

Fred Levine died too soon at the age of 58. Very shortly after the removal of a melanoma, he was diagnosed with pancreatic cancer. He lived bravely until March of 2014, coming to TBZ regularly and only missing services when it was truly not possible for him to be here.

Many of us knew and were connected to Fred. For those who may not have known him or joined TBZ more recently, I will share a few of my memories and experiences.

At TBZ, we often describe each other by where we sit. Fred sat in the area over there, usually behind, in front of or next to, Marjie, Joita and me. He arrived here one Shabbat morning, and was here at TBZ in his spot almost every Shabbat after that. During the time leading up to her bat mitzvah, his youngest daughter Maya would often be next to him.

You may remember how handsome he was. It makes me laugh to think that when I first met him I thought to myself, single, handsome, mensch, who do I know that I could introduce him too?

Fred had a kind smile, a gracious, solid, gentle presence. On the surface there was slight hint of seriousness that underneath I think was a deep mindfulness and reserve.

I have wondered what he would say about our current political situation. I am sure he would have joined us for the Women's March and I can completely picture him wearing a pink pussy hat with a big grin.

He would frequently be given the honor of lifting the torah, which I sensed was deeply meaningful for him, given his attachment to Judaism, learning and torah. Marjie mentioned to me the other day that she often thinks of Fred as the torah is being lifted and tied.

Illness has a way of drawing people closer. Many of us began spending time with Fred driving him to and from the hospital, to and from TBZ for services, to and from his AA meetings, and dropping off groceries for him.

I am assuming I am not the only one in this room, who, when picking up the Talente Salted Caramel Gelato for Fred, thought, well that looks good, one for Fred and one for me. It's just one of the many small collective intimacies that makes me smile when I think of it.

During his illness he kept his calm and steady focus on what was most important to him: he continued to attend his AA meetings where he was a consistent and wise presence. He came to TBZ, and he spent time with his three daughters. Maya, Yael and Orli. Yael left her job, and moved in with Fred and was his fierce and primary caretaker during his illness.

And there was also Zoey Sunshine, the sweet, tiny little dog who had belonged to Fred's mother, who had become Fred's beloved companion.

Fred would talk about each of his daughters and what I found compelling, was his ability to truly and clearly see each of them, as they were, with understanding, adoration, compassion and love.

And his former wife Lisa. Many of us had the opportunity to witness the profound affection and tenderness between them. They had navigated the road from being married, then divorced, to becoming very dear friends.

Judaism and TBZ was important to Fred. And TBZ provided a place for his daughters and Lisa be together with him. Various daughters would come to services with him on Shabbat and all of them would be here together during the holidays.

During Fred's last Simchat Torah, many of us stood around him and held the tallit over him as he received the aliyah and we listed to Ebn read the verses of Moshe dying and not seeing the promised land and then without pause, the verses of the creation of the world. He had a way of just taking in that bittersweet moment with such presence.

There had been a huge snowstorm the evening before and day of Fred's funeral. You like me may have thought this would impact the number of people who were able to attend. I recall walking in these doors and seeing this sanctuary completely filled. And not as it is set up now with chairs along the side, filled with

all the chairs out. Filled with friends, family, his TBZ community and the huge number from his AA community.

There is a poem by an unknown author, about the Measure of a Man. One of the verses reads

Not "What did the piece in the newspaper say?"
But "How many were sorry when he passed away?"

How appropriate for Fred.

So I have wondered these past couple of weeks. What would Fred think about a classroom being named for him?

I imagine he may be a bit surprised, he would be humble, and also deeply honored. I think he would like that he was being remembered in a community that he felt so connected to and was important to him and his family.

He would be pleased with the idea that these new spaces have been created that would allow for continued learning for people of all ages. To learn and become closer to the Judaism that was so important in his own life.

As we enjoy our own experiences taking place in the classroom being named for Fred, let us also hold the memory of the man he was in our hearts.