 25, is just the third Black woman to win the title, per [ABC affiliate KAKE](#).

During the [interview portion](#) of the contest, which Smith shared on social media, she firmly stated her goal as Miss Kansas would be to "eliminate unhealthy and abusive relationships."

She then made a stunning declaration: "Some of you out in this audience saw me very emotional, because my abuser is here today."

"But that's not going to stop me from being on this Miss Kansas stage and representing as the next Miss Kansas," she continued. "I and my community deserve healthy relationships. We deserve a domestic [violence]-free life."

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Miss Kansas Goes Viral for Powerful Pageant Declaration: 'My Abuser Is Here Today...But

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On July 16, a clip of the moment got shared on Smith's official X account, which then went viral.

Alongside the clip read the words, "Respect Reclaimed!" — a reference to her community service platform — as well as the message, "Our time is now for healthy relationships."

The post, which has over 53 thousand views, drew praise from countless social media users.

"YOU GO GIRL. YOU make me proud of my home state " wrote one commenter, while another replied, "I just got chills. She's amazing!"

Added a third, "What an amazing way to take your power back. I got goosebumps. I know there are other victims watching her now knowing they aren't alone."

In a statement to PEOPLE, Smith says that: "As Miss Kansas, my platform is deeply rooted in empowering people to break free from cycles of domestic violence and unhealthy relationships. My answer on stage reflects my commitment to fostering a world where every individual feels safe, valued, and empowered to thrive."

"Through the Miss America program, I have found a powerful platform to amplify my voice and advocate for those who may feel silenced or alone," Smith adds. "I will use my story as a catalyst for change kicking open doors to inspire others and create a society where everyone can live free from fear and abuse."

Speaking with the *Leader and Times*, Smith said that her work with domestic violence victims stems from her "own personal experiences...whether that was in my household or my own experiences of falling into that cycle of abuse at the age of 14."

In an interview with NBC affiliate KSNW she went on to say that "my family, every single woman in my family, was impacted by domestic violence."

Opening up some more about her own experience, she said that when she was 14 she "got in my first relationship, but it was also an abusive relationship that I was in until about 2018, 2019. It's something that I'm still experiencing and dealing with today."

In a [statement on Facebook](#), Smith went on to say that on the night of the Miss Kansas pageant, "my journey took an unexpected turn when someone I have been healing from tried to disrupt my peace. Instead of falling into silence, I chose to live out my vision for a better world. I took back my power – not just for myself, but for my dreams and everyone watching and listening."

"This isn't about shunning others," she added. "It's about turning our pain into purposes and channeling it in a way that unifies and uplifts."

Smith told [KWCH-DT](#) she hopes to spread her message to the youth in Kansas by using her skills in ventriloquism, which was her talent during the Miss Kansas contest, to reach them.

"Being able to create our own special ventriloquism dolls that are filled with different characteristics of healthy relationships that they want to see in the people around them," said Smith, who has been doing ventriloquism for 19 years.

Smith will now go on to represent Kansas at the next Miss America competition in Jan. 2025.

If you are experiencing domestic violence, call the National Domestic Violence Hotline at 1-800-799-7233, or go to thehotline.org. All calls are toll-free and confidential. The hotline is available 24/7 in more than 170 languages.

Texas Woman's Lawsuit After Being Jailed On Murder Charge Over Abortion Can Proceed, Judge Rules

Reprinted From The July 24, 2024 AP-By Valerie Gonzalez



Lizelle Gonzalez, center, listens as a statement is read aloud by her lawyer Cecilia Garza, left, during a news conference held in Garza's office on April 2 in Edinburg, Texas. © Joel Martinez/The Monitor/AP

McALLEN, Texas (AP) — A Texas woman who was jailed and charged with murder after [self-managing an abortion in 2022](#) can move forward with her lawsuit against the local sheriff and prosecutors over the case that drew national outrage before the charges were quickly dropped, a federal judge ruled Wednesday.

U.S. District Judge Drew B. Tipton denied a motion by prosecutors and the sheriff to dismiss the lawsuit during a hearing in the border city of McAllen. Lizelle Gonzalez, who spent two nights in jail on the murder charges and [is seeking \\$1 million in damages](#) in the lawsuit, did not attend the hearing.

Texas has one of the nation's most restrictive abortion bans and outlaws the procedure with limited exceptions. Under Texas law, women seeking an abortion are exempt from criminal charges, however.

Starr County District Attorney Gocha Ramirez and other defendants have argued their positions provide them immunity from civil lawsuits.

Rick Navarro, an attorney for the defense, argued that it was "at worst a negligence case" during the hearing. Ramirez has previously told The Associated Press that he "made a mistake" in bringing charges.

Tipton asked Gonzalez's attorneys whether they could prove the prosecutors knew of the exception.

"What we intend to show is that negligence doesn't explain this oversight. It is the role and function of prosecutors to be aware of the elements of the statutes that they are charging," said David Donatti, an attorney with the ACLU of Texas who is representing Gonzalez.

Gonzalez was indicted in 2022 after she took the drug misoprostol while 19 weeks pregnant. She was treated at a Texas hospital, where doctors later performed a caesarian section to deliver a stillborn child after they detected no fetal heartbeat.

Her lawsuit filed in March also named the county, which runs the small hospital where Gonzalez was treated, claiming that hospital staff violated patient privacy rights when they reported the abortion. An amended complaint alleged that the sheriff's office interviewed Gonzalez and arrested her later under direction from the prosecutors.

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Texas Woman's Lawsuit After Being Jailed On Murder Charge Over Abortion Can Proceed

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The charges were dropped just days after the woman's arrest. In February, Ramirez agreed to pay a \$1,250 fine under a settlement reached with the State Bar of Texas. Ramirez also agreed to have his license held in a probated suspension for 12 months.

Wednesday's decision will allow the case to move forward

Dates To Remember

August

None

September

Sept. 2nd: Labor Day

Sept. 8th: Grandparent's Day

Sept. 11th: Patriot's Day

Birthdays

August

None

September

None
