

Eulogy: Leanore (Leanie) Galinn Mendelsohn (z”l)

Cantor Danielle Rodnizki

10.24.23, 8 PM

Memorial Service on Zoom

OPENING REMARKS:

Say the old masters, “What is life like?” “Life,” they said, “is like a musical instrument. God plays upon the instrument. The time may come when the instrument that had felt the touch of the hand of God and had responded to its caressing, may crumble and fall into dust. But they who have heard the melody will have its notes ring in their ears to the last day.”

Leanore (Leanie) Galinn Mendelsohn (z”l) was a musical instrument in the hands of God. With kindness, generosity, her hearty laugh, and beautiful piano playing, she answered with the melody of her life to the touch of God’s hands. We know that mortal remains return to dust but we gather in gratitude because we have heard the melody. Though the music of this hour is a sad

farewell, the words we speak are sweet and affectionate, recalling a woman whose soul's sublime song filled our own lives with a wondrous harmony.

Leanie was born on August 30, 1939 in El Paso, Texas to her parents, Joseph and Dorothy. Her father worked in the clothing business, making menswear for the military, and her mother was a social worker who had studied at Northwestern University. Leanie was active in Jewish youth group through BBYO and served as President of District Seven B'nai B'rith Girls. She earned her degree in music composition from Texas Western College (now UTEP) in El Paso.

After graduating from college, she attended a Friday night Shabbat service at the local synagogue, and it was there that she met Mort. Mort had been working with the Army and AirForce exchange service, and after meeting some new Jewish soldier friends, he suggested they attend a Shabbat service together, in the hopes that the people of El Paso would hear that they were coming and send their daughters too! Leanie was there, sitting with her friend,

two rows in front of them. After the service, he approached and greeted them.

Leanie used to say that Mort asked her why she wasn't married in that first conversation. Afterwards, Mort and his soldier buddies and Leanie and her girlfriend all coincidentally ended up at the same diner, The Cottage, and it was there that Mort asked her out on their first date.

Mort and Leanie were married on August 28, 1963 in El Paso, just two days before her birthday. She used to joke: "I got married before I was born." Their wedding date was not hard to remember, as it was the very same day on which the Reverend Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr. gave his famous "I Have A Dream" speech in Washington, DC. Mort and Leanie celebrated their 60th wedding anniversary this past August, a lifetime of love and memories.

And, boy, did they make some good memories. Mort and Leanie traveled all over the world, moving eight times – once every 2 years or so – leaving El Paso for Colorado Springs, then back to El Paso and onto Ogden, Utah, followed by Madrid, Spain, Munich, Germany, Athens, Greece, and finally to

St. Louis in 1972. But their biggest adventure of all were their two kids, Sharol and Ron.

Sharol remembers falling asleep to the sounds of Leanie's piano playing at their house on Summer Hill, her childhood bedroom located right above the basement where the piano was, hearing tunes like Flight of the Bumblebee, Bohemian Rhapsody, and Leanie's own compositions.

She remembers Leanie's goofy side – funny faces she would make with her tongue sticking out at Mort's camera as he captured family videos. Most importantly, she remembers the support she received from her mom. Before Sharol's 40th birthday, Leanie asked if she had any regrets, and Sharol shared that wished she had learned to play guitar. Lo and behold, Leanie and Mort bought Sharol a guitar as a special birthday gift that year, and Leanie's musical legacy made its way down to the next generation.

Ron remembers that Leanie was always big on family. She supported him and Sharol to attend Jewish youth group, where they both found good

friends. Leanie taught Ron that “wherever you are, be happy and be content – that’s where family is.” No matter what country they were living in, Ron recalls that there were always friends that were like family who were there to take care of him and Sharol.

Sharol and Ron remember the creative meals and treats Leanie would make when they were growing up: A taco bar before Taco Tuesday was a thing, cheese and chocolate fondue, enchilada casserole, and bananas foster, complete with a live flambé experience. She loved playing games: Mexican Train, Rummy-Cue, Gin Rummy, and Go Fish with her grandkids: Aaron, Danny, and Laurin.

Aaron remembers that Leanie and Mort were present for every event – hockey, baseball, and more – even at a cold rink in the middle of winter. In the 4th grade, Aaron had a school project to write a story about a family member, and he chose to write about Leanie, seeing the beautiful young woman she

was, her openness and open-mindedness, the way she transcended from young adult to parent and then to grandparent. She was always supportive.

