

Eulogy for Celia Cohen --- Tzippa bat Chaim

More often than not it seems that when one of our loved ones passes away it coincides with the week we read a particular portion of Torah, or there is a Holiday or Festival that somehow relates to the life of the deceased.

Celia Cohen of Blessed Memory, passed away on Shabbat morning, the first day of Pesach . Although I did not meet with her family until last night, I knew enough about Celia already that as I read certain passages in the Hagaddah during the second Seder on Saturday night, I could not help but think of Celia and the devotion she had to her family.

The first passage I refer to concerns the enforced separation of husbands and wives during the period of the Hebrews slavery in Egypt. The Egyptians decreed that men should sleep in the field, and women should sleep in the city, in order to decrease their offspring. The women, however, would bring warm food to their husbands, and comfort them, saying, "They shall not succeed in subjugating us. In the end, the Holy One will redeem us." Thus, in spite of the decree, they would be together and they did have children. Through the merit of the righteous women of that generation the Israelites were redeemed from Mitzrayim.

Celia Cohen also was a righteous woman who took it upon herself to ensure that her family, wherever they were in the world and however distantly related, benefited from her kindness and the love of Yiddishkeit she inherited from her parents.

Although not the oldest of the four children of Rabbi Hyman and Bessie Goldstick, Celia assumed the role of matriarch of the family after her parents passed away.

Celia was driven to keep the family together with a passion to ensure that they would know each other and their common roots.

Her father was the first Rabbi in the Province of Alberta serving Congregation Beth Israel from 1906 to 1912.

Rabbi Goldstick decided to leave the rabbinate on a full-time basis to open a retail store in Edson, eventually becoming the town's mayor.

Even though they were usually the only Jewish family in the community, Celia, her sister and two brothers, were raised in a traditional kosher home, learning the customs and laws of our people that stayed with her until her

death. She also learned kindness and compassion which she exhibited to all who knew her throughout her life.

She was a generous woman who gave tzedakah 'charity' to causes in both the Jewish and general communities. She was also generous with her time, observing the mitzvah of *bikkur cholim* - visiting those who were ill in the hospital or at home.

Celia was an excellent cook renowned for her baking. Often the cakes were created from memory rather than by following a written recipe but each time they came out perfect. Thyrsa recalls how organized her mother was. Certain foods were served on certain days of the week and fresh laundry always appeared on the same weekly schedule.

Celia's devotion to family was not something that developed in later life.

When she moved to Edmonton with her mother so that she could attend high school in the city, frequent trips were taken back to Edson to see those that remained behind. This is a practice that she kept as long as she had family there, even if it meant going out and returning the same day.

When she married Sid in 1946 she stayed home to raise her children while Sid operated his pharmacy. Only after the children were grown did she begin to help him in the store. She volunteered for ORT and National Council of Jewish Women and kept a watchful eye over Matt and Thyrsa's progress at Talmud Torah.

Matt remembers taking family vacations when he was younger but at his mother's insistence they always revolved around visits to family in various parts of North America. Later, when Matt and Thyrsa traveled on their own, Celia insisted that they visit and stay with family which they did on their first visits to Israel.

When Sid retired in 1978, Sid and Celia were able to travel to Israel to visit the relatives that she had kept in touch with for so many years. In fact they visited Israel three times. For years Celia had kept in touch with a first cousin in Australia and they were also able to travel there.

In 1963, years before activists were fighting for the cause of Soviet Jews, Celia was able to somehow secure the release of her mother's sister from Latvia. After a few months in Edmonton, Celia was able to arrange for her aunt to live the rest of her life in Israel. Celia continued to send parcels to other relatives who stayed behind in the Soviet Union.

Up to a few months before she passed away, Celia continued to look after her family. In Canterbury Court she was able to keep an eye on her brother Cecil.

They had a very close relationship, and Celia took special care of him after his wife passed away in 1979.

Her two grandchildren, Eva and Daniel were the special rewards of her life. She loved to baby-sit them, and Matt and Helen were comfortable leaving them with her at her apartment in Canterbury knowing that they were safe as well as loved.

I'll remember Celia as one of the regulars at the monthly Shabbat services at Canterbury. She was dressed impeccably, always in a dress, never pants, a custom which she had throughout her life. She enjoyed culture and attended the symphony and plays at the Citadel. She was a devotee of foreign films long before they became popular in North America. Celia also loved baseball and whenever they could she attended Trappers games with Sid.

Her life reflected the days of the early Jewish pioneers in Alberta and we are fortunate that the family inherits a wealth of knowledge through the stories that Celia told of her life, many of which have been preserved on tape, and through the hundreds of photographs she saved.

We are poorer for her loss but fortunate that she was with us for so long and that her legacy will continue through her children, grandchildren, nieces, nephews and cousins many of whom have traveled here today to pay their respects to a true matriarch.

Another commentary in the Haggadah tells of Miriam the prophet - the sister of Moses and Aaron. Miriam is ranked with her brothers as one of the liberators of ancient Israel. Many midrashim tell of her resourcefulness, her leadership, her outspokenness, her wisdom and her beauty. Because of her merits, runs one Miriam myth, the Israelites were blessed with fresh sweet water all the days of her life. Throughout those forty years in the desert the wanderer's were accompanied and refreshed by Miriam's well .

In our time we can also say that we benefited from the merits of a strong woman. The water from the well no longer flows but the taste will linger in our memories.

Future Passover celebrations will be tinged with sadness in Celia's family as the holiday will coincide with her Yahrtzeit but may they be comforted by the knowledge that the words of the haggadah will remind them and inspire them to continue her life of integrity and dedication, determination, loyalty to the traditions of our people, and devotion to family.

Tehi nishmatah tzroorah beetzror HaChayim
May her soul be bound up in the bond of life. Amen.