

Gary Cherrin

Gershon ben Herschel v'Tovah

March 27, 1944 – November 14, 2007

Gary passed away when Jews all around the world were reading the Torah portion, *Vayeitzei*, taken from the Book of Genesis. The portion deals with dysfunctional relations and antipathies between siblings: Jacob and Essau, as well as Rachel and Leah. One can, in part blame these problems on parental favoritism and in part on a husband loving one spouse more than another. But much of the blame lies with the siblings themselves.

I share this aspect of the Torah with you because in reviewing Gary's all-too-brief 62 years, we see Gary's life to be the complete opposite of the strife experienced by our early patriarchs and matriarchs. Gary had an absolutely loving relationship with his siblings, their spouses and their children, and he loved both his children passionately and completely. The ancient founders of our faith would have had far happier lives had they been able to take a page out of Gary's family play book.

Gary was the last of four children born to Harry and Sylvia Cherrin. Loretta, Joan and Richard all had such kind things to say about their baby brother, Gary, who was born in Wilmington on March 27, 1944. They originally made their home on 3rd Street but as their family fortunes improved, they were able to move "uptown" to 28th and Washington. Loretta said Gary was an absolutely great brother. Joan said that best of all was Gary's laugh; his sense of humor was infectious. Richard said that Gary loved to sing songs from the fifties, especially songs with teenagers dying tragically on motorcycles – songs like "Dead Man's Curve" and something about a Black Leather Jacket. When Richard was 13, Gary just 9, the two of them used to go joy riding in their dad's car in the dead of night. They were always able to park the car perfectly in the spot their father had originally chosen, and they were never found out. Then one night, upon returning

home they discovered, to their horror, that the parking spot their dad had chosen was occupied by another car – and the rest, is well, one bad memory.

The Cherrin's are long-term members of Congregation Beth Shalom. Rabbi Kraft would not only officiate at Gary's bar mitzvah, but in time, would also officiate at his wedding. Gary's secular education included Harlan Elementary and P.S. DuPont High School, where Gary played football. In his last semester, Gary skipped formal high school graduation, preferring instead to serve our country in Vietnam, and graduate with a GED. He served as an army medic. I was told by the family that I cannot share the hoochie coochie story, but I can tell you that among Gary's most memorable experiences in the service was when he delivered a baby. After his four years in the military, with the help of the GI Bill, Gary was able to attend Cheney College, where he received his BS in mathematics and went on for graduate studies, graduating in 1970. He would go on to become a beloved high school math teacher, working at both Sanford and A.I. DuPont. Between his two math jobs, Gary spent the years 1980 through '85 in a business venture with his brother-in-law, Marty, as co-owners of a deli in Brandmar Plaza. Gary sliced, he diced, he schmoozed and he entertained his customers. The customers used to enter an annual contest to see how deep into the winter season Gary would persist in wearing his denim shorts - his favorite mode of clothing. Gary achieved minor fame for his insensitivity to winter cold. The prize for guessing the date the shorts were replaced with trousers? a free hoagie. Gary's brother-in-law and partner, Marty, said that Gary was the best man you could have had on the job, he was good with people and really knew how to slice meat. It was a real family affair, with Gary's sister, Loretta, on the register; Gary's other sister, Joan, coming in and drinking the coffee, and Gary's dad, Harry, picking up the odd jobs.

After retiring, Gary would spend his volunteer time teaching math to inmates in prison in order to help them prepare for their GED. His hope was with a good education, these inmates would have a chance at a better life once they had served their time.

Having been born only one day apart, it is quite possible that Grace and Gary could have met in their respective incubators at Wilmington Hospital. They became reacquainted in the fourth grade at Harlan Elementary. It seems that Gary had taken his big sister, Loretta's, necklace and presented it to Grace as a gift. When Grace brought it home, her mom told her it was too expensive and she must give it back. Grace and Gary were 10 at the time. And then time passed.

The year is now 1967. Gary is fresh back from Vietnam. Grace's mom needed to get something fixed by Gary's Aunt Anne the seamstress. Aunt Anne tells Grace's mom that Gary is back home. Aunt Anne gets Gary's phone number and puts it up on Gary's fridge. At this point Grace was making her life up in New York City. Gary calls. During one of Grace's visits back to Wilmington they get together. They are both 26. Off they went to the Edgemore Theatre. Grace reports that Gary was a perfect gentleman. And so began a wonderful courtship, with outings both up in New York City and down in Wilmington that would eventually culminate in a wedding on the bimah of Congregation Beth Shalom Rabbi Emeritus Jacob Kraft presiding on June 7, 1970. Grace said that her 37 years with Gary were wonderful. He was kind, funny, and he even did the dishes and cooked – he was the perfect househusband. He was particularly praised for his fish in the pan, and his potato salad. When it came to dicing vegetables, he had the patience of a saint.

Grace and Gary's first child, Lynn, was born in 1977. She said that Gary was the best dad you could ever have. He was always there for her. Lynn played clarinet back at PS DuPont Elementary School, and no matter how awful those early band concerts sounded, Gary was always there to support her. He would praise her, saying, "Lynn, I could hear you over all the other instruments." (Not necessarily a good thing). Lynn remembers cringing when her father would try to sing. Not only was his singing awful, but he would totally make up words to the songs as he went along. Lynn said, ironically, she will miss those awful songs now.

Harry, named for Gary's beloved father, was born two years later, in 1979. Like his big sister, Harry also graduated from the University of Delaware, making Gary very proud. Gary and Harry were always very close. Perhaps Harry caught the teaching bug from his dad, as Harry majored in Music Education. From there he went on for higher studies at the New England Conservatory for Music, where he mastered the soprano saxophone. In fact to get to today's funeral on time, Harry had to leave his advanced saxophone studies in Holland. Whenever Gary thought of Lynn and Harry he would light up. He felt that they were the very best things that ever happened to him. If you asked him how his kids were, he would light up, he would radiate. And Gary's kids loved him back. Lynn said that whenever she or Harry wanted something, they knew the strategy was to go to their dad first. They would convince him, as he would never say "no." Then Gary, in turn, would try to convince their poor mom, who was always cast as the heavy.

Gary enjoyed the simple pleasures of life – like having his back scratched, any time, any where. He even let his niece Valery try massage therapy on him. He loved his nieces and nephews very much. One of his nephews, Peter, thought Gary was a super hero for plucking him out of the way of an oncoming car when he just five years old.

Gary would be embarrassed to have been called a hero. In fact he probably would not like the fuss we are making about him. For at his core, Gary was a very modest man. But he also had a great sense of humor, which is evidenced by his family and the stories they tell. In later years, Gary's health was compromised, first by a quintuple bypass surgery, then kidney problems culminating in dialysis. Throughout it all, Gary was never a complainer, sometimes a moaner, but never a complainer. He just loved to laugh and put people at ease.

His legacy will be his love and devotion to his family: his children, his nieces and nephews, his brother and sisters, and always to his beautiful Grace. May his memory be for a blessing, and may we be inspired to be better brothers and sisters, better aunts and uncles, better parents and spouses because of the life that Gary lived, and let us say *amen*.