

Rabbi Michael S. Beals
Congregation Beth Shalom

October 13, 2021
Wilmington, DE

Marilyn Rosetta Weiler

Miriam Esther bat Gershon u'Malka

October 12, 1933 – October 10, 2021

d. 15 Cheshvan 5782

Marilyn Weiler passed away when Jews all around the world were reading from the third *parasha* of Genesis, *Lech Lecha*. The Torah portion tells of the journey of the world's first Jews, *Avram* and *Sarai*, from their Mesopotamian home in Ur, up to Haran, then down to Canaan, then further down on to Egypt and then back up to Canaan again. It is an appropriate Torah portion for celebrating Marilyn's life journey, from multiple trips from Brooklyn to Camp Lokanda and back again, then on to Detroit and finally Wilmington –a journey of almost 88 years, which included a loving 58-year marriage, two extraordinary children, two even MORE extraordinary grandchildren, ten terrific nieces and nephews, and 19 loving great and great-great nieces and nephews --- and lots of good friends thrown in just for good measure.

Marilyn, who entered the world on October 12, 1933 from the Bensonhurst neighborhood of Brooklyn, was the first-born child of Jarrit (known to all as Jerry) and Molly Gosler. This past Tuesday would have marked Marilyn's 88th birthday. Jerry's family came from Holland through his father's side, and Dutch culture was an important part of Marilyn heritage, which she passionately passed down to her children. Many of her Dutch cousins perished in the Holocaust, and Marilyn endeavored to search out those Gosler cousins who survived, becoming the bridge between the cousins. In fact, today we have Gosler cousins joining us via zoom from as far away as Australia and Holland.

Marilyn was blessed with a baby brother, Joel, her junior by six years. But she always looked up to him as an older brother, as a mentor, an advisor, someone who could do no wrong in her eyes. No one understood Marilyn the way Joel did. During her recent bout with depression due to her failing health, all she wanted was one last hug from her brother for her birthday. She also so adored Joel's wife, Diane, who was like the sister she never had.

Marilyn's home was somewhere between poor and middle class, and definitely religiously observant. That said, Marilyn never had a formal Jewish education. She prayed wonderfully in Hebrew but it was courtesy of her ability to memorize the prayers, and a very musical ear. She would pass down a love of Jewish tradition to her children and grandchildren, making her spiritual home first at Adas Kodesh Shel Emeth, under the guidance of the legendary Rabbi Gerwitz, and for the past 5 ½ year with us at Congregation Beth Shalom.

She attended Utrecht High School, graduating in 1951. Marilyn was always attracted to art and music. In fact, she was so gifted that she was offered a scholarship to study the arts at Oberlin College. But her parents refused to let her go. So instead, Marilyn worked summers at Camp Lokanda in the Catskills as a camp counselor, a job she would hold all throughout college, and funded her way through Long Island University. She studied both art and teaching, earning not only her BA and Teaching Degree in 1955, but also a special art medal from Pratt School of Design.

Upon graduation, Marilyn began a 30-year career in education teaching first Braille to visually impaired children, and later elementary school. For Marilyn, education was a true vocation, and an enduring value in her life. We have Estelle Harris, close friend of Marilyn's mother, Molly, to thank for her introduction to Morris, known to all as Morrie, back in March of 1958. Marilyn was a good-looking brown-eyed brunette, with a beautiful smile, warm, fun, outgoing, a spitfire. Morrie was the opposite of all these qualities, which made Marilyn so attractive to him. Upon returning to his native Detroit, they embarked upon a romantic, long-distance relationship, sustained by letters where they expressed their life's goals and heart's secrets to one another...long before the era of emails, texts and Instagram.

Morrie's proposal to Marilyn is worth recalling. Still long distance, Morris arranged to have the engagement ring purchased at a Brooklyn jewelry. Then Morrie arranged to have Marilyn's father, Jerry, slip the ring on his daughter's finger, as Morrie popped the question over the phone.

Fortunately, Morrie and Marilyn's long-distance relationship came to an end when the couple were married on September 1, 1957 in a Brooklyn catering hall. Morrie's niece, Wendy, served as the flower girl.

Thelma Smolar, affectionately known as Timmy, Marilyn's closest life-long friend, served as the Maid of Honor. After the wedding, Morrie and Marilyn honeymooned in Acapulco, Mexico, where the couple enjoyed lots of fishing and waterjet skiing.

