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ANSHE CHESED BIKKUR CHOLIM

My Friend Avraham Melezin

In 2004, Jeremy [Kalmanofsky] emailed the Bikkur Cholim committee asking if one of us would call and check on an elderly Anshe Chesed member name Avraham Melezin. It had been a while since he had attended Shabbat services, and Jeremy was concerned. I accepted the request and called Avraham. He said he was fine, and appreciated the concern.

At 93 years old, walking up the hill from his 97th street and West End Avenue apartment to the synagogue was too difficult for him. He said he had a wonderful live-in caregiver named Hillary, and we shouldn't worry about him. Avraham's Eastern European-accented voice, strong and confident but at the same time sad and lonely, prompted me to ask him if he would like me to visit. He immediately said yes, and my first visit resulted in a friendship that lasted until Rosh Hashanah 2008, when Avraham died.

Avraham was a Holocaust survivor from Vilna, Poland, where before the war he had been a geography professor. His wife Sula and young son Zarek were murdered in the Holocaust. After the war, Avraham married fellow Vilna survivor Rachela, came to New York, and adopted her daughter Sara. He and Rachela owned an egg farm in New Jersey until Avraham accepted a position teaching geography at a college in Teaneck. After several years, he became a professor of geography at City College, and the family relocated to 97th Street and West End Avenue.

I could write pages and talk for hours about our friendship. But, to be brief, my friendship with Avraham was a joy. We spent hours together talking about the past and the present, usually in his study. We drank tea and ate cookies and fruit in the dining room. Sometimes he ordered in dinner, and twice he took me out for dinner. I was included in family gatherings, and became friends with Hillary. Avraham shared his life story with me, including his great happiness and greater pain. When he talked about the Holocaust, I listened quietly, respectfully, and with deep gratitude that he was sharing this with me. Once, he asked me to verify the date his wife Sula had been sent to the camp in which she died, and I was so honored to do the research. I loved hearing about Vilna, Sula and Zarek, Rachela and Sara, the egg farm, and why he loved being a professor of geography. My friend Avraham Melezin was a brilliant, funny, mischievous, wise, difficult, and loving man, and I will never stop missing him.

Thank you, Jeremy, and Bikkur Cholim, for bringing us together. Eileen Gordon

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