

Congregation B'nai Israel

Chesed Shel Emet Death Notification



Chesed Shel Emet is to inform people of a death in our congregational family.

Betty Reuben



It is with great sadness that we announce the passing of Betty Reuben on Monday, February 13, 2023.

Betty passed away peacefully at home on February 13, 2023 at 1:50am after a full century of exuberant living focused on repairing the world, caring for her family and friends, celebrating the richness of the world's cultures, and enjoying the beauty of nature. Blessed with extraordinary energy, she was constantly told by all who knew her she was their model for healthy aging. Alas, even the strongest batteries eventually wear out.

Betty would have been born in London if American relatives attending her British parents' wedding there hadn't talked about the metaphoric streets of gold in the New World, promising economic opportunities for her father. So, Emanuel Smuklerz and his London-born bride Ernestine on April 27, 1921, bravely boarded the SS Scandinavian and steamed across the Atlantic, settling in modest Flint, Michigan. Though Ernie was eternally disappointed with the paucity of London-quality culture, Manny changed their last name to Salter (as his brother had done years before), opened National Credit Clothing Company, the first of his three clothing stores, and did very well in that factory town.

Betty was born in Flint on September 27, 1922 and enjoyed all the benefits of a much loved and desired first-born child: piano, dance, and elocution lessons; home-knit initialed skating outfits; and her school principal and teachers invited home to tea.

Although Ernie never directly volunteered for social justice organizations, Betty learned lessons of grace and inclusivity the way Ernie lived her life. When their housekeeper reported to Ernie that Betty, as a young schoolgirl, walked past her on the bus without a greeting or sitting with her Ernie gave Betty a talking-to about her rudeness that impressed Betty deeply. In fact when asked this fall to offer his opinion of Betty on the occasion of her 100th birthday Mayor Darrell Steinberg, a longtime friend, said, "Our dear Betty Reuben personifies everything that is good in community and in life; she is committed to the causes of overcoming injustice and poverty and all the other ills of the world and does so in a way that inspires confidence, because she is both principled and kind."

“Whenever I’ve had a life decision to make, I always called Betty,” said Anne Eisenberg, Past President of the Sacramento Section, National Council of Jewish Women (NCJW). “One of the things she taught me was that it’s better to be kind than right.”

At age 14 Betty was required to work Saturdays in her family business, putting together the white cardboard boxes given to customers to carry home their purchase. By high school she progressed to running the tiny casual women’s clothing store Manny opened nearby, called The Betty Shop (dresses \$1.77 each). The discipline she learned from her father carried into future jobs; she always finished her work ahead of others in the office.

Although registered for the University of Michigan, Betty chose to marry her first husband, Harry Schnider, in January, 1941 and forgo a college education. Less than a year later came Pearl Harbor, and Harry volunteered for World War II. Betty followed him to Southern California where he was trained before going overseas. She returned to Flint to anxiously wait out the war years, working in a Chevrolet factory office. When Harry returned from the war they chose Santa Monica, California, as their new home and started a family there. After just 13 years of marriage Harry died suddenly of a heart attack. Betty said she never felt as old as she did when she was widowed at 31.

A year later a friend invited Betty to a party, hoping she and Jack Reuben, a young widowed single father, would find each other interesting. They did. In June, 1955, Betty and Jack married. Betty formally adopted Jack’s Ronna and Jack adopted Betty’s Carolyn and Steven. Meanwhile, their happy union produced a fourth child, Debra, to complete what would thereafter be the Reuben family.

Volunteer community service began for Betty with the Franklin Elementary School Parent Teacher Association, and progressed to serving as President of Jewish Family Service of Santa Monica. She was also Steven’s Cub Scout leader and was active in Temple Beth Shalom.

In 1965 Jack received a promotion at his work at the California State Department of Transportation and moved the family to Sacramento. They bought a ranch home in South Land Park, in those days a five minute bike ride to luxuriant bean fields.

Betty's talent for organization and attention to details created a happy home through handwritten notes inside lunch boxes, birthday morning treasure hunts for hidden gifts, elaborate birthday parties for Jack with their 75 closest friends, and home-made decorations for every holiday.

