

Betty Wexler Rosen
Brana bat Michael
July 10, 1929 – December 2, 2010

In the week that Betty Wexler Rosen passed away, Jews around the world were reading from *Parashat Miketz*, from the Book of Genesis. The Torah portion completes the first of Joseph's three dreams. In the first of his dreams, he envisions his older brothers bowing down to him. Of course, as the youngest of 11 sons, his dreams don't match his reality. But by this past week's Torah portion, an adult Joseph, acting as Pharaoh's Number Two, lives to see his dreams come true.

In many ways, Betty's life bears some striking similarities to that of our hero, Joseph. Just as Joseph lived three dreams, through three very important men in her life, Betty also lived through three dreams, growing through the men who loved her deeply through three very important stages of her life. And although in her youth, due to financial constraints, Betty did not achieve the university education she was capable of, her dreams were eventually fulfilled. The academic achievements of not only her two children, but her grandchildren, in large part, were the answer to Betty's dreams. And in later years, Betty, herself, achieved

her own academic achievements as well – and most importantly, she never stopped being an enthusiastic learner.

Betty was the eldest of two daughters born to Michael and Kathryn LeBoritz, right here in Wilmington, on July 10, 1929. Betty's sister, Pauline, is at the Kutz Home, and we send our love and support to her. Thanks to Betty's mother, Kathryn, Betty was part of a much larger family. Growing up, for a time Kathryn's family and Kathryn's sister, Lina's family grew up together – which meant that Lina's six children were more like brothers and sisters to Betty. For many years Betty and cousin Sylvia lived next door to each other and not a day went by when Betty and Sylvia wouldn't speak to one another. Cousin Helen Pottock's daughter, Shelly Mintz took care of cousin Betty after she broke her wrist and I was told by Betty's daughter, Robyn, that she acted in every way like another daughter to her. I know from the Morning Minyan here at Beth Shalom, how much cousin Sam Swinger and his wife, Barbara, cared for cousin Betty. Sam was always sure to put her on the *misheberach* list for healing, if there was anything wrong. And finally, when I ran to the St. Francis Hospital to ICU after her heart attack, I was greeted first and foremost by a delegation of Betty's cousins.

Betty also had dear childhood friends who loved her dearly. The most prominent of these at Congregation Beth Shalom was dear Frances Stein, one of our synagogue's former most effective Executive Directors. I know she is taking Betty's death very hard and we send her all our love and support. Betty grew up in the old Jewish neighborhood, the hood, near Fourth and French Streets. Betty's life would span all three synagogues in Wilmington. She spent her early years at Adas Kodesch and Rabbi Gevurtz would eventually perform her wedding to Pinny. She raised her children at Congregation Beth Emeth. And she was my congregant in her later years here at Congregation Beth Shalom, where we have gathered to celebrate her wonderful life. Having started her early Jewish life at Adas Kodesch, where girls did not have bat mitzvahs, I knew her as an avid learner of Jewish studies in later years, and there is no doubt in my mind that had the opportunity been available, she would have had a bat mitzvah and certainly a confirmation. Betty was really enmeshed in the Jewish fabric of Wilmington. Adding to the friends of her earliest childhood, she made even more friends at Wilmington High School, where she graduated in 1947. She would be very proud to tell you that during these years she made the All State Band, playing clarinet. Betty would later see her dreams of musical aspirations played out in the lives of

her son, David, and her grandsons. Every piece of music they will play from this time forward, will be strengthened because they will be playing for themselves and for Betty as well.

Upon graduation from Wilmington High School, funds being tight in the LeBortiz home, Betty did not have the opportunity to continue on to college. Although in later years Betty would earn her Associates Degree from Del Tech. Instead she went to work, serving as a secretary for the airlines industry.

