

Rabbi Michael S. Beals
July 3, 2007
Congregation Beth Shalom

Bernard Leeman
Beryl ben Shmuel
1918 – 2007

This week's Torah portion, *Pinḥas*, begins with God bestowing his *brit shalom*, his covenant of peace, on the High Priest, Pinḥas. Yesterday, after 89 years, Bernie Leeman left this world for the next. Like Pinḥas in the Torah reading, we hope that Bernie, too, has been blessed with an everlasting covenant of peace.

Bernie was the second of three boys born to Samuel and Fannie Leeman, in 1918, in New York. Effie, the eldest brother, died just last year at the age of 93, and we are blessed to have the baby brother, Ira, still with us in Florida. His health prevented him from being with us in Wilmington today, but we know he and his wife, Phyllis, are with us in spirit. Alas, Bernie knew tragedy from the early age of three, when his father died in 1921. Fannie was left to raise the three boys, aged 7, 3 and 1 ½ all on her own. She obviously did a great job as the boys never got into trouble, were educated and went on to get good jobs. Ira remembers Bernie being a wonderful big brother. Along with Effie, Bernie convinced Ira to pass up the job working for their rich cousin, and instead go to

college, and then on to law school. That intervention changed Ira's life. Ira remembered his brother Bernie as a *mench*, a good husband, and a good provider, taking care of the family business – real estate. Bernie was also a good American. He served in the United States Army during World War II.

Bernie was a mature 43 years of age when he met Sarah Schwartz, back in 1961. We actually have Bernie's mother, Fannie, and Sarah's aunt to thank for making the *shidduch*. Bernie, then a real estate appraiser for the City of New York, appreciated what a beautiful, intelligent, warm and generous woman Sarah was. Bernie wasted no time. They were married the following year, in 1962, and made their home in Brooklyn. They joined the Kane Street Synagogue, where Bernie and Sarah were known for their generosity and volunteerism. Among their acts of hesed was their nurturing and care for new Russian emigrants who they took under their wings and helped in many ways over the course of many years. The members of their *shul* would eventually honor the couple with a special dinner to thank them for everything they had done for the synagogue and their community.

Aside from their generosity, Bernie loved to go on trips with Sarah. Of their most special destinations was Israel, of course. However, I recently saw a photo of Bernie dressed as the big kahuna, with the inscription "Hawaii 1985." Bernie,

along with Sarah, loved to travel, and they loved to dress up in costumes. Among the Leeman's travels, was the annual trek from Brooklyn down to Florida. On the trip south and again on the trip north, Bernie and Sarah would spend time with the Lipschultz's, who had moved from Connecticut down to Wilmington in 1989. Before Wilmington, the Lipschultz children remembered fondly being taken individually for sleep-aways with Uncle Bernie and Aunt Sarah. As a result of all these interactions, Dina and her family became increasingly close to both Bernie and Sarah. So when the couple's health began to fail, Sarah's sisters gathered and decided to ask Dina if she would intervene in the care of both Bernie and Sarah. At first, Dina and Alan would take long trips down to Florida to care for the couple. But in time, Dina and Alan decided the best way to care for the aging couple was to move them to Wilmington. Sarah and Bernie spent their last years receiving the best of long term care in a warm and loving Jewish environment – the Kutz Home. We especially recognize the loving care Sarah's nephew, Michael, and especially his life partner, Lienda, gave to both Sarah and Bernie, with almost daily visits made from north-eastern Maryland. What commitment!

Bernie was a wonderful uncle to many, many children, both on his side and on Sarah's side of the family. Bernie's baby brother, Ira's son, Mitchell, had wonderful things to say about his uncle. He recalls, as a child, being taken by his

Uncle Bernie to Frontier Land, which allowed him to visit the wild west without ever leaving the safety of The Bronx. Mitchell loved when Uncle Bernie took him on appraisals throughout the City, regaling him with stories of New York and making him giggle with observations about men with beards which he called Bull Dogs (an in joke). The visit which best stands out in Mitchell's head was his uncle taking him to the main railway switching yard for The Bronx. Mitchell also remembers Uncle Bernie taking him and his brother to the Brooklyn Children's Museum, the Hayden Planetarium, and The Bronx Zoo. These field trips were some of Mitchell's fondest childhood memories.

Both Mitchell, and Dina's daughter, Rachele, remember the extraordinary fruits, flowers and animals Uncle Bernie could create out of balloons. It was really quite extraordinary. In 1986, Rachele, then 12, went to Israel with a group of relatives, including Sarah and Bernie, for a cousin's wedding on a kibbutz. It was both Rachele's first trip to Israel and her first wedding. But Rachele actually missed the wedding because she was with her Uncle Bernie, who was busy blowing up balloons for all the kibbutz kids and not paying attention to the time. As Bernie got older, Sarah bought him a compressed air cylinder so that way he could still make the balloons but not exert himself so much.

I could not think of a better way to live a life. Bernie was an unending source of fun to his many, many nieces and nephews, a wonderful travel partner to his wife, a valued loyal civil service worker for the City of New York, and a generous supporter of the Jewish community, and particularly, his synagogue, with his time and money. Yes, it seems clear, the *brit shalom*, the covenant of peace which God bestows upon Pinhas in the Torah portion, was also be bestowed upon Bernie as he travels from this world to the next. May his memory be for a blessing., and let us say *amen*.