From sunny Acapulco, the couple returned to Morrie's native Detroit, where Marilyn took on a teaching position. It was thanks to Morrie's brother, Bernie, and his offer to work for an electrical supply store called Art Craft, back in 1958, which first attracted the newlywed couple to their new home in Delaware, settling in the Fairfax neighborhood of Wilmington. Among their neighbors were Jeannie and Howard Handelman, who shared a duplex with the young couple. The Weiler's joined Adas Kodesch. Aside from shul, Marilyn strengthened Jewish life in Delaware by becoming one of the founding members of the Delaware Chapter of the National Council of Jewish Women.

Marilyn began teaching for the blind in one of the Wilmington city schools. She was a lifelong member of Delta Kappa Gamma and received the Governor's Award for Teaching Excellence when she retired many years later. Even after retirement, Marilyn continued teaching method students at the University of Delaware and learning at the Academy of Lifelong Learning, actively taking classes up until her passing.

The success of Morrie and Marilyn's 58 years of marriage can be attributed, in part, to Morrie's devotion, gentility, thoughtfulness, warmth, friendship, dedication, humor, Yiddishkeit, and perhaps above all, patience. He passed away on April 29, 2016. Marilyn has spent the last five and a half years honoring Morrie's memory, first saying Mourner's Kaddish in Congregation Beth Shalom's Morning Minyan. Then after the time of reciting Kaddish was over, Marilyn stuck around adopting the Minyanaires as her family – making every morning brighter for me, as rabbi, and the faithful dedicated crew, including Josh Sachs, Howard Zucker, Lori Barbanel, Peter Burcat, Steven Klein, Barney Kantar, Cantor Elisa, Ed Sobel, and Anita Sobel – who was reduced to tears when she learned of Marilyn's passing. All the Beth Shalom members served as part of her extended family. She joined us early in the morning, in person. Then after Covid19 hit, she would get on Zoom early, just so she could schmooze and catch up with her fellow worshippers. I enjoyed flirting with her and making her laugh. I truly loved her.

It was here, in Wilmington, that Marilyn and Morrie built their family. Adriann was the first to expand the Weiler family, coming on the scene in 1961. Her mother was laser focused on Adriann's education, from proper penmanship, alas a lost art in the era of texting and emails, to reading, arts and culture. She remembers being taken by Marilyn to her first musical, *Fiddler on the Roof*, with Zero Mostel, as well as December performances of *The Nutcracker* at The Hotel, and she herself was the product of many dance classes.

Her mother was an excellent cook and baker. Among Adriann's favorite childhood dishes were her mother's chicken with gravy with the amazing home-made stuffing, frozen cake with Lady Fingers, and an amazing pecan pie, made perfect with Jello caramel pudding –which, alas, was discontinued, so there is no longer any such thing as a perfect pecan pie.

Adriann remembers her mom supporting her obsession with animals, allowing her to bring home stray dogs, lost cats, even sea creatures collected during family trips to Florida, which were lovingly preserved in the hotel bathtub. Every year, Adriann recounts how her mother would take her and her brother on a field trip to collect caterpillars among the milk weed. They would be temporary lodgers in netted homes on the back porch until they were transported to Marilyn's classroom. There, each student would be presented with their very own caterpillar to raise from caterpillar to chrysalis to cocoon to butterfly. Adriann's love of animals and her menagerie at home can be directly credited to her mother's own love of all creatures great and small.

Adriann is also grateful for her mother's trips to see Aunt Diane and Uncle Joel in Chicago every year. One of Aunt Diane's neighbors was young Jeff Sax, and it was he who gave Adriann her first kiss, and it was he who would eventually propose marriage to Adriann. Jeff was fiercely devoted to his mother-in-law, and there wasn't anything Jeff would not do for her, which could be challenging because she was pretty tough. One moment they might have been in heated debate and the next minute rolling with laughter.

Together, Adriann and Jeff blessed Marilyn with her one and only granddaughter, Jennifer, who Marilyn dubbed "the gorgeous one." Granddaughter and grandmother had a saying only they shared: "I love you. I like you. You're my best friend forever and ever."

Marilyn, known to Jennifer as Nanna, NEVER missed a performance – Jennifer has an amazing voice and could easily have become a Cantor – I have already gone on record telling Jennifer that it's never too late – second career cantors and rabbis are quite in fashion these days. In fact I got a call from Adriann and Jeff's rabbi, Philip Bazeley in New Brunswick. He told me that the only thing better than listening to Jennifer sing prayers at Anshe Emeth Memorial Temple, was watching Marilyn kvelling from the congregation seats as Jennifer sang those prayers – Marilyn's glow lit up the entire sanctuary according to the rabbi.

