

Rabbi Michael S. Beals
Wilmington, DE
July 21, 2005

Jacob Balick
Yaakov ben Yitzhak v'Sara
April 8, 1920 - July 18, 2005

It is most appropriate that we say farewell to Jacob Balick when our fellow Jews all around the world are reading the story of Pinchas, found in the fourth book of the Torah, Numbers. Like Pinchas, grandson of Aaron the High Priest, Jacob Balick had a love of law and a love justice. Like Pinchas, Jacob was deeply concerned with the welfare of the Jewish people and did everything he could to ensure his people's survival. Jacob was a leader for our time.

Jacob, known to his friends and family as "Jake", was the second of five children born to Isidor and Sadie Balick, who originally both hailed from what is now Bylorussia. We are not sure why Isidor and Sadie chose Wilmington, Delaware as the city in America to create their family back in 1912, but we do know that their choice strengthened both the Jewish community in Wilmington in general and Congregation Beth Shalom in particular. Jake now joins his siblings Martin, Herb and Stanley in *ha olam ha ba*, but we are blessed to have Jake's younger sister, Doris, affectionately known as Dorie, with us today.

Isidor and Sadie ran a grocery store at 2908 West Street in Wilmington. As the store prospered, Isidor began to acquire property, becoming a landlord. Jake entered the Balick family on April 8, 1920. His childhood memories include escorting his father as he went to collect the rent from his father's tenants. His love for his father was so great, that in adulthood, he saw to it that one of the downstairs chapels at Congregation Beth Shalom would be named the Isidor Balick Chapel, sacred place where religious school children enjoyed Junior Congregation for many years. As a child growing up in Wilmington, Jake recalled being abused both physically and verbally because of his Jewish heritage. Ironically it would be that same Jewish heritage that would later save the lives of many non-Jewish Americans during Jake's service in World War Two.

In his youth, Jake had a great love of the outdoors, as expressed both in his love of Scouting, Jake achieved the title of Eagle Scout, as well as tennis. In later life, he would become an active member of the Wilmington Trail Club, and even pass on this love of the great outdoors to his son, Michael. Jake graduated P.S. Dupont High School in 1938 and went on to Drexel University to study Business Administration. It should be noted that Jake was the first in his family to achieve a university education, which I am sure was a great source of pride for his family. While at university he became President of Kappa Phi Delta fraternity and he maintained several of those fraternity friendships long after he graduated Drexel in 1942. Actually, throughout his long life, Jake was known to be a very good and loyal friend, and maintained his friendships for many years as some of you gathered here today can attest.

He was also the first of the Balick family to enter the law profession, beginning with his entrance to Temple Law School. Unfortunately his legal education came to an

abrupt halt due to World War II. Jake's life was radically effected by his wartime experiences, beginning with his entrance into the U.S. Army in 1943, serving in the field artillery with the 83rd Infantry Division. He was wounded by shrapnel not once, but twice, first in France while performing the dangerous work of identifying advanced enemy positions for his artillery unit, and again in Germany, right before the Battle of the Bulge. Watching comrades perish before his very eyes had a deep affect on Jake, as did his second injury, where the doctors predicted he would never walk again. He was determined to prove them wrong, and he did. Perhaps his most amusing story of this time in his life was the time when faced by a unit of German soldiers ready to surrender, Jake's commander called out: "does anyone speak German?" There was silence. Then Jake stepped up to the plate, shouting: "I can speak German! I can speak German!" Then with his very best Yiddish, Jake mediated the surrender of these German soldiers. So much for being abused because of his Jewish heritage as a child! Jake wrote down many of these memories in his War Memoirs and was interviewed for a public television documentary in his later life. He earned the Purple Heart with Oak Leaf Cluster for his valiant service in the defense of this country, and there is a Jewish War Veterans Honor Guard with us today, as fitting tribute to Jake's war time service. Jake's great appreciation for life and his desire to help others was surely shaped in his wartime experiences.

After the War, Jake resumed his legal studies and graduated Temple Law School in 1947 and was admitted to the Delaware Bar Association that same year, making him one of the longest practicing lawyers in Delaware, retiring in December 2004, after 57 years of service. What attracted Jake to the legal profession was his love of structure, fairness and equity. Like the good Jew that he was, he believed that laws were the foundation with which to live one's life. Among his peers, Jake was known as a man of impeccable morals and standards, and thus held in high regard. He did not like to play political games with the power and authority that came with his profession. Perhaps influenced by the anti-Jewish persecution he experienced in his youth as a minority, he used his legal education and position to further the cause of the Civil Rights Movement, taking on pro-bono work for African Americans. He served his community as attorney for the Sheriff of New Castle County, and chief council for the Office of Price Stalibizatin of Delaware, as well as running a successful private practice.

