

Shirley Snyderman Klein

September 14, 2016

Cantor Solomon: Psalm 23

Shirley once told me that after all her years of religious education, the most profound teaching of all came from one of the aides who accompanied her in the latter years of her life. “Try, every day, to live your life in such a way to make God happy”. She urged me, well actually, she directed me to announce that from the pulpit that Friday evening, and to teach it to the children in the religious school on Sunday, and to publish it in the Temple newsletter and to speak about it in front of large crowds. So, as she would have wanted, I am announcing it today to you. “Try, every day, to live your life in such a way to make God happy.”

We have gathered here today to grieve and to honor the memory of Shirley Snyderman Klein. A simple statement at the beginning of every funeral. And yet, how can we grieve for Shirley, so vital, so present, so brimming over with purpose and plans, with indignation at injustice, with motivation to fix and solve and resolve, so indomitable? And who has gathered? Those who loved her, those who feared her, those who were awestruck by her, those who were grateful to her, those who depended on her, those who learned from her, those who served with her, those whose lives would never have been the same without her. Her beloved sons, Andy, Michael, and Howard. Her daughters in law Jayne, Clara, and Susan. Her grandchildren, Marshall, Sarah, Rachel, Jake, Sam, David, Steve, and Tory, and their spouses, Rachel, Dean, and Elizabeth. Her extended family, her employees/companions, her colleagues, her fellow board members, her fellow citizens of Forest Hill, her fellow community leaders in Harford County, her customers, her fellow members of Temple Adas Shalom and Baltimore Hebrew Congregation, those

who considered her “a living treasure” in the words of Dr. Roger Schneider, chairman of Upper Chesapeake Medical Center Board of Directors. Those of us who cannot imagine a world without Shirley. A paler, quieter, blander world, yet one permanently improved by Shirley’s 86 years of service to it and her absolute and utter devotion to being God’s partner in repairing it.

- Marshall speaks
- Michael speaks
- Andy speaks
- Howard speaks

Shirley was concerned about her death, about what would happen after her death.

Since Shirley grew up as a Reform Jew, as I did, and she attended Baltimore Hebrew Congregation, I knew that hundreds of times she heard these words from the old Union Prayer Book, recited just following the mourners kaddish. Sometimes, when she was telling me about her parents, Fannie and Julius Snyderman, she would ask me to recite these words with her.

“The departed whom we now remember have entered into the peace of life eternal. They still live on earth in the acts of goodness they performed and in the hearts of those who cherish their memory. May the beauty of their lives abide among us as a loving benediction. May the Author of peace send comfort to all who mourn and all the bereaved among us and wherever they may be. And let us say amen.” But those lyrical words

sometimes did not comfort her as they had when she was younger. She wanted to be absolutely certain that after she died, her children and grandchildren would continue to thrive, be successful, and never shirk. She wanted to be absolutely certain that the myriad projects she initiated would not be diminished or forgotten or neglected.

One of the rabbis who visited her gave her a book about afterlife. The soul, she read in the book, flies over the earth after death, and can see what is happening in the mortal world it has left. Ah, Shirley said, that's more like it. She donated money to construct skylights. So she would be able to fly above us, and watch, and make sure that her donations were being used for the good purpose for which she intended them. One of these skylights is at Or Hamizrach Synagogue just up the street on Park Heights Ave. An Iranian Jewish synagogue. I asked Andy, why did she donate to that particular synagogue? She was fascinated, he said, with what Jews could accomplish in the diaspora, she was the descendant of tough, smart, and high achieving Eastern European immigrants, and she had Queen Esther's courage.

Shirley was a Queen Esther figure in many ways. She left her home town, as did Esther, to live in an area where there were few Jews. Despite the odds against her, she greatly influenced the kingdom. Queen Esther stood up to the king. Shirley courageously stood up to the zoning commission, to senators, county executives, to school boards, to identify corruption, health risks, dangerous environmental situations, educational needs, and civil rights.

After Haman's demise, the King gave Esther and Mordecai much autonomy in Persia, and with that power, they built to help the kingdom of Persia flourish.

What Shirley did to help her community flourish will be chronicled in articles, such as the one in the Aegis/Sun this morning. Absolutely remarkable. When I came to visit her at Upper Chesapeake about five years ago, she was telling her nurse and some nursing students how she built that hospital, how she drove to Baltimore to Sinai's emergency room with a sick child in the middle of the night and thought of all the other mothers doing that. She resolved that Harford County should have a state of the art hospital. And she did it. She headed a campaign that exceeded its goal of raising \$10 million for the hospital, which opened in late November 2000. The Klein Family donated \$1 million to get the campaign rolling.

