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Wilmington, Delaware

Harry David Zutz

1917 – 2008

*Hertz ben David*

Harry David Zutz passed away in the week when Jews throughout the world are studying the Torah portion, *Vayeitzei*, taken from the Book of Genesis. The Torah portion begins with a young Jacob, starting out with nothing, in the home of his uncle and future father-in-law, Laban. But through hard work, discipline, diligence, and time, he builds a successful business – not insurance, but the next best thing: herds of sheep and goats. Not only that, but he builds a strong and vibrant family: two wives, two concubines, one daughter, and twelve sons. Through those twelve sons, Jacob builds the Jewish community, because each of those twelve sons will evolve into twelve tribes, the foundation of the Jewish people. It seems as if this Torah portion was reserved especially for Harry. Harry who said: “You can’t wait for something to happen. You have to Make something happen.” Harry, who started out with nothing and who ended up building the largest insurance agency in Delaware. Harry, who earlier this year had a tribute lunch in his and George Weiner’s honor chaired by the Senator Joe Biden, the next

vice president of the United States. Harry, who has built an impressive and beautiful family, right down to great-grandson Jack, (who would be perfect for my four year old daughter, Shira). Harry is the Jacob of our day. He is the patriarch of Jewish Wilmington. It is his memory we come to celebrate today. When you call the Siegel Jewish Community Center, a JCC which in many ways Harry helped build from the ground floor, they ask: “How can we inspire you?” Harry’s life is the answer to that question. Harry is our inspiration.

The Zutz name is part of the fabric of Jewish Wilmington. Harry’s uncle, Max Zutz, tailor to the elite of Wilmington, working from 311 Delaware Avenue, is one of several prominent Jewish Delawareans featured in the book: *Half a Chance: Stories of Jewish Delawareans*. The Zutz family all seem to be related to most of Jewish Wilmington. So it is not surprising that right here in this synagogue congregants like Jeff Lewis, Yetta Chaiken, Marsha Borin and Larry Zutz are all cousins. What an impact this family has had on Wilmington.

Harry was born right here in Wilmington, on December 12, 1917. His parents were David and Mary Zutz. We are blessed to have his brother, Ted, his sister-in-law, Sylvia, his sister Elsie Klein and their families with us today. His siblings, along with Harry, and for that matter almost Jews all of the Jewish in their neighborhood, attended P.S. DuPont High School. Harry continued his studies at

the University of Delaware, and he has been a generous alumnae to his alma mater. It was at P.S. DuPont that he met the beautiful Gladys Rich, whose father, Barney, who like his future son-in-law, Harry, started with nothing, eventually transformed his business into one of the most successful chains of Delaware drug stores which were eventually sold to Sunray Drugs. If you include Gladys and Harry's young great-grandchild, the Zutz Family are five generation Wilmingtonians, so their roots go down deep in this community. Harry began dating Gladys in earnest back in late 1939, when she was 18. Among the restaurants they frequented in their courtship was the Charcoal Pit of their day, the Spik and Span, home of the mile long hotdog. After three years of dating, Henry popped the question and they had intended to elope. However because they did not realize they would need a blood test, their plans were foiled. What to do?

Harry's connections to Beth Shalom, particularly to the Kraft family, stretched right back to his childhood. Both Rabbi Kraft and his lovely wife, Leah, were beloved Hebrew school teachers to Harry as well as Gladys. Rabbi Kraft would later perform Harry's bar mitzvah as well as his Confirmation. So it made sense, then, that the Kraft's were instrumental in marrying Gladys and Harry. Rabbi Kraft performed the service and Leah did the dishes. The Kraft's were two of twelve guests invited to the wedding ceremony. The service was held in

Gladys's childhood home at 403 W. 20<sup>th</sup> Street. Two of the huppah holders, Harry's younger brother, Ted, and dear family friend, Mace Burger, are with us this morning. The young couple bought a house on 35<sup>th</sup> and Washington, and they have called Wilmington their home for more than 30 years. With Gladys maintaining an ordered, loving home environment, Harry was able to launch Harry David Zutz Insurance, in business since 1940.

