

GRAVESIDE EULOGY FOR OUR CHERISHED MOTHER, DORIS L. SASSOWER
by her daughter Elena Sassower
October 25, 2019

There are six people who would not be here but for Doris Lipson Sassower – myself, my sister Carey and her two sons, Jeremy and Caleb, my sister Beth and her daughter, Aliza.

As for me, Carey, and Beth – she was the first person to know of each of us – and with our father, she knew us, before we knew us. And although we love and loved both our mother and father, it was she who raised us – and who took care of all the unending details of what it means to raise children, while, simultaneously, pursuing a demanding career, professional and civic activities, leadership positions, and a house.

She didn't love her mother and father any less than we love her and our father – and when her parents died – her father, Abe, in 1958, when I was less than 2 and Carey was just 4 months – and her mother – Rose, in 1969, when I was 12, Carey 11, and Beth 2 – she nonetheless went on to lead a full life – positive, constructive – and this was most of her life, which was after their deaths.

She died on Shemeni Atzeret – a very special time. We have just read the last parasha – portion of the Torah – Zot HaBracha, “This is the Blessing”. Moses blesses the Tribes of Israel and then he goes up to the mountain where G-d shows him the land of Israel, which he will not enter, but which he sees. He dies and G-d buries him – and no one knows where precisely. The children of Israel mourn him, but then continue on, by his successor, Joshua, who will take them into the land, though he is not as great as Moses – and, indeed, the Torah says: “And there has not arisen a prophet since in Israel, like Moses, who G-d knew face to face”.

As mom was dying, I told her how significant it was that she would be dying at this time – with this parasha. Because, in doing the work that I have been doing, to achieve some measure of judicial accountability – a fight to which she had, in her final years, despaired of ever achieving, unlike dad who continued to battle for it, until the end – we were so close to that achievement. Over the past many months, I told her again, and again, and again, every day, and incessantly, how close we were – and that we would succeed. I begged her to really believe that it was so – and not just say it to humor me.

In Bereyshit, “In the Beginning”, the Torah's first parasha that we now begin, G-d creates the world – and man in his image – man and woman – and then rests on the seventh day, Shabbat. And this is where our extraordinary mom and dad veered off. They lost the sense of Shabbat – a day of rest – so busy were they in toiling “by the sweat of their brow” – now returning to the earth, as G-d decreed, “for dust thou art, and unto dust shall thou return”, which is in Bereyshit.

But maybe mom and dad lost the sense of Shabbat – and rest – because they were such fundamentally good people, who – as prodigiously capable as each was – became overwhelmed by the 24-7 undertaking of fending off the evil of the world around them – and of human nature – the same as causes G-d, at the end of Bereyshit, to regret having created the world and to decide to destroy it, excepting Noah who “found grace in the eyes of the Lord”.

Mom, like our dad, left a powerful legacy of love, optimism, civic-mindedness, and hard work which we would all do well to emulate, albeit with better balance.