

## REFLECTIONS ON HELEN SARNA Z" L BY A FRIEND

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I am one of Helen Sarna's numerous good friends over the years, many of whom are gathered here today to honor her. Helen loved everyone---the young, old, strong, weak, long time friend or colleague, new acquaintance or stranger. She was truly, to paraphrase Pirkei Avot (1:12), "ohevet et haberiot" (loving of G-d's creations). In turn, everyone loved her.

Lee and I were privileged to live next door to the Sarnas for about 11 years on Green Park, from the early 1980s until they moved to Florida. Because of our proximity, we had many contacts with them-including walks to and from shul and women's study groups, and frequent dinners. This experience was very special for us. Helen and Nahum warmed our lives by their presence and their loving and giving personalities, and that illumination lives on in our recollections.

Helen was one of the kindest and most gracious people I've known. She cared deeply about others, was genuinely interested in their welfare, and was encouraging and supportive of their needs while respecting their privacy. Even in recent years after she returned to Newton from Florida, she remembered the names of all the neighbors who had lived on our street and asked after them individually. It goes without saying that she remembered all of the extended family members of each of her friends, and was solicitous about them.

Helen saw only the good in others. In all the years I knew her, I never heard her say a critical word about another person. She greeted everyone and every situation "beseyver panim yafot"-with a bright and pleasant countenance, and a sweet smile that she shared even in the last few months. Cheerfulness was her constant companion. In recent years, despite increasing frailty, she never complained about her health or limitations, but accepted them quietly and with dignity.

Helen was a master of the mitzvah of bikur cholim (visiting the sick). Her compassion and loyalty to others made her the ideal visitor to those who were ill, either physically or emotionally. Her lively and upbeat presence lifted their spirits more than any other medicine, whether they were old friends or new acquaintances. We personally saw the positive effects of her visits to Lee's mother, when she was hospitalized in Boston. It was Helen who first saw the need for a Chessed Committee when Shaarei Tefillah was established, and she served as its first chairperson, modeling for others the importance of helping to heal the afflicted.

Helen's love and sprightliness also manifested itself in her interaction with children-of all ages. It was as though there was a mutual admiration society comprised of Helen and all children. They were drawn naturally to each other, and remembered each other fondly for many years afterward. At Shaarei Tefillah, Helen was beloved as honorary grandmother to all the children, and she often volunteered to lead children's groups there. She also frequently baby sat for families she knew.

I have already alluded to Helen's personal energy and vitality. She would actually walk faster than I could on Shabbat or Yom Tov, despite our age difference, and even in her high heels! She was also adventurous and courageous in many respects. She was supportive of the formation of a new synagogue-Shaarei Tefillah-in her middle years, and

of new and meaningful experiences there. I remember Helen and Nahum at a Shabbaton retreat in the early days of Shaarei Tefillah, where they joined a group of young families at a summer camp to share the spirit of Shabbat and the new congregation. (Helen also organized storytelling activities there for the children.) Later, in her more mature years, Helen faced the move to Florida, for health reasons, with energy and enthusiasm, despite the distance from family and friends and known surroundings.

Along with her many interpersonal midot (character traits), Helen had a deep love of learning and of books. She was totally devoted to Nahum's work and provided close editorial support for him. She was highly regarded by her colleagues at the Hebrew College library during her many years of service there. And she created the library at Shaarei Tefillah, heading its first committee and taking a serious interest in its development for many years.

Devotion to family and friends; wisdom and faith; dignity and modesty. These are but some of the qualities I think of when I reflect upon Helen.

Dear Helen, you were a wonderful friend to us and to many others, bringing sunshine wherever you went. You were a pillar of the community, adding kindness, strength and wisdom through your acts of chessed (lovingkindness). You have earned for yourself a "keter shem tov"-the crown of a good name (Pirkei Avot 4:17), the highest of all honors. "Lechi beshalom"-may you go in peace, to eternal rest with your beloved Nahum, and may your memory be a blessing for us all.