Based on his early Jewish upbringing, Jake was also a very charitable man with his time and resources, serving on the Boards of the Jewish Community Center and the Delaware Mental Health Assication, and was a board member and past president of the Montefiore Mutal Benefit Society and Jewish Family Service. He was generous to his own synagogue, Beth Shalom, and as a result his family has asked that donations be made in his name to the synagogue that educated all his children in the Jewish religion.

Lillian entered Jake's life back in 1958. They both benefitted from a *shodchin*, a matchmaker, in the pair of Bud and Harriet Soffa. Bud knew Jake through their days at Drexel and Harriet knew Lillian through their days at Temple University. Lillian used to accompany Harriet when she sang, and Bud brought Jake, along with some of their fraternity brothers, to listen to Harriet and Lillian. At the moment of their meeting, Lillian was accompanying Harriet to the beautiful song, "Autumn Leaves." Lillian must have been playing particularly well that evening. After the performance, Lillian and Jake went out to dinner. Seven days later they decided to get married. That must have been

some meal they had. In retrospect, Jake and Lillian came to refer to that initial courtship as "Holy Week." When I asked Lillian what her first impressions of Jake were, she said: "please, rabbi, the children are here." Then she told me that he was handsome and intelligent, to quote the comedian Adam Sandler, Jake was "a fine-lookin' Jew." When she looked into his ice-blue eyes, she felt that it was *bereshert*, just meant to be. Jake proposed marriage to Lillian by saying: "So, I guess that's it." And Lillian, to her credit, responded: "I guess it is." They were married in 1958 in a shul in Philadelphia, and the Beth Shalom's legendary rabbi, Jacob Kraft, came up to officiate. The couple honeymooned in romantic Paris. Lillian said that throughout their 47-year marriage, Jake treated her "elegantly." Among her happiest memories with him were their seven visits to Israel, and a rather eyebrow-raising visit to the Greek Island of Mycanos....details which I will not reveal at this time. I will only say that Lillian always kept Jake interested. I should also share with you Jake's advice on marriage, which he practiced. He said: "In marriage, you do everything and MORE for your spouse. Keep her happy. It's all about a cycle of giving. Marriage is not about taking."

Jake and Lillian were both widows when they met. Jake came into the marriage with three children, ages two, seven and eight. Lillian came into the marriage with two children of her own, ages three and five. Lillian said it was just like the movie: "Yours, Mine and Ours". The kids said it was just like the television show, "The Brady Bunch." And who knows....Brady kind of sounds like Balick...."the Balick Bunch", hmmm....., and Sherwood Schwartz, the show's creator, Jewish, so could be. The most important thing for the kids, is that they united as a family, with Jake and Lillian as their parents.

The first of Jake and Lillian's children was Stephanie, born in 1950.

The second of their children was Jennifer, born in 1951. She travelled all the way from her home in Israel to be here today. Her love for Judaism was certainly inspired by her father, Jake, her Zionism fueled by her mother Lillian. She was part of the first graduating class of Gratz Hebrew High School in Wilmington, worked for the Jewish Federation of Philadelphia, spent her junior year abroad in Israel, fell in love with the country and made aliyah, and even helped establish the settlement of Yamit in the Sinai. Jake absolutely adored her daughter, Maya, who is also here with us.

The third of their children was Michael, born in 1953. He affectionately referred to his father's "limited palate of jokes," enduring the same jokes for months at a time. He attributed his early interest in scouting directly to his dad. In high school he remembers helping his father conduct title searches, perhaps with the hope that this work would inspire Michael to follow in his footsteps and become a lawyer. Michael said that those title searches inspired him to become a botanist for the New York Botanical Gardens. Michael does feel that his dad's pro-bono work for minorities did help inspire his own work in trying to preserve cultural diversity, in "doing the world's work," or in Hebrew: *tikun olam*, repairing the world.