As a homemaker Betty was as fierce as a mother bear defending her cubs, telling a critical friend that young Steven wasn't "beating" a drum, he was playing music. Betty meanwhile launched enthusiastically into community service in Sacramento. She was active in the League of Women Voters and was co-Girl Scout leader for Debbie's Troop 780. It took just three years in Sacramento to be elected as President of B'nai Israel Congregation's Sisterhood (now called Women of B'nai Israel), and was the first woman on the Board of Directors of the synagogue.

When Debbie was in junior high Jack convinced Betty, age 47, to take one college course just to prove to herself she was as smart as any college grad. That led to other courses and ultimately a master's degree in education at Sacramento State University. Betty meanwhile ran a parent-participation Head Start preschool at New Helvetia Public Housing on South Broadway from 1974 to 1984.

Starting in 1978, Betty was an adjunct professor in the Early Childhood Education Department at Sacramento City College, teaching and inspiring people who are the licensed caretakers of our preschool generation. She infused her teaching with the depth of personal values that she lived by each day; One student from City College wrote to Betty that her goal in life was to be the kind of teacher for her students that Betty Reuben was for her.

In her spare time Betty served on the Board of Family Service of Greater Sacramento 1977-1983 and on the Board of the Jewish Community Relations Council. As a consultant to the City of Davis and the Community Services Childcare Division Betty presented one workshop on parenting skills and another for the musically challenged.

Betty was Chair of the Committee of Concern (now referred to as Women Feed the Hungry), a group of Congregation B'nai Israel members dedicated to doing something about hunger in the community. They began by helping create the Central Downtown Food Closet (now the Central Downtown Food Basket) along

with 14 churches.

In 1986, when Committee of Concern members Betty, Jane Orkand, and Sylvia Shemanski heard a speaker suggest the Jewish community could do more for people with AIDS, the three women decided that one talent they could contribute was cooking chicken soup. Touch of Shabbat was born: a package of chicken soup to last the weekend, a mini-loaf of chala, and applesauce (which they figured was easy to digest for people who were ill). Eventually the Jewish service sorority Theta Delta Xi took over cooking the soup but for thirty years Betty was the contact person organizing deliveries the last Friday of each month and also part of the distribution team. She and the team delivered to anyone in the greater Sacramento community who signed up for the service who was HIV positive or had AIDS regardless of their ethnicity or religious affiliation.

Betty joined another Jewish service effort serving meals at Loaves and Fishes, a Sacramento charity focused on providing a spectrum of care for the homeless.

For 13 years Betty served as NCJW State of California Public Affairs Chair, testifying before legislators at the Capitol and publishing a monthly bulletin about what actions NCJW members were expected to take for the betterment of underprivileged and disenfranchised people of all races and religions.

In 1996 Betty received framed Resolutions from the State 9th Senate and 9th Assembly Districts for her community service. The same year she received the Tish Sommers Award from Older Women's League (OWL) for exemplifying the enthusiasm and dedication of an OWL founder.

In 1998 Betty received the Hannah G. Solomon Award from NCJW, the highest honor of the 130-year organization, presented to someone who has changed the lives of others through leadership and service. The same year she received another Resolution from the State Assembly for her "significant record of accomplishment on enhancing the quality of life of the community."

From 2000-2002 Betty supervised contract compliance for START, an afterschool program for the underserved created thanks to the foresight of then-legislator Darrell Steinberg.

In 2000 a National Council of Jewish Women (NCJW) program on domestic violence inspired the NCJW Sacramento Section's Public Affairs Committee, chaired by Betty, to create a subcommittee they named Family Shalom. Through grants and donations Family Shalom obtained a cell phone to enable Jewish women victimized by domestic violence to have a source of referral. The committee sponsored a poster and brochure distributed county-wide to let everyone of any ethnic and religious preference know the most common ways a perpetrator gains control of a domestic partner. Through dynamic work of committee members Family Shalom has addressed Jewish teen dating behavior, elder abuse, and human trafficking, becoming a founding member of the Sacramento Domestic Violence Partnership and a partner in the national Rescue and Restore Coalition on human trafficking.

For two years Betty volunteered in the first grade classroom at Jedediah Smith Elementary, to read to and tutor individual youth. She was also part of the team who brought extracurricular guests to the school including a judge, chef, forester, and engineer, hoping to inspire the youths to follow their dreams.

In 2001 Betty received the Mary Tsukamoto Educators Award from the August Women's Peace Event, Educators for Social Responsibility and the Japanese Citizens League.

