

Marion Sandler, Pioneering Businesswoman and Philanthropist

Marion Osher Sandler, a trailblazing business leader and philanthropist, died on June 1, 2012 surrounded by family at her home in San Francisco, California. She was 81. She is survived by her devoted husband of 51 years, Herbert (“Herb”) Sandler, daughter Susan Sandler (Steve Phillips), son James Sandler (Gretchen Sandler), grandchildren Leah and Elijah, and brothers Bernard Osher (Barbro Osher) and Harold Osher (Peggy Osher).

Early Years and Career

Marion Osher was born on October 17, 1930 and grew up in Biddeford, Maine. She was the youngest of five children and the only daughter of Samuel Osher (formerly Osherowitz) and Leah Lazarovich Osher, Lithuanian and Russian immigrants who settled in Biddeford. Her family was entrepreneurial with business experience in hardware and plumbing supply, amusement parks, real estate and art auctions. Three of her four brothers went into medicine, the fourth into business, and all the siblings were active philanthropically.

Marion graduated Phi Beta Kappa from Wellesley College in 1952 and attended the Harvard-Radcliffe Program in Business Administration. She earned her MBA from New York University in 1958, where she was elected to the business school honorary society and was the first woman to win the school’s Money Marketeers Marcus Nadler Award for attaining the highest scholastic ranking in banking and finance. In 1955, she was hired at Dominick & Dominick, Inc. as the first female executive at the firm and one of only two women in professional jobs on Wall Street at the time. In 1961, Marion joined Oppenheimer and Company as a senior analyst following the savings and loan industry, an advisor to institutional investors, and consulted by major business publications.

One of the Most Successful Partnerships in American Business

In 1960, she met Herb Sandler, a New York lawyer, on the beach in the Hamptons. As *The Wall Street Journal* once remarked, “from that chance encounter would spring a partnership that has become one of the more intriguing – and successful – in American business.” Married in 1961, the couple moved from New York to California in 1963 in their early 30s, with Marion convinced they could run their own savings and loan more effectively than others. With a bank loan and support from family, they acquired an Oakland-based thrift in 1963 with two offices, 26 employees and \$34 million in assets. Over the next 43 years, the Sandlers served as husband-and-wife CEOs of Golden West Financial Corporation, the parent of World Savings Bank. The company went public in 1968, was listed on the New York Stock Exchange in 1971 and grew to become the second-largest savings and loan in the country. By the time of Golden West’s sale in 2006, the company had \$124 billion in assets, 285 savings branches, lending operations in 39 states, and approximately 11,000 employees.

Golden West was a risk-averse residential mortgage portfolio lender with a long-standing reputation for ethics and integrity, quality lending, the lowest loan losses in the industry, high tangible net worth, and low expenses. Unlike other financial institutions, Golden West kept its

loans on its own books and did not securitize and sell loans to others. *The New York Times* noted that many analysts considered the company to be the “nation’s best-managed savings and loan” and described the Sandler as “conservative, methodical, penny-pinching and risk-averse in the extreme.” The company had a long-term orientation and achieved an unparalleled earnings record over four decades. As *Forbes* once noted: “The Sandler have produced compound annual earnings-per-share growth of 20% over the last 35 years, a record that appears to be unmatched by any other financial firm, with the possible exception of Warren Buffett’s Berkshire Hathaway.” The compounded annual growth rate of Golden West’s stock price was 17% from when it went public to December 31, 2005, Golden West’s final year as an independent company – ten thousand dollars invested when the company went public would have been worth \$3.38 million by the end of 2005.

Marion was known among colleagues for her discipline, analytical rigor, demand for excellence and focus on fundamental questions like “what is the good business reason for doing this.” She applied her deep understanding of the business model of savings and loans, first learned as a leading analyst on Wall Street, to oversee financial analysis and deposit gathering at the bank and maintain an unrelenting focus on expense control and profitability. She had an uncanny ability to quickly get to the heart of core issues and to discover, through direct and penetrating questions, the weakness in others’ arguments or analysis. She was not afraid to admit when she did not understand something, or to force others to acknowledge that they did not either. Marion was also entrepreneurial, instinctual and insightful, able to look at issues from different perspectives, challenge conventional thinking and push through obstacles to reach the desired result. She placed a high premium on clear communications and painstakingly oversaw the writing of all of the company’s annual reports and customer communications. A lover of art and architecture, Marion also handpicked some of the nation’s leading and up-and-coming architects to design functional, attractive and award-winning branches.

Marion was one of the first women CEOs of a Fortune 500 company and the longest serving. The company was one of the first to employ women as branch managers, loan sales representatives and appraisers. A majority of the members of the Board of Directors were women. She was awarded Morningstar’s CEO of the Year, was listed among the US Banker’s 25 Most Powerful Women in Banking, was selected as a fellow of the American National Business Hall of Fame and was inducted into the Bay Area Business Hall of Fame. On 10 occasions, *Fortune Magazine* ranked Golden West as the nation’s most admired mortgage services company or most admired savings institution.

