

IRA GOLDENBERG

Let us begin this celebration today, Dec. 18, 2010 with words from Ira—Ira Gershwin.

It's very clear, my dear (Ira)
Our love is here to stay
Not for a year, but forever and a day
In time, the Rockies may crumble
Gibraltar may tumble; they're only made of clay
But Ira our love for you is here to stay.

How does one succinctly summarize the adventurous life of Ira Goldenberg?

It is Perry Como impossible or *oomeyglach zein* (as the Barry Sisters used to chant) but worth a college try. A product of kindershule and “progressive” parents, we met on hallowed ground, Camp Kinderland in the summer of 1952, where we shared a love of *Kultur*, the New York Yankees, comedy, music, sports, women, (he was far more successful than I in this sport), *yiddishkeit*, social justice, and political action. We became roommates in Camp (along with Bobby Boikess) and six years later, in college, and best friends for life.

A diamond in the rough, Ira had so many facets. He was an extraordinary athlete: a go to guy in basketball with a deadly two-hand set shot and, as the game changed, a deft jump shot from the left (like his politics) side of the keyhole. In softball, he anchored the infield at shortstop going to his right and left with equal grace punctuated by a powerful peg to first. At bat in the third slot, he could hit to all fields. On the dance floor, his athleticism carried over to the Russian two-step as well as to the American Lindy-hop, Cold War conflict notwithstanding. His guitar prowess was only fair proving that he was somewhat less than perfect but he could belt out a favorite folk song with gusto and could also compose a tune or two. Again in the Gershwin groove, one feels compelled to sing Ira's praise.

The way you swung the bat
The way you tipped your hat
The way you danced till three
No, no! They can't take that away from me.

As a scholar at CCNY (once signifying Circumcised Citizens of New York), he earned the approval of celebrated psychologist, Kenneth Clark, the first black to receive tenure and a coveted chair, in his chosen field of Social Psychology. In our senior college year, we reconnected as roommates in a SRO roach infested room living frugally on a dollar day (dinner). Ira used to rev up his old car on Amsterdam Avenue going up hill in order to go down faster than Robert Redford on skis. His dual aim was to save gas and money. One gloomy Saturday, Ira's car was towed and our first attempt to snap the umbilical cords ended. We returned to our respective homes, depressed and debilitated. Mom's chicken soup and a few visits to the “Shrink” relieved our funk.

Recovered from this ordeal, Ira went to Connecticut to seek the Holy Grail in academe, the PhD. while I remained in New York in the same and for me lame quest. We celebrated our early successes in grad school with a trip to Mexico where I got sick (Montezuma's revenge) and Ira got laid. On a more constructive journey, we participated in a “Freedom Ride” project headed by Yale University Chaplain William Sloane Coffin that attempted to integrate the public facilities--motels, restaurants, theatres--in Glen Burnie, Maryland only forty miles from our nation's capital. Animated by

the core values learned in Camp Kinderland, we tried, in the memorable words of poet Langston Hughes “to let America be America again.”

Safely back in New Haven, Ira wrote his dissertation under the aegis of Dr. Seymour Sarason on the way schizophrenics perceive time. Interning at the West Haven Veterans’ Hospital and teaching part time at the University of Southern Connecticut, Ira honed his therapeutic as well as pedagogic skills. Blending humor and compassion, Ira excelled at both tasks as I, an occasional visitor, witnessed.

Shortly after our wild adventure in Mexico, love walked in and took Ira for a spin when a beautiful young secretary joined the Yale Psych. Dept. On their first date, our impetuous friend proposed marriage. Following dessert and some reflection, she said maybe, then yes. They were married in the home of Ira’s esteemed mentor, Dr. Sarason. I brought Ira’s parents from Brooklyn. In my rush to reach New Haven in time, I incurred my first and only speeding ticket. Fleet-footed Ira beat me to the altar too and quickly he and Sue turned out four beautiful children, all present, in chronological order: Ari, Sair, Raychul, and Asa. Taking their cue from Pete Seeger’s evocative song, “A Kiss is Sweeter than Wine,” sung tenderly at Camp Kinderland, Ira and Sue eventually became “grandparents of eight” plus two or ten in all.

A wandering Jew and scholar gypsy, Ira carved out professional credits in CT, MA, NH, and FL.

In New Haven, he made his mark as head of a residential youth center, wherein inner-city youths at risk found a surrogate home laced with love, a saga that he chronicled in his first book, *Build Me a Mountain*. Eventually, Ira--a gifted writer—produced four more. During the 1960s riots that engulfed New Haven, Ira was probably the only white “dude” to move safely in and out of the ghetto. Unable to build a mountain, his grateful colleagues, however, helped the Goldenbergs to erect a log cabin in rustic NH.

