

Rabbi Michael S. Beals

July 6, 2008

Congregation Beth Shalom

Wilmington, DE

Rose Harad

*Rivka bat Pinchas u'Batsheva*

January 13, 1921 – July 5, 2008

Our tradition tells us that, although I am sure all our loved ones are *tsadikim*, righteous people, in our own eyes, the greatest of our *tsadikim* pass from this world to the next on Shabbat, the holiest day of the week. So it was with Rose – a *tsedekes* – a righteous woman for our times, who passed way yesterday, on Shabbat. And the family has embraced Jewish law and tradition by choosing to bury her the very next day, today, for the Rabbis taught that the sooner we lie the body to rest, the sooner the soul is able to rest as well.

Here at Congregation Beth Shalom, we dedicated yesterday's Torah reading in Rose's memory, and the portion we were chanting could not have been more appropriate for Rose on so many levels. Parashat Chukkat narrates the deaths of both Miriam and her brother, Aaron. I asked our congregants to imagine how difficult it must have been for Moses to weather two such substantial losses so close together. I realized that such deaths, having taken place more than 3,200 years ago, might be a little too removed. So I told my congregants, many of whom have enjoyed Rose's presence (along with Manny) almost every Shabbat morning for decades, to access their feelings of loss upon reflecting on Rose's death, and then maybe, just maybe, we could begin to understand Moses' anguish, and why he might have struck a rock instead of talking to it, as God had commanded.

But on a deeper level, I want to focus on Aaron's death in particular, because Rose and the High Priest, Aaron, had so much in common. Our tradition would call them both *rodef shalom* – pursuers of peace. Our Torah tells us that upon Aaron's passing, the people mourned for 30 days – what we would call *shloshim* today. The Midrash, rabbinic commentary on the text written 1200 years ago, said that the people mourned more for Aaron more than they would mourn for Moses, because Aaron was a *rodef shalom*. They recounted that when husbands and wives would quarrel, Aaron would go to the husband and tell him: "look your wife came to me and told me how sorry she was." Aaron would then quickly run to the wife and tell her: "look your husband came to me and told me how sorry he was." And in this simple way, when not seeing to the sacrifices, Aaron was busy making peace between couples. And the children of Israel loved him for it.

For Rose, too, the operative word was *shalom bayit* – peace in the house. Family was her most important value and bringing peace to her loved ones was paramount. It was a craft she began in childhood. Rose was the third of five children born to Phillip and Shayva (aka Jenny) Schnitzer of Philadelphia on January 12, 1921. Her older brothers, Charles and Rabbi Shai have since passed, but Rose's sister Selma in Florida, or Claire, who is with us this afternoon, can attest that Rose was the peace

keeper in the family. And in truth, the Schnitzer siblings were remarkably close. In their adult lives they all lived with their families in close proximity to one another, in homes built by their father, Phillip, who was a builder of many homes in Wilmington. Three key words guided Rose and which many of us would be wise to take to heart today: “let” “it” “go.” Rose was always taking care of everyone. When her brother Charlie was ill in later years, it was Rose who was always there, preparing meals, making sure he was okay. Her availability 24-7, no complaints, quietly caring, not looking for *kuvod*, leading through example, not preaching but doing, is something that her children and grandchildren said were hallmarks of how she lived her life. Rose was there to take care of her mother, in later years, at the Kutz Home. Rose was always there to care for others, but she never wanted to be in a position where others would be obligated to care for her. Following her fall and broken hip of three months, when facing a future of needing to rely on others, Rose began to make the spiritual preparations to leave this world for the next, and she did everything she could to help prepare her loved ones as well.

Although the Schnitzer’s were on the move in Rose’s early childhood – Vineland, NJ and Coatesville, PA, as Dad went where the homes needed to be built, she came to call Wilmington home from an early age. Congregation Beth Shalom, then on 18<sup>th</sup> and Washington, was the family’s spiritual home, and Rose wore a lovely white dress for her Confirmation back in 1934. Her best girlfriend then and her best girlfriend all these years was Helen Goldberg. Helen was lost in thought yesterday morning, preparing Shabbat Lunch with the Kitchen Klub in the shul’s newly renovated kitchen. If the mac and cheese they served for lunch was a little salty yesterday, it was probably from Helen’s tears – they were so close.

