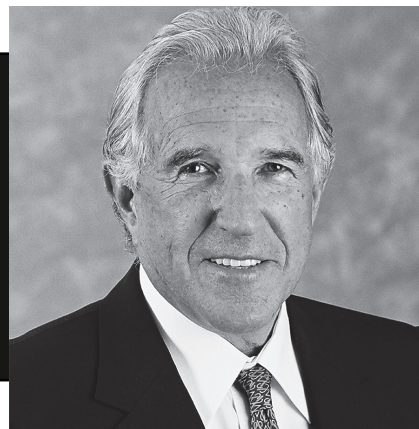


# Stanley A Weiss, 94, Who Believed That Being Dead Was Bad for Business



Stanley A Weiss, a swashbuckling, self-made mining magnate and bon vivant of the old school, who believed his life was saved by the atomic bomb, made a fortune supplying a material that made nuclear weapons possible, and then founded two organizations to ensure nuclear weapons were never used again, died on August 26, 2021, surrounded by family in his London home. He was 94 years old.

The cause was cancer. In a colorful life of adventure and purpose that embodied the outsized ambition of a generation of Americans now largely gone, with unlikely friendships from prime ministers to movie stars, and a knack for being present at so many historic moments that it was called “Forrest-Gump-like,” Weiss’ illness was really the only thing that could slow him down.

A self-described “skinny Jewish kid,” Weiss was born in South Philadelphia to a homemaker mother and a father who was ward boss for the local Republican machine. He enlisted in the U.S. Army three weeks after his 17th birthday and was training to participate in an invasion of Japan with 100,000 expected G.I. casualties when the atomic bombs were dropped on Hiroshima and Nagasaki, ending World War II. “Those bombs,” he wrote decades later, “took more than 200,000 lives—but they probably saved mine.”

Sneaking onto a ship after the war to follow an old girlfriend to Paris, he was publicly humiliated by the woman’s

famous father in a spelling contest, which set him on a lifelong course to better himself in every way. On a ship back to America, he befriended a British diplomat, who encouraged him to attend Georgetown University, which he did on the G.I. Bill.

A year later, he attended a screening of *The Treasure of the Sierra Madre* starring Humphrey Bogart as an American who searches for gold in Mexico. Weiss decided on the spot to move to Mexico to seek his own fortune—even though he had never been to the country, didn’t speak the language, and didn’t have the first clue about how to search for gold. Days before leaving, he read a story that his British diplomat friend, named Guy Burgess, was on the run, suspected of being a Soviet spy, a member of the so-called Cambridge Five, the most infamous spy scandal of the Cold War.

In a region of Mexico known for danger, Weiss developed one cardinal rule for business: Don’t Die. He never found gold but, learning to follow columns of ants deep in underground mines, he discovered manganese—a mineral required for a range of products, including as a strengthening agent for nuclear weapons. It made him a fortune. He delighted that when asked what her son did, Weiss’ mother responded, “I think he’s selling magazines in Mexico.”

With his partner Ralph Feuerring, Weiss founded American Minerals, Inc. which became a leading mineral processing



company, eventually merging with Premier Refractories to form American Premier. Later, with Feuerring and partners Charles and John Gehret, Weiss also helped start Premier Magnesia, which became the largest supplier of magnesia and Epsom salts in North America.

Eager for adventure beyond Mexico, Weiss was introduced to Turkish entrepreneur Ara Oztemel, who needed funding for a fledgling trading company that sought to import Soviet chrome ore into the U.S. when trade between the Cold War adversaries was at a standstill. Regularly flying from Mexico City to Moscow, Weiss helped make SATRA (Soviet-American Trading Corporation) a success.

But minerals were far from his greatest discovery in Mexico. His life changed forever when he met Lisa Popper, the beautiful, cultured, daughter of a Viennese couple who had fled the Nazis in 1938. For weeks afterward, Weiss wrote, "I couldn't get Lisa Popper out of my mind, and I didn't want to. I remembered her auburn hair ... her dazzling smile ... We fell in love, suddenly, simultaneously, and forever." They celebrated their 63rd wedding anniversary in May.

