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## Reflections on Esther Leah Ritz

Cindy and Jerry Benjamin (<mailto:wjc@lanex.com>) | March 31, 2008 | 24 Adar II 5768

Esther Leah's death has left us aching. Just one more conversation. One more blast at President Bush or Israeli Prime Minister Ariel Sharon. One more light touch on our arm as she cautiously lowered herself onto the passenger seat.

Esther Leah was our wise woman, our Jewish beldame, who was as fearless as she was determined. We considered her a mentor, a teacher for whom we stood when she entered the room, a member of the establishment who taught us the art of self-criticism. Her life story flows with integrity, reason, generosity, kindness and wit.

We were all so lucky to have shared time with her — we are her heirs — we are her mourners and we will never forget this singular, marvelous, wondrous woman.

Esther Leah was a committed atheist, consequently there will be no funeral rites, no shiva and no Kaddish. Nevertheless, we should all tear our clothing as her death has torn our hearts. We should listen to an opera or go to the ballet, we should redouble our efforts to strengthen our community and the Jewish people and always ask ourselves, "What would Esther Leah do?"

We heard with deep sorrow of the passing away of Esther Leah Ritz, a legend in her life, a world Jewish leader, an entrepreneur, a pioneer, a righteous and a most generous philanthropist.

As the skies over Jerusalem are now covered with deep dark clouds and pouring rain, we feel the sadness of the Jewish and non-Jewish people world wide, whom she touched in her meaningful journey.

Esther Leah's deep voice resounded everywhere across the globe. She felt passionate about moral values and was ready to fight over her beliefs and vision and to bring justice to all.

She always put her actions where her mouth was and paved the way for her followers as well as for her opponents. She was thoughtful and her wisdom was always worth learning from.

The impact Esther Leah had on her audience was enormous. We were privileged to get to know her and to be liked by her. She always found time to meet, listen and share her teachings.

As her last photo, hanging over her beloved paintings at her home, is carved in our minds, we remember her love of visual arts, music and theater. Her many "last visits" to Israel and opinionated care about us here left a huge impression on us and managed to move the wheels of the camp she was so much in favor of.

There are few world leaders among the people of our generation who had that much impact on so many.

We, together with you and Esther Leah's family, are mourning and will always remember the expressions that are synonymous with her name: tikkun olam, tzedakah and g'milut hassadim.

Anat and Nir Barkin  
Modi'in, Israel

Both Jerry Benjamin and I had some rather poignant thoughts when we were sharing our grief over Esther Leah's death. I suggested that several people are sleeping better since her death and that is not a good thing. Jerry shared that he didn't want to live in a community that was more pareve as a result of the loss of such a woman.

She was a teacher, a guide and a mentor. Not always because we agreed but because even when we disagreed, there was a lesson to be learned. On more than one occasion, I was honored to hear the words, "While I don't agree with Marty..." because she always finished her statement with respectful recognition of our differences and shared passion for what we were convinced was right and just.

We who share her love and passion for Israel and the Jewish people must continue our legacy, her work, as we already do, but maybe with even more fervor. She made a difference in so many lives, in so many ways.

A loss like hers creates a change I am not ready for yet. When she wasn't at meetings but we knew she was always around, that was one thing. Now, she won't be at meetings and won't be around either.

May she be the shining light guiding each and all of us on a way of bettering our community, large and small, in death as she was in life and may she rest in peace, the final place she may just find it!

Marty Katz

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