

Edith Rose Cantor

Yehudit Raizel bat Pinchas

Died October 9, 2001

22 Tishrei 5762

As we have heard from Sharon and Paul our community has lost a magnificent woman who influenced the lives of not only her family but also generations still to come.

In talking with Sharon last night I learned how many years ago Edith was concerned about low attendance at synagogue services. She suggested to the Beth Shalom rabbi at that time, Rabbi Sacks, that a youth choir be formed which would not only bring more young people to services but their parents as well. Edith helped organize the choir, which of course included Paul and Sharon, and the idea was a success. The idea she envisioned, involving youth in services, continues to this day, as our shul prides itself on the participation of our children. Families pray together at Beth Shalom and for this we can thank people like Edith Cantor who recognized that traditions are not only found in the past but are created for the future as well.

Edith also knew that Judaism was not practiced only in synagogue. She made sure that newcomers to the city, especially those who joined the staff at the University Hospital or the faculty at the University of Alberta were welcomed to our community.

Edith practiced a teaching from the Torah, *hachnasat orchim*, which means welcoming the stranger. It is said that Abraham, the first Jew, was famous for his willingness to embrace and care for the stranger. Indeed, some sages taught that it was his love of the stranger that brought Abraham to God's attention and was the deciding factor in his being chosen by God to father the Jewish people. It is the obligation of every Jew to remember what it is like to be a stranger as we were in Egypt, to feel compassion for strangers in our own communities, and to reach out to newcomers with a welcoming hand.

Edith passed away as we prepared to begin the holiday of Simchat Torah, when we read the final chapter of the Five Books of Moses and from the beginning of the Torah again in Genesis. This shows us that the reading of Torah never ends, the study of Torah never ends and the meaningfulness of Torah never ends.

Simchat Torah also teaches us that Torah ends with the death of Moses and begins with the birth of the world. Life is a round of death and rebirths; the story never ends even as the characters change. Each time we read Torah we discover something new, not because the text has changed, but because we have changed.

Edith will no longer be with us as we begin our new year of discovery. Her inspiration will be missed as we seek new meaning in the Torah to help us survive in this constantly changing world. Just as the teachings we learn from Torah have allowed us to reach this time, the guidance that she gave not only her family but those who knew her, will help us continue to grow and follow in her path of dedication to her faith, her community and her belief in generations to come.

Tehi nishmata tzroora beetzror hachaim

May her soul be bound up in the bonds of life

Oct 11, 2001
Paul Cantor - son
Sharon Abbott - daughter
Memorial Speech

Paul: Edith Rose Cantor lived a full life. Daughter, wife, mother, volunteer, actress, but beyond all that her own woman. As we remember Edith today, we want to share her life with you, not just from the perspective of her son and daughter, though we too have much to say, but as a celebration of the way that she embraced all of those who came within her circle.

Sharon: Those of you gathered here today will know that she was always full of life and full of solutions for life's challenges. Whether it was explaining the price of oil to visitors from Texas or telling a dear friend what to wear to her daughter's graduation—Edith always had advice and was always prepared to help. And the phone was always ringing as her friends and acquaintances called to share experiences, feel good as a result of talking to her, and benefit from her sense of humour or advice.

Paul: Are we talking about a class act? Yes, with a capital "C". If she had lived in the 19th century, she could have been a grand lady with a salon on the continent attended by her courtiers. Instead, in the 20th century, she passed her life on the prairies in western Canada where, over the years she collected friends from her acting days in little theatre, from the Women's Musical Club, the University Hospital Women's Auxiliary and the Jewish community. To these we would add the many colleagues and contacts grown through her husband, Max's prolific involvement in endocrinology research, at the University of Alberta and in the medical and legal communities.

Where did she get all this style? Edith spent her early years in Luseland, Saskatchewan, where her family had a general store. We can picture mother, a very pretty child with her long blond curls, dancing and singing to entertain the other members of the family. Her mother would say "Edit, dance. Edit, sing," and she would. Later the family moved briefly to Saskatoon so they could be in a Jewish community and then to Winnipeg, when Edith was twelve.