The fourth of their children was Bobby, born in 1955. He remembers that when his father took him to and from Hebrew School at Beth Shalom, by the way Jake made sure all of his kids had either bar or bat mitzvahs as well as Confirmations at Beth Shalom, at anyrate, Jake would have the radio tuned to the classical station. Jake would conduct the orchestra while driving. Now this both terrified and fascinated Bobby, who was always curious to see if his dad was conducting the orchestra properly. Bobby

remembers a cross country camping trip his father organized for the family back in 1965 - six kids, six weeks, with a station wagon and a camper attached (think the "Long, Long Trailer" with Desi Arnaz and Lucille Ball meets "The Brady Bunch"). Jake ran the trip like a military campaign, making the kids randomly count off (think Captain Van Trappe in "The Sound of Music" before Julie Andrews softens him up). Bobby was also keen to demonstrate his dad's sense of humor with the story of Oscar. It seems that later in life, Jake had a cane named Oscar the second. Thanks to Bobby, the name was actually engraved on the cane. People would sometimes ask Jake, "what happened to Oscar the first?" Jake, would answer in dead pan, "I killed him." It seems that he had backed over him in the driveway, mistaking Oscar for a garbage can, which I presume would have been acceptable to backover in the driveway. So that's what became of Oscar the first. Jake was fond of calling out to his wife: "Hey, Lil, where's Oscar?" Bobby said at the end, his dad got so close to Oscar, that he sometimes called him "Ozzie."

The fifth of their children was David, born in 1956. In childhood, he remembers taking refuge with his father in walks around the neighborhood or sometimes in Brandywine State Park. These walks guaranteed him quality time with his dad. Like Michael, Jake also had David help him with title searches, perhaps with the hope of enticing him into the field of law. David became a software engineer. It was his father's love of the structure found in law that helped inspire David to embrace the structure found in developing and programming computer programs. But like his father, David, too, hopes his child will become a lawyer...and who knows, David's daughter Rachel has expressed a serious interest in attending law school, so Jake might get his wish after all.

The sixth of their children was Andee, born in 1961. As the baby in the family, Andee got to share a lot of her father's life and is having a difficult time dealing with his passing. She remembers even in adulthood getting these sweet telephone messages on her phone from Jake saying: "just called to say your daddy loves you." She said as a lawyer he could have a combative side to his personality, which she thinks she inherited from him, but around her he also had a sweet, gentle, side. In childhood, she would always play the same joke on him, and he would always respond the same way. As soon as she heard the car pulling up, she would pull the door open without being seen. And every time, Jake would exclaim: "Oh my God, it's an electric door!" In retrospect, Andee thinks that this little ritual is how Jake made his daily transition from the rigors of work to his home and family. Even still, in the middle of a preparation for a particularly big case the family would have tip toe around him. She remembers how special he would make her feel...small things, like the privilege he gave her in choosing the name for the family trailer: Dumbo, and when it died, Dumbo II.

Andee made a point to say how devoted her father was to his family. No matter how busy he was with work, he was always home for Shabbos dinner on Friday night, with the entire family gathered around the table. Lillian ran a kosher home. Jake would brag about how wonderful his wife was, his children, the nine grandchildren: Alison, Alex, Daniel, Eric, Jessica, Maya, Melissa, Rachel and Tamara, all of whom he adored. When any one of them would enter the room, or even when speaking of them, his eyes would just light up. He loved to play with them. Almost quoting a line from the Talmud, Jake knew that his children's children were the future, as the text says: *al tikra banayich*,

ella bonayich...do not read it as 'your children', rather read it as 'your builders.' Jake's nine grandchildren, spanning the ages of 24 to 12, were indeed Jake's special legacy.

Just as Jake, perhaps inspired by his war experiences, was dedicated to helping others, so Jake's commitment to help others may have been what inspired Andee to become a therapist. In her work, she would often call her dad for his advice and perspective. She saw her dad as her best friend, someone she could snuggle with, and talk to.

Three years ago, Jake reluctantly went on dialysis, because he had so much more life to live, and would do what he could to extend it. I met him several months ago, during one of his many visits to St. Francis Hospital for a heart problem. He struck me, even back then, as someone very much committed to living. In this past year, Andee took a leave of absence from her work, to help her father with the many transitions dictated by his declining health. Speaking for all her siblings, Andee said: "our hearts are totally breaking."

But the last words I should leave you are the ones which Lillian thought were most apt in describing her beloved husband: "emotional and intellectual commitment, devotion to his work and family."

Zichrona l'vracha... May his memory be for a blessing and inspire us to better serve our family, country and profession and let us amen.