

Gregory Joseph Fink

*Ze'ev ben Yaakov v'Hinda*

December 15, 1969 – June 23, 2011

“Greg was one of my oldest friends. We spent Hebrew school, middle school and high school together. I remember visiting him at Drexel during our college days. We had many birthdays together. He will be very much missed.”

“Greg was one of the first friends I met when moving to Delaware from South Carolina. We had such great fun playing tennis. Your smile and kind heart will be missed by all who knew you.”

“I remember him as kind, friendly, approachable and he had a smile for everyone.”

“This man had a heart of gold, and he will be missed.”

“I am sad to hear of the passing of my old classmate Greg Fink. We all grew up with him. I went to Hebrew School, Junior and Senior High as well as Synagogue. He was always nice and friendly to everyone. “

These are but a sampling of the kind words friends, up-and-down the Eastern Seaboard have written of Gregory Joseph Fink in just the few hours after his obituary appeared in our local *News Journal*. I have a strong sense there will be more written in the days to come. But from this sampling of young men and women, you get the sense of a man who was a good friend -- kind, warm, connected to his Jewish community – in short a *mench*.

I always turn to the Torah portion of the week that a person passed away in order to get some Divine guidance as to how to put that person's life in perspective. This week, Jews all around the world were reading from the portion called *Korach*, found in the Book of Numbers. More than speaking about Greg, the Torah portion might speak directly to us, and help us deal with the shock of his passing. The Torah hardly ever speaks about the effect of someone's death on others – the emotional toll. But this Torah portion is unusual in that it does register the shock of the people upon the death of Korach. Our ancestors respond in grief: "We are lost, all of us lost . . . Alas we are doomed to perish" (Num. 17:27–28).

Jewish Theological Seminary Chancellor Arnold Eisen writes: “That is true, of course. They *will* die, and not in the manner or at the time they would have wished. Human beings of every generation are familiar with this problem. It cannot be minimized. The Torah does not often express the terror human beings feel in the face of death as directly as it does in this parashah. Nor does it often advise its readers, as explicitly as it does here, how best to cope with the fact of death, which often comes as an interruption in our journeys toward personal promised lands. What is that recommendation?

Live your life surrounded by the demands and rewards of God's eternal sacred order. Be part of a community that shares life's joys and sorrows with you. Be grateful for the gifts you have. Seek forgiveness for the wrongs you commit. Know the difference between holy and profane, and the distinction—to which it points—between good and evil. Seek to know God, as best a human being can, and imitate God via acts of justice and compassion. Trust in God's enduring mercies.”

Of course it is hard to talk about, let alone imagine “God’s enduring mercies” after weathering such an inexplicable death of a healthy 41-year-old in the prime of his life – a man FULL of potential. But we see something of God’s

goodness, not in the death of such a man, but in the way the Jewish community at Beth Shalom has responded, trying to anticipate the Fink's most immediate needs, from the meal of condolence to the *shiva minyanim*. And our local Jewish funeral director, Barbara Schoenberg, shared with me the kindness of her fellow Jewish funeral director in Montgomery, Alabama, who couldn't do enough to ensure that Greg's body was treated with respect and dignity, per the ancient customs of our people, on his journey back home. As Harold Kushner points out in his book, *When Bad Things Happen to Good People*, we find God NOT in the tragedy itself, but in the human and humane responses to the tragedy. This is where comfort is to be found.

Greg was the second child born to Jack and Hinda Fink, on December 15, 1969. Stacey, Greg's older sister by three years, remembers a baby brother in whom she could confide. Together, they created a mighty force in standing up to the neighborhood bullies of their youth. Together they loved their summers in Ocean City, Maryland, with the family, boogie boarding all day long until, finally, and perhaps reluctantly they emerged, summoned from the ocean for dinner. Their relationship continued into adulthood, when Greg would make frequent visits to his big sister at the University of Delaware. In time, that love for sister

would transcend to Stacey, and her husband Steven's, two beautiful children, Hannah and Joseph. Hannah and Joseph adored their Uncle Greg, especially his sense of humor. He was reported to have the best Scooby Doo impersonation anywhere. We are especially supportive of Stacey, who just weeks ago survived her own near-death experience. We wish her a *refuah shleyma*, a speedy and complete recovery, and it is with even greater sympathy that we turn to Greg's parents, Jack and Hinda, who having almost lost their daughter, survived that crisis only to be confronted by the untimely death of their son.

Hinda had a relationship with her son that was as close as a mother and son could be. It went well beyond Hinda's delicious brisket and turkey buns, not to mention her key lime or chocolate peanut butter pies. They consoled each other, when times were tough, confided in each other always. Greg would regale his mother with jokes, stories of his road trips as a salesman, shared with her his love of nature and observations, from the simple to the sublime. I shared with Hinda that a connection that strong cannot be separated by death, and that I believe Greg will always be by her side, and that which made Greg her loving son cannot be buried.

Jack always tried to be a good mentor to Greg, how to handle himself as a man, or advice about his various jobs. Not that Greg always took his father's advice, but it was always offered freely and whole-heartedly. Prior to starting his life anew in Fort Meyers, Florida, Greg and Jack used to play tennis regularly, a passion they both shared, as well as enjoy together season tickets to the Eagles. Above all, Jack and Greg were not only father and son, but also good friends.

As you heard earlier, Greg made many friends along the way, through Hebrew School at Congregation Beth Shalom, where he became a bar mitzvah on this very *bima*, through his years at Concord High School, where he was ranked number one in varsity tennis in his senior year, graduating in 1987. From high school he went on to study business at Drexel and furthered his education with business classes at the University of Delaware. He then went on to guide investors at the PFPC Investment Firm.

Greg has always loved working with people, and he always enjoyed the hotel industry so he decided to make a change, and move to Key West, Florida and later Fort Meyers. He was friendly, funny and loving, and these three personality traits made him very successful, earning him the distinction of Employee of the Month at Hyatt, his most recent employer. He was completing a

sales swing for Hyatt through Alabama and, with his team, heading back to Florida when he passed away.

Although a fine salesman, above all, Greg was a *mench*. Jack shared with me a story where, prior to Hyatt, Greg had worked in a supervisory capacity, for a hotel with very rigid rules. One day a foreign-born worker was coming to work for the hotel but the company would not afford her employee housing until she already worked for them. She was in a catch-22 situation, and she was going to be homeless. Knowing the potential risks to himself, Greg broke the rules by getting her into employee housing early. As a result the company fired Greg. This is an example of a man who put values first. It was with pride that Jack shared this story of his son with me.

This five-foot-ten, broad shouldered, brown-eyed man, was kind, attractive and gave great hugs – to his friends, to his parents, sister, niece, nephew, and in his childhood, both sets of his much-adored grandparents, the far-away Fink grandparents in Silver Spring, and the more accessible Rubin grandparents in Philadelphia. I would like to think that Greg has now been reunited with his grandparents and that they are together once again.

It is hard to know where to find comfort from such a tragic loss, but our religion affords us the belief that our story does not end with our deaths, but that there is something eternal and timeless about our souls, and that Greg's journey continues.

As we consider Greg's life, may we be inspired by him to put our family first, the way Greg did. And like Greg, to appreciate nature, to pick up a tennis racket or find some other way of staying active, to love people, to be a good friend, to laugh, to make other people laugh, and to truly appreciate life. If we strive to do these things, then we can truly say *zichrona l'vracha*, may Greg's memory be for a blessing, and we can all say *amen*.