

Rabbi Michael S. Beals

February 19, 2017

Andrea Ruth Dobkin Rogosin Levine
Hannah Rikvah bat Menahem Mendel v'Dora
October 12, 1955 – February 15, 2017

Andrea passed away earlier this week as Jews all around the world were reading *Parshat Yitro*, which primarily concerns itself with the giving of the Ten Commandments by Moses at Mount Sinai. This got me to thinking: what would be Andrea Levine's personal Ten Commandments? And here they are, in no particular order of importance: One: Show up with a gift. Two. Why buy one when you can buy two? Three: Be kind and generous. Four: Have a sense of humor. Five: Love and care for animals. I know that's only five Andrea Commandments, but that last one about animals – really covers so much of Jewish values. Called *Tsa'ar Ba'alei Chayim*, or "kindness to animals" legislation, our Torah and Jewish faith are filled with laws regarding the humane treatment of animals. From the commandment to not boiling a kid in its mother's milk (which is why cheese burgers are a no-no), to shewing away the mother bird before you dare take her eggs, from the prohibition not to muzzle an ox while it's treading out your grain to not yoking an ox and a mule together – to the biblical command that even your animals should be given a day of rest on the Sabbath – our Jewish religion strongly protects the well-being of animals. It goes to character.

Speaking of character, there's a *midrash*, rabbinic legend, that explains why God felt Moses had the right moral character to be the leader of the Jewish people. It seems, while as a shepherd in the wilderness below Mount Sinai, Moses went to great lengths to recover a baby lamb that had gone missing. That search led Moses right to the Burning Bush, where God told Moses that if he were willing to show such love and care for his flock, God would entrust him with His own flock, the Jewish people, and make Moses their shepherd.

That same moral character was in Andrea as well. I am sure some of you wondered, from where did Andrea derive her love of animals? And I am here to tell you it was in her Jewish DNA from birth. That explains her love of Pepe the

Poodle of her youth; Bootsie the Cat from her single motherhood days; Duffy, the West Highland Terrier who went on to become a national and Canadian champion and showed at the Westminster Dog Show; Lulu the Yorkie who was the model for Andrea's jewelry; and finally Balick the Service Dog of her later years. Andrea's rich Jewish tradition also explains her unflagging support of such animal support groups as the Delaware Humane Association and more recently, the Canine Partners for Life service dogs, as well as the protective vests she purchased for the canine unit of the New Castle County Police Department.

Andrea's kind and loving personality was nurtured in the home of her parents, Emil and Doris Thierman Dobkin. Andrea, their only child, was born in Seacliff, on Long Island, New York on October 12, 1955, but her family soon moved to Atlantic City, New Jersey, and then to Linwood, New Jersey, where she was raised and educated. Her years at Mainland Regional High School included playing flute in the Marching Band (she could play piano as well just not while marching in the band), as well as Field Hockey and Lacrosse. Her family owned a pharmacy, Lane's, in Atlantic City, where she developed an entrepreneurial spirit, and a love for jewelry. In her youth, Andrea considered the Atlantic City boardwalk and beach her camp and playground.

Following her graduation from Mainland Regional High School in 1974, she attended Lafayette College, where she majored in English, minored in Spanish, and played powder puff football for fun. After a stint of teaching English at Egg Harbor High School, she went on to earn a Master's Degree in education, with a specialty in gifted and talented, from Weidner College in Chester. She served as a teacher in Lenape High School in Medford, New Jersey, and then as a school administrator at her old alma mater, at Mainland Regional High School.

I have recently seen comments Andrea's former students wrote about her on Facebook, and I thought I would share two with you this morning:

From Kimberly Wells: *Andrea Dobkin Rogosin Levine...one of the best damn teachers I've ever had. She was my teacher in my Freshman year of high school. But she always stuck out in my mind. My heart is so broken right now. I had the good fortune of being able to reconnect with Andrea, only recently. But I thank*

God that I was given the opportunity to chat with her...I let her know how I feel about her, what an impression she made on me, and how I've thought about her, on & off, throughout the last 35 years. Rest In Peace, "Miss Dobkin," you will not soon be forgotten.

And from Bob Matthews: *Andrea taught me so much about the art of the written and spoken word, more than i learned in college. I didn't truly appreciate her mentorship until much later in life.*

Andrea remained single for many years, enjoying an active social life with friends. Among those special friends was Mona Trocki-Ozlek, who she first met back in her teen years, at USY, a Jewish youth movement.

