



William Leonard Sweda

November 26, 1967 - May 11, 2025

In Loving Memory

William Leonard Sweda

November 26, 1967 – May 11, 2025

William Leonard Sweda, 57, of Santa Barbara, died unexpectedly on Sunday, May 11, 2025.

Born in Port Jefferson, New York, to Robert William Sweda and Christine Zella Sainsbury, Will spent his early years on the East Coast and in the Bay Area of California before moving to Illinois as a teenager. He graduated from Downers Grove South High School in 1986, and later returned to California to study mortuary science at Cypress College.

While in school, Will began interning at Welch-Ryce-Haider Funeral Chapels in Santa Barbara — where he would go on to spend his entire career as a licensed Funeral Director, Embalmer, and Crematory Manager from 1989 until his passing.

In 1994, he married Elizabeth “Betsy” Adams, and in 2003, they welcomed their daughter, Isabella Grace. Though their marriage later dissolved, they

remained devoted co-parents. In 2007, Will married Kelly Kathleen Altshuler, becoming stepfather to her son, Isaac Solomon, and father to Francesca Ann, born in 2010.

Will had a deep love for Italy — its food, culture, wine, music, and motorcycles — visiting more than a dozen times. In 2022, he rode his 1961 Bianchi Tonale from Milan to Sicily, later tattooing the route on his forearm. A recent highlight was seeing his favorite artist, Jovanotti, live in Rome.

A passionate home cook, Will was known for his handmade focaccia, pizza dough, and gourmet meals. Whether it was ribeye steak or something more adventurous like boar, quail, rabbit, or octopus, Will showed his love through food and drink — always with impeccable attention to detail.

He also cherished time in his garage workshop, sipping red wine, listening to Italian music, and tinkering with his motorcycle.

Will is survived by his wife, Kelly Sweda; children Isabella, Francesca, and Isaac; parents Bob and Donna Sweda; siblings Jon (Signe), Marc (Amber), and Michelle (Dave); stepfather Paul Briner; mother-in-law Cindy Walker; sister-in-law Corey Villicana; and nieces and nephews Sebastian, Emilie, Brooklyn, Blake, Charley, Tyler, and Robbie.

He was preceded in death by his mother, Christine Sainsbury Briner.

Funeral Mass

Thursday, May 29, 2025 – 10:00 a.m.

Our Lady of Sorrows Catholic Church

Santa Barbara, California

Graveside Service to follow

Santa Barbara Cemetery

In lieu of flowers, memorial contributions may be made to Francesca's educational funds. Please make checks payable to "College America" and write on the memo line "4004946107 Francesca Sweda", and mail the checks to:

Nirmal Singh

620 Coolidge Dr. Ste 165

Folsom, CA 95630

Cemetery Details

Santa Barbara Cemetery

901 Channel Drive
Santa Barbara, CA 93108

Previous Events

Funeral Mass

MAY **29**. 10:00 AM (PT)

Our Lady of Sorrows Catholic Church
21 E Sola Street
Santa Barbara, CA 93101

Tribute Wall

BB

“ You will be missed my old HS friend. The Renault Le Car. Going "bugging" in all of our old VWs. Lake Geneva and all the crazy times. I wish we weren't living so far apart and got to spend more time together as adults... Just a couple visits here and there and always wishing I was eating all that wonderful stuff you always seems to be cooking. Until we we meet again my old friend....
Brian Barbato

Brian Barbato - May 31, 2025 at 11:58 PM

TP

“ Gone too soon my friend. I was hoping for a visit with you later this year. Thanks for 40 years of friendship, laughs, and memories. Look after us from above, until we meet again. Godspeed
Will....Godspeed

Tim Plotkowski - May 27, 2025 at 11:11 AM

HW

“ Rest in Peace William.

Herbert Watson - May 24, 2025 at 10:17 PM



“ Dear Will,

Never did I imagine a time where I would be writing to you to express the feelings and emotions that I've felt this past week without you earth side.