I spoke of Biblical Joseph's three dreams being paralleled by three dreams in Betty's life. The first dream was her marriage to Pinchas Wexler, known to all as *Pinny*. They met in about 1952. He was nine years older than Betty, and that showed in his sophistication and determination. He had come all the way from Buffalo, New York, to open up a dry cleaning business here in Wilmington. He had drive. But he also wanted to share his life, so he did what any sensible unmarried Jewish man in Wilmington would do. He started attending dances at the Jewish Y, located at Fourth and French. And it was at one of these dances that he met the lovely, thin, brunette, brown-eyed Betty LeBoritz. They were married on Thanksgiving Day 1953. That day continued to have significance years after her beloved Pinny died in 1980. In fact just a few weeks ago, on Thanksgiving Day,

Betty took her daughter, Robyn by surprise by asking her, “aren’t you going to wish me a Happy Anniversary?!” They were married in their first home and they honeymooned in New York City, taking in the shows in and around Times Square. Betty always displayed a photo from that happy time in her life in her home.

Pinny and Betty’s 27 years together was marked in large part, by their absolute love for ballroom dancing. They were not shy about taking the center of the dance floor, be it in ballroom dance competitions – which they often won, to their daughter, Robyn’s, high school prom (yes, at the time she was embarrassed – but later looked back fondly on that moment). Pinny was Fred Astaire, and in his arms, Betty felt like Ginger Rogers. Dancing was part of Betty’s first dream with her Pinny, and even more important, were her children.

Robyn came first. She told me how wonderfully supportive her mother was to her. Robyn, answered her mother’s dream of higher education, be attending the University of Delaware. And Betty showed her support by attending every single game where Robyn performed as a cheerleader. Not only did Betty mount those steep, stadium steps, but she more often than not, dragged her own, aging parents up those steps to join her. Robyn said her mom was a great cook, and that she has a portion of her mother’s famous stuffed peppers in her freezer,

even as we speak. We all want the recipe, Robyn. Robyn said her mom made the best roast chicken ever, and although we don't mix milk and meat together, I would be remiss if I didn't tell you that everyone loved Betty's "cheese dreams." This one we can all make – open face grilled cheese sandwich, using the broiler in the oven to melt the cheese. Robyn said it is the ultimate in comfort food.

Robyn married Paul Pascale, and together they blessed Betty with two amazing granddaughters, Jennifer and Jackie. I have often heard Betty brag about them. They called Betty, *Grammy*, and they and their friends thought Grammy Betty was so cool because she had her own Face Book account, and she friended most of Jennifer and Jackie's friends. I mean really, who, if anyone, has a grandmother on Facebook? Grammy was so active on Facebook that when she attended Jennifer and Jackie's respective Sweet Sixteen Parties, all the girl friends already had cyberspace friendships with Betty, and she was the life of the party. This story tells you something very important about Betty – she was forever young. She may have been physically into her eighth decade of life, but in her soul, she was still a teen – intellectually curious, open to new ideas, fun, and meaning no disrespect, flirtatious – she even flirted with me, and I would be lying if I didn't say it was kind of flattering (of course I made sure to my wife was

aware). I know, Jennifer and Jackie, no matter which universities you end up going to, where you end up living, how you make your own lives, your Grammy will always be with you, taking pleasure in each of your future accomplishments. She will always be with you.

How many mothers dream of saying: “my son the doctor?” Well David, who came along in 1958, gave his mother that pleasure, being a grad of Stanford’s Medical School and specializing as an Ear, Nose and Throat surgeon. He credits his mother for his start in medicine. As a ten-year-old boy, David was taken with Betty as she raised money for Devorah Hospital. It seems that many self-respecting Jewish women spent at least part of their lives in Wilmington raising money for Devorah Hospital. They specialized in cancer treatment, and as David held a can soliciting for Devorah, he began to get interested in their work. He proudly announced to his parents that he was going to become a doctor, and he set up a laboratory in the basement. Of course, not having the opportunities of a university education themselves, his parents took pride and pleasure in David’s aspirations. And in making his own dreams come true, David also made Pinny and Betty’s dreams come true as well. And through his playing of the trombone, and then the organ, he also continued his mother, Betty’s, All State Band clarinet-

playing dreams of years gone by. To this day, whenever David and Rachel switched states or countries, the first thing David looks for is a band that he can join.

