

Shloshim of RUTH N. REINGOLD Rivka bat Gershon haCohen v'Chasia

Edward M. Reingold

Parashat Emor
Iyar 14, 5776
(May 15, 2016)

Ruth was buried just hours before the start of Passover. Isaiah (chap. 24, v. 11) describes judgment day, saying, "Tzavacha al hayayin bachutsot, aravah kol simcha, gilah misos ha-aretz," loosely translated as "Amidst the wine in the streets there was crying; all happiness is diminished; joy is gone from the land." That describes our family that night: while the rest of Skokie was enjoying the wine of the seder, we were miserable.

Because Ruth died in Nisan, we could not eulogize her; because her funeral was Erev Passover, the shiva was only a couple of hours long. Such a short shiva was totally inadequate. We make up for that inadequacy today, at her shloshim. In English we say "Speak no ill of the dead," but the Hebrew idiom is more poetic: "Acharei mot kedoshim emor." Excellent timing because we read Parashat Kedoshim last week and we read Parashat Emor this coming week.

Every Friday night we ask, "Aishet chayil mi yimtza?" The answer is, "I did!" albeit with the help of a computer. Ruth was a lovely, compassionate, modest, brilliant, energetic woman; she was strong in every dimension—physically, emotionally, morally, intellectually. She believed in doing everything as well as possible, with full energy—no half measures for her.

In her honor, I want to share some memories of our almost 50-year life together.

We met in May, 1966 when she was a 17-year old rising college junior at the University of Michigan: having been double-promoted twice in grade school, she had entered Michigan at 16 with enough AP credits to make her a sophomore. She was a superb chemistry major, getting straight A's and many awards—until she met me; I kept coming to Ann Arbor to visit, distracting her from studying. We got engaged in the summer of 1967, but told no one because we knew we could not get married until she graduated college 18 months later. By then I was in grad school at Cornell, at risk of being drafted, so Ruth applied to grad schools at places that would mesh with whatever happened to me (Cornell, if I avoided the draft; Princeton, if I had to take a job at Bell Labs to get a deferment; University of Chicago, if I got drafted and she had to live with her parents in Wilmette). She was offered excellent fellowships at all of them. We were married in December, 1968 and settled in Ithaca; to fill the gap until grad school started in fall 1969, Ruth worked as a lab technician in the chemistry department at Ithaca College.

She started grad school in chemistry at Cornell in fall, 1969, doing superbly. But I was two years ahead of her and finished my PhD in 1970, getting a job at University of Illinois in Urbana. Ruth applied to the chemistry department at UIUC, getting (naturally) full support. UIUC's chemistry department was a step up from Cornell's, but Ruth was still one of their best graduate students: one had to take qualifying exams in all areas of chemistry, one exam per month, passing 6 before failing 6. The students did not know what exam they were facing, nor even the language in which the exam would be given (English, French, or German). She passed the first 6 exams she took, getting an MS degree in one

year. She also translated scientific Russian on the side.

Gradually her interests shifted and she started working on a PhD thesis in physical biochemistry. She was in the midst of the lab work for her dissertation when her advisor was lured away from UIUC for a plum job elsewhere. We had two little girls by then, and Ruth didn't want to start over looking for another advisor. We were planning a 1976–77 sabbatical in Israel, so she took a job doing lab work until we left for Israel.

When we returned, Ruth decided not to continue graduate work, but rather to take a job doing chemical analyses in the Foods & Nutrition department. There she did work in the chemistry of folates in human breast milk, publishing two fundamental papers that are still cited more than 35 years later (those of you in academia know that most published papers are never cited!). One of these papers was presented at a spring 1980 conference in Los Angeles while I looked on with baby Rachel in a Gerry carrier.

Ruth again tired of lab work and wanted to stay home with Rachel, so in 1981 she left her position in Foods & Nutrition. In 1981–83 she baked cheesecakes commercially for local restaurants and other customers. During those 3 years Ruth baked almost 1700 cheesecakes: white, chocolate, chocolate & white, hazelnut, and almond. Using only our home facilities, Ruth was able to get a cheese cake in the oven from the raw ingredients in less than 5 minutes!

We wanted to go back to Israel for a second sabbatical in 1983–84, so Ruth shut down the cheesecake business; when we returned she decided to take some time to study computer science; she took the usual collection of introductory courses (getting straight A's, as was her habit), wrote the solutions manual to a data structures text, and co-authored an introductory programming book, but then decided that the hacker mentality was not her forte. She then started taking courses in the business school, and with her CS background was hired to run their computer operation while she completed an MBA. During those studies she took a course in business ethics for which she wrote an analysis of the Arab boycott of Israel; it was so good that the professor encouraged her to publish it (with him as a co-author, naturally) and it became widely cited. After completing her MBA, she ran the Business School's IT operation for many years.

In 1996–97 we returned to Israel on another sabbatical. Ruth had been teaching web page design in the business school and decided to use her skills to put her many recipes on the web so she would have them available in Israel. Her web site, ruths-kitchen.com, grew in extent and complexity, eventually comprising about 400 recipes. It gets about 100 hits per day, as people around the world cook her recipes.

When we moved to Skokie, Ruth had no job and was terrified that, at age 51, nobody would hire her. She was unemployed exactly 3 weeks: Northwestern University's Weinberg College hired her to run their computer operations. After doing that for several years, she moved to NU's Human Resources department to set up Northwestern Scholars, an innovative database project, joint with Elsevier Publishers, to make the wide-ranging research of Northwestern University easily available to the outside world. In this she had to convince recalcitrant faculty of the value of the project and encourage them to cooperate. Ruth's great skill in dealing with cranky professors in the development of NU Scholars was honed in her many years of marriage to one.

In the Talmud (Sanhedrin 22a) R. Johanan compares the death of a man's wife to the destruction of the Temple; R. Alexandri says the world is darkened for him. Indeed. R. Samuel b. Nahman said all things can be replaced except the wife of one's youth; Rab Judah taught his son R. Isaac that only with one's first wife does one find pleasure.

Ruth was an extraordinary woman—as a wife, mother, mother-in-law, grandmother, cook, scientist, business manager, and in the many other roles she played. *Yehi zichra baruch*.