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Congregation Beth Shalom

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Lois Paul Stape
Shulamis bat Shlomo
July 31, 1929 – June 25, 2009

This week Jews all throughout the world are reading about the rebellion Korach waged against Moses and Aaron, found in the Book of Numbers. It is high drama at its best. So memorable was this story, that almost 2,000 years after it was reputed to have taken place, the early rabbis were still referencing it. In one of their most famous texts, *Pirkei Avot*, the Teachings of the Ancestors, the Rabbis talked about disputes *b'shem Shamayim*, that is, for the sake of heaven, and disputes there were NOT *b'shem Shamayim*, that is, NOT for the sake of heaven. An example of disputes for the Sake of Heaven were those between first century rabbis Hillel and Shammai. And the rabbis cited the dispute between Korach and his rebels as being the definitive case of a dispute not for the sake of heaven.

I mention for the sake of heaven, because both in the early part of her life and at the end, Lois' life and her concerns were for the sake of heaven, and it is precisely for that reason that we have gathered here, today, in the sanctuary of Congregation Beth Shalom, to say goodbye to Lois. She was educated in her early years at this synagogue. She was married by Rabbi Kraft, long-serving rabbi of this synagogue. And I, as the current rabbi of this synagogue, had the honor of leading Lois through the Shema, the ultimate affirmation of her faith, by her bedside at Christiana Hospital, as part of the Viddui, Confessional, prayers. And I was told by her loved ones that these were the very last words she ever spoke. At the end of her life, Lois, did teshuva. Rabbi Grumbacher, my colleague at Congregation Beth Emeth, where Lois and Jack raised their boys in the Jewish faith, shared with me that she expressed regret to those whom she may have hurt in her life. Her articulation of the Shema, "Here O Israel the Lord is Our God, the Lord is One," plus her quiet apologies and expressions of love to those closest to her, were ALL for the sake of heaven. Lois proved the rabbinic expression that one can always do teshuva, repentance, up until the day of one's death, but not one moment after. And Lois did in deed do teshuva.

Lois was born on July 31, 1939 right here in Wilmington. She was the only child born to Louis and Helen Paul. While pregnant with Lois, Helen's husband, Louis, died tragically in a freak accident. Louis never met his daughter, and in loving memory, Lois was named for the biological father she would never know. How Helen went on with her life, as a single woman in the 1930's defies description. But she went on. She married again in order to ensure her daughter would have a father. And from her mother, Lois learned to be strong – a trait that would stay with her for the rest of her life.

Lois grew up around the intersection of 28th and Monroe. Her life-long girl friends included Doris Hollett Budner, Mitzi Humber Herman, and Charlotte Kaufman Balick. They were all born four months of each other and all attended P.S. DuPont High School. I asked Doris Heisler, her good friend for more than 60 years, what was Lois' secret in keeping friends for so long. Doris told me that Lois treated her more like a sister than a friend. This was certainly true for Lois' Bridge Group. After more than fifty years, Lois was bonded to Janice Antanoph, Phyllis Ploener, Anne Jacobs, Connie Wahl,

Doris Kane and Flo Austin. When Doris went to visit Lois last Monday, the last words Lois said to her were “I love you.” When Lois made friends, they were friends for life.

Lois was an intelligent student and as a result was able to skip grades, graduating PS Dupont High School at the age of 16, back in 1946. From there she went on to study at Goldie Business College. She completed her studies and went to work for the Welfare Department. She always had compassion for the clients who came for help. But in truth, Lois and her mother, Helen, had had a pretty tough time of it themselves. Their circumstances certainly put their faith to the test. Lois went on to work as an Executive Secretary for Transworld Airlines, TWA, whose headquarters, at one time, had been located right here in Wilmington.

In 1948, thanks to a Real Estate Agent who was friends with Lois’ mother, Lois was introduced to Jack Stape. They first laid eyes on each other in Jack’s father’s store, Theresa’s Gifts, located downtown at 9th and Washington Streets. What a catch Lois was for Jack: tall, brunette, beautiful blue eyes. They dated for two years. Then one day, the story goes that Jack took Lois out on the Brandywine and he said, “see that rock going down stream? That’s me and I’d like you to follow me downstream for the rest of my life.” Well how could a girl pass up such a poetic proposal? They were married on January 7, 1950 on the pulpit of this synagogue, in its original location at 18th and Washington Streets. They honeymooned in New York City, coming home when they ran out of money. Funds were so tight for the couple that they had to move in with Lois’ mother. Jack made a living selling shoes at a store over on 7th and Market. From shoes, Jack eventually got into real estate and over the course of the next 12 years he slowly and steadily built the business whose familiar Jack Stape Realtors signs are a familiar part of the Wilmington business landscape to this very day.

