

## Dr. Rachel Hines

Thank you all so much for being here. I wish to speak about my grandfather. Sometimes I feel disconnected when I read about Popsi in an official capacity, like his biography from the Holocaust Museum or even a chapter in one of his books that were so carefully crafted and edited. His story spans so many decades, epochs, wars, continents, languages and I was around for relatively little of it. Of course, I – and my siblings, cousins, parents, aunts, uncles – are products of it all. We were born of his suffering and strength. Looking around today, I can see what a fruitful commitment it all was.

I'm so grateful to have so much documentation of my grandfather's life, way more than most descendants will ever have. But my strongest memories of him are not epic. They are snippets, sayings, feelings. They are forged in his gentle and unique accent, lilt of polish and Yiddish and Hebrew coating his English, his tenses occasionally but predictably mixed up in a way that I took for granted, his voice being part of my first language.

Shabbat dinners were the axis of our family around which the rest of the week spun. We'd sing blessings and recount our weeks. Popsi took diligent stock of every bite that we ate so we learned to eat slowly since he wouldn't believe us that we'd had enough unless he actually witnessed us eating. He'd eat his soup at almost-boiling temperatures. As we got older and it was less common to have everyone at a given Shabbat dinner, he'd insist on getting his digital camera out and taking one or more pictures of everyone at the table together. Usually someone's head was cut out and everyone had at least a double chin so luckily, Popsi often forget to download them off the camera.

He gave phenomenal hugs. Whatever lack of strength he complained of, his embrace never suffered for it. He'd ease out of a hug into holding your hands, his trigger finger pressed up on the inside of your palm like a secret handshake, squeezing your hands to emphasize the important parts of what he was saying.

Most days, he could be found at his computer, his "second wife." The pictures surrounding him in his office told as much of a story as whatever he was typing. Next to photos of himself with Eli Wiesel and Nancy Pelosi are my bat mitzvah invitation, dozens of pictures of his family printed hastily off an email, and my favorite – a fake magazine cover of him and my grandmother with the headline, "The Century's Sexiest Couple." When their apartment building prohibited feeding birds from balconies, my grandma and aunt bought him a plastic bird to hang over his desk; it tweets, somewhat unreliably, when you clap hard and he named it "schlemiel."

Passover is my favorite holiday because of Popsi. I loved the ease with which he'd recite long davenings in Hebrew, reminding us how deeply the words were seeded in his memory. Between courses and in the background of our conversations, he'd sing softly in Yiddish. Each year he'd recount the story of the Warsaw Ghetto Uprising with caution and pride, imploring us to remember, to internalize this as part of our own history like the haggadah instructs regarding the Exodus from Egypt. We would end the seder with an assortment of songs that always included, at his insistence, an American patriotic anthem.

Writing was his own form of resistance. Popsi gave us permission to wrestle with our faith and with aging, to be damaged *and* resilient, to be angry *and* grateful. The more he typed, recounted, told, emailed, the more dignity he retained over the human and natural forces that tried to bring him down or make him forget.

Popsi fervently wished for each of us to find a partner, get married, and have children. He wasn't always subtle. One of his favorite sayings, though, was "may all your troubles be little and all your little ones be legal." When he asked my sister when she was going to get married, she said, "maybe soon, Popsi." He said, "I want to know when, so when I'm talking to God, I can give him a date." His prayers and ours came true and he was at all of my siblings' weddings. He co-officiated mine, in spite of not feeling well that day. As he placed his hands on my head and my husband's to recite the priestly blessing, I could tell he was relying on us to help hold him up, the weight of his body coming down on us with his words.

May the LORD ([YHWH](#)) bless you and guard you -

יְבַרְכֶךָ יְהוָה, וַיְשַׁמְרֶכָּ

("Yebhārēkh-khā Adhōnāy weyishmerēkhā ...)

May the LORD make His face shed light upon you and be gracious unto you -

יָאֵר יְהוָה פָּנָיו אֵלֶיךָ, וַיַּחַנֵּךְ

("Yā'ēr Adhōnāy pānāw ēlekhā wiḥunnēkkā ...)

May the LORD lift up His face unto you and give you peace -

יֵשָׂא יְהוָה פָּנָיו אֵלֶיךָ, וַיִּשֶׂם לְךָ שְׁלוֹמִים

("Yissā Adhōnāy pānāw ēlekhā wiyāsēm lekhā shālōm.")

These were also the last words that Popsi said to me this past weekend, when I bent down to give him a kiss on each cheek as I said goodbye on Sunday afternoon. The night before he had dreamt of saying good bye to each person in his family and his many friends but was still so worried about who would pray for his loved ones after he was gone. We reassured him. Now, I ask for your help in keeping our promise. Please keep our Popsi in your hearts and keep yourselves and your loved ones in your prayers as he always did. Linger a little longer at the dinner table. Listen to or tell a story from your youth. Sing together or hum along. Hug with both arms and kiss on both cheeks.

I'd like to close, as he would have, with a song and a prayer. If you're comfortable, take the hand of the person next to you and join with me in singing Bashana Haba'a - another one of our Pesach favorites:

Bashana Haba'a

May God bless you and guard you, May God's face shed light upon you and be gracious unto you, May God lift up his face unto you and give you peace. Amen.