Unique Philanthropic Commitment and Approach at the Sandler Foundation

Marion started the Sandler Foundation in 1991 with husband Herb, and they have contributed more than \$1.3 billion to the spend-down foundation. The Sandler applied the same business-oriented discipline to their philanthropic endeavors, including conducting extensive due diligence to identify gaps and evaluate the potential for impact, the opportunities for leverage, and the quality of management.

The foundation has focused on a relatively small number of areas with relatively large grants, and has been willing to take risks and make bold strategic investments. A 2008 article in *The*

New York Times entitled “Self-Made Philanthropists” captured the foundation’s grantmaking philosophy when describing the Sandler’s decision to launch ProPublica, a Pulitzer Prize-winning investigative journalism newsroom led by former Wall Street Journal editor Paul Steiger: “They chose a path ... that few other philanthropists had trod. Rather than give money to someone who approached them, they did the approaching. Rather than finance an organization that already existed, they started their own outfit. They found a star to run it. They seemed almost to relish the thought that they risked failure with this new, unproven model of journalism, though if truth be told, they don’t think they’ll fail. And they gave a lot of money -- \$30 million for the first three years, with the expectation of continuing that commitment, if not more, for years to come.”

Overall, the foundation has contributed more than \$550 million to various initiatives, including the following:

- The foundation has donated more than \$100 million to the University of California San Francisco (UCSF), including support for neurosciences facilities and groundbreaking research; the Program for Breakthrough Biological Research, a program that challenges UCSF scientists to pursue basic science projects that are creative, risky and transformative; the Sandler Asthma Basic Research Center, an investigative unit dedicated to basic discovery in asthma research; and a research effort focused on third world parasitic diseases.
- The foundation has contributed more than \$90 million to support highly innovative research in asthma since 2000. Marion’s insight was to attract outstanding scientists from non-asthma fields to study asthma, which has resulted in hundreds of scientists and postdoctoral research associates reorienting their research to study a chronic disease that affects 25 million Americans. The American Asthma Foundation research program has already produced 26 major advances in understanding or treating asthma, including fourteen that have drawn support from the biotech and pharmaceutical industries and four that have advanced to clinical trials.
- In addition to starting ProPublica, the foundation helped start the Center for American Progress, a think tank launched by former White House Chief of Staff John Podesta, and on which Marion served on the Board; the Center for Responsible Lending, an organization that protects homeownership and family wealth by working to eliminate abusive financial practices; and the Human Rights Center and Center for Equitable Growth at UC Berkeley.
- The foundation has helped catalyze the expansion and/or improved operating capacity of several nonprofit organizations, including Human Rights Watch, the ACLU, the Center on Budget and Policy Priorities, the American Constitution Society, MDRC, the PICO National Network, the National Center for Youth Law, Oceana, the Public Library of Science, and others.
- The foundation has supported various projects, including to increase critical thinking and equity in the nation’s schools, to improve credit card standards and transparency (with the

Pew Charitable Trusts), to reduce central line infections in hospitals nationwide, and to protect marine life and coastal lands in Baja California.

Marion served on many nonprofit boards during her career, as well as on the advisory boards of the business schools at UC Berkeley and New York University. For her contributions, Marion received the Chancellor's Citation from UC Berkeley and the UCSF Medal. Having committed to give away all their wealth philanthropically, the Sandler family participated in the Giving Pledge initiative organized by Warren Buffett and Bill and Melinda Gates.

Personal Life and Interests

Marion relished deep and engaging conversations with friends and colleagues around the family's circular dinner table, loved modern art and reading, tirelessly knitted sweaters and scarves for others, and enjoyed classic movies and humorous television shows. She had enormous compassion for others in need, particularly widows who required financial support and advice, and she enjoyed being a matchmaker for friends seeking companionship.

Throughout her life, and particularly in her last decades, Marion bravely weathered a series of illnesses, many resulting from asthma, migraines, a compromised immune system and the treatments therefor. Herb remained a tireless and loving patient advocate for Marion throughout her hospitalizations and recovery periods, and the family appreciates all the outstanding doctors, nurses and friends at UCSF who helped keep Marion alive and vigorous for many years.

Marion's is not just a story of breaking through barriers and setting and living up to high standards of excellence, but also a quintessential love story with Herb that successfully blended marriage and business. Married for 51 years, the Sandler family reveled in building a successful company together, raising a family, and working closely with their grown children in philanthropic pursuits. The two were inseparable, shared a mutual respect and admiration for each other, and were known to finish each other's sentences, stories and desserts.

Additional Information

- For additional biographical information, see www.marionsandler.com
- The successful track record at Golden West Financial Corporation/World Savings Bank is documented at www.goldenwestworld.com
- See www.sandlerfoundation.org for more information about the philanthropic work
- Quotes are from the following articles: "[If Only All the S&Ls Had Been Managed Like Golden West](#)" (Wall Street Journal); "[Inside the Nation's Best-Run S&L](#)" (NYTimes); "[Stick to Your Knitting](#)" (Forbes); "[Self-Made Philanthropists](#)" (NYTimes)

Friends or former colleagues who wish to share memories about Marion may do so at memories@sandlerfoundation.org