

Eulogy for Esther Levine Esther bat Velvel

Died March 4, 2005 23 Adar 1, 5765

With the passing of Esther Levine we have lost a pioneer who was both a witness to, and a participant in, the decisions that have given us the institutions and organizations that guide our community today.

Esther moved to Edmonton from Winnipeg early in the 20th century with her parents, Sara and William Wiseman and her brothers, Louis and Dave.

Her father operated Dominion Pawn Shop, joining the large number of Jewish businessmen with stores on 101st street. Esther and her brothers were enrolled in Talmud Torah and the family was soon a part of a circle of friends that included other pioneer families like the Baltzans and Rudolphs. The Wiseman children were brought up in a traditional Jewish home and Esther became immersed in the customs that she passed on to her children, David and Julie.

After finishing high school, Esther worked in furniture stores, developing a love for antiques. She would collect items piece by piece, many of which stayed with her through her life or were passed on to her family.

Esther met George when she was 18 and they married in 1938.

George was a salesman for the Margolus family's Dominion Bottling Company, but he disliked being away from Esther as he traveled through north-east Alberta, so he purchased Teddy's Lunch, a popular restaurant on Jasper Avenue.

It was a hard life for him with the restaurant open seven days a week, but Esther helped him with the bookkeeping and together they made it a success. When George joined the navy in 1943 Esther took on even more jobs at the restaurant. At the same time Esther found herself as the main caregiver for her grandfather and her parents who lived with her in the home she and George bought on 114th Street near the restaurant.

Despite her responsibilities at the restaurant she never complained about the added duties. Esther always appreciated the sacrifices that her family had made for her and accepted the tradition of being responsible for others. After the war ended George returned to the restaurant and Esther's life changed as her priority became the needs of her two young children.

She was always there when David and Julie came home from school and she wanted to know every detail of how their day went. When David was in the first grade, he developed an illness that forced him to miss many months of school and Esther not only nursed him back to health, but also tutored him in the Hebrew that she had learned at Talmud Torah.

In 1949 the restaurant was sold giving both of them more time to spend with their children and to become more involved in community activities. They were active members of Beth Shalom well before the current building was built in 1950 and Esther was active in both Hadassah and National Council of Jewish Women. She loved to bowl and became an avid bridge player. She joined George on many of the trips he took as part of the Boy Scout association and with the children they enjoyed vacations visiting family in California.

While she never felt the need to push her children too hard in school she still found a way to impress on them her belief in higher education and she took great pride that they both went on to university and careers.

In 1968 George suffered a major heart attack and together with his doctors, Esther convinced him to cut back on both work and his many volunteer activities. Together they discovered the pleasures of travel and longer vacations.

Yuma, Arizona eventually became their destination of choice and after George retired they bought a home there and would stay the entire winter. Over 30 years they developed close friends that looked forward to seeing them every year and continued to care for Esther as she continued to visit Yuma after George passed away in 1998.

Esther was an independent woman who continued to drive a car until she was 89 and insisted that she be the one to host the family for Rosh Hashanah dinners at her home each year.

But David and Daryl and Julie and Hal will always remember that Esther never interfered as a mother-in-law and grandmother, knowing that she could trust them to raise her grandchildren in the traditions of our faith and respectful of their heritage.

In the past three years as illness and falls took their tolls on Esther she found herself leaving her river valley apartment and moving to Canterbury Court and then Grandview Extended Care.

Esther never complained about this change in her life and continued to make new friends and to exhibit her compassion for others who she felt were in need of her help. To the end of her life she still took an interest in how Shaquille O'Neal and her Los Angeles Lakers were doing and whenever she could she followed the news on CNN and in the daily papers. The doctors and nurses at Grandview have told David and Julie how much their mother will be missed for the joy she brought to others. She will be remembered as an elegant lady who never raised her voice in anger or said a bad word about anyone.

Esther lived to see six grandchildren and 4 great grandchildren. She leaves a legacy of devotion to family, respect for others and a sense of responsibility in making this world a better place.

It is as if by divine intervention that Esther left us as we were preparing for the Shabbat when we read the portion Vayakhel where God's instructions for the construction of the sanctuary were lovingly and faithfully carried out. The Torah describes how the children of Israel were so generous in their gifts for the Temple that Moses had to finally appeal to the people to stop bringing donations. This is the tradition that Esther followed in her life. Without complaint she did what was necessary - helping her parents, working with her husband, raising her children, caring for the elderly, becoming a loyal friend and contributing to her community. She felt she could never do enough and only her passing stops her from doing more.

Tehi neeshmata tzroora beetzror hachaim

May her soul be bound up in the bond of life