



Samuel Joel Mostel

February 28, 1915 - September 8, 1977

Died: Philadelphia, Pennsylvania

Interment: Cremated; resting place not public

Samuel Joel Mostel died at Thomas Jefferson University Hospital in Philadelphia on the evening of September 8, 1977. An aortic aneurysm is the account that followed. He was sixty-two. Born in Brooklyn on February 28, 1915, to Galician Jewish immigrants, he was called Zero in school for his marks and kept the name when Caf? Society hired a painter who could make a room laugh. He spoke Yiddish at home, copied pictures at the Metropolitan in a velvet suit, and graduated from City College because it was the college that would take a poor student who wanted to draw.

The 1940s made him famous fast: nightclubs, radio, a draft and a medical discharge, then the kind of movie contract that vanished when his politics and his mouth arrived in the same sentence. In 1955 he told the House Un-American Activities Committee that he would not name names, asked whether a butterfly at rest was sabotage, and went home to a decade of regional work and a studio full of canvases. Toby Cole, an agent who hated the blacklist, brought him back. Ulysses in Nighttown, Rhinoceros, A Funny Thing Happened on the Way to the Forum, and Fiddler on the Roof made him the actor a ticket buyer meant when the lights went down. He won Tonys. He made Tevye a cantor's joke and a father's grief in the same breath. Mel Brooks talked him into Max Bialystock; the picture took years to become the classic the first reviews missed.

A crosstown bus crushed his leg in 1960. He refused amputation and walked with pain and a cane for the rest of his life. He painted every day he could. Kate, his wife, and their sons kept the house that was not a shrine. Philadelphia was a tryout city: Arnold Wesker's The Merchant, a rewritten Shylock, a dressing-room collapse. New York was the city that had blacklisted him and then stood in line.

He asked for no funeral. He was cremated. The family did not publish the place of the ashes. The roles remain the memorial he would have trusted.

Services

Died in Philadelphia, Pennsylvania, on September 8, 1977, during an out-of-town tryout. No public funeral, by his request. Cremated; location of ashes not published.

NN-OBIT-2026-H028

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