

Darby Penney

December 10, 1952 ~ October 11, 2021 (age 68)

Darby J. Penney, 68, an internationally recognized Social Justice and Human Rights Activist died on October 11, 2021 at St. Peter's Hospice Inn, in Albany, New York. Born in Oceanside, N.Y., she was the daughter of Audrey Penney of Florida and the late Arthur Penney. Darby was a visionary and tireless champion for the liberation of people with psychiatric disabilities. She was known for her direct, no-nonsense approach to advocacy and life, fiery outspoken nature and the courage to live by unwavering principles. She leaves behind her family, many friends and colleagues from across the globe. She is remembered for her generosity, willingness to provide mentorship, quick, dry sense of humor and desire to live life to the fullest.

Ms. Penney was a leader with expertise in multiple fields who identified as someone with a psychiatric history. She was committed to ensuring that the voices and experiences of those with psychiatric diagnoses were infused into all areas policymaking, program development and evaluation. For the last 15 years she worked as a Senior Research Associate at Advocates for Human Potential. Previously, she was the Director of Recipient Affairs at the New York State Office of Mental Health in Albany for over a decade and during that time she published numerous articles, technical assistance reports, manuals, brochures, and books. As a popular public speaker, Darby traveled widely in the United States and abroad providing technical assistance to organizations addressing issues of homelessness, implementing trauma-informed approaches to practice, and peer-support.

She was a founding member of the Community Consortium, the International Network Towards Alternatives and Rights-Based Supports, and the National Association of Consumer/Survivor Mental Health Administrators. Darby also served on the Board of Directors for a number of organizations including the National Association of Rights Protection and Advocacy and the Campaign for Trauma-Informed Policy and Practice. Darby was one of only 100 people in 25 years to be named a Petra Foundation Fellow, honoring her work promoting civil and human rights of people with psychiatric disabilities. The organization celebrates "unsung local heroes fighting injustices and working to make the world more equitable and just."

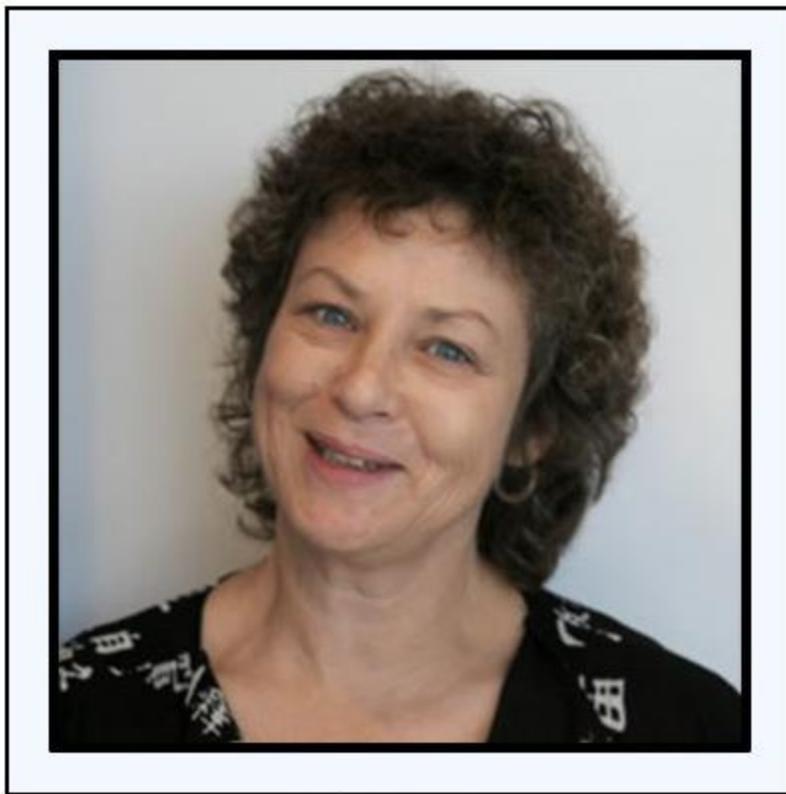
Darby once remarked that she was most excited about her work on The Suitcase Project, a multi-year, collaborative effort to memorialize the lives of patients who had been committed to Willard State Hospital. Based on this research, the New York State Museum exhibited "Lost Cases, Recovered Lives: Suitcases from a State Hospital Attic," which became a traveling exhibit displayed in over 11 states until finding a permanent home at the Museum of Disability History in Buffalo, New York. In 2008, Darby co-authored a book entitled, *The Lives They Left Behind: Suitcases from a State Hospital Attic*, frequently touring the country with the exhibit, sharing the stories of former patients while emphasizing the importance of reclaiming historical records to reflect those who have been left out of a larger narrative. Remarkably, she delivered a public presentation about the Suitcase Project in the last month of her life.

Darby was an avid gardener and a lifelong Yankees fan as well as her broad array of interests including outsider art, poetry, history, and exploring the ways people make meaning of their life experiences.

Darby lived her life, embracing the richness of new experiences with 100 percent zeal. Her indomitable spirit will be missed by family, friends and colleagues across the United States and around the globe who mourn her passing. Her legacy lives on in the large body of work she left behind, the strong relationships built throughout her life and the echoes of an unwavering conviction that all people should have opportunities to thrive. This belief was a reflection of hope that we could rise to the occasion and a reminder to accept nothing less.

Darby received a Master in Library Science degree from the State University of New York, Albany, and a Bachelor of Science degree in writing and literature from the Empire State College in Saratoga Springs. She is survived by her mother, Audrey Penney; sister, Darcy Litt and her husband Fred; sister, Melissa Penney; brother, Merritt Penney; niece and nephew, Amy and Steven Litt; and two cats, Dennis and Sophie. Her father, Arthur Penney; and husband of 30 years, Kenneth Denberg predeceased her. A memorial gathering will be held at a later date.

Memorial donations may be made to the Mohawk Hudson Humane Society. Mail checks to 3 Oakland Avenue, Menands, NY 12204 (Phone: 518-434-8128 ext. 208 or 204), or donate online: <https://mohawkhumane.org/donate-online.html>.



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