

Eulogy of William Fields
Ze'ev ben Elchanan v'Rut
Date of Death September 3, 2008 - 3 Elul 5768
Rabbi Eliezer Havivi

We gather together here today, sharing our sorrow, to bid farewell to our friend Bill Fields. We recall the blessing of his love and of his friendship. We reach out, with love and compassion, to Anne, to Bryon and Marc and Lauren and Ellen and their families. There are so many of us here today who knew Bill and loved Bill, we reach out to each other as we remember him. We thank God for all that was good his life, and for the precious memories which endure.

Bill Fields was a first born son to Ruth and Edward Fields, born in NY in 1937, and grew up in Rockville Center, four years older than his sister Ellen. After his Bar Mitzvah, the family moved to Greensboro to open Fields Department Store downtown. He attended Grimsley, which was then called Greensboro Senior High, and UNC.

Bill was a sophomore, when the Jewish girls from Women's College, now UNCG, came out to Chapel Hill one day to meet the Jewish boys. Bill spotted Hedy, they fell in love, and within the year they were married. They lived in an apartment on Lawndale Drive, Bill worked for his father, and Bryon was born nine months after the honeymoon. Bill left his father's business and worked for Prudential Life Insurance, 2 ½ years later Marc was born, Bill got a promotion and he and Hedy and the kids moved to Cincinnati, where Lauren was born.

Bill always wanted to come back to Greensboro, and in 1964 he found a job working with Phil Levine and came home. They lived in some rented places, then on Surrey Dr, and then on Westminster. The kids grew up and went to school here, Papa Ed and Nana Ruth moved back to Greensboro, and Ed and Bill together opened "The Showroom" in 1967. The kids remember hanging around the store a lot in those days, eating donuts and ice cream from the places next door.

Over the years, Bill built that business into 50 showroom stores, from Atlanta to Washington.

After 20 years of marriage, Bill and Hedy divorced, remained friends, respected each other, and shared the parenting of their children.

At one point in the 80's the economy turned sour, and stores began to close, - Bill looked for the silver lining, and began to learn the liquidation business. Bill and Gene Polner, his partner, in the showroom, bought Lori's, a women's clothing store in Friendly Center.

Around that time, Bill, who had been dating, just waiting for the right woman to come along, met Anne. He had actually met Anne many years before when she was still a kid, when she worked in the Showroom on Market St. Anne had moved back from Los Angeles, where she worked for the airlines, to Greensboro – their first date was in December of 1986, they were married eight months later in August of '87. They lived in Friendly West Townhomes, then moved to Chiswell next door to Mimi and Jack Levin, and then into their home on Holden. When Lori's went out of business, Bill and Anne started A&B Store fixtures, A&B for Anne and Bill. . Marc joined his dad in business in 1994, Bill stayed active in the business until he broke his hip last February.

What kind of a man was Bill Fields? He was a quick decision –maker. He had strong opinions, and moved quickly on them. Even though he didn't embrace synagogue attendance, he was a proud Jew – He was President of his AZA chapter in high school, so he was particularly pleased when his son and grandson followed in those footsteps. He volunteered to be an usher during the Holidays, so he wouldn't have to be in services, and as one of the kids noted to me about their living on Chiswell, "close to the shul, but not in it."

Bill loved to play poker, and Gin Rummy. He was an avid reader, he loved watching basketball, he was involved in the Carolina Cougars, the ABA team here in Greensboro, and he used to play tennis as a family. And he loved his dogs.

And he was also a family man. In early years, he worked very hard to support his family. By the time he had grandchildren, he had the time to take them to New York, to show them "his" New York, and teach them how to play poker. Thanksgiving weekend was the place for the family always to be together, and gather with friends.

Bill's friends in earlier days were Sigmund Davidson, Bobby Pearlman, and Bob Lavitas, Irv Corman and Bill Starr, Elliot Pearlman, Jerry Martin, and Barry and Ronnie Framm.

Bill had a sense of humor. When Marc was young, and working at the store, he once said that he was so hungry that he could eat a dozen donuts, no, make that two dozen donuts from Honey Dip, down the block. Bill, a man with a good sense of practical jokes, as well as not wanting to back down from a bet, had them line up two dozen on the counter, and brought out some friends to watch. There's a similar family story with the kitchen sink, a very large Sundae that Marc tried to finish, which took him so long to eat, that by the time he got down to the bottom scoops, they had melted, so Bill asked the waitress for replacement scoops for the melted ones, to make sure that he ate it all.

Bill was a man who appreciated quality, who and grew to love the fine things in life. His kids called him King Farouk – He didn't want to fly coach, he didn't want to sit in the middle seat, and he didn't want to fly in the no smoking section. He loved to live extravagantly – When the grandkids slept over, Bill would get five or six movies to watch with them, even though they could only stay awake for one or two. He would take them to Harris Teeter, and popcorn and candy and ice cream, far more than they could ever eat. He took them on cruises for High school graduations.

And Bill taught his children a work ethic – not just to work hard, but to connect with people through business. He made his employees feel special. When he would buy businesses that went out of business from people who had reached the end of their rope, after all, as a liquidator, he was a kind of business undertaker, he was able to interact with them in such a way as to leave them feeling whole.

William Fields, *Ze'ev ben Elchanan v'Rut* left this world after 71 years of life, on the 3rd day of September, the third day of the Hebrew month of Elul, in the year 5768.

To Anne, Bill promised you 20 healthy years, and in the end gave you 21 He pursued you in the beginning and for twenty-one years, he felt that you made him whole;

To Bryon and Barbara, Bryon, your dad loved talking business with you, all the way back to your first college balance sheet, and in later years, you shared a love of fine wine, which gave you both great joy;

Marc and Kay -- Bill was responsible for bringing you together -- Kay was working in one of Bill's stores in Atlanta, and he introduced you to each other;

Lauren -- you were his baby girl. He owned clothing stores, and you had one of each outfit, even though you preferred blue jeans;

To Ellen and Roger and Cindy and Wendy to Bill's grandchildren, who called him Poppa -- to Michael and Evan and Aaron and Eric and Martin;

To Hedy, you and Bill were happy together for many years, you shared your children and so many of your vacations and wonderful times;

to Shirley and Bill and Andy and Janis, and to Sarah, who was really a member of the family, and to all of us who knew Bill -- and to know Bill was to love him,

Our arms and hearts reach out to each other in love and in consolation.
May Bill's memory always be a blessing for us.