

Rabbi Michael S Beals

May 7, 2021

Wilmington, Delaware

Susan “Susie” Jacobs Rosen nee Greenberg

Sarah Hinda bat Yitzhak Beryl v’Nechama

April 25, 1944 - May 4, 2022 (22 Iyar 5781)

Susan Jacobs Rosen, known to all as “Susie” with the infectious laugh, passed away when Jews all around the word were reading from the double Torah portion of *Behar* and *Behukkotai* which conclude the Book of Leviticus. In the Jewish religion we believe that the Torah portion in which one passes away can tell us something significant about the person we are mourning. In the very opening of *Behukkotai*, we get a brief but eloquent promise of blessings for those who follow God’s ways and a lengthy and chilling series of curses for those who reject God’s ways. We have free will. If we follow God, God promises: “I will grant your rains in their season so that the earth shall yield its produce and the trees of the field their fruit. Your threshing shall overtake the vintage, and your vintage shall overtake the sowing; you shall eat your fill of bread and dwell securely in your land.”

The moment I saw that reference to freshly baked bread, and I immediately knew which path Susie had taken --- from Jewish apple cake to key lime pies and mile-high candied walnut apple pie -- Susan Greenberg Jacobs Rosen was all about the blessings, as evidenced with three generations of her family who remember her this morning with love.

Susie was born on April 25, 1944 right here in Wilmington, Delaware – the city which prides itself in saying “Wilmington: A Place to Be Somebody.” From her delicious baked goods at her store, The Baker’s Rack, to her youthful double date with the future President of the United States, Joe Biden, Susie was born in the right city. Her father was US Army Lt Colonel Bernerd Isaac Greenberg, whose name we recite with our honored Beth Shalom servicemen every Yom Kippur at Yizor.

Her mother was Nina Matusoff Roffman, the Beth Shalom Rabbi's Secretary, who along with Cissy Berlin, Ida Coder and Bea Twer, was part of the Fab Four who ran Congregation Beth Shalom for years. Susie was the oldest, followed by middle child, Beverly and baby brother Les. Beverly Cloud, who is a long-standing member of Beth Shalom explained family life to me this way: Susie was the eldest, miss perfect, she couldn't do anything wrong. And Les was the youngest, and the only son of an only son, so he couldn't do anything wrong either. So that left me, Beverly, the middle child, who got to do everything wrong for the both of them."

It's ironic that Susan was born and also died in the same hospital, Wilmington Hospital: both events separated by 77 years. Her first home was at 27<sup>th</sup> and Pine Streets. Then there were two stints in Texas owing to her father's army service, and then the family settled down on West 39<sup>th</sup> Street, in what was the Jewish neighborhood of Wilmington. And like most Jews of her era, Susie went to PS Dupont for both junior and high school, and belonged to the Jewish sorority. Her social life included dances at both the Jewish Y at 4<sup>th</sup> and French Street, and over at the Seller's Estate. Ironically, not too long ago, Susan had another visit to that old Seller's Estate, now transformed into the Kutz Senior Living Campus – where she received excellent care, and the only place in Delaware to get three hot kosher meals per day. Susan was Wilmington through and through – that includes her Jewish life as well. After having her Bat Mitzvah at a Reform Temple in El Paso, she would come back to Wilmington to have her Confirmation at Beth Shalom. You can find her face beaming at you from one of the Confirmation class photos along the wall facing our Executive Director's Office. And a little bit later, she would have her wedding at Congregation Beth Shalom, as well.

Susie graduated PS Dupont in 1962. After a brief stint at the University of Delaware, she attended Goldey Beacom College, where she graduated in 1964 with an Associates Degree in Secretarial Skills. Her first job out of college was working for Beth Shalom congregant, Larry Kauffman's insurance agency. That became her springboard to married life. As a real estate agent, young Ed Jacobs was friendly with Larry – insurance and real estate went hand-in-hand. And so it was at Larry's insurance agency that Susie and Ed first met. It was reported to me that it was "love at first sight." They were engaged on Christmas of 1964 at Uncle Stan and Aunt Netty Hart's home in the Lynnfield neighborhood of Wilmington.

It also happened to the birthday of Grandpa Louis Green, so the entire family was gathered together, when Susie came out of the backroom wearing that sparking diamond engagement ring. And that was no ordinary sparkling engagement ring. Ed needed to sell his equally sparkling '64 green Impala to buy that ring.

Rabbi Kraft had officiated at Susie's Confirmation back in 1960. And it was Rabbi Kraft who officiated over Susie's wedding to Ed on the bimah of Congregation Beth Shalom on March 28, 1965. They even had the wedding reception at Beth Shalom. From there the young couple honeymooned in the famed Borsht Belt. Among the comedians playing the Catskills in the mid-sixties were: Woody Allen, Milton Berle, George Burns, Shecky Greene, Danny Kaye, Jackie Mason, Don Rickles, Joan Rivers and Henny Youngman. Any one of these could have been entertaining Susie and Ed during their stay.

