

Harry Kline

Tzvi ben Moshe v'Chava

Died November 20, 2003

25 Cheshvan 5764

Last May I got a phone call from Harry. He was at the Cross – his prospects didn't look good - and he wanted to talk about a few things and start making arrangements for the inevitable. Shelley was in from Toronto and together we talked with Harry about his life, his accomplishments, his disappointments and some of the things he wanted said when this day would arrive. He also started the process of arranging for his own burial plot, knowing how hard that would be for Lu and the girls.

It's ironic that the Torah portion that we will read tomorrow in synagogue is "Chaye Sarah", referring to our first matriarch, the wife of Abraham. While the name of the portion translates as the "Life of Sarah" it actually begins with her death at the age of 127 as we find Abraham setting out to Hebron to purchase a burial place for her.

In my experience I see Abraham's task similar to the custom in many Jewish communities today where we find ourselves in the midst of our grief, having to make decisions that should be made with a stress free frame of mind. We tend to avoid the subject of our death and that of our loved ones, hoping against hope that we will live to an old age, free of pain and disease.

Harry knew, even before pretty much everyone in this room, that he would not have this luxury. Being the kind of person he was, he started to put his affairs in order, not for his own benefit, but rather to spare others from the responsibility. From talking with his family and friends I know that this is typical of Harry. He put the needs of others above his own and that's why he was a friend to so many and will be sorely missed.

As we talked about his life and his accomplishments I sensed that he had some disappointments that certain goals weren't met or that he didn't do as much as he would have liked to for Lucille, Jodi and Shelley, but the more we talked the more I saw how wrong he was and I hope he did too.

I knew from the care and attention that he showed his mother Ida, especially in her last years, what a devoted son he was. Harry and Terry's father, Dr. Morris Kline, had his own health problems, passing away when the boys

were quite young and Ida worked very hard to look after them. Harry graduated from high school and spent a year in university but as he told me, the opportunity to take 3 cents a point from his friends at hearts games was more enjoyable than the prospect of studying and he soon left school to enter the work force.

He took the stubbornness he inherited from his father and his mother's sense of humour and set out to make a name for himself. One of his first jobs was as a stock boy at the Bay where he met his good friend Art Mihalchen and spent a lot of time flirting with the girls that worked there. His career at the Bay didn't last too long especially after Mrs. Frankfurter caught him sleeping in the pillows in the stock room.

He tried various jobs but after taking an aptitude test he discovered that the best career for him would be in the insurance industry. At the age of 26 he began working for Bernie Wise and since then thousands of customers have benefited from his expertise.

Working downtown he always had his eye on the pretty sales clerks from the stores and one day in a coffee shop he spotted Lu who was working for People's Credit Jewellers. He double dated with his friend Ken Knowles and soon the relationship with Lu grew. They were married for 42 years becoming as Shelley told me, the best dad there could be. With his young family there were lots of trips to the Okanagan where apparently Harry proved to be the worst camper ever. He much preferred the more civilized trips to Calgary to see Shelley perform at Mount Royal College or to visit Jodi after she moved to London. He has passed on to them his own unique brand of humour, although they may not be able to match his Donald Duck imitation, and the stories he would regale them with about his life.

With the girls on their own he and Lu could travel to his preferred hot spot, Maui, and his favourite place of all Las Vegas, where he graduated from hearts to blackjack. In fact it was just last month that Harry still found the strength to travel to Las Vegas with Lu where they enjoyed the excitement of the city that Harry loved so much.

Harry also had special friends that he played cards and baseball with. He fondly remembered the fishing trips to BC where they caught salmon in the inlets near Terrace. These were great times that he treasured and it brought tears to his eyes when he remembered the good times he had had.

Harry was modest about his own accomplishments. He became active with the Elks and was one of the main organizers of a very successful national convention held in Edmonton. Others recognized his achievements and for his efforts he was awarded a City of Edmonton Ambassador Award from the mayor. He worked on bingos and casinos for the Elks for over 25 years raising money that was used for their charitable activities for special needs children.

He loved to curl and was a member of the Menorah Curling Club, staying on after it was sold and became the Avonair, winning many championships. Apparently he was a pretty good pool player too, telling me that he loved to play with Mel Wyne and Ron Wolch even though he was a lot better than they were.

Harry was a respected member of Beth Shalom Synagogue where in his earlier years he sang in our choir. He became a regular member of our morning minyan every Friday up until the time his illness prevented him from attending.

Harry fought hard against the disease that took him from us yesterday. With the help of Terry and Carol and others who cared for him he sought out treatments that gave him the extra time to say the words to those he loved that would have gone unsaid had he given up earlier.

There is the familiar story of an elderly man who complained to his doctor about his aches and pains. After a careful examination, the doctor said to him, "My friend, I am sorry but there is nothing I can prescribe for you that will make you younger." To which the man replied, "Who wants you to make me younger! All I want you to do for me is to make it possible for me to become older!"

Harry was not given the blessing of old age. We recall the words of Solomon who said;

A good person, though taken from us too soon, will rest in peace,
For honor in old age does not come from length of life.
Honor in old age does not come from length of years.
Understanding is the gray hair of humanity;
A blameless life is ripeness of age.
Perfection in limited years is like living for many years.

So a good person taken from us too soon will rest in peace.
Let us, then, with peace of mind, let that good soul rest.

Our learned rabbis pondered the question of why the portion we read tomorrow has the title "The life of Sarah" even though it deals with her death. They taught that "the righteous are called living even after death, while the wicked are called dead even in life." And so Sarah, the righteous mother of Israel, still lives because her example continues to inspire acts of goodness among her descendants.

So too will we continue to be inspired by Harry Kline, a man who didn't seek greatness, but greatness found him through his loving family, devoted friends and a community that will miss him for many generations to come.

Tehi nishmato tzroora beetzror hachaim

May his soul be bound up in the bond of life