

Jack Geffen      Yaacov ben Moshe

Passed away June 24, 1998

One of the memories I have of Jack Geffen is of him sitting quietly in a room full of people, not talking to anyone, just watching, while others around him talked and laughed. I probably thought that he wasn't enjoying himself, he wasn't feeling well or that he would have preferred to be somewhere else. After spending time yesterday with Joyce, Craig and Missy I realized that there was a lot about Jack that I didn't know. And what I didn't know explains a lot about who Jack Geffen was.

What I know now is that Jack was probably one of the happiest people in the room. He was content to watch others, take in everything he saw around him and to reflect on the life he had made for himself and his family. A life of giving, a life of caring and a life that still had a lot of love to share.

Life for Jack began 71 years ago in Calgary. The harsh reality that life sometimes holds came early when his father passed away when Jack was only 12. Not only did this cancel the plans for the Bar Mitzvah he had studied for at Hebrew school, but it gave him an early taste of responsibility to family. As one of four children Jack helped out by working while still in school. His grandfather, Mr. Rootman, operated a Kosher butcher shop and Jack earned money by delivering meat; riding his bicycle even during the winter months until he was old enough to drive the delivery truck.

After high school he attended business school and shortly after graduating he married Joyce. Their 49th wedding anniversary would have been just a few weeks from now.

Together they moved to Edmonton where Jack had accepted a job as an Account Executive with CHED Radio. He excelled in sales and the eight years he was there in the mid 1950's bring back some of the earliest memories for his family. Craig remembers going to gas station openings with his dad, where Jack, dressed in his CHED blazer and straw hat would implore listeners to drive over to a new White Rose or BA station to enter contests and pick up free balloons for the kids. He was too busy to golf but Joyce remembers the time that he was in a tournament with advertisers and she got

a call to come pick him up at the hospital. It seems that some of the participants got a little exuberant and Jack was run over by a golf cart. Fortunately other than the tire tracks over his chest he was OK.

Some people go through life never satisfied with their career choice - always wishing they had done something else--this was not the case with Jack. The decision to leave CHED to start a career in insurance sales with London Life was a fortuitous decision for Jack, London Life and thousands of clients who benefited from his guidance. He spent over 35 years with London Life, working for them up to the time he passed away. He loved the business. His pursuit of clients took him to Whitehorse, Yellowknife and other points in the Territories. He became a life member of the Million Dollar round table and earned the coveted Chartered Life Underwriter designation by taking weekend classes, and studying diligently for four years through the University of Toronto extension courses offered in Edmonton. He was made for the business and the business was made for him. He didn't want to be trapped behind a desk in an office. He reveled in the opportunity to be his own boss, to control his destiny and to excel in his field.

While he helped his customers gain the security they would need for their families in the event of death, or earn financial independence upon retiring, Jack also recognized that there was a responsibility to take advantage of the good things that life had to offer and he practiced his motto " Do it while you can".

Again the memories flowed as we talked about the annual summer family trips to Spokane. The first two weeks of August meant a shopping trip for school clothes and a chance to check out the bargains in the U.S. This was back when our dollar meant something there. The family were regulars at the Ridpath Hotel but this may have ended had Jack fulfilled his desire to move to Spokane full time. Even though a house was picked out and a position in the insurance field secured, Jack relented when he saw the tears in Missy's face when she realized that she would have to leave her friends behind.

Jack loved to travel to more exotic places in the winter. Joyce says he was a bit of an adventurer as he would choose holidays and locations that had yet been discovered by the average tourist. They went on cruises long before they were popular. They visited Hong Kong, Australia, England, the Canary Islands, Spain and Portugal. Later in life there were extended stays in Palm Springs and Hawaii. This fall he was planning a trip to New York City.

He was ahead of his time in other ways too. Jack was a 90's kind of dad back in the 60's when his kids were growing up. Through his membership in the Associated Canadian Travelers he was active in fund-raisers for the Kidney Foundation. Craig remembers being out at Klondike Days with his dad, dressed in award winning Klondike costumes selling raffle tickets. Missy remembers helping her Dad with the ACT Candy drives. He diligently followed their progress in school always urging them to do better. He was at Missy's ballet recitals, he reveled in seeing Craig win debating championships. Missy remembers that her dad always told her ' You can do better'. Even if she brought home a report card with all A's he told her she should get A pluses. But she knew that he wasn't being difficult or overbearing, he just wanted her to do and be the best. It is a phrase that has helped her find success in her field. When she received her first promotion at ITV, Jack bought her a clock engraved with the words "You Can Do Better". And just last week her Dad told her how proud he was of her accomplishments. What a blessing that this man, who some thought was so private would share these words with his daughter when there was still time. He was also proud of his grandchildren. If you asked about them you would be regaled with story after story about their accomplishments. His oldest grandchild, Rory, will miss Jack. He told his mom that when things were bad you could always go to Jack for a hug and then feel better.

Jack was a generous man. He gave more than he took, finding it easier to help someone else than to do something for himself.

He was generous with his time. At various points in his life he was the leader of the Edmonton Jewish Cub Pack, the president and the hockey coordinator for the Crestwood Community League, honorary pipe major in the Clan MacNaughton Band, and Santa Claus at parties at ITV, and various West End community leagues and day cares. He also served a year as president of the Edmonton Chapter of the Chartered Life Underwriters.

He believed in helping people. Once while on a sales trip to the Yukon he volunteered to help in the search for a missing aircraft. He spent hours searching the ground from an open door in an airplane. He came home with pneumonia, which may have been the beginning of the lung diseases which afflicted him in later years.

He slowed down in the last five years. Joyce and Jack still traveled but many of the trips were interrupted by extended hospital stays. He had back surgery and was told that he may never walk again, but he refused to believe that and he wouldn't even take the cane he was supposed to use. He spent more time in the Vancouver area with Craig and his family still taking trips across the

border to Bellingham and Seattle looking for bargains. Just a few weeks ago on June 6 he was at Simon Fraser University in Burnaby to see his daughter-in-law Kirsten graduate.

Perhaps there is a master plan that says we can only give so much and Wednesday night, peacefully, in his home, with Joyce nearby, Jack's soul gave in to the illnesses of these last years. A companion, a father, a grandfather is gone. There will be no more far away trips, or gifts from antique shops, no more calls to the office to see how his daughter is doing, no more advice for a son's career, no more hugs for the grandchildren. But there will be memories, and death does not take memories away. Today we see Jack's memory in the tears and sorrow of his family and friends, but long after the tears have gone we will see Jack in the happy faces of his beloved grandchildren, in the success of his children and in the thoughts of Joyce who was able to share in the many years of joy that Jack had. I am convinced that Jack left this world a satisfied man. Knowing that through his efforts so many others have prospered both materially and spiritually. Let us remember him this way.