The success of this business is something of a biblical miracle story. Harry literally started with nothing. He chose insurance because it was the only business he could think of where you didn't need start up capital, except the \$200, which he borrowed. Harry said that he founded his business on the "principles of neighborly manners, a benevolent spirit and ethical business practices." Headquarters were a small, one-room office in the Delaware Trust Building in downtown Wilmington.

Harry was also the founder of Professional Liability Insurance, Inc. and a member of Lloyd's of London and Regent National Bankshares Holding Company. Governor-elect Jack Markell, wrote of both Harry and his good friend, George Weiner: "your names are synonymous with success in the Wilmington business community...In your business practices, in your support of your own people and in your leadership in civic life in general, you set an example that I, among many, am proud to follow." This from the next governor of the State of Delaware. And how

right Governor-elect Markell is.

Harry served as Director of the Bank of Delaware (now PNC) and also played an instrumental role in real estate development in the Wilmington area including the Bank of Delaware Building at 300 Delaware Avenue; Ninth Street Plaza; Playtex Warehousing in Dover and various Market Street properties. He was also a member of numerous insurance-related boards, committees and associations over the years.

Of his philanthropic work, along side his friend George, Senator Joe Biden wrote: “our state – and the Jewish community in particular – is a better place because of your decades of hard work. Your leadership over a half-century is an inspiration to everyone, especially those of us who have made a career in public service. It is not hyperbole when I say that many Delawareans live better lives today because of your service to the community.” This from the next vice president of the United States of America. And how right Vice President-elect Biden is.

Harry is a life-long member of Congregation Beth Shalom, a past president of B’nai Brith, and was a member of the board and building committee for the Kutz Home. Many of Delaware’s finest public officials owe their start to the moral and financial support which Harry provided with such a giving heart. It should

come as no surprise that Harry's granddaughter, Lisa, serves so ably on Senator Biden's staff. Harry was actively involved with many other organizations including the Avoda Club, Delaware State Board of Education, United Community Foundation, Delaware Chamber of Commerce, Delaware Safety Council and Hunter's Run Golf and Racquet Club, just to name a few! He also served as President of the Brandywine Hills Civic Association. He, along with George Weiner, were founding members of Interfaith Dental Clinic, a free dental clinic that served children in need.

Harry served on countless committees and boards of the Jewish Federation of Delaware and chaired the Federation Campaign, which was the driving force in the development of the current Jewish Community Center and Family Campus facilities. Harry served as president and was a life member of the Jewish Community Center. And it was the Siegel JCC, under Assistant Executive Director Donna Schwartz, that chose to honor both Harry and his friend, George, with a Life Time Achievement Award this past April. Ruth Siegel told me how nice that they chose to honor Harry while he was in good health and good spirits and able to enjoy the many family and friends who came out to show him their love. How right Ruth is. Often we wait for moments such as these, funerals, to sing the praises of our loved ones. The event honoring Harry and George was so

refreshing as it honored these two leaders while they lived. Close to 200 friends and family filled the Doubletree Hotel and the event raised more than \$55,000 for the JCC.

I asked Donna why she and the JCC chose to honor Harry. She told me that when Harry turned 90 this year, it was exactly 50 years ago that he had served as President of the JCC so it was an anniversary worth celebrating. “Besides, “ Donna said, “he is such an inspiration. Look what he has done for himself, for his family. He started with nothing. And now look what he does for the Jewish community. He supports everything: Federation, the Center, and well beyond.”

Donna is quite correct. In fact, at the University of Delaware, there is a Gladys and Harry David Zutz Award given annually to a rising senior woman who shows dedication to community service.

How Harry will be missed at this year’s 16<sup>th</sup> Annual Sports Classic, a wonderful fundraiser for the Siegel JCC which was one of Harry’s passions. Along with George, Harry was one half of the Mulligan Men. Now I had no idea before Donna explained it to me, but a Mulligan is a do-over when you swing your golf club and the ball goes terribly wrong. Harry along with George would sell Mulligans as a special fundraiser at the Sports Classic: three for twenty five dollars – and no one could get pass the Mulligan Men without a purchase.