A rising scholar, Ira scored a tenure track appointment to Harvard’s Social Psychology Department. On the cusp of academic glory, Prof. G. opted for high risk academic adventure when he accepted the presidency of Franconia College. There, as reported in the *Chronicle of Higher Education* with a photograph as proof, he performed admirably as executive, pedagogue, fund-raiser, cheer-leader and, yes, even dish washer. He recruited former students; some are present in this celebration of life today. It was a dream-like experience for participants: to good to be true and it was. Financial distress closed the college. All dressed up with wife and four children in tow, Ira had no place to go. Fortunately, Ira’s reputation earned him a deanship at a local business college. Here, he introduced a breakthrough program for inner city residents with dead-end jobs or no jobs at all who traveled to New Hampshire on week-ends to earn college degrees in order to secure a passport to better lives. As an occasional visitor, indeed participant, I witnessed Ira’s inspired work. Despite its palpable success, hard times beset New Hampshire College. And again Ira joined ranks of the unemployed.

Ever resilient, Dr. G. pursued other positions. After one interview at which he excelled, he was told that if he had a different skin color or ethnicity, he would be hired. Normally, cucumber cool, Ira exploded with a Bronx jeer (“I’m not chopped liver!”) and undeleted Brooklyn expletives. Chastened, the search committee at FIU reversed course and discrimination. Ira made the cut. At long last, he had found a vocation worthy of this multitalented *élan vital* (vital force). He secured much needed government grants and turned the FIU School of Education into beehive of creative energy. In addition to a stellar stint as Dean of Education, Ira created an urban institute at FIU: again bringing heightened prestige and grant money to this fledgling program. After a much deserved and long overdue sabbatical, Ira opted for retirement rather than deal with a contentious as well as unappreciative administrative hierarchy. Ever responsive to worthy causes, he volunteered for service

in the emergency component of Memorial Hospital, where in the heart of Miami's ghetto he labored without pay until the onset of Sue's illness.

We shared good times and bad. Who could forget those wonderful Camp Kinderland reunions in 1979, 1984, 1999 as well visiting with *unzer kinder* (our children) during visiting days? Our children blossomed and we, so it seemed, aged imperceptibly. When our parents crossed the River Jordan as it were, we took turns at consolation and eulogies minus rabbinical intervention. Indeed, Ira introduced me to the secular sermon when my mother died in 1976. And at this moving minyan that celebrates life we "carry it on" to this day.

Three Ira stories, among so many, merit mention. When his mother, Frima was institutionalized because of Alzheimer's, unable to cope with a visit alone, he asked me to accompany him to her nursing home. I consented. As we entered his car, I asked: "Where is she?" "Somewhere in South Brooklyn." he replied. "What??" I countered in disbelief. So, we went in search of Frima. We must have visited ten different homes. Evidently, either Ira did not know the name and address or was in deep denial. Eventually, I spotted her in a corner of the Crown Nursing Home on Coney Island Avenue. We spoke in Yiddish. "*Vos macht die mame?*" "*Gantz gut*" I lied in reply for she had died seven years prior. Her mind returned, temporarily. Choked with sorrow, Ira could not converse; so, I carried on with small talk in Yiddish. Regaining his composure, he picked up the threads of tattered line of communication. We left that Saturday encounter happier than when we entered. He thanked me. "*Nishtu farvos. After all, we are brothers!*"

In 1979, I lost an administrative post at LIU for refusing to cross a picket line. The strike lasted five weeks and left me jobless with a wife and three young children to care for. Always a *gute nehsume* (a generous spirit), Ira provided valuable assistance and remuneration for a research project that he developed on government sponsored unemployment programs. Subsequently, he invited me to New Hampshire where I was handsomely paid for a week-end presentation at New Hampshire College. He was *tzaddik* (saintly soul) who offered *tsadakah* (charity) to those in need like Warren Kimbro, a Black panther lured into a murder. Always an MVP, Itzik-shpitzik, as I affectionately called him, came through in the clutch.

Many years later, August 2006 to be precise, when my wife Eileen learned that her mother had pancreatic cancer, Ira and Sue appeared as angels of mercy with much needed cheer and a special recipe for "heroin chicken," an addictive dish. Thanks to Ira's gifts of humor (he was a great mimic), empathy, and culinary excellence, our stomachs filled and our spirits rose. Eileen's father, severely impaired by stroke, voiced his approval. "I like your friends. Let's bring them back."

Following the death of my wife's mother, Ira and Sue did return to console my father-in-law with more heroin chicken and good cheer. Now, as we enter the winter of our discontent, would that they could return to feed us tasty morsels and soothe our aching hearts. I think continually of Ira and Sue Goldenberg. They were great friends to us all and faithful lovers as their children will attest. And as we say goodbye, a Gershwin refrain rings true.

It's very clear.

Our love is here to stay. Not for a year, but ever and a day.

The radio and the telephone

And the movies that we know

May just be passing fancies and in time may go

But oh dear Ira and Sue Our love is here to stay.

With love mixed with tears,

Yusl Dorinson, Class of 1952