

Eulogy of Mary Ann Mendelson  
*Miriam bat Ya'akov v'Sarah*  
Date of Death July 4, 2008 -- 1 Tammuz 5768  
Rabbi Eliezer Havivi

*Aishet Chayil*

The author of Proverbs pays tribute to the Jewish woman in his chapter glorifying the *Aishet Chayil*, the "Woman of Valor". He praises the Jewish woman, finding a virtue for her suggested by each letter of the alphabet. In this poem, the author sums up his sentiments in the most moving tribute to the Jewish woman found in a single verse: *Kamu vaneha v'ya-ashruha ba'ala viyhalla*, her children rise up and bless her, her husband he too praises her.

No more eloquent eulogy, no better summary of Mary Ann Mendelson's life can be given than to say that her family consider themselves blessed because she was their wife, mother, sister, their grandmother.

Mary Ann Mendelson was born in Brooklyn, 67 years ago, in 1940, to Sadie and Sy Brick, middle sibling to Larry and Judy.

She attended Packard Collegiate Institute, a prestigious school in NY. One summer, she was enrolled in a teen program at Camp Welmet in Liberty NY, Gene Mendelson was a counselor, they met, and fell in love, and at age 17, Mary Ann eloped with Gene, and shortly afterwards, Mark came along to start the family.

They lived at first in the Rockaways – Gene was a retail store manager, Mary Ann held a variety of jobs over the years, they moved to St. Louis, then to Memphis, where they lived for 12 years – Gene and Mary Ann, Mark, then Steve, Mona, then Eric, and Daniel. It was in Memphis that most of the early growing up of the children took place. The boys and Mona went to the Memphis Hebrew Academy for a few years - the boys weren't always the top students in school, and MaryAnn immediately assumed the role of strident advocate for her children. She defended their ability, and way ahead of her time, understood that they had learning styles that didn't make them less, just different.

And they were a rambunctious bunch – there were countless trips to the Emergency Room – someone was always in the ER – broken limbs, accidental poisonings, kidney stones – It was a house where there was always some drama or trauma going on.

For her part, Mary Ann adopted a philosophy of what Daniel calls selective neglect – The kids learned to do things on their own. The kids made Mary Ann breakfast of coffee and toast when they came home from school at midday. In Memphis, and afterwards, when they moved to Long Island, there was a lot of driving around shlepping the kids. During the summers, Mary Ann would drop the kids off at the pool at 8 in the morning, with a jar of peanut butter, a jar of jelly and a loaf of bread, and pick them up again at 6 in the evening. She raised five kids who learned how to take care of themselves.

But Mary Ann was far from disengaged – She cared for anyone who was sick in her extended family, tracking down the right specialist, if necessary; she was connected with lots of aunts and uncles, she cooked for close to eighty each Passover,. She was very kind to a lot of people – she picked up strangers at the supermarket and invited them home. . The door of the house was always open to the kids'

friends, and to lots of others. When they were living in Memphis, and when Gene got a job on Long Island, and had to go up and start right away, she put five kids and two dogs in a white station wagon, and took two weeks to drive up to NY to join him and set up a house there.

Mary Ann was a woman of strong opinions – Some of the kids' friends adored her as a second mom, and others were frightened of her, but she was clear about what she thought of people and their behavior. She was intensely proud of her kids, and later, of their spouses - she felt that all her kids had married well – and their successes and her grandchildren.

They lived for a while in Connecticut – Mary Ann got involved with a new synagogue that was being formed there in Glastonbury, and dragged Gene into the project, and he became the first president. She was the force behind Gene – he moved from one job to each better, bigger one, running stores, department stores, Steinbecks, Woolworths, huge chains of stores, eventually to liquidation of groups of stores, and she would move the family with him. In later year, after the kids were gone, she would accompany him on three month business trips around the country. After Connecticut, they moved for a while to Mahopac NY, and then to Edgewater NJ, so he could be closer to Manhattan. In 2000, Steve and Carmen moved to Greensboro, and Gene and Mary Ann came down in '02 and fell in love with North Carolina and our community in Greensboro.

This past winter, Mary Ann had heart surgery- I went to see her the first day after the surgery – she smiled and was still a little groggy. Just a few days later, she was out of the hospital, charging forward with great energy and gusto for life. This past March she was diagnosed with lung cancer. She fought, but this time she couldn't beat it. She was admitted into the hospital on Thursday after noon, I went to see her in the ER - she smiled, we said a prayer, she joked with me, her nails were done impeccably with stars and stripes red white and blue for July fourth.

On Friday morning, the first day of the Hebrew month of Tammuz,, Mary Ann Mendelson, Miriam bat Yaakov v'Sarah left this world, after 67 years of life.

To Gene – her lover and partner for 50 years – she took care of you for 50 years; for the last few years, you took care of her;

To Mark and Christopher and Gus;  
Steven and Carmen and Willie and Jacob  
Mona and Jan, Talia and Aram;  
Eric and Anka  
Daniel and Linda, Leanna and Megan;  
Mary Ann's sister Judy and Peter Wendy and Debra;  
Mary Ann's brother, Larry and Carolyn  
Gene's brother Jules and Phyllis;

all of you know that family – family near and far, family close and extended, was key for Mary Ann, who loved all of you, and wanted to enjoy as much time as possible with her family;

and all of us here in Greensboro – friends of Steve's and Carmen, who got to meet and know and have great affection for that feisty mother of Steve's;

our hearts and our arms reach out to each other in comfort and consolation.

Mary Ann's memory will always abide among us as a blessing