But the real foundation of her style was The Winnipeg Public Schools. In north Winnipeg most of the children were new Canadians. And there must have been a teacher or teachers who believed it was their responsibility to teach social skills like setting a proper table, which fork to use, how to cope in various social situations, how to treat people and how to dress for social occasions. She got her early practice teaching it to her brothers and sister, who responded with varying degrees of enthusiasm.

Forty years later, the University called my mother for this same kind of help. One of my fraternity brothers was going to be given the Rhodes Scholarship. He was an academic giant, an outstanding sportsman, and deeply involved in extracurricular activities. But he didn't have the table manners to go to Oxford. Edith was asked to come to the rescue. And at dinner once a week in our home, she did.

Sharon: And speaking of style, Lilian Green remembers that Edith was always a real show stopper when she made an entrance. She proved that Edmonton stores stocked clothes that made her look like she stepped out of an ad in a fashion magazine. Her niece, Linda Greenberg of Winnipeg remembers Edith's admonition to a thirteen year old...that one should always count the pieces of jewelry that you had put on. If there were more than three, some had to be removed.

The sense of style worked for me too. I remember that I did not yet have the date I wanted for my Grade 12 graduation dinner and dance. Edith told me to wear my new fuchsia dress the next day. Within an hour, I had my date for the high school prom.

Paul: Edith had a real sense of what was right and what should be done. Her commitment to being responsible for oneself was absolute. I remember a time when I came home late and well-oiled from a fraternity party. The next morning I tried to stay in bed to nurse my hangover. But Edith came in at the crack of dawn, threw open the bedroom curtains, which caused the rising sun to shine directly in my face and said: "I want the sun to shine on my diamonds".

She knew how to get others to do things too. One time she told Rabbi Sacks that if he wanted better attendance at Friday night services, he should start a children's choir. Then people would have to

come to bring their children. He did, they did, we did. Of course, for the first year the rest of the congregation could not even sing the "Shema", as that was all the choir could initially manage. By the way, there was no sitting up in the back behind the curtains for the children's' choir. We had to sit out in front where the congregation could see the sun shining on their diamonds.

Edith's commitment to the Jewish community was linked to our involvement with the university. Edna and Bernard Snell and Lilian and Leslie Green both reminded Sharon that it was Edith who first found out they were in town, adopted them and introduced them into the community.

Sharon: And who could forget those wonderful parties: after musical club concerts, theatre performances, for their gang from the Jewish community, or for neighbourhood parties where Vic Wallace played the piano and Edith sang torch songs. Of course there was Paul's Bar Mitzvah and our wedding where there were wall to wall people – these were fun, fun, fun. All these were at our home. When the house on 86th avenue got too small, a new house on Saskatchewan Drive, with a sunken living room to allow the cigarette smoke to rise, held almost half the population of Edmonton.

Edith had a devotion to cleanliness. Even when her grandchildren, Laurence and Jennifer were three years old, she was still sterilizing the utensils they used when they came to visit. I remarked that I didn't sterilize the dishes and cutlery anymore. Edith said it was a wonder the children didn't get sick. Laurence and Jennifer were even given their own guest towels and soap on each visit. But the grandchildren had fun on those visits too. Edith and Max dressed them up in Klondike clothes and created scenarios for them to act in.

Paul: Her grandson, Adam also recalls her advice. Like the Talmud, Edith's advice was sometimes obscure. For example when Adam went to visit her while travelling in the west, Edith told him he should learn how to dance to improve his networking.

When visiting last Passover, the conversation went like this:

Adam: I haven't started dancing lesson yet.

Edith: Why would you take dancing lessons?

Adam: To improve my networking.

Edith: That's a stupid idea. Who told you that?

Adam: You did.

Edith: That's not what I meant.

Adam was unclear what she meant but Aunt Sharon supplied the answer. How are you ever going to catch a wife if you can't dance.

When Alexandra was tree planting in western Canada, she brought her then boyfriend with her. The meeting went like this.

Alexandra: "Bobba Edith, this is my boyfriend."

