

For Some People "Judgment" has Come too Soon

The summer has too rapidly come to an end. In shul, the plaintive sound of the shofar is heard every morning, marking the advent of the month of Elul. The Days of Judgment are surely upon us. But for some of our Beginner friends, judgement has already been rendered.

It was a weekend in July that I'll never forget. The first call came on Friday morning at 2:10 AM. I was with my family in Tannersville, about 2¼ hours north of the city. I had spent 4 hours that afternoon and evening at Sloan-Kettering Hospital saying the final prayers with my beloved friend, Les Nelkin. The doctors didn't know whether he would hold out for one hour or five days. So I went up to Tannersville.

Les had been diagnosed 28 months earlier with Wilms tumor, a rare pediatric cancer that usually doesn't strike adults. Les was 37 when he died. He learned of his grave illness only a few weeks after he and his family had been honored at the National Jewish Outreach Program dinner at the Waldorf. He fought a valiant battle, but finally succumbed.

Les was a superstar. The first student of Columbia Engineering School ever to be accepted to the prestigious 6 year joint undergraduate-graduate program with Columbia Law School, Les started his career as a lawyer at Skadden Arps before moving to securities. He was a top-rated analyst at Furman Selz and later a highly regarded investor.

Les was tall (6'4"), dark, handsome and athletic. As they say in Yiddish, *aleh maylos*—he had all the wonderful attributes. But Les also had a great yearning for Yiddishkeit, and was devoted to learning and personal growth. We had a standard joke at the Beginners Service. If Les would arrive late to the service, I would threaten that the stock market would go down. Once, when Les gave a D'var Torah at the Beginners Service he concluded by recommending Salomon Brothers stock. Those who listened to him made a small fortune (alas I didn't).

Les was generous to a fault. He would never pass up an opportunity to give charity, and even as he took his final journey to the hospital in the Hatzolah ambulance he made his family promise to "take care" of Hatzolah for their kindness, just as he made certain himself to generously "take care" of all the organizations that had helped him during his illness.

Some of the doctors said that the Wilms tumor was probably present in Les's body even as a child, but had been

dormant. We had a gift of Les Nelkin for 37 years. We're so sad that he's gone; but we are certainly extremely fortunate to have known him.

Getting to the city from Pinelawn, Long Island, where Les's funeral was held, was a nightmare. All roads leading in were closed or blocked. After two hours of driving, I finally crossed the Whitestone Bridge and found everything there backed up as well. In desperation, I took the local streets of the Bronx, past the neighborhood and house where I was born and raised, in the Tremont and Southern Boulevard section. It took an hour to get through the Bronx, but it was better than sitting on the highway. Thank G-d, I arrived in Tannersville about a ½ hour before Shabbat.

Saturday night, soon after Shabbat, the phone rang again. Elyse Spero had passed away. 45 years old, she was the wife of Ted, and mother of two young children, Sonny, age 11 and Hannah, age 9. An artist and a truly spiritual person, Elyse had been diagnosed with melanoma four years earlier and had been in remission for about two years. Elyse would come to the Beginners Service on the High Holidays, and occasionally on Shabbat with

her mother, Meme Weissberg. When her cancer reoccurred we had a long talk. From that time on, I tried to keep more closely in touch with her and spoke with her almost weekly. She was a very brave woman who faced this daunting disease with fortitude and faith. I learned a lot from Elyse about courage. She drove herself to always be there for her husband and children, until the final few weeks when her strength ebbed.

The philosophers ask, Who is closest to G-d? They respond, He or she who lives up to his/her potential. Our tradition teaches that the Al-mighty doesn't judge by the length of one's days, but by the quality of one's life. Les and Elyse brought much joy, happiness and meaningfulness to their families, friends and to the lives of all those who knew them. To know them was to love them. Their all too short lives were truly of the highest quality. For them, the "judgment" certainly came much too soon. Our hearts are broken.

As the Psalmist (90:12) says, "Teach us to number our days." May the Al-mighty wipe away the tears from their families and from all faces. May their memories be a blessing for all.

