

EULOGY – Jerry Groner

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20 Shevat 5768

By Judy Groner

Jerry died on the 18th day of the Hebrew month of Shevat. Ironically, the number 18 equals *Chai* – life. Dad's life as the father we remember changed significantly in the last twenty years. Over twenty years have passed since the first signs of memory trouble became evident. His descent into the cruelty of Alzheimer's disease began gradually, then spiraled quickly downward.

I would like to take just a moment to remember Dad as Dad - the father that Jon and I remember as children.

Dad never let us wear socks in the house. Whenever Jon or I would pad through the house in stocking feet, Dad would say, "Put on shoes or take off the socks. We're not sitting shiva." Dad grew up with a strong sense of *Yiddishkeit* that permeated his ethics, behaviors and his sense of right and wrong.

Dad was a die-hard Republican. As Jon may have mentioned, Time Magazine was his Bible. His presidential choices were based on one principle only – his opinion of which candidate would be the best for Israel and for the Jews.

Dad was not a regular shul go-er until I decided to become one in the late sixties. It didn't take long for dad to decide that he was in on it too, and when I was in 8th grade, he joined me as a regular Shabbat attendee. Soon, Beth El became a significant part of Dad's life. He served on various committees, never attending the meetings, but always getting the work done. When his parents died a few years later, he became a regular morning *Minyannaire* as well, continuing this commitment long after he was done saying kaddish. Even when he was no longer able to drive, helpful congregants continued to enable him to participate in this most meaningful part of his life.

Dad's education did not extend past Chicago's Senn High school, but he made certain that his children's did. He made peace with his daughter's career in education and could not have been more proud of Jon the doctor. Dad was a builder, a fixer – from model train tracks to barbecues. In most areas of expertise, he was self-taught, and surpassed his peers in the vast array of his hobbies and talents – from photography, to gardening, to Irish Setters to badminton. He lavished his love on his begonias and roses with Styrofoam cones, a special lighting system in the basement, and carefully cultivated beds. We have shelves of photography, gardening, dog show and badminton trophies that verify our certainty that Dad was a champ.

Dad respected nature and appreciated music. I have fond memories of walks with Dad, Mom and Jon in the Daniel Wright woods. Usually Dad had a camera in hand, in order to photograph barns, plants or animals in unusual light. Though he was not particularly tuneful, he enjoyed singing at full volume in order to accompany his collection of classical albums. He also took pleasure in belting out familiar

melodies in shul. He was able to hum along with familiar tunes long after he was able to carry on a conversation.

Dad was in charge of the practical parts of our lives. When Jon and I were teens, he taught us how to drive. His unique method baffles my own driving children today: left foot on the break, right on the accelerator. He never used a map when driving – Jon and I agreed that Dad had a Chicago map imprinted on his brain's hard drive. When he got lost once taking me to Highland Park from O'Hare, we knew that what we were seeing was no longer mere forgetfulness.

He also encouraged our love of that peculiarly Chicago genre of 16" softball, and played with us in neighborhood pick-up games using his childhood softball until the hide came off.

Despite their mischievous behavior, Dad loved our Irish setters. One of the reasons he loved them is that they only listened to him. Dad's devotion to the dogs was such that he missed a family trip to Mom's parents in Mississippi in order to be with Amber while she gave birth to her puppies. Mom was none too happy about this, particularly as the dogs paid absolutely no attention to her attempts at commands. His dedication to the dogs was diminutive, however, compared to his loyalty to Mom. He loved Mom fiercely. In the south we would say, "Dad thought Mom hung the moon." He believed Mom was the smartest, most beautiful and precious woman in the entire world.

Plunging into the depths of the disease which robbed him of so much pleasure during the last two decades, he missed the opportunity to enjoy and *kvell* in the presence of his six grandchildren. He was not able to attend any one of their b'nai mitzvah, each of which would have brought him a great deal of joy and nachas.

In this week's Torah portion, *Parashat Mishpatim*, we hear the final of three affirmations of Israel's acceptance of the Covenant. In Exodus 24:7 we read, "*VaYikach sefer habrit vayikra B'oznei ha-am, vayomru, kol asher deebear adoshem na'aseh v'nishmah.*" "All that the Lord has spoken, we will faithfully do!" Commentators on this verse indicate that saying, "I will do" before fully understanding the laws indicated great faith. The Israelites trusted that God's demands would be reasonable and in their best interest. Dad understood that there are many things in life that we cannot appreciate without doing them first, and through the actuality of doing, we understand their significance. Na'aseh v'Nishmah – faithfully doing – befits the life led by Jerry Groner, Yosef Meir ben Shlomo, zichrono l'vracha. May his memory be a blessing.