

Mark Batshaw's Eulogy to his Father – June 22, 2016

I would like to give a personal perspective of my father and also permit him to speak for himself. My father, the baby of his family, was born shortly after the Batashovs emigrated from Russia and had their name changed by the Canadian immigration agents to Batshaw. His father worked for the railroad and his mother ran what we now call a convenience store from their living room, with my grandfather carting groceries up Mount Royal from the market before setting off to work at daybreak. There was a hardscrabble immigrant life leavened by the dream that their children would be educated, do well and serve their community. Father, however, was a slow starter with early learning differences that affected his reading; his sister Frances remembered that phonics remained a mystery to him for many years. Because of these learning problems he did not have the grades to get into McGill but did well enough at Queens College that he was able to transfer after two years to McGill to receive his BA and subsequently to complete his Masters in Social Work there. With his challenging educational experience, he was so proud when he received an honorary doctorate from McGill more than a half century later.

Perhaps it was this experience of having to work so hard to learn that formed the basis for Father's intense work ethic that continued until he retired for the third time at age 92. My father lived to work and to contribute to the community; there was never a down time for leisure other than swimming laps in the pool. It was this commitment that led him to social work as a profession, and to the Jewish community and children and youth at risk as his clients.

This was not always easy for me, an only child, and for my mother, Rachel. He was not around much in my youth, and from my birth in Montreal we moved 6 times in the next 16 years as my father was promoted within the Jewish Community Center and JWB organizations. We moved from Philadelphia to Hamilton and from Atlanta to Newark, New Jersey. I remember, however, that Father was most proud

when he was called home to become Executive Director of Allied Jewish Community Services when I was in college.

My father was a fixer; he could not leave a problem big or small untouched. This was a problem for me when I was a teenager trying to find my own solutions; it was a skill I learned to appreciate more from a distance than when applied to me. Later, for his grandchildren it translated into him being called “Mr. Neat”; everything had its own place and order.

What I and my family did learn in addition to the virtue of neatness, was to serve the community, and it has become our family business. I am a pediatrician, my wife an international adoptions social worker, our daughter a school psychologist, our older son a psychotherapist and our younger son has been involved in tutoring services. So Father’s lessons were not lost on us and we continue to live his values.

While my father spent his life taking care of the community, when he was at the end of his life, it was a community of wonderful women who took care of him. I would like to acknowledging them publically. Fran Schleien, father’s niece by marriage, took loving care of him. Huguette Batshaw, his other niece, helped with health care issues and frequent visits. Judy Martin was father’s close friend and Beverlee Ashmele his special friend. Finally, Lodita Breboneria was his caregiver who treated him as if she were his daughter. His final years were made pleasant and easier by their care and affection.

My father always had to have the last word and such is the case with his eulogy. To save the Rabbi and me time, he wrote his own eulogy in the year 2002 at a time when, despite several medical issues, he enjoyed a vital good life with his second wife Ruth, and his work with the Jewish General Hospital Foundation and the Mount Sinai Hospital Foundation, the later where he spent his final days under their compassionate care.

This is what he wanted to say to you.

Members of my family, friends and associates, clergy and the Paperman Family:

This is not a sad event. My age went way beyond the ‘three score and ten’. I see my funeral as being one of “thanksgiving” for the happiness which had been provided to me by my wives Ruth and Rachel of blessed memory, and by my son Mark and his talented wife Karen and their children, Elissa, Michael and Andrew. Through my marriage to Ruth, I became further enriched by acquiring my adopted daughter Irene of blessed memory and son Jordan and their children Alyssa, Nick, Josh, Leehee and Ofir. That adds up to being surrounded by an immediate family of many beautiful and talented human beings.

And, as for my own activities, few people can be as fortunate. I began in humble circumstances as a nondescript child but my parents were people who extolled and practiced religious and secular social values - four in particular:

- 1) Every human being is important and has to be helped to achieve his/her potential;
- 2) One must devote oneself to the well being of others;
- 3) Work hard and do your best and
- 4) Identify with your Jewish people and the greater society.

The model for me among my beloved siblings Harry, Arthur and my sister Frances, of blessed memory, was Harry. He became the first Jew appointed to the Superior Court. This was the Federal Prime Minister’s way of according “first class” status to Canadian Jews, by appointing a Jew to the Judiciary. Harry was the source of much encouragement and inspiration to me.

As a result of my parental and siblings’ values and my own efforts, I take joy and pride in some of my accomplishments such as helping to build Jewish communities in Canada and the United States, making Jewish education a community responsibility, contributing to the well being of Israel and local services through the raising of increased funds, also by being a child care activist, social worker.

The personal contribution, which was most satisfying to me, was when individuals said “you’ve been a model for me” or “you had an important influence on my life”. Others, exaggerated, by prematurely characterizing me as a “legend”. Some of the recognition I received in my lifetime provided me with much happiness. Among them my

being the only graduate of the McGill School of Social Work to receive the LLD degree at McGill, the naming of the large city-wide English child care agency services as the Batshaw Youth and Family Centres, my designation as “Chattan Torah” at the Shaar, the feat that I was the only professional to receive the Bronfinan Medal (Honorary Executive Vice- President of Federation CJA) as well as the C.Q. Award (Order of Quebec) and the Order of Canada. Above all, I am grateful to most of you for reasons, which are known to each of you. I wouldn’t dare to name names except Charles Bronfman for fear of leaving anyone out. Charles was a key influence on me and I hope I was on him too. Isn’t all that cause for thanksgiving? I think so!

Ruth and I studied Kabbalah. A major thesis of Kabbalah is “to give of oneself in life by having a strong desire to share, to help others and thus to improve the world.” While one shares for sharing itself, nevertheless one receives ego satisfaction in doing so.

I close by wishing you all good health, long life, and a peaceful world. I sum up my life by saying that I hope I was gentle, kind, humble, purposeful and productive. It’s been a good ride. Or, in the plagiarized words of Genesis: Vahyehee Boker Vahyeh Erev - from my early days to the end - Kee Toy. It was good!