And then there was dear Tilly Kwong, who Andrea first “virtually” met when she attended the World’s Fair in Flushing Queens, back in 1965, and was given the chance to get a pen pal from China. Andrea always referred to Tilly as her “Chinese sister.” Tilly’s daughter, Jess writes:

Thinking about my Aunt Andrea Dobkin, who passed away this week. Way back when my mom Tillie first moved to the US from Hong Kong, the Dobkin’s took her under their wing; Andrea was like a sister to my mom and, during long summers on the Shore, taught her Yiddish and the finer points of Jersey culture. My sister and I were flower girls at her wedding and I still fondly remember dancing the hora beside her at Emily's Bat Mitzvah. She never lost her effervescent warmth and generosity of spirit, in spite of the many, many painful challenges life set before her. We will miss you so much, Aunt Andrea.

Both Tilly and Mona are here today, and Mona will be addressing us in just a few minutes. And just this morning, I received an email from a dear friend from Andrea’s single days, who, although limited by MS for the past 25 years and confined to a wheel chair, still wanted to make the arduous trip from San Diego to be with us today.

With great humanity, Richard begged her not to come, given the physical toll it would take on her. Instead, knowing that she is watching the live stream this morning, I share the following:

Dear Richard and Emily,

It is with deep sadness that I am writing this to you. My dear, dear friend was taken from us way too soon. We shared so much our whole lives since seventh grade. We will continue to be friends forever just like the silver engraved paperweight said that Andrea had sent to me. We had a strong bond and cared for each other.

We were like sisters who will always be best friends. Each one of our many times together will always be with me. Dancing all night at Melody Lounge, breakfasts at Bagel Nosh, Watkins Glen car races, many ski trips and several years as an educator.

I would love to be with you on Sunday, but given how difficult it is for me, I know you will understand. The memories we shared will always be with me in the future. I can still hear her say "hey Bertie The Bun-Yip", a character from TV years ago when we were little, and also "my buddy Bert". As our favorite singer, Kenny Loggins, sang, Andrea will always be "Forever In My Heart."

*Thinking of you both at this time of grieving,
Old Buddy Bert (aka Roberta Long)*

In 1989, Andrea married the first love of her life, Eugene W. Rogosin, D.D.S., who she met through an ad she placed in *Philadelphia* magazine. Dr. Rogosin was a graduate of University of Pennsylvania Dental School and with Andrea's help, soon started a dental practice in New Jersey. In 1991, Emily was born to Andrea and Gene.

Tragically, Gene was killed in an automobile accident while on active duty with the Navy Reserves during Operation Desert Storm in 1993. Andrea soon retired from her school administrator position and, together with her mother, Doris Dobkin, who lived nearby, shifted her efforts to raising Emily.

In 1995, Andrea again placed a personal ad in *Philadelphia* magazine, which was answered by many people, including Richard Levine.

I just happen to have both the printed ad and the recorded message from the magazine with me today.

Here's the ad:

"SJF 39, widow, statuesque blonde, brainy, athletic klutz with dancer legs, accomplished, financially/emotionally secure seeks NS professional/ entrepreneur SJM over 5'8" who likes children, travel, city and shore, jazz, Kramer, cars, sports, film, and just a good laugh. Must know your protons from your morons! Photo appreciated, not essential. I miss the magic... So. Jersey"

And here's the recorded message:

Hi- thanks for calling. My name is Andrea and I'm a young widow with an adorable 3-year-old daughter named Emily. We live at the shore year round, but we love to travel. I enjoy the beach during all the seasons, and I vacation to tropical places frequently. I'm fortunate to be a full time mother, although I spent 15 years (and numerous degrees) in education. Now is the time for me to enjoy my life with my daughter and maybe you! I'm looking for someone to laugh with and to have fun with. Life is short (and I've found out the hard way) and I would like to share my future happiness with someone special. Maybe that's you! My ad said I miss the magic- a line that Tom Hanks said in "Sleepless in Seattle," and that's true. I'm looking for a person who wants to share good times together: a partner in crime. Please tell me a little about yourself, and don't forget your phone number (w/area code). I'm looking forward to speaking with you."

Richard, was, like her first husband, not only a responder to personal ads placed in the *Philadelphia* magazine, but also a fellow graduate of the University of Pennsylvania, but of the Law School. These and many other commonalities created lively pre-date phone conversations Richard and Andrea enjoyed together. After getting off the phone, Richard would share his enthusiasm with good friend, Miriam Edell, who sat with him on the Beth Shalom Rabbinic Search Committee. At one point Miriam turned to Richard and prophesized, "I'm sure you're going to marry this person."

For their first in-person date, Richard pulled up sporting a fedora, in a Cadillac with two-tone silver and gold wheels. He made quite an impression.

Andrea matched Richard's Cadillac and fedora with a three-year old Emily in a stroller. Together they walked the Atlantic City Boardwalk followed by dinner. It was a good thing that Richard left his fedora in that restaurant. When Andrea offered to mail it to Richard, Richard told her not to bother because he would pick it up from her on their second date. That means that whether Andrea knew it or not, there WAS going to be a second date. They went to Mac and Manco Pizza in Ocean City. Andrea liked it because it was a Jersey shore version of Grotto's Pizza.

