

Ceil Weinstein

Ceil Weinstein, Zipporah bat Tevya v'Edda, was born on February 4, 1941 and died last Friday, July 23, 2021. Her Hebrew dates are 7 Shevat, 5701 to 14 Av, 5781. If asked if that were her full name--Ceil Weinstein--she would reply yes: Ceil, not Ceilia or Cecilia, just Ceil. No middle name. She was the youngest of six surviving children (a seventh died in childbirth) of Charles and Edda (née Rosen) Weinstein. In order they were: Elliot, Leona, Gilbert, Edwin, Joey, and, last but not least, Ceil.

The family lived in Roxbury, where Ceil went to school. The family was close, with immigrant parents and grandparents who all lived together. Later in life, Ceil would describe herself as her grandfather's favorite, and indeed I can imagine her that way as a kid: the spunky, independent-minded, non-conformist youngest child who drove everyone crazy while completely owning their hearts. All of those characteristics (minus, at least for me, the part about driving everyone crazy) persisted until the very end of her life.

She had Jason at age 33 in 1974, and what Jason remembers was that it was the two of them in Revere, along with much support from Ceil's family. Uncle Edwin would pick Jason up from school. He would spend weekends with his grandfather in Brockton--indeed he remembers the blizzard of 1978 as a moment when he was stuck in Brockton while Ceil was working. In Revere.

During her early adulthood, including when Jason was born, Ceil was working for the Record American, the first tabloid newspaper in Boston (and which became in the early seventies the Boston Herald). At some point during Jason's childhood, Ceil began attending North Shore Community College, transferring eventually to Boston University, where she graduated with a BA and later a masters in education, the field in which she worked until her retirement.

Ceil's life and joy were her children, including her daughter-in-law Kim, and grandkids, Jacob and Grace. Every year the young family would come from

Binghamton, NY, to Brookline for Memorial Day and the Fourth of July, and Ceil would visit them over Hanukkah. Those were always joyful, and occasionally extremely noisy times. When Grace was 2 years old, one of Ceil's neighbors called the police because of this child who would not stop crying. The officer who investigated was Ceil's nephew, Steven, so that was the end of that. Of course, Grace cannot remember the event, but she's heard about it so many times it feels that she can. Jonah remembers tossing an afghan on top of Bubbe so she could be an anthill and the kids could be the ants crawling all over her. The kids loved coming to Boston to be with her--she was was classic Boston--Dunkin' Donuts was not a coffee place, it was Bubbe Coffee. When he was younger, Jacob would fantasize with her about coming to MIT to become an engineer and they would plot about how he would come to 100 Centre for good food and Bubbie time. And for that accent! The kids loved repeating what they heard when Ceil was helping out at the desk at 100 Centre Street: I have no idear, deah!

And what a helper Ceil was. In her decades at 100 Centre (now called Danesh), she was an energizer bunny, always doing what needed to be done: manning the front desk when Patience needed a break; taking care of copying and delivering newsletters; connecting with her wide network of friends and acquaintances, keeping track of who needed what and how to arrange for them to get it. All the while, she was giving off such love to everyone around her.

For Ceil and her family, as for everyone at Danesh, the Covid pandemic was a cruel interruption in their usual routines and of their time together. Visits turned into Zoom calls and longing for reunions. When Ceil contracted Covid, we all worried about her, but the infection didn't seem that bad. But then it turned out that the diagnosis was something no one could have predicted--Ceil had put down cigarettes decades ago--but lung cancer it was.

Ceil herself struggled with the diagnosis, not feeling ready to die, not wanting to leave her community, not wanting to leave her family. At the same time, she responded in the only way that Ceil knew how: with love for everyone around

her. I would go to visit her in Roslindale, to sing to her, to pray with her, which we would do, but she would also insist that I tell her about how I was doing with my cochlear implant, how my kids were doing, and how everyone at Danesh was holding up. Likewise, she inspired such love among the staff at Hebrew Rehab, nurses, PCA's, and chaplains alike.

I will tell the story of one chaplain intern, Alyssa, who had the privilege of working with her. Ceil, in sharing her fears and her sadness, asked that Alyssa be present at the moment of her death. It was the first time Alyssa had experienced the holiness of such a moment, of holding a person's hand as they passed from this life to whatever awaits us. In that, it was the perfect encapsulation of Ceil: asking for what she needed from someone while giving them a priceless gift. Not in return, because it wasn't transactional--it was relational, the need itself the gift, a means of deep spiritual connection that Ceil was able to forge with every person she encountered. This was her gift to us as well, amid all of her struggles and sadness at the end of her life: a reminder that no matter what the circumstances, we need to connect, to be together, and to give one another what we need.

Ceil leaves behind her son, Jason, daughter-in-law, Kim, and her two beloved grandkids, Jacob and Grace. She also leaves two brothers, Edwin and Joey, along with a large, extended family of in-laws, nephews, and nieces, too many to mention here. May Ceil's soul be bound up in the bonds of life, and may her memory be for a blessing,