

Wishing You a Happy New Year
from
Nancy and Peter

This window was a major feature in the 120-year-old "shul" that burned down in Duluth, Minnesota several weeks ago. According to latest reports, the fire was begun by a homeless man trying to stay warm by lighting a small fire. He has pled guilty to negligently starting a fire and has since disappeared. A warrant is out for his arrest. There are plans to rebuild the shul.



Nancy remembers the shul because her mother's great grandparents settled in Duluth from Lithuania in the late 1800's as did many Jewish families coming into the country through the Great Lakes. No immigration documentation papers were required. The joke was that every Jewish person in Duluth was related! As a child Nancy and her family lived in St. Paul and visited Duluth often to see her great-grandmother and grandparents and cousins. It was just a four hour drive (now a 2 hour drive on a superhighway.)

In 2010, Nancy decided to take Peter to Duluth so he could see the beautiful shul and the cemetery where her family is buried and the town of Duluth which is three miles wide and 30 miles long on the steep banks of Lake Superior. Nancy's sister, Terry, came with us. The shul is about a mile up from the banks of the Lake and about two blocks from where Nancy's grandparents lived. The shul's exterior had been remodeled with simple shingles. But the inside was original and intact with beautiful dark wood carved benches and a beautiful ark and sacred Torahs. (Eight of the fourteen Torahs were rescued from the fire.)

One main feature of the synagogue was the stained glass window on the wall opposite the ark which only could be admired from the inside. Above is the photo Nancy took of it nine years ago. *Note from Peter: The interior was an architectural gem... totally unexpected from the exterior and the neighborhood.*

Our visit to Duluth included a visit to the Jewish cemetery about a 40-minute ride outside of town. Burials and funerals were all-day affairs with horses and buggies, even through the Duluth winter. Nancy's Grandpa Oscar was a tailor, and his tailor shop was a local meeting place of the reporters from the Duluth Tribune newspaper. He loved his family, talking, the blue pushkah box, the Yeshiva he helped fund in Israel, fishing and life.

Note from Nancy: As I remember my grandfather, I realize how easily he could move from discussions of death to discussions of life. (I guess those are my existential genes.) Grandpa Oscar lived every moment to its fullest and often said that he didn't want a funeral. He wanted everyone to dance and celebrate his life. And, on the day of his funeral there was a terrific snow storm in Duluth. Not many friends could travel out for the burial. But everyone celebrated his life back at my grandparents' home -- just as he would have wanted -- perhaps planned.

We send our best wishes for a happy and healthy New Year to you and your families and friends.

Fondly,
Nancy and Peter

Nancy Margolis Berkley and Peter Berkley
September 2019