Their relationship quickly flourished. This was to be a blended family. Richard adored the precious 3 ½ year old Emily, who he was eager to raise with Andrea. That was a good thing because Emily was the centerpiece of Andrea's life, and she would only marry a man who adored Emily. And Richard came into the marriage with two children of his own: Katie, age 9, and James, age 17.

James shared with me that he was a complicated teenager, and what endeared Andrea to him was that she understood him – they clicked. James told me that Andrea was everything a mother should be, without trying to replace his own biological mother, Marjorie, who had passed away the previous year.

James, and his wife, Ellen would make Andrea a grandmother twice over, with Molly, now four, and Matthew, now two and-a-half. Andrea chose not to be called Bubba, or Savta or even the more formal, Grandmother. Rather, inspired by Goldie Hawn, Andrea's title was "Glamma," because she was far too glamorous to be called a Grandma. Bringing gifts to Molly and Matthew were among Andrea's chief pleasures. Her progressive illness was an un-ending source of frustration for Andrea as she longed to get down on the floor and play with her grandchildren. But long before she became a Glamma, she would have to marry Richard first.

It was November 1995. With James, Katie and Emily all on board, Richard was now ready to formally propose to Andrea. But how to do it? Because we are talking about Richard, it would have to be a grand gesture, with style, and creativity worthy of Andrea.

Well it seems on Andrea and Richard's first date, Richard brought her 11 long stem roses. He explained to her that if this worked out, she would eventually get the 12th rose, to make an even dozen. After 10 months of dating. Richard arranged for them to take a vacation at the Club Med at Port St. Lucie, Florida. A large package was delivered to the couple, which Richard claimed to contain important work from his law firm. Then, at dinner, Richard told Andrea to open the package. What she found was an original oil painting of a rose, the promised 12th rose, with a diamond engagement ring hanging from the stem. "What's this?" she asked. At which point Richard asked Andrea to marry him. Andrea said "yes." Actually, her exact words were "you bet." And ever since then, Andrea's email address has been "ubetlevine@aol.com."

Andrea and Richard were married on March 30, 1996, at Congregation Beth Judah, in Ventnor, New Jersey, with a lovey reception at the Seaview Marriott, in nearby Galloway Township.

The newlyweds enjoyed their mini-moon, that is, their abbreviated honeymoon, in New York City at The Saint Regis Hotel. Immediately after that, Andrea and Emily made "aliyah" -- a term normally reserved for the spiritually uplifting emigration from Diaspora to Israel, but in this case applied to their move from Jersey to beautiful Wilmington, to begin a new life.

Andrea lit up the room everywhere she went in Wilmington, and her outgoing personality helped her to quickly make new friends, including members of Brandywine Country Club, parents of children at Wilmington Friends School, the Pilot School and later Brandywine High School, especially its tennis team. The summer parties Andrea hosted for members of Richard's law firm were legendary for their graciousness and good fun.

Where Richard, who had been in Wilmington since the early seventies, had made friends with such families as Phyllis and Buddy Aerson, thanks to Andrea, now Richard was becoming friends with the Aerson children. This pattern was repeated again and again with many of Richard's long-time friends.

Richard, who had been President of Congregation Beth Shalom, as well as serving as an officer on the Boards of both the Jewish Federation of Delaware and the Jewish Community Center, had created quite a reputation for himself before he married. But it was not too long after his marriage that Richard was simply known as “Andrea’s husband.” Andrea opened up an entirely new world for Richard. One of Andrea’s new friends, Susie Grant, recently wrote the following to Richard:

Words cannot express how she was a burst of sunshine wherever she went. I can't think of anyone who turned every idea, every conversation, into an idea of how she could help other people...or animals! Her illness was so unfair, to her and to her family. Her beautiful memory will surely be treasured and will be a blessing.

And Stacey Baron Colton shared with me how hard it has been to lose such a wonderful friend and neighbor. I know Stacey speaks for so many of you who are gathered here this morning, as well as the many, many other friends who could not make it here but who are, never-the-less, with us in spirit today.

How wonderful it was that Richard and Andrea recently hosted such a beautiful 20th wedding anniversary celebration, with their children holding the chuppah, at the Wilmington Country Club. The Levine’s gave so many friends the opportunity to demonstrate how much we all adored Andrea while she was live to enjoy it. Richard, what a gift you gave us.

Friends would always be a central part of Andrea’s life. After Andrea’s mother, Doris Dobkin, passed away in 2001, Richard and Andrea bought a beach house in Margate, New Jersey, where they made new friends and renewed many of Andrea’s lifelong friendships. When Andrea’s health no longer allowed her to climb stairs, Richard and Andrea moved to a high rise condominium in Ventnor in 2013.