May you and all of Israel be inscribed in the Book of Health and Peace. Ephraim Z. Buchwald



The Nelkin Family



The Spero Family

Carl (Chaim) Henry: Forever Young

The Jewish world lost a remarkable, passionate and truly memorable member of its flock on the 5th of Elul, August 24, 2001. His name was Carl Henry, but he preferred to be called "Chaim." Chaim's Hebrew name was particularly appropriate because he lived a vibrant, exuberant and productive life for 88 years. What the Torah (Deut. 34:7) says of Moshe Rabbeinu, was true of Chaim Henry as well, "His eye did not dim, and his spirit did not wane." He was in fact as the poet/songwriter wrote, "Forever Young."

Carl was a true American success, a graduate of Harvard college, class of '34, when few Jews were accepted to that institution. Although he was thoroughly Jewish, he conducted himself in a very formal and proper, one might say patrician, manner. A gentleman's gentleman, with a subtle Boston Brahmin accent. Maybe that's what it took to survive as a Jew at Harvard in those days. At college, Carl became a close disciple of the famed philosopher Alfred North Whitehead. Few Harvard professors of that era were of the inclination or found the time to take a personal interest in their students. But Whitehead took a particularly keen interest in his promising student. When Carl was about to graduate he asked his mentor Whitehead for guidance, and even though Carl Henry was a gifted philosophy student, Whitehead advised him to go into the family business because he felt that Henry would be able to make far greater contributions to humanity if he had the wherewithal that a successful business career would provide.

Chaim was born in Cincinnati, where his family was deeply involved with Reform Judaism. His great-grandfather was a charter member of the Isaac M. Wise Reform Temple, the "mother" temple of Reform Judaism. And for most of his life, Carl followed his family's tradition of expressing his Jewishness as a Reform Jew. Until he was 79 years old, in fact. After college, he returned to Cincinnati and entered the family shoe business.

In 1941, in Miami Beach, two days before Pearl Harbor, Carl met his beloved future wife, Edith for whom his granddaughter, Barbara Edith, is named. Three weeks later they were married in Temple Emanuel in New York City. Together they built the business into one of the largest shoe manufacturing companies in America. In fact, Carl was made an honorary Colonel (like Colonel Sanders) by the State of Kentucky because of the economic contributions he made to the State. He was exceedingly proud of the fact that his wife, Edith, was at one time during the 1950's the (cont. on back)

(cont. from front)...highest paid woman executive in America. He retired in 1960 at age 47, moving permanently to New York with his wife (who died in Sept. 1984), and beloved daughter, Diana.

During WWII, Chaim enlisted in the army and served his country with distinction under General Patton in the 81st infantry division. Carl used to delight in telling the story of how he saved a Torah scroll from a burning synagogue in Hochfelden, Alsace. Unfortunately, the Torah scroll was subsequently lost in the Battle of the Bulge, when Carl had to abandon the jeep it was in. But, Carl always attributed the fact that he came through the war unscathed to the fact that he had saved the Torah from destruction.

Carl became prominently involved in Jewish life, and was a lifelong defender of Israel rising to the position of co-chairman of the National Committee of AIPAC. Always very charitable, he belonged to Temple Emanuel for close to forty years. He was particularly fond of the associate rabbi of New York's Temple Emanuel, Rabbi Dr. David Posner, with whom he had a close and meaningful friendship.

In 1991, being a perpetual seeker of truth, Carl enrolled in an Aish HaTorah Discovery seminar which changed his life. It was there that he met and befriended two young Orthodox activists, Steve Eisenberg and Steve Jacoby. At their urging, Carl soon started attending the Beginners Service at Lincoln Square Synagogue, and although he lived on Fifth Avenue and 88th Street, for years he walked across Central Park to attend the LSS Beginners Service at 69th Street and Amsterdam Avenue. He wrote a letter to his rabbi explaining his decision to resign from Temple Emanuel. Rabbi Posner responded with a beautiful letter blessing Carl and wishing him well on his journey. They remained close friends until the very end.

