

## A Tribute to Monica Spier, A"H

It is quite fitting that we close the Monica and Martin story on the week that we read Parshat Pekudia and on the day that we begin the celebration of the new month of Adar, ushering in the holiday of Purim. While the two events may not be connected, they each speak to an aspect of who they were and what they stood for, proud Jews who used the gifts given them to support many Jewish causes.

Monica and Martin were so much a team that it is almost impossible to talk about one without talking about the other. While Martin was the front man, we all know Monica was the "power behind the throne." I can still hear Martin's voice in response to being asked to do something for the Shul: "Let me talk to Monica about it."

In the chapter of משלי that is sung in many homes every Friday night, known as אשת חיל, Woman of Valor, there is a verse that reads: נודע בשערים בעלה בשבתו אם זקני ארץ. It may be loosely translated as: Her husband is known in the community as one of the Machers. The chapter is speaking about the woman who takes care of all of her family's needs, always provides wise counsel and makes it possible for her husband to be involved in all the communal activities for which he is known.

I have a very clear memory of the time that Martin and Monica donated an ambulance to Magen David Adom and the celebration was held in our Shul. The ambulance was parked outside and we all went out for the official dedication and pictures. While it clearly said "Presented by Martin and Monica Spier" on the driver's door, Monica resolutely refused to stand in the picture. She insisted, "This is for Martin." It should be noted this was not the only time they made such a generous a donation to Magen David Adom, to name just one of the organizations that they supported generously.

Monica and Martin had a strong desire to perpetuate their Jewish identity. In an era when it was not uncommon for Jewish children from strongly Jewish homes to go to public school, especially girls, their daughters Jennifer and Audrey ("The Girls") were sent to Yeshiva. In those days, doing so was an even bigger challenge than it is today, not because of the high tuition, but because of the limited income most families had.

Their love and concern for Israel was not limited to financial support of its institutions. I only recently learned about the summer that Monica and the girls spent in Israel with the intention of making Aliya. They waited for Martin, who just couldn't make the break because at that moment his business was taking off and it required his full attention. It was certainly Israel's loss but the Washington Heights Congregation's gain.

For both Monica and Martin family was everything. They were very proud of the accomplishments of "The Girls" and their families, especially the grandchildren. If you wanted to bring a smile to their faces just ask how the grandchildren were doing. We know that their love for their family was reciprocated by love and care that their family, especially Audrey and Jennifer, gave them in their hour of need.

It is no secret that Monica was not much of a Shul goer and medical issues made the walk to Shul a challenge. As a result, unfortunately, for a long time, I had little contact with her. All I knew was that she was a strongly opinionated individual. It wasn't until Martin, the rock, who was always concerned about Monica's health, began to face his own medical challenges that I learned about other facets of her personality. It was during the many hospital visits when Martin was ill and Monica was by his side that I became acquainted with a very caring and loving individual, who couldn't bear to see her beloved Martin suffer so. As time went on we developed a close friendship that I will deeply miss.

The friendship was expressed in many ways. Monica and Martin were fiercely loyal friends and as Rabbi of the Shul, I could always count on their support. They showed genuine interest and concern for us, our son Yossie and his children, and were also generous friends. Whenever Leah and I would make a trip to Israel to visit our son and his family, they had me come over to the apartment to receive something to take to him. This tradition did not end when we made Aliya. We never left their apartment without something to take back and it was always Monica reminding Martin not to forget to give it to us. Even after Martin's passing Monica continued the tradition.

We will dearly miss the visits that we looked forward to on our semi-annual trips to the States. The good conversation, the friendship and warm feelings of support will be missed but not forgotten.

And this is my message to the children, Audrey and Jennifer, and to grandchildren: Your parents / grandparents will be missed. Know that they greatly appreciated your love and the care you showed them. They always made it clear that they were never alone. The many visits and the time you spent with them were greatly appreciated. What is important now are the memories and the perpetuation of the things that were important to them, continuing the Jewish tradition through practice and support.

Rabbi Ellis Bloch