After 59 years of marriage, I asked Lois’ children what was the secret for their parents’ long-lasting marriage? The first answer was Jack’s ability to master two words early on in their marriage: “yes” and “dear.” But upon further reflection they shared that Jack always led Lois to believe that she got her way but that wasn’t really always the case. But what was most important was that Jack made her feel that she got her way. The joy of Lois’ life was her family, beginning with her two sons.

Jeff, Lois’ eldest, was born in 1953. You will be hearing from him in just a few minutes. Jeff remembers that the phrase his mother most repeated to him in childhood was: “wait ‘til your father gets home.” Jeff said his baby brother, Michael, was the good kid. In his youth, Jeff remembers his mother being a resourceful teacher, teaching him basic math by laying out the silverware to count, and how to read by reading street signs, a talent which Jeff still likes to show off to this day. Jeff’s success in business might have come from his early proclivity to swallow pennies, but he assured me that his mother did NOT teach him this skill. He loved anything and everything his mother cooked. His favorite dish was his mother’s meat loaf and potatoes with gravy, and to this day no one has been able to replicate the recipe to Jeff’s liking. To Jeff, this was the ultimate comfort food. Lois derived great pride when Jeff graduated Miami University.

Jeff and Caryl brought comfort and joy to Lois with the birth of Lois’ two cherished grandchildren, Pamela and Mark. The grandkids loved their time down in Boca Raton with their grandparents. Mark said he especially enjoyed his grandmother because she was always up for anything. And Mark was Lois’ special hero because

during his visits, she would have him do all the technical things that she couldn't, like update her computers and her cel phones.

Baby brother Michael was born in 1958. He will address you in just a moment. He remembers his mother being involved in his education through her volunteer work on the PTA at Edgemore Elementary School. Although Jeff remembers him being the good brother, Michael says, in truth, he wasn't perfect. But, Michael, in truth, who is? Lois' comfort food for Michael was her brisket. Michael said it was absolutely delicious. He also remembered her Shabbat dinners in his youth, where his mother began each meal with the blessing over the candles. Michael also said that thanks to his mother's cooking and hard work, their home was where the extended family gathered for all the Jewish holiday meals, from Rosh Hashana to the Passover Seder. And Lois ensured that both her sons had good Jewish educations culminating in their respective bar mitzvahs at Beth Emeth. And I had the pleasure of getting to meet Lois when she attended the bar mitzvah of her grandson, Mark, at Congregation Beth Shalom, on this very pulpit. I saw that Lois derived a lot of *naches* from that bar mitzvah, and I am sure she derived a lot of *naches* from Michael when he continued his advanced education by attending and graduating from York College. *Naches* from the *kinder* – what more could a Jewish mother want?

As her children grew, Lois got a lot of pleasure from so many things in life, from playing tennis to playing bridge, canasta and mahjong with her friends. I also understand that she was quite a shopper. She could work a Marshalls' sale like no one's business and she knew quality. After Jack retired, they enjoyed extensive travel together, from the Caribbean to Mexico to Europe, where Lois had a special passion for Italy and Greece. She was a voracious reader all her life, from best sellers to gossip magazines, the latter being a passion Lois passed on to her eldest, Jeff (who knew?)

Among Lois' most important values were love and support of family and friends, as well as the time-honored values of honesty and respect. She enjoyed good health for the first seventy-five years of her life and refused to let the last five years of poor health define who she was. She was determined to live life on her own terms, at all costs. Her doctor praised her for her great sense of humor, remarking that Lois always made him feel good after a check up – amazing because normally the reverse is supposed to be the case in a patient-doctor relationship.

But I understand what the doctor was saying. I was called to Lois' bedside last Monday evening at Christiana. As I shared with you earlier, I chanted the Confessional Prayer, *Vidui*, for her, but when I got to the *Shema*, the Jewish education of her youth came back to her, and Lois sang along, giving us both great satisfaction, as well as to her Michael, Jeff, Caryl, and Caryl's sister, Felisha, who were all by her bedside. Then I kissed Lois on the *kepala*, on her forehead, and she looked at me, and gave me the most angelic, contented smile. It is that smile that will forever stay with me, and define that moment I shared with Lois, and like her doctor, it gave me profound satisfaction and joy. In her last verbal communication with the world, she did what most religious Jews pray for: she had the clarity of mind and the strength of body to recite the *Shema*, and it was *shem Shemayim* – for the sake of heaven. May her memory be for a blessing, *zichrona l'vracha* and let us say *amen*.