The young couple made their first home in the city before moving off of Grubb Road, where Susie established quite a reputation for baking cakes. First they were just for friends and family. But as her reputation grew, those original friends and family began ordering them for their friends and family for simchas. Eventually, by the 80's Susie's culinary gift grew into The Baker's Rack, located at the corner of Concord Pike and Murphy Road, just across the street from fellow Congregation Beth Shalom member, another Susie – Susie's Uniforms. Susie, that is, Susie Jacobs, provided desserts for some of the best eateries in Wilmington, from Feby's Fishery on Lancaster Pike to the Back Burner, right off of Old Lancaster Pike. It's her amazing desserts that would forever be remembered by her appreciative children so many years later.

But for the longest time ---there were no appreciative children. So Susie and Ed took the big leap and adopted their first child, Beth, on August 13, 1969, when she was only three day's old. Beth remembers lots of family gatherings growing up, always surrounded by cousins. There were Saturday's with MomMom Nina at the Farmer's Market and Sunday's with the bustling Jacob's family. In her teenage years, Susie would bribe Beth to take trips with her down to Rehoboth Beach. But with mouth-watering Nicolo's Pizza as part of the deal, it didn't take too much convincing. Beth remembers doing road trips with her mom when it was time to check out colleges – and one particular road trip where Susie left her daughter sleeping in the car so she could go shopping at the outlets.

Susie had a passion for all things having to do with the kitchen. Of all her mom's baking and cooking, Beth's favorites were her mom's chocolate mousse cake, her fudge pecan pie, and her brisket.

Susie's sister, Bev, added that her favorite was Susie's candied walnut apple pie, and her key lime pie --- except when Bev was pregnant and the key lime pie smelled like wet socks. The only other time when Susie's cooking smelled like wet socks was when she was experimenting with a cooked collie flower and cheese creation early in her cooking career. Baby brother Les agreed that the collie flower and cheese creation indeed smelled and tasted like wet socks. But that his big sister's Jewish apple cake and cherry-on-the-top cheese cake were his personal favorites.

Beth married Bill in 2000. That would be the beloved Bill who would go on to build Susie's kitchen in her Talley Hill home. Bill was the only man in Susie's life who could actually DO anything around the home. Together, Bill and Beth blessed Susie with two amazing granddaughters: Emma and Madeline. Emma remembers fondly how her MomMom attended her productions of "Wizard of Oz," "Peter Pan," and "Charlie and the Chocolate Factory" at the Albert Einstein Academy (I know that to be true, because I was at every one of those same productions in the audience, very close to Susan, watching my own kids on stage along with Emma). Susie never missed a Grandparents and Special Friends Day, be it at the JCC ECC or at AEA. She loved hearing her MomMom say "There's my Emma" as she picked her from Day School. It was very important for Susie that both Emma and Madelyn have a great Jewish education, just as she had a great Jewish education as well. It must have given Susie so much pride to see her own granddaughter paying it forward, as an ozeret teaching assistant at Beth Shalom's Hebrew School, helping provide a Jewish education for a next generation of Jews. And what a treat it must have been to watch Emma have her bat mitzvah on the bimah that Susie herself had been both confirmed on – and married on. It just doesn't get much better than that.

And MomMom was there for all of Madeline's big moments at the JCC and AEA as well.

Life is FULL of surprises! Born on November 23, 1970, a mere 15 months after adopting Beth – Michelle was Susie's surprise. We have all heard stories about people who could not get pregnant and therefore adopted. Then not too long afterwards they get pregnant. I have heard that story before, too, but I have never met anyone in real life to back it up until Michelle. What a wonderful, gift-wrapped surprise!

In childhood, Michelle remembers being shlepped around with Michelle in a bright yellow station wagon, rolling around in the way back before that whole seat belt business. Everyone always knew where Susie was because of that uniquely painted station wagon – it was like rolling sunshine...which is a really nice metaphor for Susan, don't you think? That station wagon took the Jacobs girls on all sorts of adventures, including the drive-in up on 202 above Glen Mills, armed with Hickory Farms snacks.

One of our favorite phrases in Judaism is "*l'dor va-dor*," from generation to generation. The fact that Michelle not only embraced her mother's love of cooking, but actually pursued it at BICC- the Baltimore International Culinary College, with a memorable master's class in Ireland – must have given Susan such *naches* and gratification. At this point, Beth might want me to add that although she may not be such a memorable cook who went off to culinary school, she has mastered her mother's brisket and sweet 'n sour meatballs.

Michelle and Eddie blessed Susan with a wonderful granddaughter, lovely Leilah – now 15 years old. Without missing a beat, Leilah shared that her MomMom's Jewish Apple Cake was, beyond a doubt, her favorite baked dish. Nine years ago, something really special happened. Michelle and Leilah moved in with Susie in her Talley Hill home, and that created the opportunity for some really special memories. In this generation, very few grandkids get to say that they actually got to LIVE with their grandparents, which is very different than those once or twice a year visits down to Florida. Leilah loved being in the car with her MomMom when they picked up her cousins, Emma and Maddie from school, and then maybe going to the Town Centre Regal for a movie, followed by something delicious at Red Robin or Friendly's. Leilah also appreciated her MomMom's visits and support at her gymnastic meets.

