

EULOGY FOR MOLLY SHAW

AUGUST 20, 1997

Sitting with some of the family last night reflecting on Molly's life, someone made the comment, how do you sum up 95 years of life in the few minutes that we usually take for a eulogy.

One after another the children and grandchildren spontaneously came up with another story, an anecdote, a little vignette in the life of their beloved mother and grandmother.

But each story had a common thread. The devotion that Molly had for others. The desire to put her own material or comfort needs aside so that those who depended on her would have a better life.

Molly was born in Winnipeg in 1902. It was Purim so the name Esther Malka was chosen. The Purim holiday date also became significant years later when she finally had to register her birth date which was not done originally as she was born at home. In Winnipeg she met her husband of 63 years, Joe, who had migrated to Canada from Russia in 1911.

After their marriage they moved to the small town of Bellis in northern Alberta where Joe and Molly operated a general store. They found themselves in a town where they were not just the only Jews but also among the few people who spoke English. They realized that success would only come with hard work, and they persevered while at the same time maintaining their connection with Yiddishkeit through gatherings with the other Jewish merchants in nearby towns and ensuring that there was always kosher food in the house.

Thelma and Roy were born in Bellis but despite Joe and Molly's best efforts to give them a good Jewish upbringing, they realized that it was necessary to move to Edmonton where there was a community with a synagogue, Hebrew teachers and the opportunity to meet new friends.

So in 1945 they bought a store on the south side, named it Shaw's Black & White and moved upstairs, their home until they retired 26 years later.

It must have been hectic for them as they were not only establishing their business but they engaged a private Hebrew teacher to prepare Roy for his Bar Mitzvah which took place shortly thereafter at the old synagogue on 95th Street.

Molly and Joe worked hard. The hours were long, they rarely took days off, but they were dedicated to their family who grew up in a home where traditions were important. In a time when Hebrew education for girls was not always a priority they sent Rosalie to Talmud Torah and they continued to maintain a kosher home where the Shabbat and holidays were celebrated. Finally the years of hard work and dedication were beginning to pay off. Their dreams of a better life for their children were fulfilled as they saw all three graduate from University, Thelma with a degree in Education and Roy and Rosalie, degrees in Pharmacy.

While Joe remained in the store Molly finally began to travel. In 1967 she took her first trip to Montreal to visit Expo 67. A few years later it was to New York where the highlight of the trip was a New York Yankees baseball game.

And then in 1971, she journeyed to Israel on a Pioneer Women tour. Mindful of her responsibilities as one of the few Edmonton women on the national tour, she took copious notes of every event on the trip which Rosalie found when they were cleaning up the home above the store in preparation for the move to the apartment downtown.

It would have been natural after their retirement to perhaps move to the coast or take long winter vacations but instead Joe and Molly began a second life in Edmonton which they shared together for 21 years until Joe's passing in 1992. With their days and weekends now free Joe and Molly were able to increase their participation at Beth Shalom. While Joe became a regular on Shabbat and morning minyan, Molly was active in the sisterhood. She helped the Pioneer Women with bake sales and catering for community celebrations. Molly loved to play cards and maintained close relationships within her card group. She was a regular visitor to the Jewish Senior's Drop-In Centre and participated in many of their activities.

Another reason to stay in Edmonton was of course the grandchildren. She loved to baby-sit them at every opportunity and have them visit her in what Stewart described as the 'hottest' apartment in Edmonton, meaning the temperature of course. When they were old enough Molly would challenge them to games of Chinese Checkers and no matter how young they were Molly always played to win.

Even in her eighties Molly baby-sat her youngest grandchild, Hart, when Rosalie and Gary would go out. Rosalie had full confidence in her mothers abilities and was never worried.

The same could not be said for Molly's driving abilities. While she sometimes drove earlier in life in the small towns she did not officially get her driver's license until she was 65. This was a time of great concern for her children who finally got her to stop driving a few years later. One time a friend saw her driving the wrong way up a one way street and called Gary. When he told her he knew, she couldn't believe that someone thought that this was a serious enough infraction to report. When Roy and Jackie lived in Edmonton, Molly would often drive to their west end home to visit but she didn't remember the house or the address just an orange cloth that was attached to a TV antenna in the living room window. Molly made a surprise visit once while Jackie was doing some cleaning and the usual marker was gone. Apparently Molly circled the block quite a few times before she finally found the house and of course Jackie never made that mistake again.

Molly continued to cook for her family for Friday night and holiday dinners. She took pride in her traditional recipes and passed them on to her children. Just a while ago in the hospital when Rosalie told her that she was preparing a roast for Gary and Hart, Molly insisted on reminding her of the necessary ingredients to make sure it was just right.

As a contemporary of my grandparents in a way I knew Molly all my life but it was really in the past 5 years that I saw her on a regular basis after she moved to Canterbury Court.

Once a month there was a Shabbat service for the Jewish residents and Molly, whose room was strategically located next to the room where the service was held never missed a Shabbat.

I remember that she insisted on participating fully making sure that she kept up with the service and that she was always on the right page of the siddur. The service wouldn't begin until she was there even the time when I found her snoozing in her suite all dressed for Shabbat.

The last few years there was an extra Shabbat treat when Hart would help lead the services. Molly so wanted to be here next year when Hart celebrates his Bar Mitzvah, but we know that she'll be there in spirit and in our thoughts. Our services were diminished by her absence over the last few months.

There are so many remembrances of the full life that Molly lived. Her passion for the Find-a Word puzzle in the Saturday comics, G-d forbid someone should do it before her. The organization of her weekly TV watching by marking the TV Guide in advance so she wouldn't miss her favourite shows, and her keen interest in watching sports.

These are all memories that we will share as we join with the family during shiva and in the weeks ahead.

In synagogue now we are reading from the book of Devarim, Deuteronomy, the last of the five books of Moses. Most of the portions are reminders of God's commandments to the people of Israel and his promise that by keeping his Torah we will be granted a better life.

Moses speaks to the people before they enter the Promised Land even though he already knows that he will not have this opportunity. Although Molly too wanted to continue to live to share in the lives of her children, her five grandchildren, and her two great grandchildren, one of whom she hadn't met yet, like Moses she too knew that her time on earth was drawing to a close. Lucid until the end she told Rosalie that she had been dreaming of Joe, and seeing his face clearly. We pray that their souls are together now, once again sharing their love and the love they gave their family.

Tehi nishmatah tzrurah beetzror hachayim

May her soul be bound up in the bonds of eternal life. Amen