Once Chaim started studying Torah, there was no stopping him. He began attending a host of Torah lectures throughout the city. So devoted was he to the Torah classes, that he became known by some as "King of the Torah classes," and gave out cards to all those he met promoting attendance at Torah classes. Every Tuesday night he joined thousands of young people to listen to Rebbetzin Esther Jungreis weekly Torah class at KJ. On Wednesdays he attended a Talmud class with Rabbi Yisroel Jungreis at Bear Stearns, insisting, out of respect, on caring for the rabbi's coat and hat. He was a regular attendee at Rebbetzin Leah Kohn's classes at the Jewish Renaissance Center and Rabbi Ben Zion Krasnianski's classes on Chassidism at the Chabad Center of

the Upper East Side. He became a member of Congregation Kehillath Jeshurun and much admired Rabbis Lookstein, George Rohr, of the Beginners Service, and Rabbis Motechin and Cedar.

Carl's nighttime ritual always began with reading the Bible. He never slept very much because he was a voracious reader. He sent clippings to me and many of his friends from newspapers from all over the world. He particularly loved the passionate writings of the defenders of Israel in the *Jewish Press*. At age 84 he became a weekly columnist for the *Algemeiner Journal*. He was a courageous and outspoken advocate of the Israeli right, and took on all critics. One of the last articles he wrote was a review of David McCullough's book *John Adams*. He was particularly impressed by John Adams' admiration for the Jews. Carl went beyond McCullough's research to find obscure sources to account for John Adams' high esteem for the Jews and the



Chaim (Carl) Henry

influence of Judaism on this important early American figure.

Chaim became a staunch supporter of the National Jewish Outreach Program, attending all events and annual dinners. He once complained about typos that he found in some of NJOP's published materials. To address the issue he volunteered to proofread the NJOP material. And so for the last six years nothing went out of the NJOP office without Carl having proofread them. It was ironic that this 85-year old "geezer" found mistakes that the young proofreaders in the NJOP office could not find. He was truly "forever young."

Walking the streets with Carl was a memorable experience. He was alert to the history and architecture of New York which he readily shared with his walking companions. His stride was the firm stride of someone 20 to 30 years younger. While on a trip to Europe several years ago, Carl broke his hip and dislocated his shoulder. His hip was

operated on in Europe, and after a brief convalescence he returned to the United States to have his shoulder repaired. He was soon back at the Beginners Service. No one would have known that he had been injured. He walked as strongly, as ramrod straight, and as fast as we'd come to expect of Carl.

Carl was a great friend to many. He not only attracted numerous admirers, he worked hard at fostering those relationships. He was particularly adept at developing relationships with young people in their 20's and 30's, many of whom were present at his funeral. Carl was proud of his family and his origins. Several years ago, our family hosted a Shabbos lunch at our house which was attended some of the "older" members of the Beginners Services. The youngest was 80, the oldest 95. At that luncheon Carl met a landsman from Cincinnati, Esther Judith Manischewitz of the famed Manischewitz family. They discovered that they had grown up only six blocks from each other and were about the same age. But their paths never crossed because the Henry's belonged to the Reform Temple and the Manischewitz's were strictly Orthodox. Both these octogenarians possessed keen minds and amazingly accurate memories. Carl began to visit Judy Manischewitz on a regular basis, bringing her flowers and reviewing with her the memories of Cincinnati.

Carl was particularly proud of his daughter, Diana, who as a result of her father's influence also became involved in the study and practice of Yiddishkeit, and his granddaughter, Barbara Edith who receives religious training.

Chaim Henry's funeral was attended by many prominent rabbis and leaders, including Rabbi Joshua Lookstein, Rabbi Ben Zion Krasniansky of Chabhad, Rebbetzin Leah Kohn from the Jewish Renaissance Center, Rebbetzin Esther Jungreis and Rabbi Yisroel Jungreis of Hineini. Tzivia Jacobson was also there from the *Algemeiner Journal*, as were Helen Freedman and Charlie Bernhaut of Americans For a Safe Israel.

Several weeks ago, Chaim was diagnosed with liver cancer and entered the hospital for an operation. He recovered remarkably, but apparently caught pneumonia. He passed away quietly on Erev Shabbat without suffering. Since he began learning Torah, when Carl was asked how he was doing, he would always say in his very proper Brahmin accented enunciation, "I'm doing fine, *Baruch Hashem*." His life was remarkable. It was a life worthy of celebration, not mourning. And *Baruch Hashem*, we had the privilege of knowing him. *Baruch Hashem*.

Ephraim Z. Buchwald