

JEAN SHAFIROFF:

HOW TO MAKE A LIFE BY WHAT YOU GIVE



PHOTO COURTESY OF BFA

Jean Shafiroff at the 2016 El Museo Gala at The Plaza Hotel in New York. El Museo del Barrio celebrates artists from Latin America.

Seldom does philanthropy come packaged as beautifully as Jean Shafiroff. Her grace and style in which she effortlessly sponsors countless charity events is reminiscent of Audrey Hepburn in *Breakfast at Tiffany's*.

Don't mistake her good looks and extraordinary poise as the only reason for her rise in the exclusive circles of the American philanthropists, and for her coveted title of one of the 100 Most Powerful New Yorkers. Jean received a Bachelor of Science degree in Physical Therapy from Columbia University's College of Physicians and Surgeons, and an MBA from Columbia Business School. She worked as a physical therapist

at St. Luke's Hospital in New York City and later in the public finance sector and in private partnerships on Wall Street, including a post in the corporate finance department of investment bank L.F. Rothschild, Unterberg, Towbin. Jean is married to Martin D. Shafiroff and has two adult daughters.

Jean's charitable body of works is as impressive as her haute-couture wardrobe. She has served as a trustee of the Jewish Board of Family and Children's Services (JB-FCS) since 1992, and as a board member of the Youth Counseling League from 1998 to 2009. She has served as co-chair and a board member of Southampton Bath & Tennis Club Charitable Foundation since

2005, and as a member of the board of directors from 2001 to 2004.

In 2010, she joined the board of Couture Council, which supports the museum at the Fashion Institute of Technology. In 2012, she joined the board of the French Heritage Society, as well as the board of the New York Women's Foundation after having hosted the foundation's annual luncheon fundraiser the previous four years.

Jean is widely recognized for her leadership in raising contributions for the Southampton Hospital totaling \$5.4 million. She chaired the hospital's annual summer gala fundraiser for the years 2010–2011 and 2013, as well as the Bicentennial Gala of the NY Mission Society, the Solar One Gala, and the New York City American Cancer Society Gala three times.

In October 2014, Jean was elected to the Board of Directors of the NYC Mission Society, a nonprofit organization dedicated to helping families in New York City's impoverished neighborhoods. She is also an honorary board member of the Southampton Animal Shelter.

Each year Jean co-chairs or chairs half a dozen charity galas and events. In 2016 she was honored by the American Cancer Society and the American Heart Association.

Jean sat down with me at *Opulence* to discuss her career as a benefactor for humanity.

Ava: *Your charitable interests are diverse. What inspired you initially to become one of the few who attempt to make the measurable difference in the lives of the many?*

Jean: We live in a world with enormous disparities in lifestyles and wealth. While traveling to countries such as Cambodia, China, Colombia, Costa Rica, Argentina and Nicaragua, I saw tremendous poverty. We have great poverty in the United States as well. It is hard to ignore the needs of the underserved without doing something to try to help. I could never turn my back on their struggle.

Ava: *Your book, Successful Philanthropy: How to Make a Life By What You Give, is a well-researched tutorial on how to become a philanthropist, inspire others and join the ranks of Bill Gates, Warren Buffet, Michael Bloomberg, Edsel Ford and John D. Rockefeller. What motivated you to write your book?*



Jean: About four years ago, I was approached by Hatherleigh Press to write a book on the art of giving. I did a little research and could not find anything on the market like the

book I was planning to write, so I verbally agreed to the project. There was just one problem—I did not have the time to write the book because of my involvement with Southampton Hospital and several other charities. Eventually my time freed up and I submitted an outline to Hatherleigh Press, which immediately liked it. The book was an enormous amount of work, but I am very glad to have written it. It has been very well received and is now ranked 5 stars on Amazon.com.

Ava: Legend has it you have been the muse of the iconic *New York Times* fashion and society photographer Bill Cunningham, whose passing you lovingly acknowledged at the Heart Ball in Southampton this summer. Tell us about your relationship with him. What was it like to be his inspiration?

Jean: Bill Cunningham was a true gentleman and I will always have great admiration and respect for him and would like to believe it was mutual. I especially remember him for his kindness and for his vast knowledge about the fashion world. He understood the importance of philanthropy and made a great effort to acknowledge those

of us involved in the charity world. Mr. Cunningham was a very private person. He loved his work and seemed to work all the time. He photographed what he loved and what he thought was new and different.

Ava: "Philanthropy should begin at a young age," you wrote in your book. I understand you just came back from Nicaragua where you traveled with your daughter. What was the purpose of this trip? How do you envision your daughter's role in this or any other charitable interest you might have or would like to share?

Jean: In the past 12 months, we have taken a number of trips to Nicaragua and Costa Rica to meet with and support different animal rescue groups. My daughter, Elizabeth Shafiroff, and her friend, Lindsey Spielfogal, are in the process of starting a charity called Global Strays. This charity will help animal rescue groups in developing countries by giving them grants to further their work in education on the proper care of the animals. Since my family has a great love of animals, we enjoy working on this project together. Both of my two daughters are very interested in philanthropy. Right now my older daughter, Jacqueline, has a very demanding work schedule, so her time is very limited. However, both girls want to do all they can to be of help to society. I try to encourage this interest in any way that I can.

Ava: You are a woman of many accomplishments. What do you consider your greatest?

Jean: Bringing up two responsible daughters has been one of my greatest accomplishments for sure. Jacqueline and Elizabeth



Bill Cunningham, fashion photographer *New York Times*, shoots the Michael Kors Spring 2015 collection during Fashion Week in New York. (Richard Drew/The Associated Press)

mean the world to me. It is wonderful to see them develop into socially responsible adults with an interest in philanthropy. I have great respect for all the mothers of the world and believe we should pay more tribute to women and working mothers. The role women play in molding future generations should receive highest recognition. Women should be treated as the equal to men. I hope to see equality between the sexes as we move forward.

Ava: How do you balance your life with your work, your family and friends?

Jean: Balancing my life is not always easy. My family has always been my top priority. Friends matter a great deal to me, as well. I do not always have enough time to see friends on a regular basis because my volunteer work and writing takes a lot of my time. The only way I can accomplish all that I want to do is by working on a continual basis. It is rare that I have the time to go out to the movies or stay home and watch television. However, I consider myself very lucky. Good fortune is a gift, and with that gift comes the important responsibility to use our resources to better society.



PATRICK McMULLAN PHOTO — OWEN HOFFMANN/PATRICKMCMULLAN.COM

Southampton Animal Shelter Foundation's 6th Annual Unconditional Love Gala. (l-r): Jean Shafiroff, Elmo, Beth Ostrosky Stern, Jonathan McCann.



Ava Roosevelt and Jean Shafiroff

Ava Roosevelt is the author of *The Racing Heart*. She is also a Palm Beach philanthropist and wife of the late William Donner Roosevelt, grandson of President Franklin Delano Roosevelt.