I'll never forget when Kelly called me and told me that she had met you. I remember the excitement in her voice, I remember meeting you haphazardly on State Street for the first time, Kelly and I headed down, you and baby Isabella headed up. We stopped and spoke for a moment, Kelly made introductions and we all continued on our way.

Little did I know then that you would go on to become my brother for the next twenty some years. Uncle to my sons, friend to us all. I didn't know about the countless meals we would share, most of which you would prepare lovingly. Didn't know about the endless late night conversations we would have over bottomless glasses of wine. Didn't know the way I would come to love you and understand your mind and heart. I didn't know then that you would give me one of the greatest loves of my life, my niece Francesca. That you would allow me to know and love your sweet Isabella like my own and that you would love and support my sweet nephew Isaac too.

Time is a funny thing. The three and a half hours that separated our homes at times felt massive and other times not. I'm hoping the coming years will be as gracious, years without you here with us. You'll be felt and remembered with every amazing meal, glass of wine, road traveled and cooking show I watch. I love you and always will. Cheers Pal.

Corey Villicana - May 23, 2025 at 07:20 PM

JM

“ I am shocked and saddened as I read that Will has passed away. We hadn't spoke in a while but I always enjoyed following his travels and food posts on SM. He will be missed.

Joan McGrew - May 22, 2025 at 12:50 PM

AV

“ Will, we have known each other for a very long time. Would have never have guessed you would leave us this early. I wish we could have chatted more about life. I did know that you loved your daughters dearly , you loved to cook weird shit that others actually loved , I knew of your love for your motorcycle and your Italian 2 seater car that was parked in the garage that I have yet seen to spin wheels. Your laughter and your voice will never be forgotten. I promise you that I will look for you in heaven and bring a fine bottle of vino with two glasses to catch up . Until then my friend.

Anthony Villicana

Anthony Villicana - May 20, 2025 at 03:09 AM

JB

“ I miss my friend. Will, I am so sorry that the world you left behind failed to bring you happiness and contentment. You will always be remembered for that bright smile, Vespa riding, a wonderful sense of humor and your passion for food and Italy. May you find peace. Ride on -- Vesperados forever!

Jo Ann Bell - May 18, 2025 at 02:57 PM



“ A sympathy card was purchased for the family of William Leonard Sweda.



May 16, 2025 at 06:03 PM



“ My Deepest condolences to Will's family and coworkers at Welch-Ryce-Haider Funeral Home. The tears are falling as I say Goodbye. I worked with Will for over 19 years and truly enjoyed his low key humor and high energy. Will always took pride in his professional attitude and dress. He knew how to put grieving families at ease with his genuine caring and would often take the extra steps to ensure a smooth and calm closure for the the families he assisted. As a long time fellow employee and one-time partner at Welch-Ryce-Haider, he will always be remembered, loved and sorely missed... ♡♡♡

Sylvea Viot - May 15, 2025 at 09:29 PM



I remember Will as we interacted frequently during my time at Santa Barbara Cottage Hospital. He was great, such a nice person, caring and meticulous in his work. My condolences to his family!

Luis Gonzales - May 17, 2025 at 01:15 PM

DC

I remember Bill from Bagby grammar School in San Jose/ Campbell. He was really bright and had a great sense of humor. Over Easter vacation, he let me take over the massive and massively complicated paper route he had built up. I wasn't blessed with Bill's brilliant logistical mind and really blew it! Confronting me the next week with the stack of pink paper slip complaints from his customer base, I was ready for some righteous indignation, whereupon Bill just shrugged his shoulders, tossed them in the air and laughed--good old Bill! I think what made Bill Bill was the close knit (Polish?) family he came from. I remember his smiling little bro, his Mom and Dad and the super fun Halloween party they threw. I wore a much too gorey costume and his Mom diplomatically gave me the 'Most Scary' costume award. Such was the stand-up guy Bill was that even after 50 years the memories of my dear friend are still as vivid and as strong as ever. My sincere condolences to Bill's family and all those who knew him. --Dan Cottrell (writing from France)

dan cottrell - May 29 at 07:22 PM