

A Woman of Accomplishment

It is required, every Friday night, for a Jewish husband to sing in Hebrew to his wife the Psalm from Proverbs which begins, "A woman of valor who can find...." This is probably a bad translation, and it should be written, "A woman of accomplishment who can find...." In many traditions, this reading is typically heard at funerals. Not so in the Jewish faith.

I have read the modernized version of this selection to my wife, Kimberly, every Friday night of my married life. I finally discovered the correct Hebrew translation, and I now sing it in Hebrew, as is the traditional approach. I prefer the correct translation.

What is important about this particular selection from Proverbs is that it defines the role of a woman in ancient times. The praise of a woman points out that she conducts business in her own name. This was unheard of outside of the Jewish faith. The woman of valor, or accomplishment, would determine whether to purchase a field, and if she thought it was appropriate, she would buy it. She was clearly engaged in business outside of the home and was a leader both in her family and the community. There was an integration between family and work that was not a problem for the Jewish woman of ancient times.

I thought about this important reading only recently when Gert Wainger celebrated her 99th birthday. Gert, born October 19, 1915, in Roaring Branch, Pennsylvania, has been a stalwart member of Congregation Ohev Sholom in Williamsport, Pennsylvania, and a regular Shabbat attendee for much longer than I can remember.

Gert is one of those unusual people whose very presence is warm, kindly and thoughtful. Gert is not afraid to express her opinions, but what is unique about her and what I learned as President of the Congregation over many years, is that she knows how to impart her feelings without rancor, dismissiveness or anger. When Gert spoke to me about a matter of concern, I found that I must listen to this authoritative woman.

I found out later that Gert had been a first grade teacher. She worked at what is now Jefferson Apartments in Williamsport, and substituted "all over." She and her husband, Perry, were married in approximately 1947, the year is uncertain to me. Gert retired from Cochran Elementary School.

When I asked Ms. Wainger what her greatest accomplishments were, she most appropriately cited her Synagogue and other volunteer activities. She worked for the Salvation Army with youngsters. During World War II, she worked for the Red Cross. She constantly came back to her community involvement. As a retired teacher, she

worked with a retired teachers' group. This modest, hardworking woman thought that her most important contribution was to support the "community."

It is not surprising that Gert was the youngest of several siblings. There is something about being in a large family which makes everyone responsible for everyone else. She said that growing up was a good time, and that her life was better than others'. Her maiden name was Sherman, and her family values became her compass. Her parents were members of the Synagogue, and were also active in the community.

So what makes this woman so great and worthy of a written tribute? To me, Gert Wainger represents what is otherwise missing in America. People like Gert very simply support their community, their religion, and a simple, straightforward way of life that extols virtue and repels dishonorable behavior. People like Gert Wainger do not have to think about or work at being good people; it is part of the culture, her environment, and the religious values imparted by her family that taking care of others is a priority.

Gert Wainger is not someone, to the best of my knowledge, who has received tremendous recognition in the community. I am not aware of dinners or tributes that have been tossed the way of Gert Wainger. All of that is unnecessary. All that counts is that Gert has always done the right thing, without prodding and without what in Hebrew we call *kavod*. In other words, Gert did not do what she did to receive a "thank you" from anyone. It is simply part of the way she is.

On her 99th birthday, Gert stood up at the Kiddush, after services, and gave a perfectly appropriate, simple, straightforward and clear-headed "thank you" to all those who were present to honor her. Gert, at 99, continues to contribute to the well-being and to the good feelings of everyone around her.

We all wish for Gert continued good health, success in her endeavors, and accomplishments that represent a positive example to her community and religion.

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