

## ELUL Stories Day 11 Erica LaChant

*“Are u listening? Rayanna, are you listening?” she asked the 12-year-old.*

*She couldn’t tell by just looking at Rayanna since macular degeneration had robbed her of her eyesight two years earlier. How cruel. Hadn’t she been through enough?*

*She was. She was listening.*

*“Yes”, Rayanna replied.*

*“Then tell your friends.”*



In 2015, while donating Passover baskets for B’nai Brith’s Project Hope, I, and my then 12-year-old daughter, Rayanna, had the good fortune to find ourselves in the living room of Mrs. Jean Chapnick, a 91-year-old, Orthodox, Holocaust survivor. She captivated us with her story of narrow escape; of split-second decisions that made the difference between life and death. In her town of 3,000 people, she was one of just FOURTEEN to make it out alive. At her advancing age, she felt it was her duty, her responsibility, to speak of the first-hand atrocities she witnessed and to be the voice of the victims who, as it weighed so heavily on her heart, never had anyone say Kaddish for them.

Three weeks later was my 50th birthday and I picked Jean up and brought her to TBT where she held court in a small classroom of congregants – not a dry eye among us.

With her thick Polish accent like my Grandma Anna and a joke always at-the-ready like my father, Marvin, I vowed to stay in Jean's life for as long as she would have me. Beginning right after we met, we spoke every single Friday for Shabbat. To my amazement and delight, she retained all the details of my life and followed up on all of them – each week sending regards to my children by name, my mother, and as she would refer to him, my wunnnnnn-derful husband. Periodic visits to her home in West Hempstead HAD to include a meal, like it or not. It was her way, or no way, as she never, and I mean never, took “no” for an answer.

My dear friend passed away on July 26, just five months short of her 100th birthday. Five days later, Rabbi Moskowitz told us of this year’s Elul story theme.

The more I got to know Jean, the more in awe of her I became. She was an amazing human being; a woman of incredible strength, determination, and resilience; she was proud and thoughtful; she loved deeply and she accepted help from others with grace. Despite the darkness she lived through and, for the last 10 years, literally lived in, she never lost her faith.

I’ve never known, and I never will know, anyone like Jean Chapnick. In a word, she was extraordinary. May her memory be for a blessing.

Erica LaChant and her wunnnnnn-derful husband, Philip Shwom, have been members of TBT for about 15 years. Her two children, Rayanna and Michael, who have both just flown the coop, became a Bar/Bat Mitzvah at TBT in 2016 and 2018 respectively. Erica joined their ranks by becoming a Bat Mitzvah this past June. Erica's email: [elachant@optonline.net](mailto:elachant@optonline.net)