

## Lilli D. Zimet - "A Woman of Valor"



"I have been so lucky in life." Our matriarch, Lilli Zimet (z'l) spoke these words often and lived their gratitude till she died last Sunday at 101. In 1946, Lilli and her husband Rabbi Erwin Zimet with 15 mo. old Miriam arrived in Poughkeepsie as recent refugees from Berlin after spending a few years in NYC's prestigious Park Avenue synagogue. They were a team from the beginning. Rabbi Zimet became the spiritual leader of Temple Beth El and a moral voice in the Community and Lilli worked right alongside him. They eagerly embraced their new home and community and the community embraced this charismatic caring young couple as well.

Lilli made her mark on the Jewish Community and the Dutchess County Interfaith Council community and will be remembered as a part of the fabric of both. Born in Berlin, Germany, she was a young girl when Hitler came to power. She was fortunate to leave in 1939 shortly after Kristalnacht, through Holland, and reunited with her fiancé, Rabbi Erwin Zimet in London and then followed him to New York City. In 1946, the Zimets with Miriam, their 15 month-old daughter, came to Poughkeepsie and worked as a team at Temple Beth EL for over 40 years. Lilli started the Synagogue Choir and the High Holiday Choir. She directed a youth choir for 50 years. Year after year, generations of singers from the choirs returned to join the Thanksgiving Shabbat for a musical reunion. Lilli joined Roberta Sheehan and worked to grow the Dutchess County Interfaith Music Festival.

Lilli loved music, but she was primarily an educator. Trained in Berlin as an early childhood teacher, she educated generations of students in Poughkeepsie. She founded the religious school and nursery school at Temple Beth El and taught high school students a special Holocaust course long before it was popular to do so. Many students first encountered the horrors of the Holocaust through her course and produced writing and art work based on their reactions. Generations of 3<sup>rd</sup> graders heard her tell the remarkable story of her saving her family's "little Torah" which today

sits proudly in the ark of Temple Beth El. She always incorporated Tzedakah, charity, into the school's culture. Before her teachers were allowed in the classroom, they met each semester with Lilli to learn about each child's individual needs.

Lilli fiercely loved and supported her family especially her 3 children, 3 grandchildren and 2 great grandchildren and her extended community family. She regularly made "pastoral" hospital visits and when she could no longer drive, she regularly called to "check in" on congregants and friends, a practice she continued until the week before she died.

Lilli and Erwin always worked as a team and their work with the DCIC was no exception. They both believed very strongly in being part of the larger community, the value of interfaith and humanitarian work, and the dignity of each human being. They were involved in the formation of DCIC and continued working with the council and other clergy for many years. They taught these values to their own 3 children and their community at Temple Beth El. The Erwin Zimet Memorial Institute continues to generously contribute to the work of the Council. For many years, Lilli took an active role in this Institute whose mission is to "perpetuate the values and goals for which Rabbi Zimet stood and to which he devoted his life. These include his love of Judaism and encouragement of Jewish learning, interfaith dialogue and education, Holocaust education of Jews and non-Jews alike, and a strong sense of social justice."

Lilli was truly a "Woman of Valor" and will be missed and remembered by all who knew her. May she her light always shine and inspire us to act for good in this world.!