

As I was talking with Elissa and Danni yesterday, they both remarked how they thought that music was an appropriate theme for their mother's entire life, given that she played and enjoyed music so much. It was clear from our discussion that there was a definite melody to Florence's life, a melody matched by her intense, almost burning desire to learn the inner harmonies of her life's music as well.

Later, I ran across a verse from T.S. Eliot that seemed like it could not have been written with anyone else in mind. He writes of the wonder of "Music heard so deeply/That it is not heard at all/But you are the music/While the music lasts." Florence Karp was indeed the "music heard so deeply" that I knew and so many of you loved so much and so well. For she not only played music on her violin and appreciated it in performance. Her presence among us was felt so deeply that she was the music while it lasted and it lasted seventy nine years until just the day before yesterday. Those of you who knew her were privileged to share in the music of her life.

You are her family, from sisters to daughters to in-laws, from the ninth grandchild to the last countless cousin. You are her friends. You are her companions. All of you heard and reveled in Florence's complex rhythms, melodies and harmonies.

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The music of Florence Berman Karp's life began in 1914 in Altoona, Pennsylvania. She was the second of five children of Abraham and Sylvia Berman: Emma, Florence, Bell, Arnold and Birdie. She adored her parents. She especially took great pride in her mother and all of the sacrifices and adaptations she made to make life as good as possible for Florence and her siblings.

and Ruby explored the museums and culture of Europe and Israel, as well. She grew up with an intense interest in learning matched by a love of good music instilled by her mother. Florence wrote in the book her family knows so well, Roses In December, that her mother would never praise her too much when she played. Instead, she'd say, "It sounds a little better and if you practice it will improve." She listened to her mother, eventually playing with the Altoona symphony and giving solo violin concerts to civic groups for decades.

Elissa and Danny spoke of how Florence and Ruby helped create the Florence finished her studies at Altoona High School, but unfortunately, there was not enough money during the Depression to send her to college. So, she went to the local secretarial school instead. She was working in her Dad's jewelry store when she met Reuben Karp, with whom, I'm told she fell in love on the spot. She and Ruby were married when she reached the tender age of twenty. And it was a fairly easy transition for her, given that Reuben himself was a jeweler.

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They had three children, Norman, Danni and Elissa. Danni and Elissa remember that their mother and father had a good, strong, loving marriage until Reuben's death 43 years later. Florence and Reuben kept each other stimulated and vibrant. They were one of those unique couples that really enjoyed each other's company. I'm told that they especially liked traveling together and that she and Ruby explored the museums and culture of Europe and Israel, as well as the jewelry and Broadway shows of New York together.

She loved our history, with its emphasis on perseverance and

And although no one would ever call Florence Karp a balabusteh, I'm told that she made an incredible mandelbread and a chocolate cake from a recipe from her mother that still makes mouths water with the memory of it. Florence made sure that their home was loving and lively and provided a music all of its own.

Elissa and Danny spoke of how Florence and Ruby helped create the Jewish synagogue in Kitanning out of nothing. I'm told that it was Ruby who started the ball rolling by pledging \$1,000 toward the building of Congregation Knesseth Israel. He and Florence were intimately involved with the running of that synagogue. Florence was the Superintendent of the Sunday School. She wrote its curriculum and taught the history, customs and rituals of our faith to any and all who entered the doors of the congregation. She taught the Jews of Kitanning in the classroom and local churchgoers on her many tours of the building. She also singlehandedly

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wrote and directed musical shows to raise the funds needed to keep the synagogue afloat. She was, in fact, the music of Knesseth Israel.

What was ironic about Florence's intense involvement in Knesseth Israel was that she was not exactly a passionate believer in the Jewish faith, as she told me personally...more than once. No, she passionately believed in the Jewish people and their story. She loved our history, with its emphasis on perseverance and steadfastness in the face of persecution both in Europe and here in America. She loved our human values and ethical teachings, our tolerance of diversity and difference. It was all music to her, the soul music of her and her family as far back as she could remember.

With all she did in building the synagogue from within and without, we might say, "Dayenu," it would have been enough. But in addition, Florence served as President of both the local Women's club and her Hadassah chapter. And when she stepped down from her work at the congregation, she volunteered at the Kittaning Hospital.

