

She Brought Us All Together

Editors Note: After a long illness, professor of Jewish literature Zvia Ginor passed away in September. Below are some thoughts her colleague David Roskies expressed at her funeral.

There was no better reader than Zvia.

There was no better teacher than Zvia.

There was no better friend than Zvia.

Zvia had a ravenous appetite for everything new, so when she read, she read not to confirm some long-held conviction, not to consolidate her prior knowledge, but to break new ground. When she found a new idea, she ran with it. Once, in class, I threw out a thesis about the role of the volta in Mani-Leyb's sonnets. It didn't matter to Zvia that my thesis was hardly fleshed out. She turned it into a structural paradigm for the sonnet as a whole: the volta as the hidden fulcrum of life. I often felt that Zvia understood the things that I said or wrote much better than I did. And I am not alone. Those of her teachers who were present at Zvia's PhD orals in Jewish literature remember the day. At the end of the exam, she went around the room and told each one of us what she had distilled from our teaching. It was a revelation. It was a gift. It was a profound act of love.

Zvia was relentlessly analytical. The harder, more opaque the text, the better. If it was Avraham Holtz teaching the *Tales of Rabbi Nahman*, Zvia chose to analyze the "Tale of the Fly and the Spider," the most elusive and allusive of Reb Nahman's tales. When it came time to choose a dissertation topic, she chose the poetry of Abba Kovner, a poet who, if read at all, was read for all the wrong reasons. Where others were dazzled by Kovner's heroics, Zvia sighted Kovner the elegist and liturgist. Where others heard only Kovner's lyric voice, Zvia heard the complex interplay of lyric and epic, of mythic and erotic, of measured beat and

subversive rhetoric. Where others read Kovner as an Israeli poet, Zvia read him as a Jew.

When Zvia wasn't reading, she was teaching. God, what a commanding presence she was, standing in front of a class or a lecture hall! She didn't merely teach; she modeled behavior. Give her two sessions, and her students became her disciples, especially the women. Mark this well. Having struggled long and hard to achieve selfhood and stature as a woman, Zvia was intent on helping other women to actualize their fullest potential. She offered them no shortcuts. A woman, especially a Jewish woman, had to do it all. A wife, she insisted, must have a shabbes dinner on the table with all the trimmings, no matter what. Her professional aspirations came later.

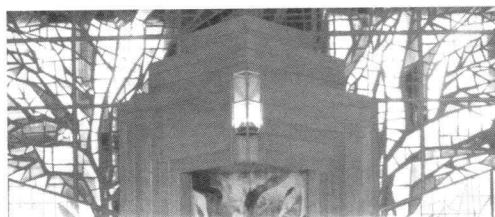
Did Zvia lament the careers she gave up as a musician, a journalist and a script writer in order to cook shabbes dinners for Amos and raise their three sons? I think she was too busy running the Gahalet school for expatriot Israelis. Damned if she was going to compromise the education of her own children! Did Zvia then devote herself full-time to her graduate studies? To study and not to teach others was unthinkable, so Zvia made time to lecture on Israeli fiction. Her students followed her from Great Neck to Hadassah, to the 92nd Street Y, to JTS.

Zvia knew no halfway measures. She was a full-time mother, full-time wife, full-time teacher, full-time poet-scholar and full-time friend. To be Zvia's friend was to be enveloped by her abiding love. On the one hand, she somehow managed to remember each person's particular interests. Anything she read, saw or experienced, she filed away to share with the one friend whom this would most enlighten. On the other hand, she conspired to bring her friends together.



Zvia Ginor

Every summer, when Amos and I were well, they would plan a shabbes dinner with twenty-five guests, and she called the shabbes. It was a more subtle way of bringing everyone together. I discovered that she had met her sons at a book signing for my honor. Although they had never met me before, they seemed to know me with a mixture of awe and affection. It suddenly dawned on me that she had set up to her old tricks. She had told them stories about Professor Roskies. What things did they know about me? It was obvious. The same intimate details I had shared with her. We were all one mishpocha. She delighted in you, and you should also delight in her. What she said, or written, or done was yours. Now that you're gone, Zvia, bring us all together! ●



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Zvia Ginor, z"l

Every summer, when Amos was alive and well, they would plan archaeological expeditions with twenty-five of their closest couples, and she called those summer expeditions her dialysis machine. She also had a more subtle way of bringing her loved ones together. I discovered this the first time I met her sons at a book party she threw in my honor. Although they had never set eyes on me before, they seemed to look at me with a mixture of awe and familiarity. It suddenly dawned on me that Zvia had been up to her old tricks. She had been telling them stories about Professor Roskies. Her beloved Professor Roskies. What hyperbolic things did they know about me? The answer was obvious. The same kind of wonderful, zany, intimate details I knew about them! We were all one mishpokhe in Zvia's eyes. If she delighted in you, then all her loved ones should also delight in what you had said, or written, or done.

Now that you're gone, Zvia, who will bring us all together? ●



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