

# THE CENTER

It is with profound sadness and a heavy heart that I share with you the news that Edie Windsor, LGBTQ rights activist and icon, Center founding member and cherished friend, passed away today. Edie worked passionately and tirelessly throughout her life to support the LGBTQ community and fought tenaciously for LGBTQ rights. In 2013, she famously paved the way for marriage equality with her victory in the United States Supreme Court when it struck down Section 3 of the so-called Defense of Marriage Act (DOMA), allowing same-sex couples to have the benefits and protections of marriage deserved under federal law.

Born on June 20, 1929 to James and Celia Schlain in Pennsylvania, Edie was a lifelong trailblazer for the LGBTQ community. She was one of the first donors to The Center's campaign to purchase our building on West 13 Street in 1983, and famously refused our repayment check to avoid being outed to her bank manager. With degrees from Temple University and New York University, Edie pursued a career at IBM for 16 years. After leaving, she dedicated herself to numerous LGBT organizations, including The Center, SAGE Hetrick-Martin Institute and Callen-Lorde Community Health Center, among many others.

At The Center, Edie volunteered over a span of more than 30 years. She donated her time and coding expertise to modernize our technology systems and infrastructure, and in May 1985, she helped organize our first women's dance. It was there that Edie and her future wife, Dr. Thea Spyer, danced to the disco version of "If You Could See Me Now" alongside 300 other women. That is how many of us will always envision her, dancing, laughing and enjoying life in a way that only she could, with impeccable style and grace. Her life's work and legacy are inextricably intertwined with our work and for that we will always be grateful.

With Edie's passing, she leaves behind a legacy that will long-serve to inspire and empower us to demand equality. But perhaps most poignant is the legacy Edie leaves of love and dignity, demonstrated by Edie and Thea's 42 year engagement. Thea famously proposed to Edie in 1967 with a circular diamond brooch, rather than a ring, to avoid questions at Edie's work about the engagement, particularly assumptions about the intended husband. Edie and Thea were finally married in Toronto, Canada on May 22, 2007. When Thea passed away in 2009, Edie held her memorial at The Center. The room was filled to the gills as they celebrated Thea's life, culminating with the Big Apple Marching Band's performance of "When the Saints Go Marching In."

It was the government's refusal to recognize their marriage after Thea's death that led to Edie's lawsuit and eventual victory in *United States v. Windsor* on June 26, 2013. In true Edie fashion, she held her victory press conference in The Center's lobby...and then headed directly to the third floor to celebrate this unforgettable moment with our community: the hundreds of supporters and well-wishers who had gathered to hear the announcement. Her historic victory forever changed lives for same-sex couples in the United States and emboldened us to believe that we can, and will, win the fight for true equality for all in the LGBTQ community. Edie Windsor is survived by her beloved wife, Judith Kasen-Windsor.



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