Susie was married to Ed for a beautiful 25 years until his life was cut off from complications from a car accident, back in 1990. She was 46 at the time. Her girls were all grown up and out of the house. What was she supposed to do? She did what many people like her have probably done – she threw herself into her work, doubling down on her baking at the Baker's Rack. And in doing so, she quite accidentally baked up a great plan --- Fred Rosen.

Let me explain. While still living of course, realtor Ed had sold Fred the building right next door to the Baker's Rack on 202 & Murphy Road. And Fred would find excuses to go next door and buy coffee from Susie. Let me pick up the story from the eulogy I wrote for Fred back in 2009:

It was two years after Ed had died that Fred got up the nerve to ask Susie out. Once he decided in his mind that he was going to ask her out, it took another three weeks of trying before he got up the nerve to actually ask her. And even then, shy Fred made sure that it was a group date with the Meaney's, of HiPoint Dairy fame, and their mishpucha, the McMillion's. They all went to Romel's, which today has been replaced by Toltecha's over in Fairfax Shopping Center. Fred and Susie loved going out to eat together. Their dates also included dancing at what was then called Mr. T's, on Concord Pike, just over the Pennsylvania border. On Saturday nights they used to play golden oldies. As President of his local Rotary Club, Fred used to enjoy having Susie on his arm at Rotary Club social events. And so it was after a year of courting, that Fred, in a private moment in a Jacuzzi, popped the question to Susie in December 1993. She, happy to have found love again, said yes, and on February 27, 1994, they were married by Rabbi Ken Cohen of Congregation Beth Shalom. In a wry moment of typical Ken Cohen humor, the rabbi was reported to have said, when informed of the upcoming nuptials: "Fred, you should be as unhappy as the rest of us," which for Rabbi Cohen, was a blessing of sorts. All of Fred's bowling buddies were there for the big event. Calvin Freedman was the best man and Susie's sister, Beverly Cloud, was the matron of honor.

After living life as a quiet, mild-mannered bachelor for over 54 years, who would have thought one could find love, the women of your dreams, a ready-made family and a group of friends ready to embrace you, plus a wonderful, hitherto undiscovered sense of humor?

Susie and Fred's wedding date – February 27<sup>th</sup> -- was important because it couldn't be too close to tax season – Fred being a CPA. In fact, the actual honeymoon couldn't take place until after April 15<sup>th</sup>, so on April 16<sup>th</sup> the couple were treated to a vacation by their dear friends, the aforementioned Calvin Freedman and his wife, Carol, who not only paid for the trip to Las Vegas, Nevada, but actually came with, too. (I recently learned that Calvin and Carol's daughter is our community photographer Sharon Fullerton, who has become a bit of celebrity at Beth Shalom for her amazing bar and bat mitzvah photos – including my own Shira's simcha. From gifted parents come gifted children.) At any rate, this Vegas trip, would be the first of many vacations the two couples would take together, flying every year, once tax season was over, to a different part of the country, then renting a car, and putting on as much as 1500 miles, as they explored a unique region of the United States on each vacation.

Fred and Susie had a wonderful 15 years together. Fred always honored the memory of Susie's first husband, Ed, throughout their marriage. He insisted on keeping Ed's awards and photos on display, and when Susie suggested they sell the Talley Hill home and start fresh, Ed demurred saying that this was the house that Beth and Michelle had grown up in. I remember bumping into Fred at Lucky's over breakfast. He told me he had advanced Alzheimer's but on that day his memory was clear and he knew that I was his rabbi. I cherished that moment, and it was my sad honor to officiate at his funeral on October 31, 2009.

I have loved being Susie's rabbi. After 14 long months of COVID19 restrictions which have kept me out of hospitals, I was so grateful that the rules had changed enough so that when called by Beth, I was actually able to go to Susan's bedside at Wilmington Hospital, play the Debbie Friedman *Misheberach* prayer on my guitar, hold her hand, say Viddui, with both her daughters joining me for the *Shema Yisrael* prayer. As I got ready to leave the room, Susie, who had suffered a massive stroke and was no long speaking, used all her effort to move her hand slowly back and forth to bid me farewell. It was such a moving moment for me. She passed a few days later.

Of all Susie's life values, Family was the most important and I hope that will be something not only her daughters, but her GRAND daughters preserve in their own adult lives. She also made a point of treating everybody equal, following the words of Dr King, judging people "by the content of their character, not the color of their skin." She obviously loved to nourish people through amazing food which she created lovingly. Susie valued Judaism so much – her lifelong membership to Congregation Beth Shalom – Jewish day school education for her granddaughters. And Susie had a wonderful sense of humor – marked by a wonderful, memorable laugh – even more memorable than that old sunshine yellow station wagon.

May we, the living endeavor to preserve Susan Susie Jacobs Rosen nee Greenberg's sense of humor, love of family, love of Judaism, and yes, love of delicious baked goods and then we can truly say of Susie "Zichrona l'Bracha" – "may her memory be for a blessing, " and let us all say, "amen."