



The Washington Post

Economist Wrote Bestsellers With Nobel-Winning Husband

By Neil Irwin
Washington Post Staff Writer
Thursday, August 20, 2009

Rose D. Friedman, an economist who collaborated with her husband, the Nobel laureate Milton Friedman, and helped bring their ideas about the virtues of free markets to the masses, died of a heart ailment Aug. 18 at her home in Davis, Calif.

She was thought to be 98, although the date of her birth is unknown. Her death was announced by the Friedman Foundation for Educational Choice, a nonprofit organization founded in 1996 to promote school-choice programs such as vouchers.

Mrs. Friedman was co-author of her husband's two most widely read books, "Capitalism and Freedom" (1962) and "Free to Choose," a 1980 book and public television series. They also collaborated on "Tyranny of the Status Quo" in 1984 and a 1998 joint memoir, "Two Lucky People."

Until [Milton Friedman's death](#) in 2006 at 94, the two were rarely apart; they frequently held hands at academic conferences and in airports. She often had a more fiery public presence than the gentle style of her husband. Milton Friedman often said his wife was the only person who won arguments with him.

Milton Friedman won his Nobel Prize in economics in 1976 and was known for spreading his ideas in the popular press, including television appearances and a column in Newsweek magazine. But "Free to Choose" brought those ideas -- including that welfare programs undermine self-reliance, that drugs should be decriminalized, that states with low taxes and minimal regulation have more vibrant economies -- to a still wider audience. It was one of the best-selling books of 1980, and the video series was broadcast around the world.

"Rose played a much more significant role than most people understand," said Patrick M. Byrne, who has been co-chairman of the Friedman Foundation with Mrs. Friedman. "I think she had a lot of the drive. She had a great deal to do with organizing and convincing Milton to do it. I think she was almost the motivating force in popularizing their ideas and bringing them to the public."

"Free to Choose" contributed to the intellectual foundations of the Reagan administration and of Republican congressional majorities in the 1990s. It also helped spur a broader movement of classical liberalism, or libertarianism.

"It was the book that really kick-started the classical liberal movement in the United States," said Ed Crane, founder of the Cato Institute, a libertarian public-policy organization. "It wasn't a conservative tract. It was about the dynamics of a free and open society. There are a lot of people who support limited government ideas who were inspired by 'Free to Choose.' "

Rose Director Friedman was born in what is now Ukraine in 1910 or 1911, and her family moved to the

Advertisement » Your Ad Here



United States when she was an infant. She grew up in Oregon and studied economics at Reed College in Portland, Ore., and then the University of Chicago, where she met Milton Friedman in 1932. She completed all the requirements for a PhD in economics except her dissertation and later worked for the National Resources Committee and the Federal Deposit Insurance Corp. in Washington.

Her brother, [Aaron Director](#), was also a leading economic thinker who helped fuse the study of economics and law at the University Chicago. He died in 2004 at age 102.

Survivors include two children, four grandchildren and three great-grandchildren.

In their 68 years of marriage, Milton and Rose Friedman shared a deep interest in economics, but her husband did not have Mrs. Friedman's love of classical music and opera. She told the Los Angeles Times in 1986 about taking Milton to the symphony before they were married.

"When I saw that he sat beside me reading a book while the music was on," she said, "I gave up."

Staff researcher Magda Jean-Louis contributed to this report.

© 2009 The Washington Post Company