David, together with his lovely *sabra*, Rachel, blessed Betty with two extraordinary grandsons, Ariel, the national level trumpet player, and Yoel, the drummer. Between David on trombone, Ariel on trumpet, and Yoel on drums, the Wexler family are a kind-of Jewish version of the Van Trappe's, minus Julie Andrews. Ariel has made his Mamma Betty so proud of his work at MIT. She recently read a posting of his work on quantum mechanics on Facebook and she wrote back, dubbing him her "little Einstein." And Betty was looking forward with all her heart, to attend Yoel's graduation from the Massachusetts Maritime Academy. Yoel, you must believe that your Mama Betty will be with, in spirit, as you graduate – as last Shabbat's Chanukah Haftarah said: "not by power, not by strength, but by spirit alone." The spirit is a mighty powerful thing, and knowing Betty's determination, if she wanted to be at the graduation, she WILL be. Betty's condo was a shrine to all four of her grand children. She loved you all so very much and took such pride in your accomplishments.

Pinny's death was hard on Betty. She was only 50 when, at 59, he succumbed to cancer. Yet I spoke of three dreams in Betty's life. Her second dream was her marriage to Isadore Rosen in 1982. To have found love again was truly a dream come true for Betty, who had so much love in her heart. This dream was bitter-sweet. Her beloved Izzy died of a heart attack in 1984. That's the bitter. The sweet was Izzy's son and daughter-in-law, Bobby and Jill. They, along with their three children, Debbie, Joey and Michael, and now their kids, all took MomMom Betty into their lives, and she became their adopted grandmother. She was included in every Rosen family event, and just spent this past Thanksgiving with the Rosen's. Betty felt as much pride for these Rosen children and grandchildren as she did for her Wexler and Pascale families. Betty had so much love to give, her heart was so big, that it needed all these family outlets. And that love was returned in full measure.

Well with Pinny death, and now Izzy's death, one would think that the dreams were over for Betty. She went to work for Del Tech, working in their Admissions Office. She sought new opportunities for intellectual growth by attaining her Associates Degree in Administration, but she found something else as well – one more dream -- a 16 year old friendship in a wonderful mench named Bill Emory.

They never married, but he was the best friend of her golden years. After they retired from Del Tech, where they had met, not a day would go by without a morning phone call from Bill to Betty, where they would plan their day together. And together they conquered the world, taking trips to China, to France, to Russia, to Poland. Robyn and David's kids looked up to Bill as a second grandfather, and Betty took his death, six years ago, very hard. Both Robyn and David described Bill as a real *mench*, and they were so grateful for the joy he brought their mother.

I, too, was so blessed to have known Betty. Often, during my years at Beth Shalom, I have not personally known the elderly men and woman whose honor and responsibility it was to eulogize. But not Betty. Not forever young Betty. Until her case of the shingles, she was my regular, every-noon time-Thursday student for Torah study. She was kind, funny, every-so-honest, filled with energy, love of life, possessing a wonderful sense of humor – in short, she was LARGER than life. Betty is one of my congregants who I could never forget. She would send me choice email articles for me to peruse, would unabashedly brag about her grandchildren to me, and was simply wonderful. After she recovered from the shingles she filled her Thursday noon slot in her schedule with some other

learning opportunity. I have missed her as my student. But not more than three weeks ago, I was a guest lecturer for one of her many, many beloved Academy of Life Long Learning courses, this one titled “Tevye and Friends.” After class, she told me she was bound and determined to return to my weekly noon time Torah classes. And I believe had she not succumbed to a heart attack, she would have been there. So I am officially keeping one seat empty for Betty every Thursday, but now that she will have Moses and the prophets to study with up in heaven, so I will understand if she skips a few of my classes.

Robyn and David commented how typical it was that her mom would have passed away so quickly. She never wanted to be a burden on anyone, and she never wanted to be placed in a care facility. She was fiercely independent, and so her sudden death, although a shock for all of us, including myself, does represent Betty’s wishes. We will never have her memory tarnished by a person whose faculties were fading, who had to rely on others for feeding and dressing. Betty Wexler Rosen’s memory will ever be preserved as a vital life force, who filled every room with her sparkling personality, who made her dreams come true, not once, not twice, but like our biblical Joseph, three times in her life. May her memory be for a blessing and an inspiration, and let us all say *amen*.