

EULOGY FOR ETHEL SMORDIN

Died December 26, 1989

One of the great sages of Israel said in the "Ethics of the Fathers," "throughout my life, I was raised among scholars, and I discovered that there is nothing more becoming a person than silence."

These are fitting words to remember Ethel Smordin by. First, because she lived by this maxim, she is remembered by those who loved her as a quiet, unassuming woman.

Second, because like Rabbi Shimon, she had a lifelong respect and admiration for scholars and learning, and education. An admiration she passed down to her children and grandchildren.

And third, because like Rabbi Shimon, Ethel too had a saying regarding the virtue of silence, only her saying extolling silence was far less wordy than that of the great Rabbi quoted, she would say, "I don't believe in foolish talk."

Ethel is remembered as a woman of quiet dignity and determination. She had an inner strength that she was able to pass on to her children and grandchildren. She was a sincere woman, a caring woman who rarely raised her voice, or judged people harshly. She was a gentle soul.

She died having been blessed with the things we all yearn for. Until her last years, when she suffered from a protracted illness, she had her health, she was blessed with a lifelong love for her husband Louie; she had four lovely children, twelve grandchildren and seven great grandchildren. She had length of days - she was approaching her 89th year, and she had the love and admiration of her family.

Not everything in her life came easy. She was a woman who did everything, gave everything, so that her family could grow and prosper. It was for her family that she and Louie moved into a small town in northern Saskatchewan where they were the only Jewish family. There she worked with Louie, side by side, in their general store, selling groceries, clothing, flowers and furs from trappers. Often her day would start at 7:00 a.m. and end at 10:00 p.m.

She was a hard worker who sacrificed her own material needs for her children, a woman who placed the value of family above all else. Louie and her children were her life.

Ethel and Louie were a team; at home and the store. Together they worked, raised a family and together they grew old. Her love for her husband was consuming, when he passed on, a large part of her died with him. Doris remembers that only a few months after his death she asked her, "When did dad die?" She went on to say, "that's when I died too." Life without her lifelong partner had lost much of its meaning and now their souls are united with the One.

So many of us fail to see the simple virtues in life. We see and introvert and we assume weakness. We assess silence and we see simplicity. Ethel Smordin lived a life of quiet determination. She was determined to see her children become educated and succeed.

Stan remembers a time when his love for books was suppressed by his love for hockey. He remembers being told that perhaps the school he was attending wasn't meeting his needs. Stan remembers Louie and Ethel driving down to the university and seeking an appointment with the Dean. They convince both Stan and the Dean that day and Stan turned his academic career around, to the point where, today, he has achieved success in his profession.

Phyllis remembers that as a young girl she would, like all of us did, occasionally play sick so she could miss school. Mom would seem compassionate and understanding. "Get up and eat breakfast," she would say, "afterwards you can go back to bed." After eating hearty breakfast she would then say, "If you can eat a breakfast like that, you are well enough to go to school."

She had a humble admiration for people who achieved in the field of education. "You can never be too smart" she would say, and if you had a degree she assumed you knew everything. If you didn't succeed in your education, you were a dreif man - or good-for-nothing. None of her children fit that description.

Harold feels that the trait was passed on to her children and grandchildren and all who graduated in their chosen field, all of them a great source of pride to her.

Shelby believes that Ethel took great comfort in the fact that none of her children suffered from want. They incorporated her ethic of education and hard work, and determination and were all successful.

Harold says, "I have three children. They all have a drive to succeed. They are all determined. I attribute this to their grandparents."

She was not a mover or shaker in the Community, but she was supportive of Louie who was. Louie had been head of the Chamber of Commerce and supported various charities. Ethel was always quick to make a donation to give to Jewish and non-Jewish charities.

That trait, too, was passed on to their children. An example being Shelby who is so active both in his synagogue and in the Chevra Kadisha, the Jewish Burial Society where he is a timeless worker.

Although far removed from any substantial Jewish Community, Louie and Ethel did what they could to maintain some Jewish tradition in the small town in which they lived. For many years they kept Kosher despite the difficulties in shipping, the expense and the reality of meat that was often spoiled.

Throughout her life, she lit Shabbat candles every Friday, and during the Holy Days they travelled some distance so they could attend Synagogue. She was not particularly a religious woman, but she passed on to her children a love of who they are, a strong sense of identity and a love for Israel. To her credit, despite the isolation her children must have felt growing up so far removed from any Jewish Center, all of her children married within the faith, all of them proud of their people and heritage.

There is a Rabbinic tradition that on certain joyous days on the Jewish calendar, such a Hannukah, we forego a Eulogy when burying the dead so that the Holy Day will not be marred by excessive grief.

But this is not a time to remember Ethel's silence with silence of our own. This is a time to remember and to reflect, a time to grieve.

Today we gather to remember Ethel Smordin by telling stories and by remembering her values.

Speaking of silence on this occasion would indeed be "foolish talk".

JACOB ROSNER

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