

## Helen Shafer by Joe Shafer

My mother was born in Poland in 1920 to a very orthodox family. Her father owned a textile store where she worked. I believe that is where she began to develop her sharp business acumen. She often told me how she bought textiles at very good prices and then sold them in her father's store. She often told me how proud her father was of her and the special relationship she had with him.

My mother was in her early twenties when the Nazis came. One day, she came home and no one was there. Of a family of many brothers and sisters, only she and one brother survived the war.

My mother was put into a labour camp where she was forced to manufacture artillery shells. She used to tell us that whenever the guards were not observing her, she would sabotage the manufacture of these weapons. She was very brave in doing this because if she was caught, she would have been immediately shot.

My mother met my father after the war and they emigrated to Canada. I was born in Germany and my sister Esi was born here in Edmonton. Family meant everything to my mother and she saw, together with my father, that my sister and I were educated and she was very proud of that. She was adamant that we were given every opportunity of which she was deprived because of the war.

When my mother came to Canada she couldn't speak English and my parents had no money. They sustained themselves through hard work. I remember my mother would buy chickens and have Rabbi Postone slaughter them. My mother would pluck them, clean them and then sell them. She bought her first property with that money.

My mother had nerves of steel in business. Once she made up her mind to embark on a venture, she made it succeed, whatever the odds. As I grew up, I marvelled at what she did. I once asked her, "Mom, how do you buy real estate without money – it's so expensive." She chuckled and immediately replied, "anyone can buy real estate with money; the trick is to buy it without money."

I remember when my mother would sit at the dining room table doing the bookkeeping for her ventures. She would have a column of 10-15 rows of figures that she would add in a matter of seconds. That image is burned in my memory.

It is very rare that one encounters a person who really knows. My mother was one of those people. I recall on many an occasion where I needed advice I would speak to her and she had the right answer. After I married my dear Rell, I would ask her for answers to difficult questions, and where the matter was imponderable Rell would say – call your Mom. I did and the advice was always sterling.

The question is often asked – what is a Jew? The simple answer is someone who follows the tenets of the Jewish religion and culture. My mother did that – she was very frum. She kept a kosher home, and an orthodox home. I remember the week before Pesach – she would clean the house from top to bottom and kasher all the utensils and dishes. She went to shul regularly – and enjoyed it.

But beyond that, being a Jew is also being a mensch. And my mother was a first class mensch. I recall she came to see me about a tenant who was not paying rent – and the matter was extremely complex. After doing some research, I met with my mother and told her that she could go to court to cancel the lease, which would have resulted in a substantial financial gain

for her. She immediately replied that she wouldn't do that because the tenant was a husband and a father, he had a family to support and she wasn't going to throw him out on the street. She instructed me to broker a deal, to use her words, that "was good for me and good for him." I did that and never once did she regret her decision.

My mother was not only proud of her children, but also of her three grandchildren, Steven, Mark and Amy. She always spoke about them with great love and joy.

Now Mom is gone. We sorely miss her; but we know her soul is in G-d's hands and because of the wonderfully beautiful person she was, He will take special care of her.