Stanley Zabar, 94, Who Had a Head for Business and Coleslaw, Dies

The New York Times

Late Edition - Final

Publish Date: 12 Nov 2026 12:00

Section: Section B, Column 0, Obituary

Length: 1049 words

Zabar's, a family business, became a renowned food emporium, which he ran with his brother Saul and another partner. He was 94.

Stanley Zabar, a principal owner of Zabar's, his family's world-renowned Upper West Side culinary and cultural landmark, who handled the financial and legal side of the bustling store's world of whitefish, gourmet cheese, coffee and housewares, died on Monday at his home in Manhattan. He was 94.

His daughter Dr. Sondra Zabar said the cause was cancer.

''Zabar's means to me a place to go,'' Mr. Zabar said on the Zabar's podcast in 2021. ''A place to meet all the West Side/Upper West Side people -- people I've grown up with. A place where all the personnel are like family.''

Mr. Zabar, his older brother, Saul, and their longtime partner, Murray Klein, were for many years a powerhouse of appetizing at 80th Street and Broadway. Saul oversaw the store's operations, particularly its crowded smoked-fish counters, and taste-tested the coffee roasted on the premises.

Mr. Klein, whose face was the most familiar to customers, was the pugnacious marketing macher who drove decisions on pricing, merchandise and publicity.

And Mr. Zabar, a lawyer, handled the business side, working from a second-floor office at the store and another one across the street, dedicated to the neighborhood real estate holdings owned by the brothers and Mr. Klein. But Mr. Zabar -- recognizable in his Zabar's baseball cap and carrying a tote bag -- was also a presence in the store, often greeting customers.

''They all worked to their strengths,'' Dr. Zabar, a vice president of the store, said. Her father, she added, ''had a talent for being strategic.''

His niece Annie Zabar, also a vice president, added, ''When the three of them were there, they stayed out of each other's way.''

Mr. Zabar was an architect of the store's mail order department and website. He also helped start the prepared foods section and was integral to the growth of the vast cheese business, said Scott Goldshine, the general manager. Mr. Zabar would sometimes remind Mr. Goldshine when something was wrong with the coleslaw, one of his favorite foods at the store.

''He really had a thing for it,'' Mr. Goldshine said in an interview. ''And when we screwed up, I'd get a call.''

Stanley Jerome Zabar was born on Aug. 19, 1932, in Brooklyn, and moved with his family to Manhattan when he was 2. His father, Louis, and his mother, Lillian (Teitelbaum) Zabar, once owned five small stores along Broadway, from West 80th to 110th Streets, which consolidated into the single, current location.

In 1950, Mr. Zabar was attending the University of Pennsylvania when his father died. He left school to help run Zabar's with Saul, who had abandoned plans to become a doctor. Mr. Zabar transferred to New York University and graduated in 1953 with a bachelor's degree. Three years later he earned a J.D. degree from Brooklyn Law School, where he took classes until the early afternoon and worked at Zabar's until 9 p.m.

Until 1972, he balanced full-time work at law firms -- he was a partner at one law firm and house counsel at Rapid-American Corp., a retail conglomerate -- with running Zabar's with his brother and Mr. Klein, who became a partner in 1960. In 1961, Mr. Zabar received a master's degree in taxation from the N.Y.U. School of Law. He realized that the store was more his destiny than being a lawyer when his clients showed more interest in his being a Zabar.

''When we got finished with a deal they would shake my hand and it was only when they realized who I was that they got excited,'' he told Law Notes, a Brooklyn Law School magazine, in 2009. ''There was real excitement in food.''

''It never occurred to me I could leave,'' he told The New York Times in 2025 at the shiva for Saul, who died at 97. Bagels and lox, black and white cookies, babka and coffee -- all from Zabar's -- were served.

Eli, the youngest of the three brothers, built his own empire of food, wine and flower shops on the East Side of Manhattan and beyond.

''I acted as Eli's surrogate father,'' Mr. Zabar told Edible Manhattan magazine in 2022. ''Eli has always wanted to be able to control his own destiny and he's always enjoyed the East Side. Whereas we always had more of the social ethic of the West Side.''

The real estate business that Stanley Zabar focused on was designed to protect the store's future and help it expand. One of the deals led to nearly doubling its space by taking over a single-room occupancy hotel above the store. In 1979, about 50 people, including a dozen residents, protested Mr. Zabar's plan and accused him of harassment in an attempt to evict them. Mr. Zabar initiated eviction proceedings against the hotel for nonpayment of rent.

Some protesters chanted, ''People Before Fish.'' Councilman Henry J. Stern conceded Mr. Zabar's right to develop the property but said that he should not ''adopt the tactics of a fast-buck developer.'' Mr. Zabar promised that he would restore essential services to the hotel and not evict tenants for three months, or as long as it took to relocate them. In 1981, Mr. Zabar said, he had spent $200,000 on what he called an ''amicable'' relocation settlement.

The Zabars' long partnership with Mr. Klein nearly fractured in the 1980s when he was looking to have his one-third ownership share of the store bought out. Four bidders stepped forward, including David Liederman, owner of the David's Cookies chain, but the store was not sold to an outsider. In 1994, the Zabars finally bought out Mr. Klein, who retired to a consulting role. He died in 2007.

Stanley and Saul Zabar continued to run the store together -- with numerous family members supporting them -- until Saul's death last year, when Stanley became president.

In addition to his daughter Sondra, Mr. Zabar is survived by his wife, Judith (Segal) Zabar, whom he married in 1952; a son, David, executive director at Zabar's; eight grandchildren and two great-grandchildren. His daughter Lori Zabar died in 2022.

In the Zabar's podcast, Mr. Zabar reflected on the meaning of the family business.

''It's a second home,'' he said. ''I think it's our responsibility to keep Zabar's going for the population that loves it now and to my family who wants to be involved in it.''

Author: By Richard Sandomir

Copyright: Copyright 2026 The New York Times Company

Harvest Date: 12 Nov 2026 08:20

LexisNexis About LexisNexis® Privacy Policy Trust Center Cookies Policy Terms & Conditions Processing Notice Copyright © 2026 LexisNexis. All rights reserved. RELX Group™