

ZMIRA LANGER 1917-2018

It's hard to say that one is taken aback when a woman of 100+ years passes away but I was overcome when an email 'binged' on my phone last Wednesday evening and, when checking, found that Zmira Langer had left this world. Zmira was an institution and institutions remain standing. The current ADATH ISRAEL community is far too young and far too new to comprehend the place she occupies in the history of our shul. If such a history were ever to be written a major chapter would need to cover the contributions and character of Moshe & Zmira Langer.

It was this flood of memory that washed over me when I read that email. I could not help but remember that when I first visited San Francisco for an interview as a candidate for the rabbinical opening I was met at the airport by two gentlemen, James Osterweil and Moshe Langer. The next day, Shabbos, I dined at the Langers and Zmira hosted me (and about a dozen others who wanted to listen in) graciously. But that didn't mean she didn't ask hard questions. Yes, I had her Shabbos fish, but I also nibbled on her wit, intelligence and devotion to the shul.

I recalled how back in the day when not all women were working we had a Sisterhood who worked hard for the shul. They planned events that raised funds and raised hearts. In the winter months Zmira saw to it that a Melava Malka was held at least monthly, sometimes every other week. The shul enjoyed a social life that remains unequaled in our day. She saw to it that we all talked to each other, laughed together, heard special speakers together, and sang together. It was not unusual at all to see Zmira schlepping boxes of clothes into the social hall for the regular rummage sales that were put on to benefit the shul. Moshe would shnorr the goods from his pal Joe Koret and Zmira and he would sell them.

We aspire today to make our shul a warm and welcoming place, it's almost a cliché. Zmira was a warm and welcoming person and that spilled over to the whole shul. It was rare to have a Shabbos pass without guests gathering around the Langer table. She and Moshe hosted all comers, very special people and not so special people. Zmira kept a guest book with the names of those who were there and that book would read as a road map of the Jewish world in their years in San Francisco.

Moshe Langer, whose photo hangs on the 'Presidents Row' in the shul foyer was the only person elected president on two separate occasions. That made Zmira the first lady of ADATH ISRAEL. Truth be told, she was also first lady on any other day as well. When we needed someone to be a hostess, she was first in line. If the children of the Talmud Torah were putting on a program, she was first to volunteer to help them. If we were starting a Tanach class for men and

women on Monday nights (men and women together, a scandal!) she was first in line (that Tanach class lasted 3 decades).

And how could I not remember fondly that she was also first in her sense of loyalty to our shul, seemingly a lost art. She was not shy and would point out what she thought needed to be accomplished or fixed or renewed, but she was all in when it came to ADATH ISRAEL and would not tolerate someone or something that sought to diminish it in any way.

And, of course, one can't think about Zmira and Moshe Langer without thinking of the children she raised. Larry (as he was then known), Sidney and Becky. All grew up as giving and loving members of their community, similarly involved in the growth not only of their own families but also those around them. To live one hundred years is very special. But to live one hundred years and see your children and grandchildren and even great grandchildren emulating your life and espousing your values is an extraordinary life. May her memory be blessed and may her life inspire us all.

Rabbi Jacob Traub