We are all so glad that Marilyn got to meet her future grandson-in-law, Jon. She was so happy to meet him. I have asked Adriann to ask the officiating rabbi to officially invite Marilyn to join the wedding from on high, early in the ceremony on September 3, 2023. I don't think ANYTHING could keep Marilyn away and I believe Adriann, Jeff, Jon and especially Jennifer will feel her Nanna's presence blessing her on that special day.

The next person to expand the Weiler franchise was Steven, who joined the family in 1967. Steven could not have hoped for a more supportive mother. She attended all his sporting events. Marilyn even served as umpire, complete with striped shirt and chest protector for his Namaan's Little League Team. Steven recalls, with affection, his mother's kasha vanishkas, matzah ball soup, and even her homemade empanadas. Steven appreciated his mother's emphasis on education, beginning with him being sent to Tower Hill, culminating with his graduation from Sanford.

Steven and Janie blessed Marilyn with their one and only grandson, Thomas. Just as Marilyn was there to root on Steven at all his sporting events, so, too was she there to root Thomas on at all HIS events, including that SAME Namaan's Little League Team – but no striped shirt and chest protector – age has its privileges. Thomas called Marilyn his Oma and Oma was there for all of his acting roles at the Albert Einstein Academy, from a young *Oompa Loompa* in the production of *Charlie and the Chocolate Factory* – with my own child playing Charlie, to *Lion King*, to a lead role of *Schroeder* in *You're a Good Man Charlie Brown* – I bonded with Thomas because *Schroeder* was also MY first role in a school production many years earlier.

Among Thomas' greatest joys were overnights with Oma, beginning with ordering food in, then watching a movie together on tv, then getting to take a bath in Oma's amazing whirlpool jacuzzi bath, and culminating with snuggling up with Oma in the large king size bed where they would take turns reading books to one another.

As Marilyn attended more and more Albert Einstein Academy events, from Model Passover Seders to Lag B'Omer barbeques, Marilyn became more and more enmeshed in the Jewish community of Delaware, and especially Congregation Beth Shalom, where so many of its members served on the Jewish day school faculty, including then-Head of School Rabbi Jeremy Winaker. With that connection to Beth Shalom, it became Marilyn's natural new spiritual home to honor the memory of her husband, Morrie, after he died, more than five years ago. When Thomas has his bar mitzvah on the bimah of Congregation Beth Shalom on April 30, 2022, I will make a point of formally welcoming Marilyn into the celebration, but I know her spirit would be with us whether I invited her or not – I don't think Marilyn would miss Thomas' bar mitzvah for the world. Marilyn got a taste for things to come when she heard Thomas chant *Ashrei* for the congregation, beaming with *naches* as Morning Minyan regulars congratulated her on her grandson. Marilyn also got to hear Thomas *leyn* Torah with AEA, so she knew her grandson had almost all the pieces in place for his bar mitzvah.

Marilyn has always treasured her independence – living on her own, driving herself wherever she wanted to go, being her own boss. Needless to say, her acute respiratory emergency of August 5th of this year, which landed her in the hospital was a terrible blow to her. It necessitated her being placed on a vent and the whole ordeal left her relegated to an oxygen tank, a walker, home health care, and the inability to drive. This wasn't how she wanted to live. During these past two months, her niece and nephew, Scott and Sharon, her good friend, Tanya, Steven's frequent visits, and the crew from the Morning Minyan helped give Marilyn purpose and life. We all had such a great love of Marilyn and she knew it.

Marilyn's most important values were family first, followed by a strong commitment to education reflected by 30 years in the field, perpetuation of Judaism, a love of animals, and a passion for arts and culture. In her obituary she was noted for playing opera music particularly loud while singing along. She truly valued her friends and made all of us feel very special.

This week, in synagogue as we recount Abraham and Sarah's journey in *Parshat Lech L'cha*, we can also celebrate and elevate Marilyn Weiler's life journey. She was our beloved Nanna, Oma, Mom, Sister, and Friend. May we emulate her love of life and her fierce independence for almost 88 years, and then we can truly say *zochrona l'bracha* – may her memory be for a blessing, and let us say *amen*.