"The greatest form of work you can have is to give to others," Shirley told The Aegis in a 1999 interview at the height of the fund-raising campaign. "It is your sense of self, well being and identity.

"Shirley Klein was the founder and first chairperson of the Upper Chesapeake Health Foundation, and spearheaded the Capital Campaign that enabled this community to have a modern, state-of-the-art comprehensive medical center in Bel Air," Lyle Sheldon, president and CEO of University of Maryland Upper Chesapeake Health, said in an emailed statement.

"Her drive, her vision, the intensity and focus of her commitment, her wisdom and her unfailing sense of humor set an unparalleled standard of leadership for this organization," Sheldon said.

Dr. Roger Schneider, chairman of the hospital's Board of Directors, also noted her "commitment to excellence in health care for Harford County, and her personal involvement in the achievement of that goal, day-in and day-out for over 25 years, enabled her to witness the fruits of her labors during the latter years of her life."

"Rarely in an institution's history can one find an individual whose footprint played as iconic a role as Shirley's did at Upper Chesapeake.

The poet Longfellow wrote almost 200 years ago:

Lives of great men all remind us

 We can make our lives sublime,

And, departing, leave behind us

 Footprints on the sands of time ;

Footprints, that perhaps another,

 Sailing o'er life's solemn main,

A forlorn and shipwrecked brother,

 Seeing, shall take heart again.

Let us, then, be up and doing,

 With a heart for any fate ;

Still achieving, still pursuing,

 Learn to labor and to wait.

Shirley left her footprints on the sands of time. She was up and doing with a heart for any fate, achieving, pursuing, and laboring. Not too much waiting. As you heard from her grandchildren, her work ethic continues to inspire their lives, not just in the family business of Klein's Shoprite that provides nourishment for the community in countless ways. But with her legacy of service to the women's commission that resulted in SARC, The Sexual Assault/Spouse Abuse Resource Center, her advocacy for clean water, educational enrichment, anti-discrimination. Her financial

support of the Women's seminary of Maalot in Baltimore, school for native Americans in Montana, and countless Israeli charities and political causes.

When I went to visit her at her home in Forest Hill, there would be a pile of solicitations that she would be going through. She told me about each of them, showed me letters she wrote to them in response, including senators, presidents of corporations, the president of the United States, and the prime minister of Israel. etc, sometimes she would even write her suggestions to them on the back of the check.

Shirley was dedicated to our temple, Adas Shalom-Harford Jewish Center by working for many years in the gift shop, on the curriculum transition team in the religious school, the support of youth programs, and religious education for all. She gave us advice on construction, on dress codes, on textbooks. She gave me advice in how to function as a rabbi in this community, which was as new to me 10 years ago as it was to her 63 years ago. She responded to articles in our newsletter by phone and in writing, and was unbelievably generous not only with her pocketbook, but with her time and her kindness.

A heartwarming story was relayed to me yesterday, one that epitomizes Shirley. When this young family moved to the community over 20 years ago, Shirley reached out to them with advice, encouragement, warmth and a Seder Plate. The new family was in the gift shop, looking at a Seder Plate, but knew it would be an extravagance for them. Shirley did not actually give it to them, after all, she was a businesswoman, but created a special discount for that day. "The family holiday table should be bright and cheerful, she said, and you will pay it back to the temple some day." And of course, she truly set that blessed process in motion, as that young mother is now the outstanding director of our widely renowned preschool.

Somebody said that it couldn't be done

But he with a chuckle replied
That "maybe it couldn't," but he would be one
Who wouldn't say so till he'd tried.
So he buckled right in with the trace of a grin
On his face. If he worried he hid it.
He started to sing as he tackled the thing
That couldn't be done, and he did it!

Shirley was the consummate problem solver and she was so sad and frustrated that when Ralph was ill, she could not save him or cure him. "I'm his wife, I should be able to." When I was writing a eulogy for Ralph, I asked her what she wanted to be said of him. "You should say," she responded, "that we were always equal partners, not true in every marriage, but true every day in our marriage. I knew he would be a hard worker, and would be a good earner, so I left everything familiar and moved here to make a life and a business and a family." Shirley could be both a forceful leader and an equal partner, that was quite a feat.

Like the old man who planted the tree that would bear fruit for his children, we thank you Shirley for planting for your children, and grandchildren and all children. For repairing Harford County, and being God's formidable partner in repairing our world, for inspiring all of us to a work ethic of honesty, integrity, productivity, excellence, efficiency, discipline, community responsibility, for the myriad kindnesses untold. Sometimes you weren't sure that we all loved you, because of your assertive and outspoken manner, but yes, you were loved. Yes, you were our Queen Esther, yes you were our woman of valor. Yes, you were the matriarch. Yes, your memory will be a blessing for all of us, and for generations to come.