In 2008 Betty received Hadassah's Certificate of Merit, after being chosen by NCJW as their Outstanding Volunteer of the year. Also in 2008 she was named by Nabisco as one of "100 Extraordinary Women" nationwide.

In 2009 Betty was awarded B'nai Israel's Nancy and Dick Bernheimer Distinguished Service Award. That same year she was given Hadassah's Certificate of Merit after being chosen by Congregation B'nai Israel as their Outstanding Volunteer of the year.

In 2011 Betty was awarded the Latke Cup Jewish Community Spirit Award. The same year she received a Hero of Human Services Award from the County of Sacramento Board of Supervisors. In 2014 NCJW conferred on her their national Enduring Advocate for Social Change Award for decades of working to improve the lives of women, families and children.

Betty was, clearly, a lifelong political activist, voting in every election since she turned 21, writing postcards to inspire voters to go to the polls, collecting signatures for ballot measures she believed in, walking precincts when she could, and making phone calls for candidates who indicated a commitment to address injustice, including at age 99 for Dave Jones' campaign for the State Senate this past spring. Jones, former State Insurance Commissioner, recalls Betty as "an extraordinarily inspiring person" from whom he's drawn strength and courage from her advocacy going back to 1999 when he first ran for Sacramento City Council.

"I don't design what I'm going to do, I fall into it to fill a void," Betty explained modestly to one interviewer. "Almost every major responsibility I've taken on has been because somebody needed to do it." When nobody else stepped forward, Betty did. And when she did she inspired all who knew her with her belief that individuals can make a difference by doing what they do with integrity and compassion, simultaneously balancing a life of public service with family loyalty, spiritual devotion, and self-care.

Betty loved travelling. With Jack she saw much of the United States and numerous foreign lands. She loved fishing and hugging trees and hiking the Sierra, white water rafting and hot air ballooning but most of all she loved the beach. Her happiest place to relax was in sight of ocean waves. When Jack's health issues ended their travels, Betty refocused their leisure activities locally. A voracious reader, she belonged to two book groups. A devoted matriarch, she was either called by or calling one or more of her children, grandchildren, and great grandchildren each day. Friends knew they would receive food and cards from her if she found out they were ill, injured, or operated upon. And she was equally famous for instantly-written thank you notes in response to gifts and kindnesses brought her way.

The family profoundly thanks caregiver extraordinaire Joe Tukainiu, who has for the past 8 years lovingly attended both Jack and Betty with superlative sensitivity and kindness. Joji Vu has also been a precious caregiver, spending nights and weekends regaling Betty with details of the Fiji rugby team's accomplishments and his own family's life here and home in Fiji.

Betty is survived by daughters Ronna Mallios, Carolyn Reuben Green, and Debra Reuben (Juan Acevedo), son Rabbi Steven Carr Reuben (Didi), grandchildren

Peter Mallios (Elizabeth), Seth Mallios (Gretchen), Natanya Bittman (Simeon), Keri Green, Leah Green, Brady Green (Heather), Gable Carr, Sara Acevedo, Mariel Acevedo, and Juan M. Acevedo (Annette), great grandchildren Annabelle Mallios, Sam Mallios, Benjy Mallios, Gabby Mallios, Mikail Kiva, Eli Bittman, Milo Bittman, Max Bittman, Zev Bittman, Marcos Acevedo, Marina Acevedo, Jade Fantauzzi, Luna Fantauzzi, sister Joan Helft, cousin Andrea Slade, as well as Joan's and deceased brother Lee Salter's much-loved extended family plus the hundreds of still-close friends and long-ago students from her college and preschool teaching years.

Betty will be laid to rest with husband Jack, in a private ceremony at Hillside Memorial Park, West Los Angeles, where her extended family is buried. Jack has occupied a rental crypt in Sacramento since passing away in January, 2021, awaiting this dual burial in Los Angeles. A memorial service for Betty will be held in Sacramento at Congregation B'nai Israel at a future date.

Should you wish to honor her legacy donations can be made to HIAS (aid to refugees), Planned Parenthood, National Council of Jewish Women Sacramento Section, or a charity of your choosing that, like Betty, uses mouth, mind, income, and energies to achieve social justice, feed the hungry, shelter the homeless, respect the common humanness of all, and express lovingkindness as a way of life.

May the memory of Betty be a blessing. May the Eternal One grant peace to those who mourn, and comfort during this difficult time. Amen.