

Eulogy for Rita Gold

Rivka bat Binyamin

Died July 25, 1999

12 Av 5759

In our weekly Torah reading we find ourselves in the book of Devarim, or Deuteronomy, the last of the Five Books of Moses. The portion we read this past Shabbat, Va-etchanan, continues Moses' speeches to the Israelites just before his death. He warns the people that when they enter the land of Israel they should stay away from idolatry and observe the Ten Commandments and the rest of the commandments that God gave the people.

Moses then instructs the people with the words "Hear O' Israel: Adonai is our God, Adonai is One. You shall love God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your might." These are the opening words of the Shema, words that are recited twice daily by traditional Jews. They are the first words taught to a young child, and the last words recited at the time of death. Jewish martyrs have proudly pronounced them against forces of tyranny, and, through the centuries, they have constituted the most universally known Hebrew phrase in Jewish tradition.

I relate to these thoughts when I remember our beloved Rita Gold, because she was a woman who was devoted to her family, guiding them through the trials of life, just as Moses guided the Israelites through the desert. She was a woman who truly obeyed the words of the Shema as she followed the traditions of our faith.

The story of Rita's arrival in Canada is one that may be similar to others of her generation, but for those of us who take our freedom and citizenship for granted, it must be repeated as a reminder of how our parents and grandparents struggled so that we could enjoy these freedoms.

Rita was born 90 years ago in Meliska, in the Novograd Volensk region of Ukraine. Seeking safety for his family from the oppression against Jews following the Bolshevik Revolution, Rita's father, Binyamin, escaped to Poland. There he was able to obtain forged Polish passports for the rest of his family so that they could come to the new world. At the age of 13, with her parents, and brothers Saul, Harry and Fred she began a new life in Montreal. Rita worked hard to learn a new language, and after completing her schooling went to work in a ladies dress shop. She was very successful in sales and Phil and David proudly credit their mother for passing down this

skill to them. In 1933 she married Harry, the start of 64 years together. Five years later they celebrated the birth of their first son Allan. Recognizing the opportunities that were offered in western Canada, Rita supported Harry in the decision to move to Regina to work for the Army & Navy Store.

In Regina, the young wife and mother immersed herself in the activities of the small but vibrant Jewish community. With the arrival of Phillip and then David she was busy as a full time mother to three active boys, but still had time to join Hadassah-WIZO, take part in Zionist causes, and participate in services and activities at Beth Jacob Synagogue and its Sisterhood. As the boys grew older she enrolled each in the Regina Talmud Torah afternoon school to ensure that they learned the traditions that her father risked his life to defend. Rita's parents soon followed her to Regina, keeping the family bond strong, and instilling a strong sense of family in her children.

In 1953 a move further west saw the Golds join Rita's brother Fred in Lethbridge where they operated a store that eventually became known as Tracy's Ladies Wear. The even smaller Lethbridge Jewish community soon benefited from the new family as the Golds joined the Beth Israel Synagogue, enrolled the boys in Hebrew school, and continued their activities in Jewish organizations and causes.

Phil and David have fond memories of growing up in Lethbridge surrounded by family as Rita's parents joined them there as well. Rita doted on her boys, even making sure that when they came home from school for lunch in the fall, they could watch the World Series on tables she set up in front of the TV.

Harry worked long hours and didn't take many holidays but the boys remember the B'nai Brith picnics and trips to Waterton Park. They also remember how after her father passed away, Rita took care of her mother as her health began to fail.

After completing high school Phil and David moved to Edmonton to work at Henry Singer Men's Wear. Soon a family opportunity arose again as Phil and David approached their parents for assistance in opening their own store. Continuing the tradition of seeking success for their family, Harry and Rita responded positively and in 1970, The Colony opened with Harry a full working partner.

Rita again took every opportunity to meet people and participate in her new community. She transferred her Hadassah membership and was active in National Council of Jewish Women, and Beth Shalom Synagogue. The Golds were very sociable, developing many new friendships around the

bridge table. I first met Rita in the apartment building where my grandparents also lived. They were very close friends and always enjoyed spending time with my children when I dropped them off at my grandparents to be babysat. I recall that no matter the time of day, Rita was always dressed meticulously, her hair done, makeup on. Phil and David recall how proud Harry was of her, she was a real lady.

The first years in Edmonton were probably some of the most satisfying of their lives for Harry and Rita. They would spend at least a month a year in Windsor where Allan had a successful business. They took pride in David and Phil who kept The Colony going through the turbulent retail times of the 80's and are among just a handful of independent retailers left from those who were in the original West Edmonton Mall.

Finally free to travel, Harry and Rita spent seven consecutive winter holidays in Hawaii.

In Edmonton they were regulars at the Chateau Lacombe Sunday brunch and were part of the Friday night minyan at Swiss Chalet.

There biggest pleasure, however came from their eight treasures- their grandchildren. Surrounded by their Edmonton grandchildren they celebrated the holidays with traditional Jewish food that Rita loved to prepare. In Windsor they doted on Allan's children who though separated by thousands of miles for most of the year were always close to their hearts. They took pride in the accomplishments of their grandchildren that so far includes two law graduates and a C.A. with more successes to come. Even more important is that each of the grandchildren has positive, warm memories of Harry and Rita that will influence how they live their lives and raise their families in the future.

While long life can be a blessing, it also brings new challenges. One by one many of their friends, including my grandparents, passed away. The apartment building that was so full of life was becoming lonely and they moved to Canterbury Court. Unfortunately Harry's health began to decline and the family had to move him on his own to Lynwood where he could receive the extra care he needed. While she visited him regularly there, Rita was active in her new social life at Canterbury. She was an active participant at the monthly Shabbat services where she always came in her finest clothes to honor the holiday. She continued to take an active interest in my children's lives and shared the latest stories about her family.

As we know the past few years have not been easy for the Gold family. Harry's health continued to fail and he passed away in January 1998. The first of a series of strokes meant that Rita could no longer care for herself as she had for so many years and she also moved to Lynwood. In June 1998, Allan, Rita and Harry's oldest son passed away suddenly of a heart attack in Windsor. I don't know if her health allowed her to comprehend the tragedy of losing a child, but undoubtedly events like this weaken a person's will to carry on. The recent passing of her nephew Lorne Segal, also at an early age is one more note in a series of sad events that we pray comes to an end as we say goodbye to Rita today.

I found an old Hassidic tale that tells of Rabbi Simcha Bunim of Pzhysha who used to say, "When a man is asked for whom are you working and toiling?" he usually replies, "personally, I am content with little, but I must consider the welfare of the children. It is for them that I work so hard." When the child grows up, he also begins to toil for the same purpose, namely, the children, "I would like to see," the rabbi then said, "the ideal child for whom all of these generations are working and slaving."

Over the past few years we have seen the devotion that Harry and Rita's children and grandchildren have returned to them. The foundation of family combined with dedication to work and Jewish tradition has been successfully instilled in their survivors. The words of the Shema that Moshe gave to the Jewish people have been transmitted through the generations. Rita now joins Harry in *Olam Haba* (the world to come), having completed a life that is a positive and inspirational example to all of us.

Tehi nishmata tzroora beetzror hachaim

May her soul be bound up in the bond of life