



My Dear Friends,

My family and I have had a very difficult week as we mourn the passing of my father-in-law, Mr. Luis Ash z"l. Anita and I are so appreciative of your overwhelmingly kind wishes and prayers for us during this time. My father-in-law, who we called Poppy, was a special man, and he will be deeply missed by all those who knew him and loved him.

As our Yeshiva University family is part of our extended family, I want to share with you some thoughts and life lessons that I learned from Poppy.

I met my future father-in-law when I was 17 years old as a suitor for his daughter's hand. Poppy was immediately warm and welcoming to me. His acceptance of me, eventually as a son, was so natural. I found that I did not need to scale great academic, financial or professional heights in order to win his approval. I just needed to be the person who made his daughter happy, and then he was happy.

To me, Poppy represented the hero I recently spoke about at commencement. At graduation, I mentioned two Jewish archetypes of heroes. The first is the one to which we are perhaps most familiar. It is epitomized in the Book of Esther. In this story, we read of kings, queens and palace intrigue. The stakes are high as the future of Jewish history hangs in the balance. The hero very publicly steps into the breach, risks her life and with courage and ingenuity saves her people.

The second kind of hero emerges in the Book of Ruth. Ruth is a story that takes place not on thrones but threshing floors; not amongst royalty but family. Its stakes are not national but personal. Here we read of a daughter-in-law being utterly devoted to her mother-in-law beyond any level of expectation; a field owner who tends to a poor woman who has fallen on hard times; and a family man who redeemed his cousin's lost fields, restoring his name and legacy. This is a story of quiet moments of kindness in day-to-day life. And its presence within the same scrolls that contain Esther highlights that in our tradition there is a second way to be a hero. There is a public hero, but there is also a private one. One who is present at all times. Caring, loving, extending themselves beyond any reasonable

measure – one who is a hero in the lives of all those around him and in the lives of those whom he loves.

Our Poppy was born and raised in Cuba to a European family who escaped the Nazis before the war. He was a brilliant student, who combined a sharp analytical mind with kindness, sweetness and humility. As a young man, he emigrated to America, served in the U.S. Army and embarked on a successful career as an engineer.

His life was forever changed when he met and married Adela Fenster. In her, he found his true love. It is hard to describe in words the bond he had with my mother-in-law. They were soulmates whose mutual devotion and affection were the nourishment of their lives.

Together they spread their love to their circle of friends and co-workers and most especially to their family. As a young couple they located themselves to be in close proximity to both of their parents to tend to their every need, and raised three children: Anita, Brian and Evy.

Poppy loved and adored his children and grandchildren. For them, he would do anything. No task too small, no job too large. He was always present, always available, always with patience and joy. His family was his greatest blessing.

When the doctors told Poppy 16 months ago that he had a rare and incurable cancer, his immediate response was that he was happy with his life; he has an amazing family; he feels very blessed; and if this is what God wants, then he is ready.

What more can one hope for in life than to be able to face one's mortality with such fortitude, faith and contentment. At the time of his diagnosis, it did not appear that we had much quality time left with Poppy. But this rare form of cancer had never previously encountered the power of my in-laws' love. There is no doubt that Bubbie was the force who kept him alive during this very difficult year and part of what drove him to keep going was that Poppy did not want to leave her side.

I have spent much time with Poppy since my days as a 17-year-old prospective suitor. Talking about life, playing chess, planning for the future. He emerged for me as not just a father but also a teacher and mentor who taught me what it means to be a hero and how to envision one's life success.

While Poppy was ready to accept his fate, we were not ready. Nor will we ever be.

May his memory be a blessing.

Anita joins me in extending our deepest thanks for your condolences and warm wishes.

Shabbat Shalom,

Ari Berman

You are subscribed to emails from the Office of the President.

Office of the President, Yeshiva University
2495 Amsterdam Avenue, Belfer Hall 12th Floor
New York, NY 10033

[Unsubscribe](#)