Apart from her family and friends, the love of Andrea's life were her pets.

Andrea's love for pets, combined with her entrepreneurial spirit, morphed into a business when in 2004, she began a jewelry business, together with a pet jewelry design and sales business and her beloved "model" Yorkie, Lulu. She had an office first at Independence Mall and later at Park Plaza Condominium.

She showed her pet jewelry at the annual Jewelers Association Convention in New York City (winning the best new vendor her first year) and at various shows around the country. Her jewelry was featured in magazines both in the United States and in Europe. Andrea used her pet-inspired jewelry in fundraising for organizations like Canine Partners for Life (CPL) and the Delaware Humane Association. I am proudly wearing her CPL silver plate pet silhouetted cufflinks this morning while my wife is wearing the white gold and diamond paw print necklace – both gifts from our generous and loving friend, Andrea.

The focus of Andrea and Richard's 20 years together was sunshine, travel and of central importance: Emily. Emily said that throughout her 25 years, her mother was her best friend. One of my very first memories of my rabbinate here in Wilmington, was the over-the-top bat mitzvah party Andrea planned for Emily at the Hotel Dupont. It was so extravagant that the family unofficially called it "the wedding for one." But it was officially called the "Emmy Awards," inspired by Emily's name. To get to the party you had to walk down a red carpet worthy of Hollywood, where impersonators playing Lucille Ball, Desi Arnaz, and Joan Rivers, all greeted you with witty repartee.

Emily said her mother imparted to her the values of never giving up, always pushing yourself to do your best, along with, never forget to write thank you notes, and always come with a gift. In earlier years, Andrea taught Emily how to be a responsive child, and in more recent years, how to be a competent adult And above else, Andrea encouraged Emily to always look people in the eye.

In 2011, Andrea was mysteriously stricken by the rare progressive neurological condition known as multiple system atrophy. This disease forced her

to close her business in 2013. Her love of dogs and need for help in walking brought her to Canine Partners for Life in Cochranville, Pennsylvania, where she was matched with her service dog, Balick, in 2013. Of course the Honorable Helen and Bernie Balick are not only Beth Shalom members, but well-known and honored judges in Delaware. Although they had sponsored a service dog for Canine Partners, in their modesty they had refused to take advantage of a naming opportunity. So, by default, Canine Partners chose to name the dog "Balick." When this beloved dog came into fellow congregant Andrea's life, the Balicks insisted that they rename the dog. But Richard explained that it was much too late. The dog already knew its name was Balick, and that was that. Andrea's love for Balick soon became as great as her love for her family.

When her multiple system atrophy progressed so that in 2014 she could no longer walk even with Balick's assistance, she unselfishly, courageously, and sadly surrendered Balick back to Canine Partners for Life so he could be reassigned.

Andrea passed away quietly and painlessly on Wednesday evening, February 15, following a courageous five-plus year battle against multiple system atrophy, which progressively deprived her of the things important to her life. In recent weeks, on various Fridays I would bring one of our own rescue dogs from the Delaware Humane Association, Sparky, or Cinnamon or Oreo to visit Andrea. They would jump on to her first floor hospital bed where she would pet and love them enthusiastically. I saw her continuously project her loving personality during her illness, always reaching out and embracing. It was really hard to watch Andrea lose more and more of her functionality, but she kept pushing through – those of you who attended annual High Holy Days services at Congregation Beth Shalom are witnesses to Andrea's desire to stay plugged in to her community. And with Richard's unflagging devotion and support, Andrea never ceased to be an important part of our lives.

In the last years of her life, aside from devoted Richard, Andrea was assisted by caregivers Mary Cutler, Ellen Newton and finally Linda Swinney, who lovingly cared for her until her death. The family is grateful to these caregivers

and her longtime doctor and friend, Karl McIntosh in Wilmington, and her doctors at University of Pennsylvania Hospital.

Andrea will be missed by her family and many friends in Wilmington, New Jersey and elsewhere, especially the sister of her late husband, Rochel Lomner and her husband Yaakov, of Brooklyn, New York, and their many children and grandchildren, who always treated Andrea as part of their family.

It is striking to me that of all the qualities which God could have looked for in finding a leader for the Jewish people, midrash says *ts'ar ba'alei chayim*, kindness to animals, was the deciding factor which made Moses shine above the rest. I, the husband of a veterinarian, am uplifted that this mitzvah was Andrea's trade mark – as evidenced in the photo of Andrea in yesterday's *News Journal*, with Andrea holding several beloved pets in her loving arms. Be it through our support of Delaware Humane Association, Canine Partners for Life, or through the way we treat our own family pets, may we find ways to love and care for animals, as well as those human members of our society who are most vulnerable, and may we do these acts of kindness in Andrea's memory – *zichrona l'bracha* – may her memory be for a blessing, and let us say *amen*.