Rose attended PS DuPont High School where at the young age of 16 she met Manny Harad. Rose always loved literature and her favorite place in the school was the Library, where she served behind the desk in a position of power, as the Assistant Librarian. Manny used to hang out in the library during his study period. One day he plucked up the courage and went up to her and asked Rose her name. Having got the formalities over with, he said, “What do you say we date?” And she said “fine.” No J-Date, no matchmakers, no ads in the Personal Section of the newspaper, no fix-ups, just: “What do you say we date” and “fine.” There’s something in the simplicity of the story of their first meeting which is so wonderfully uncomplicated. Rose was a gorgeous brunette, brown eyes, with a beautiful smile – of course Manny was going to ask her out. For his first date, he took her to the Lowe’s Aldin Theatre on Market Street between 8<sup>th</sup> and 9<sup>th</sup> Streets – don’t go looking for it, because it’s not there anymore. They saw a comedy and then retired after the movie to Cosy Corner over on 14<sup>th</sup> and Washington, THE place in Wilmington for ice cream – no, it’s not there anymore either.

And so that’s how it began. Five years of dating, often at the Jewish Y, that’s the YMHA, the forerunner of today’s Siegel JCC in Talleyville, then located at 6<sup>th</sup> and French, adjacent to the first Adas Kodesh building. There were dances, more movies, more ice cream, when finally they decided they should make it permanent. Manny and Rose were married on August 24, 1940 on the bimah of Congregation Beth Shalom – Rabbi Jacob Kraft presiding. Next month would have made 68 years. For their one-week honeymoon, the young couple made their way up the Eastern Seaboard, staying with Manny’s relations in New York City and in Rhode Island, which was the northern extent of Manny’s

relations. They stayed in one boarding house along the way with a shared bathroom down the hall. *Nebich*, it was the middle of the night and Rose had to take care of her needs. She recounts coming out of the bathroom and forgetting what room she was in. So she had to knock on several different doors until she found her Manny. Thank G-d that she did or else the story we are telling today could have been radically different. I asked Manny what was the secret of their successful marriage. Manny confided in me that he wasn't always so easy to live with but they had a rule worth practicing by all couples: never go to bed angry. Whatever it is, solve it before you go to bed, so you can start the next day fresh.

From her graduation from PS DuPont through the raising of her children, Rose worked for her dad, helping him balance the books for his building company, Schnitzer and Son. The young couple moved into one of the Schnitzer and Son apartments, a ground floor dwelling, on South Scott Street at Chestnut. The home they currently live in around the corner from Riverside Hospital is another Schnitzer and Son creation.

Judy -- Manny and Rose's first child, came along in 1943. Judy will be addressing you in a little while. So I will not share too much except to say that Judy saw her mom as a confidante and best friend. I did ask Judy to tell me the most memorable foods her mom prepared for her growing up. First and foremost were Rose's incredible soups: chicken, matzah ball, mushroom barley, vegetable. And there was the mandel bread, and the pletzellach—mun cookies, and the brownies, and the Kosher for Passover brownies, and the begelach. Rose was also an accomplished seamstress, embroider, crocheter, and even a painter – watercolors and oils. In the Harad home you can see Rose's originals, mostly of flowers and an incredible take on Jerusalem in the style of the Cubist Georges Bracque, adorning the walls.

Rose knew joy, and Rose also knew tragedy. In 1947, Rose gave birth to her second child, a wonderful son named Saul. Saul suffered from a disease called nephritis, kidney disease. This was at a time before dialysis or chemo. Only one hospital, the Flower and 5<sup>th</sup> Avenue Hospital in New York City, offered any type of care for this disease. So Rose went to live at the hospital. She did not believe in just leaving a child at the hospital, and since this was in the days before Ronald McDonald Houses, Rose just slept in a chair on and off for the better part of three years. And from three to seven, it was really a revolving door in and out of hospitals. Judy didn't really have her mom during these years, but her extended family rallied around all of them, and Judy didn't mind. Somehow Rose was always able to convey her love to Judy even though she was so consumed in her care for Saul. From the age of 10 through Saul's bar mitzvah at age 13 at Beth Shalom, Saul's disease went into remission, the Harad's had a normal, happy life. Unfortunately, after his bar mitzvah, Saul got very sick and he passed away on July 26, 1960.

