

## Eulogy for Jacob (Jack) Trute

Yaacov ben Baruch - Passed away July 10, 1998

There is a portion of the Torah, in the book of Genesis that tells of our patriarch Jacob, when he was fleeing from his brother Esau, who was plotting to murder him in revenge for Jacob having deceptively procured from Isaac, the blessing intended for Esau. That night while sleeping, Jacob is attacked by an angel in the form of a man. Jacob wrestles with the angel, and although he is wounded in the thigh, Jacob ultimately succeeds in pinning the angel, refusing to free him until he gives him a blessing. The angel awards Jacob with the additional name of Israel meaning - "You have wrestled with God and with men and prevailed."

I remind you of this story as we gather to remember the life of Jacob Trute, not only because he shared the same name as our revered patriarch, but also because in his lifetime he too had times of adversity, and like the patriarch Jacob he too refused to submit easily.

His life began 88 years ago in the poverty and upheaval following the 1917 revolution in Russia. He was born in Yepipitrosk on the Dnieper River. His grandfather is believed to have been a Chassidic leader, the Tolner Rebbe. Early in life Jacob showed concern for the welfare of his fellow man and told his children he took pride in being arrested while marching in a demonstration in support of the Bolsheviks. But with the poor living conditions in the area, Jacob's father decided to move to America and with most of his 10 children they sailed for Canada. Jacob nearly didn't make it as somehow he managed to fall overboard during the voyage but as he had always been an excellent athlete and swimmer he managed to get back on board.

The family first moved to Toronto where Jacob took up the hobby of driving to Windsor to try and visit relatives in Detroit. His adventures trying to get across by rowboat, by trying to fool customs officers, or the car accident that cost him his sense of smell, would probably fill a complete chapter in a book on his life, but he did show determination.

Later the family moved to Winnipeg where his father was a blacksmith. Here he met the grand passion of his life, Fanny. In what sounds like a Hollywood script, Jack and Fanny met at a Halloween party with Fanny dressed as Cinderella and Jack as Prince Charming. He pursued her throughout the night until she promised to see him again. Determined to marry her he courted her for years over the objections of her family who felt he was too poor. But she fell in love with him, recognizing his devotion to her, and seeing in his artistic ability and the beautiful poetry that he wrote, that he was a special person.

After he moved to Toronto where he found work in a candy factory, he convinced Fanny to join him and they were married on December 25, 1929, just as the great depression began. They struggled, but they did whatever was necessary to eke out a living and soon Jack found that his creative abilities lent themselves to working with fur.

They moved again, this time to Saskatoon, where Jack found work with a fur manufacturer. Eager to succeed and to eventually work for himself he took on extra work at home, designing and creating coats for special orders. Bea remembers those days in Saskatoon and recalls that her father would come home exhausted from his day at the factory, have a quick nap and then go to his workshop to prepare the raw fur hides and then sew them into the custom designs.

He was supported in every way by Fanny who believed that they should have their own business rather than relying on others and finally in 1944 he opened his first shop in Saskatoon. But their first sign of success was overshadowed by sorrow. Their son Ron, died tragically at the age of 12 from rheumatic fever. This devastated Jack and Fanny and in truth they suffered this loss their entire life. Fanny who had a beautiful voice, rarely sang again, and Jack questioned the existence of a God who would Rob them of their only son.

While their grief endured internally they poured themselves back into their work and soon moved to Edmonton where there were more business opportunities as well as a larger Jewish community for themselves and their daughters Bea and Beverly. Trute Furs was opened on Jasper Avenue and later they bought Edmonton Furriers on the other side of the street. Jack was a hands-on operator and he sold the store in Saskatoon so that he could devote full time to the Edmonton stores. Fanny was with him constantly making sure that he didn't lower his prices too much as he tended to do when he was negotiating a sale. He would do whatever was necessary to succeed, even opening the store at 6:00 am in the winter so customers could shop before they went to work.

They worked hard, they endured the problems that all business owners had, but they had a passion for work matched only by the passion they had for each other and they persevered. He was honest and ethical, with a flawless reputation in his trade.

Bea remembers her father leaning on a parking meter on Jasper Avenue, lamenting the lack of customers, but that was probably on a hot July day, because the stores were able to provide enough to allow the family to enjoy a good life.

Jack and Fanny knew that work had to be balanced with time off for family. In the early days in Saskatoon they would spend two weeks together in Watrous and after moving to Alberta they would relax in the hot springs in Banff and Radium.

Jack was never afraid of showing his love for his wife and daughters. He was openly affectionate, proud of his beautiful daughters. They were very popular with a large circle of friends, that joined them for poker games and excursions to the race track. They went to football games, theatre and shows at the Jubilee, always together.

Fanny kept an immaculate home and Bev and Bea remember spending time with their parents in the house listening to opera and dramas on the radio. On Saturday nights the radio was tuned to the hockey games and later it was Hockey Night in Canada on TV.

In the winters Jack and Fanny would travel to Florida or Palm Springs where their wonderful personalities endeared them to a new group of close friends. Bev recalls that even though they wintered in resort areas they were always frugal with their accommodation, not staying in the luxury hotels, as they remembered how hard they had to work to realize their success and they didn't want to waste their money.

However they were generous, not only with their children, but with nephews, nieces and cousins who needed help with their education and careers. They were generous with our community institutions, ensuring that those of us who live here can continue to benefit from Jewish education and spirituality. He wouldn't refuse any organization that asked him for help or advice. He was proud to have been asked by the Alberta Motor Association to serve on their safety advisory board.

After years of hard work, Jack was able to sell his stores before he reached the age of 60. For the first time in his life he trusted himself to feel financially comfortable. He dabbled in real estate, put up a small building on 124th Street, but missed the contact with people that he enjoyed in his stores. Later he went to work for Henry Singer, enjoying it even though the fact that he was color blind didn't help when he was coordinating wardrobes for customers. Later he took a job for a while at the new West Edmonton Mall in an information booth.

He adored his 4 grandchildren and loved to baby sit for them when he could. His five great grandchildren gave him great naches in his later years.

Although he never resolved his quarrels with God over the loss of his son, the choice of one of his grandchildren, Lorne, to become a rabbi, was a source of tremendous pride.

For his daughters and family the memories they will share of both Jack and Fanny will centre around the 67 years of a love that was passionate to the end. They balanced each other perfectly. Fanny used to say "If he doesn't drive me crazy today, he'll drive me crazy tomorrow." But she said it with love and the knowledge that she wouldn't want anything to change.

The last few years together were hard. Illness forced them to sell their home and then be separated as he recovered in hospital from a fall and she moved to Canterbury Court. Being apart broke her heart and she died before they could live together again. For the past 15 months Jack has endured a terrible loneliness. The same determination that helped him through his life kept his body alive, but his soul yearned to escape to be together with Fanny.

While every person is holy to God and every child of Israel who is lost diminishes his glory, we still can take comfort in the knowledge that Jack and Fanny are together now as they were in life. Soon their graves will be marked with a memorial to their lives and their love for each other.

Jacob's battle with life is over. As with all of us mortals we succumb in the end, but he fought with determination, dedication and perseverance. Like the patriarch whose name he carried he made a difference to our people. In his memory we dedicate our lives to family and community so that the tradition of our people, a people who continually wrestle with God to overcome adversity, can continue.