Danny loved going to Leanie and Mort's house when he was growing up, and thought it was "awesome" when she used to play the piano and they'd all gather around singing. Like Aaron, Danny was amazed that Leanie and Mort would always show up to any of his games or events – it could be a random Tuesday night with a snowstorm, and they would be there, no matter what. More recently, Danny fondly recalled trying to explain to Leanie what he does professionally as a data engineer – a funny experience to say the least.

Laurin remembers when Leanie took her to one of those pottery painting stores in 2008. She still uses the piggy bank frog she made with Leanie today as a coin jar, prominently displayed in her apartment. Laurin felt that Leanie was always there to cheer her on and express her pride in everything she did.

Leanie was incredibly generous and loved opening her home to people. There was always room at the table at the Mendelsohns'. Harvey remembers a terrible snow and ice storm in St. Louis one winter. He and Cathy had relatives visiting from the East Coast, and the power had gone out – no lights, no heat – and they were freezing. When Leanie heard, she said, “We have more than enough room,” so Harvey, Cathy, and their guests all ended up at the Mendelsohns' for an extraordinary overnight adventure. If you needed them, Leanie and Mort took care of you.

Marilyn had a similar experience of Leanie – they were more like family than friends. When Marilyn's third child was due, Leanie was the one who got the early morning call to come over and watch the kids while she was in the hospital. When Marilyn's father was ill and she needed to borrow a car to drive to Peoria, they borrowed Leanie and Mort's car. Marilyn felt that when Leanie would ask how she was, it was clear she really wanted to know. Leanie wouldn't ask in that cursory way that sometimes happens in passing – she

wanted to hear the details of your life. And at the end of each check-in, she'd always leave Marilyn with: "You sound good" – making sure she was truly OK.

Besides her family and her friends, music was Leanie's great love. She had perfect pitch – the ability to know what note was being played just by hearing it – which could be both a blessing and a curse. Harvey lovingly remembers visiting Leanie before chanting Kol Nidre at a synagogue in Atlanta. They spent 45 minutes together going over the high notes in the prayer, and Leanie made him try it over and over again each time he'd make a mistake.

When Sharol played guitar, Leanie could identify with precise accuracy which chord should be played – even if it was correct on a basic level, Leanie would suggest adding a suspension, changing it from major to minor, or adding a seventh.

Leanie loved composing music, and she would even produce her own recordings using an 8-track mixer. She released her album, "Heartstrings" in

2008, and won Emmys for her music in '88 and '89. She wrote compositions for various documentaries, training videos, commercial jingles, and even for sculpture art in St. Louis. She was most proud of her piece "Orphan Trains," inspired by the story of children that were orphaned before, during, or after their immigration journey to the United States.

Unfortunately, Leanie began deteriorating in the last few years of her life. She'd get frustrated that she couldn't play piano as easily because of the arthritis in her fingers, and she suffered from a variety of health challenges for many years. Leanie felt it too difficult to overcome her illnesses; she suffered quite a bit, not wanting to endure the pain. Needless to say, it was very hard for her inner circle to watch her struggle with those challenges. There were times when Leanie didn't want to continue living, but in contrast, there were even more times when she was grateful to still be alive so that she could continue to be part of everyone's lives. She felt everything very deeply, both the joy and the pain, and perhaps that is why she loved music so. The music could

hold and express it all – the joy, the sadness, the celebration, and the sorrow.

Leanore Galinn Mendelsohn (z”l) was indeed a glorious musical instrument.

May she rest peacefully in the hands of God forever.

••••

We will now hear words of remembrance shared by **Leanie’s** loved ones:

- Her husband, Mort
- Her daughter, Sharol
- Her granddaughter, Laurin

••••

CLOSING:

A poem by Rabindranath Tagore:

“This aria of mine will wind its music around you,
like the fond arms of love.

This song of mine will touch your forehead like a kiss of blessing.

When you are alone,

it will sit by your side and whisper in your ear.

When you are in the crowd, it will give you security.
My song will be like a pair of wings to your dreams.
It will be like the faithful star overhead
when the dark night is over your road.
My song will sit in the pupils of your eyes,
and will carry your sight into the heart of things.
And when my voice is silent in death,
my song will speak in your living heart.”

Leanore Galinn Mendelsohn’s song continues to speak to all of our hearts. **She** was generous, loyal, thoughtful, supportive, and kind. **Her** legacy and **her** melody will remain forever through your shared memories and the way you all continue to live your own lives. May you take comfort in the fact that **she** is no longer suffering and hopefully enjoying **some chopped liver** wherever **she** might be. *Zichronah livrachah* – may **Leanie’s** memory always be for a blessing. And let us say: Amen.