Edith to boyfriend: "You're standing with the light from window behind you and I can't see your face. Turn around"

Edith then rolls her walker 180 degrees so the window is behind her. She looks at the boyfriend for about 30 long seconds and finally pronounces "You'll do".

Sharon: When golfing slowed down, Edith became an expert bridge player. She had a remarkable memory for the cards that had been played, and her friend Dot Thornton, who was an "ace" said "she plays a good hand of bridge." Coming from Dot, that was a real compliment. Bridge playing followed Edith through for forty years from Mayfair Golf and Country Club, to the Faculty Club, and Claridge House where she had a condo. Edith carried her bridge playing skills all the way in to Canterbury Manor, where there were other excellent players, some of whom are here today. At Canterbury Manor, Edith said to Paul one day: "I haven't felt so little stress since Max died". Sharon did me a great favour by moving me here, even if she sold my car out from under me".

Paul: At Canterbury Court, Edith was still able to sneak out the back with her pals for a smoke even after they strapped the oxygen tank on her wheelchair. Edith smoked all her life. She started when she was sixteen when they still put cigarettes on the tables in tea rooms. In fact, her physical decline was attributed to smoking. Not as you might suspect, because she smoked for 70 years. Instead it was because, one day, as she stepped out of the car, she flicked her cigarette butt onto the sidewalk. As a good citizen she purposefully kicked the butt into the gutter, slipped, fell and broke her hip for the first time. I asked her if this was a reason to give up smoking. Edith replied, "don't be ridiculous".

In her latter years, Edith was still busy making everyone laugh. When Dr. Whittaker suggested that she quit smoking, Edith replied: "But what would I do with my hands?"

Even at the end, the nurses and doctors at the Misericordia told us what a character she was, what fun she was to treat and that they would miss her.

Obituary

CANTOR, Edith Rose

Edith Cantor passed away on October 9, 2001. She leaves to mourn her children, Paul Cantor, (Lynn) of Toronto, Sharon Abbott of Edmonton and grandchildren, Laurence Abbott (Tanya), Jennifer Caron (Harvey) in Edmonton, Adam Cantor and Alexandra Cantor of Toronto, her sister, Riva Levi, her sister-in-law, Rose Secter, both of Winnipeg and numerous nieces and nephews. She was predeceased by her husband, Max, on December 31, 1981, her brothers, Arnold Secter in Winnipeg in 1994, Major John Secter on May 29, 1944 at Anzio, Italy and baby brother, Abremeleh, 18 months in a tragic accident at home. Her parents, Pete and Jenny Secter predeceased her in 1957 and 1958. *(Corrected dates: I had them one year earlier but John Levi remembers that Zeyda died in May and his Bar Mitzvah was in July 1957. I remember that mother went to the B.M. and she and Riva smiled bravely and sincerely because it was John's day and they were going to make it a good day for him)*

Edith was well known in the Edmonton arts community in the 1940s and 1950s as an actress in Little Theatre, a member of the Women's Auxiliary of the University Hospital, a member of the Women's Musical Club and an avid bridge player. She and Max supported The Citadel Theatre and attended plays from the first year of its inception. They were patrons of the Edmonton Symphony and the Edmonton Opera Association.

The family have been long time members of Beth Shalom Synagogue and their involvement in the Jewish community centered around it and its congregation. Noting synagogue attendance was dropping Edith suggested a children's choir which would mean parents would attend Friday night services. She also suggested a Sunday School program that Rabbi Sacks agreed with and started in the early 1950s.

People will remember Edith for her ability to make people comfortable in social situations, her knack for saying the right thing to make people feel better, her wild sense of humour and her ability to make friends wherever she lived.

Edith passed her recent years at Canterbury Manor and Court where she was able to re-establish contact with many of her friends over the years. The family expresses its appreciation to the staff of these institutions for the caring and support during this period as well as to the staff on 7 West at the Misericordia Hospital and to Dr. Whittaker.

The funeral will take place at the chapel at the Jewish Cemetery, 7622 - 101 Avenue at 2:00 pm, Thursday, October 11, 2001