She had an unquenchable thirst for learning. Although, as I said, she never graduated college, she was more learned than many people I know with advanced degrees. She took courses in history,

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literature and political science, not to mention Russian and French. Danny and Elissa tell me that Florence loved language, words, even grammar, as her grandchildren discovered when she responded to their letters.

And Florence had a marvelous talent for being quite strict with herself, but never wholly rigid. She was known to change her positions on issues more than once, especially as she heard more information. Because of this, she was very accepting of people for who they were as they were. Difference in sexuality, race or religion were not that important to her. She was only intolerant of intolerance. She was extremely narrow minded about people who were narrow minded. To her, bigotry was a dissonance that only spoiled the music that people made by being different.

When her beloved Ruby died in 1978, a new movement began in the her life's symphony. She moved to Pittsburgh and, although she had family here, started her life anew. She worked hard to develop new friendships. She found new opportunities for service and volunteering, especially at the Jewish Community Center working with newly arrived Russians who needed to learn English.

She continued learning, taking courses at Pitt until just last year. She went to concerts and operas and movies and lectures. She was a regular at my adult education courses. She was never

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afraid to question me or challenge the ideas I raised. When I first came to Temple Sinai, she a little concerned because she saw that I wore a kippah and heard that I kept a kosher home. But it didn't take her long to find out that my traditional practices did not mean I held traditional opinions about God, Torah or Israel. And many times, she would stay after my class presentations to make sure that she and I were in agreement, which we usually were.

But even more than learning or volunteering, family made Florence's heart sing. She treasured her relationships with her siblings, her children and especially her nine grandchildren. Her grandkids and her nephews and nieces found that her heart and her apartment were always open to them. To say that her home was their home was not just an expression. It was a reality as family member after family member found themselves cared for and nurtured at the Kenmawr. And while they were there, they were sometimes surprised to find that they could talk with her about almost anything, no matter how new or radical it might seem to them.

Now Florence Karp was no saint. I've already mentioned the sheer chutzpah she displayed in correcting the grammar of grandchildren's loving letters to her. I'm told that she could be a little feisty and over-demanding at times, especially as she grew into the role of family matriarch. I'm told that tact was not always one of her special gifts. Danni and Elissa also tell me

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that their mother never quite got over the Depression and could be extremely conscious about money, even to the point of offering to pay you back a quarter she had borrowed.

But these made up barely a minor chord or two in her life's music. Her family and friends valued her honest feedback more than her diplomacy. Florence's love and concern for her family and friends, that was the music they heard, whether it was her sister in the building, a grandchild in her guestroom or a nephew living thousands of miles away. She reveled in an enormous extended family that called and wrote and made her feel loved and wanted. She needed them all, as they needed her. Their notes blended together to make the music of love.

Florence Karp lived life on her own terms, to the best of her ability. And she died that way, too. After having a huge Rosh Hashana dinner in her home (Elissa says it was almost bigger than Pesach seder) she suffered a stroke not long after. She had made her wishes clear to her family; she did not want to live by the tender mercies of breathing machines and IV tubes. She chose to die with dignity, so that you who loved her so much will always remember only the sweet music she made in life. She would tolerate no ending marred by medical science. She slipped away softly, an example for all of us.

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Although we mourn Florence's death today, we celebrate her life. It was a life devoted to love and to learning. She said in an interview a few years ago, "I'm still being educated..by my grandchildren - who talk to me and make me talk - and re-evaluate or evaluate...and I'm grateful for all of it." She will be missed by everyone here today, good, good friends and especially by her family who loved her so much: Her children, Norman, Danni and Elissa and their partners, Nancy, and Chuck. Her grandchildren, Susan, Michael, Jordan, Cara, Joel, Ellen, Steven, Erin and Amanda. Her sisters Emma, Belle and Birdie and their partners, her 4 great grandchildren, her many nieces and nephews and cousins.

Florence Karp's life may have ended, but her music still lives on inside every one of you. And it bursts forth from us when we honor her by our aspirations and our actions, when we live up to her hopes and ideals. In this way, her music will never die, it will be heard forever. May her life be an inspiration to all; her memory, a blessing for all time. Amen.

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