From Mexico City to San Francisco, London to Gstaad, they lived a life of adventure. As Weiss later wrote, "By any measure, I've tried to live my life to the fullest. I was friends with the best-known Mexican artists and writers of the 20th Century. I've gotten to know Bond, James

Bond three times' over in the person of Sean Connery, Roger Moore, and Pierce Brosnan. I spent a long night drinking with Richard Burton as his new girlfriend, actress Elizabeth Taylor, waited back in his hacienda. I watched the counterculture movement brewing before my eyes in 1960s San Francisco and was there when police dogs attacked anti-war protesters in Chicago's Grant Park at the Democratic National Convention in 1968. I produced a cult Western classic, *The Hired Hand*, starring a young Peter Fonda. I became close friends with two intellectual giants who happened to be neighbors of mine – William F. Buckley and John Kenneth Galbraith. It helped inform my most important rule in life: Don't Be Boring."



Despite his success, he craved greater purpose, to give back to the country he loved. At the urging of Galbraith, he took up residence at Harvard University's Center for International Studies. In conversation about nuclear weapons, he was horrified to learn, as he wrote, that "the prevailing experts were stuck in a world of abstract theories ... bantering all too casually about mutually assured destruction and the need for more nuclear weapons on our side – apparently, to avoid utter annihilation."

Determined to create a realistic narrative, he founded the Nuclear Information Resource Service to provide objective information about nuclear power. Unhappy with the Carter Administration, he co-founded a third political party, the Citizen's Party, and recruited environmentalist Barry Commoner to run in the 1980 U.S. presidential election.

A great believer that business common sense could help solve political problems, in 1982, he created a non-partisan organization called Business Executives for National Security. He recruited some of the top CEOs in America and set out to tackle America's most pressing national security issues, starting with nuclear non-proliferation



and Pentagon reform. “Why,” co-host Jane Pauley asked Weiss on Today, “did a group of business executives care about national security issues?” “Because being dead is bad for business,” replied Weiss, who used the memorable retort as the title of his 2017 memoir.

BENS would have an outsized impact on American politics, helping remove pork barrel politics from the base-closing process, influencing the passage of the Chemical Weapons Convention, shaping the Nunn-Lugar Cooperative Threat Reduction Program, and playing an influential role in restarting relations between the U.S. and India. For those contributions, Weiss received the Distinguished Civilian Service Award from the U.S. Department of Defense.

In his sixth decade, as he got to know prime ministers, diplomats, and military leaders through BENS, Weiss began an unlikely career as a columnist. For 20 years, he was a regular Op-ed contributor to the International Herald Tribune. His writing also appeared in a wide range of other publications, from Foreign Affairs to the Wall Street Journal to the Strategic Review—most of which

reflected his posture as “an interventionist who believes the world is better off when America is out front.” His columns were collected in a 2017 anthology, *Where Have You Gone Harry Truman?*

Weiss received an honorary Doctor of Humane Letters from Point Park College. He was a member of the Council on Foreign Relations, the American Ditchley Foundation, and the International Institute for Strategic Studies. He also served on the Board of Visitors at Georgetown University’s School of Foreign Service, the Advisory Board of the RAND Center for Middle East Public Policy, and the Advisory Board of the International Crisis Group.

He will be remembered by friends for the witty lines he had for every occasion, for treating cab drivers with the same respect he treated dignitaries, for the joy he radiated whenever he spent time with his children and grandchildren—and for his habit of traveling with a big container of brightly-colored paper clips he used to organize the hundreds of articles he ripped from newspapers and magazines, underlined and highlighted, for use in his columns.

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*Everywhere he went, he also carried his favorite poem:*

**There once was a very cautious man,  
Who never laughed or cried.  
He never cared, he never dared,  
He never dreamed or tried.  
And when one day he passed away,  
His insurance was denied:  
For since he never lived,  
They claimed he never died.**

*The author is unknown. But as a man whose passion was to live without limitation, few people embodied the spirit of that poem more than Stanley Weiss, who lived an improbable American life.*

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Stanley Weiss is survived by his loving wife, Lisa Popper Weiss; his daughter, Christina Weiss Lurie, his son, Anthony Weiss; his daughter-in-law, Natacha Weiss; his grandchildren Milena Lurie, Julian Lurie, Sacha Weiss, Tessa Weiss, and Lucas Litchfield; and his sister, Flora Webber.

In lieu of flowers, donations can be made to Business Executives for National Security.

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