I have spoken of Harry's third love: his business, his second love: community leadership and philanthropy, but his first love, his most important love, was his *mishpucha*, his family, beginning with his wife, his children, and their children.

In 1944, Harry and Gladys welcome the first of their two children into the world: Marsha. Marsha remembers her mother and father making her feel safe and secure in her childhood. Marsha, like her father and mother, was confirmed on the bima of Congregation Beth Shalom. Rabbi Jacob Kraft would later marry Marsha and Dr. Howard Borin, again on the bima of Congregation Beth Shalom, and later their children, Lisa Borin Ogden, and her brother, Josh, would celebrate their respective bat and bar mitzvahs on the bima of Congregation Beth Shalom as well. Through Harry and Gladys' fine examples, three generations of her family have culminated their Jewish studies on the pulpit of this synagogue – now that's holiness. Harry *shep naches*, took special pride, in his granddaughter Lisa's admission to Law School, her passing the Delaware Bar, and her work in Senator Joe Biden's offices in Wilmington and Washington, D.C. Lisa would go on to marry Paul, and together bless Harry with another generation, with the birth of the very handsome Jack. Jack is the fifth generation in his family to belong to Congregation Beth Shalom, and I look forward to being at his bar mitzvah. Lisa's

brother, Josh took real joy in seeing to his grandfather's every need, particularly companionship, especially after Harry's beloved Gladys passed away three years ago.

I have Marsha to thank for really getting to properly meet both her father and her mother. In the fall of 2004, shortly after my arrival to Wilmington, Marsha created the wonderful Wilmington Forum series, which featured among great luminaries, my hero, Nobel Prize winner Elie Weisel. Marsha made me and my wife her special guests and put me at her father and mother's table. It was such a pleasure to spend the evening with them, and to see what great pride they had in their daughter's great accomplishment. I can understand why Harry had such a great reputation of being such a people person, he was engaging, kind, gracious and witty.

In 1946, Gladys gave birth to a son, Larry. Larry said that his father's business succeeded because of his dad's "work ethic, his values, his integrity and his professionalism." Together, with his wife, Joyce, the couple blessed Harry with two grandchildren, Jessica and Michael.

Both Marsha and Larry will address you shortly with their own recollections of their father.

Aside from *shepping naches* for his children and grandchildren and great-

grandson, in later years, Harry developed a great love of traveling with Gladys. Together they have experienced every continent around the world, spent an entire month living in China, traveled to exotic places like Fiji, and toured every country in Europe. But what gave Harry the greatest pleasure was their nine visits to the State of Israel. More than anything, the Zutz's absolutely loved the people of Israel. They excited them.

Harry would have never achieved his successes in business, community leadership and philanthropy, if it were not for Gladys' behind-the-scenes work: keeping home and family in order. It was Gladys' quiet strength and clarity which provided Harry such a strong foundation to spread his wings, so Harry's successes were also Gladys' successes, and how he has sorely missed her these past three years. I would like to picture them as finally together again in heaven, their love restored for eternity.

We began our journey together with a look at this week's Torah portion: a Jacob who started with nothing and went on to build a business and a family, and really, an entire Jewish nation. Here in Wilmington, over these past 90 years, we can say that Harry David Zutz really did the same: he is the Jacob of this community. And although the quote belongs to Harry, clearly the biblical Jacob might have also said: "You can't wait for something to happen. You have to Make

something happen.” Harry David Zutz has left very large shoes for us to fill. In his absence we are all going to have to step up. We are going to have to be more giving to our synagogues, to our Jewish Community Center, to our Jewish Federation, the Kutz Home, the University of Delaware, to our Delaware politicians. Inspired by Harry ‘s tireless efforts, there is so much good we can do.

*Zichorona l’vracha* – may his memory be for an inspiration.