Rose could have turned away from God, she could have turned away from life, she could have embraced bitterness, she could have asked "why me?" But she did none of these things. The synagogue was always her home. And Rose, in her heart, was always a positive, hopeful person. So she worked through her grief and she helped Manny work through his as well. And as a result, much later,

when her grandson, Jeffrey became sick with diabetes and then loss of site, she took all her own experiences, all her life lessons, and she put them at her daughter Judy's, son-in-law Barry's, and her grandson, Jeffrey's disposal, and helped them weather their challenges as well. Barry told me that his mother-in-law was well named for like a Rose, she began blossoming with her marriage to Manny, with the death of her son, Saul, the fragility of the rose was shaken, with some petals falling off, only to come into full bloom in subsequent years, blessing the family and friends who occupied her garden with her beautiful scent. Barry actually said it better last night than I am recalling it this afternoon.

Judy and her husband Barry blessed Rose with three extraordinary grandchildren, Seth, Jeffrey and Pennina. I have had the pleasure of knowing Seth for more than 20 years, when we first met at Hebrew University in Jerusalem. I am glad my relationship with his grandparents brought us back together and Seth will be talking to you shortly. I know that his bubby's mailings with only positive horoscopes along with bubby notes of encouragements have helped Seth get through the rough times, and it was only his reassurance to his bubby that he was on the right path that gave Rose the piece of mind to be able to leave this life for whatever comes next.

Jeffrey could not have hoped to have had a better cheer leader than his bubby Rose. She always had hope that he would overcome his illnesses. From the time of his complete loss of sight in high school, Rose would never give up hope that new research would eventually reverse his blindness and it is a belief she took with her to her dying day. She also believed that Jeffrey's diabetes would be cured and recently Jeffrey had a life-changing pancreas transplant which in fact immediately cured his diabetes – proving his bubby right. Jeffrey brought Rose much comfort by singing to her and this he will do in just a few minutes as his way of expressing his feelings for her. Jeffrey brought much joy to Rose with the birth of her two great-grandchildren, Justin, now 8, and Talia, now 5.

Pennina, Rose's youngest granddaughter, will address you in just a few minutes as well. Like her mom, Judy, Pennina was also in daily contact with her bubby. She and her husband, Ira, brought so much joy to Rose with three great-grandchildren, Maya, 1, Abigail, 4, and Eli, who turned 6 on the day Rose passed away, thus taking a sad day and making it a little happier by allowing us to celebrate the anniversary of his birth.

Rose was a surrogate mother to so many people. Dennis Spivak, who recently ran for Congress, looked up to Rose as a mother, especially after his own mother died. Our Beth Shalom congregant, Judy Lewis, said that she felt the same way about Rose after her mother died. And Barry, her son-in-law, who felt more like a son than a son-in-law, claimed to have felt the same way, after losing a mother early in life, and then later, his step-mother. For Barry, Rose was his Dear Abby, a confidant, filled with great advice and insight.

Rose had a gift of making everyone who knew her feel like they were her favorite. Her grandson, Seth, shared with me that when she was with you, it did not matter who else was in the room, Rose made you feel that you were the only person in the room. She made you feel special.

I was blessed to have known Rose for the past four years as her rabbi. I remember our former cantor, Hazzan Horwitz, sharing with me how special she made him feel and I felt the same way. She had a real respect and love of clergy, and her love and appreciation made us to our jobs better. As her children and grandchildren shared unanimously, Rose led through example. She did not tell you what to do. Rather, she just did it, and in the doing, she inspired us to want to emulate her. So when you observe how kind her children and grandchildren came out, you know where they got it from. I certainly feel that I am a better rabbi for having known her. This past Friday before Shabbat, I came to her hospital bed with wine and challah for her family so they could make Shabbos, and I just sat by her side, singing her favorite songs of the Shabbat liturgy, I kissed her on the kephala, and I reassured her that if she possibly did anything wrong on this earth – hard to imagine, these trespasses were now forgiven. I sang the Shema, the watchword of our people and then I told her if she had more to do on this earth, she was welcome to stay, but if not she was free to move on and that she needn't have any concerns or regrets because she had lived her life well. I was joined by our wonderful doctor and friend, Stuart Felzer, who has been giving her wonderful care thanks to Judy's complete involvement in the health management of her parents. He lovingly rearranged her pillows to make her feel more comfortable. And then I received a call, less than 24 hours later, telling me that she had passed away.

They say that the truly righteous among us pass away on the Holy Sabbath. Rose was among the truly righteous. She would not have relished us calling her that in public. She had the humility of a Moses, and like Aaron, she was a *rofef shalom* -- a pursuer of peace. May her memory be for a blessing and an inspiration to all of us, and let us say *amen*.